



Flanders and the international sustainable development debate

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Elements

Warning and preliminary remark!

- Position (disclaimer)
- International sustainable development debate

- * Personal experiences

- A brief history
- Frameworks
- Present Flemish ambitions and developments
- Some observations and challenges





The 1st decade

- Some personal experience
- > 1995-1997: CSD participation
 - Request
 - Approach: preparation/follow-up/impact
 - < Belgian delegation

- Continued participation, low profile

- Some momentum: Rio + 10 (Green Parties < Flemish regional + federal governments)
 - March 2002 Clear call for more Flemish participation (Advisory Council for Environment/Nature goes beyond environmental issues)
 - Motivation: justice-equity; harm; Flemish competencies
 - Flanders signed Gauteng Declaration
 - Disappointing outcomes
 - Back to b.a.u., however...





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Flanders

- SD < environmental policies
- Policy planning and implementation tools
 - Environmental policy planning
 - Other policy documents:
 - Government Agreement
 - Policy Note
 - Policy Brief
- > Implementation: Management agreements (recent development)





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Flanders

- SD < environmental policies
 - > **Environmental policy planning:**
 - 1st Plan (1997-2003): modest
 - 2nd (2003-2007): high ambition (separate chapter)
 - > participation in int'l environmental policy development (several references to CSD): specific project on capacity development
 - 3rd (prolongation 2008-2010): draft version : no need to continue the project as result of the creation of a new unit after BBB-reform... However this is not repeated in the final version (1 page...)
 - 4th (2011-2015) : draft version: focus on process management, no SD, cooperation needs, (reflects policy note)





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Flanders

Policy Notes of environment ministers:

- 1999-2004: chapter on international environmental policymaking refers to sustainable development (EU SDS)
- 2004-2009: back to "basics": image building, international fora as source of inspiration, organisational issues
- 2009-2014: more ambitious, mentions linkage of I.E.P. and SD, issue of cooperation (intra-Flanders/intra-Belgium)





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Flanders

Last decade institutional development towards a **cross-sectoral approach**

- Implementing Johannesburg Rio + 10 ~ "Spin off" (?) from environment sector
 - September 2002 : a Follow-up initiative by Advisory Council for Environment/Nature goes beyond the environmental issues
 - Environment Minister outlines SD-approach
 - Reflected in Advice of November 2002 on an institutional framework for SD in Flanders

- **1st SD Policy Note** (2004-2009) refers to the implementation of Jo'burg outcomes as a reason for creating the SD Working Party in 2002 (much attention for int'l SD Policy!)

- This Policy Note refers a lot to SD int'l policy (including regional networks):
 - > **Horizontal institutional set-up**
 - Formalisation of SD Working Party in 2002
 - Outline of Flemish SD needs (i.a. Framework Decree)
 - Clear willingness to participate in international settings





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Flanders' development towards a **cross-sectoral approach**
-> result of Rio + 10

-> **joint advice April 2005: from 2 Strategic Advisory Councils (socio-economic & environment-nature): public governance recommendations for an effective Flemish SD Strategy**

"However, in practice Flanders is generally still insufficiently involved in the international and European policy preparation. The co-ordination system for laying down the positions with regard to the European policy has not yet been developed strongly enough, the monitoring of the transposition of international policy into regional policy can be improved, the implementation could be more strict, the provision of decent input for fleshing out and adjusting the policy has to be arranged more clearly, etc."

The MiNa-Council and the SERV argue in favour of the intensification, democratisation and better structuring of the procedures for "uploading and downloading" the international policy, and advocate a more proactive role in that respect.

This advice refers also to the intra-Belgian approach and suggests a co-operation agreement





A brief history : policy documents & frameworks

Belgium

SD < Belgian Federal Framework...

- General arrangements (co-operation agreement) for participation/position in international fora
- Cross-sectoral character of SD complicates:
 - "Mixed competencies" -> involvement of regions, communities, federal level
 - E.g. Belgium last CSD: side event on SD indicators ~ SCPP-pilot role
 - Principle: in foro interno, in foro externo, however...
 - Practice:
 - SD Policy Brief 2008-2009: MP announces desire to talk about a separate SD cooperation agreement





Present Flemish Government

Government Agreement:

- > short chapter "Flanders open to the world" on international policy, guiding principle: SD, however no reference of CSD or other fora, some reference in alinea on international co-operation
- > Linkage to Flanders in Action Strategy "sustainability"...

SD Policy Note (2009-2014):

- More co-operation, visibility and "export" of Flemish SD-policy to int'l for a
- intra-Belgium: SD co-operation agreement
- nrg4SD
- Flanders will participate in Rio + 20
- EU Presidency

New Flemish SD Strategy is being prepared





Present Flemish Government

Participation in international fora:

- **CSD & preparations for Rio + 20**
- **OECD**
- for both : coordination of BE-position in Ministry Foreign Affairs
 - > COORMULTI
 - < at EU-level : WPIEI
- European Union
 - > DGE : coordination of BE-position
- "manpower + division of labour" between 2 departments: General Government Services & Environment, Nature and Energy;
 - > Additional participation depends on issues at stake





Present Flemish Government

Participation: **Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (Nrg4SD)**

Legally registered in Belgium, 47 members

Work Programma 2008-2011: biodiversity, climate, water and sanitation

No spectacular results

Recently new dynamics: Working Party European Regions
Substantive focus on climate policy

Flemish Environment Department hosts secretariat

EU-Presidency: October: event on regional SD indicators; meetings to prepare Cancun-Top





Belgian EU-Presidency

Flanders:

Communication to the Flemish Government (February 2010)

- > SD: 1 of the 5 priorities

- 1) EU 2020-strategy;
- 2) social inclusion;
- 3) climate, energy and environment;
- 4) higher involvement of regions and citizens with the EU;
- 5) sustainable development.

Belgium: (official Programme, 18 June 2010):

"sustainable/sustainability" often used (e.g. growth, transport, pensions, resource management etc.) but SD only mentioned in relationship with urban development, education for SD...





CSD future ?...

As the CSD is being inexorably drawn into a new preparatory process for what may be another summit, some delegates paused to ponder the Commission's future.

The Rio+20 process is bringing into relief the weaknesses and advantages of the CSD. By 2012, the CSD will have traversed almost 20 years of substantive debate on the broadest range of sustainable development issues. But yet again, this session failed to capture public and media attention. Ministerial attendance is on the decline, the review of past decisions looked half-hearted and erratic, and most UN agency heads were not present. (...) Although the CSD has been providing, through its decisions, recommendations and guidance to governments and the UN system on what course to follow, but responsibility and accountability for implementation is lacking. **Admittedly, the CSD has become a proven arena for stakeholders. It is in the side events, learning centers, and partnership fairs where the voice of experts and civil society is vividly heard, but they lead to few practical actions at national and local levels.**

In one delegate's a humorous aside, the 3Rs, in a CSD context, might mean reducing strengths, reusing old ideas, and recycling the same people—but can this go on?





Some observations & challenges

- 1° Past 2 decades of int'l SD policy debate, the Flemish region has shown a modest but growing interest and continuous participation.
- 2° This interest was also the result of the intra-Belgian institutional reform, so participation was based on both necessity (reflecting internal competencies) and opportunity (visibility).
- 3° The participation had also internal impacts in the last decade. It enhanced the creation of an internal institutionalisation approach for SD (strengthening of IEP Unit within the environment administration, administrative co-operation platform, more consultation, legal basis, budget, subsidies, strategy development etc...)
- 4° However the overall investment is limited and due to the impacts of the administrative reform (horizontal co-operation remains difficult), the present approach is still weak. The weakness at administrative level reflects a limited political interest too.
- 5° Flemish delegates to international meetings need more input and experience a lack of interest when giving feedback.
- 6° Stronger internal SD policies (beyond the documents) are a condition for an enhanced and pro-active participation. Given the new SD Strategy, it 's time to take up challenges and address opportunities, e.g. transition management !


