

Final comments and conclusions

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Sustainable Development

The political concept Sustainable Development (SD) is accepted as a goal at most political levels in the Nordic countries and in the EU. It is well used in the political rhetoric but when it comes to implementation at different administrative levels, in sectors and in the economy the picture is quite different.

All the Nordic governments have expressed in their national context some kind of support for sustainable development and the Nordic Council of Ministers is presenting a Nordic strategy for sustainable development during 2000. The integration of environmental considerations into sector policies will be a crucial element in the Nordic strategy (Nordiska Ministerrådet, 2000).

The environmental policy of the EU is to support an economical and social development that is balanced and sustainable (Maastricht-treaty article B). The integration of environmental issues and concerns into other policy areas is considered to be an important goal (EU Commission "Partnership for integration - A strategy for integrating environment into EU policies", 1998 and Agenda 2000). The Amsterdam treaty of 1997 also states that the EU will support a high level of environmental protection but also should there be an improvement of the environmental quality. The EU guide to evaluation of environmental impacts of structural interventions (European commission, 1999) refers to "complementarity of environmental protection and economic development". New regulations for the Structural Funds approved in 1999 increase the emphasis on environment and sustainable development (Aalbu et al, 1999). Protection is defined not as the traditional nature conservation but as for example the development of "eco-industries" providing the market with the environmentally friendly products asked for by the consumers.

DG Regio has given support to development work in the area of Sustainable Regional Development together with the DG Research. A European research and development network on sustainable regional development has been formed (Gabriel et al, 1998, Häkkinen, 2000).

Regional development is given a crucial role in the economic development within EU and nationally in the Nordic countries. This is why the inclusion of SD in the regional context is self-evident for those who accept that SD is about an economic and social development that also takes the environment into consideration.

The above short description gives examples of a wide spread acceptance of SD as a political goal.

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Sustainable Development is important in the regional development context

Regional development is given a crucial role in the economic development within EU and nationally in the Nordic countries. Regional development activities are preceded by regional development planning and programming for example the Structural Funds, Swedish Growth Agreements and Norwegian RUPs (regionale utviklingsprogrammer). The modes of regional development planning are changing in many countries and have lately taken the form of partnerships and programming.

Conventional means of addressing environmental problems are important but are not enough from a sustainable development point of view. We need to supplement these measures by “integrating principles of environmental management with instruments of economic policy” (Clement, 2000, p 8). Sustainable Development is about an economic and social development that also takes the environment into consideration and visa versa. The challenge of SD lies in understanding the unsustainable relations (for example goal conflicts) existing between economic development, social development and environment as a basis for, as far as possible, creating new sustainable relations. The planning and programming processes that precede regional economic development activities do have a great potential to promote or hinder SD. This has been acknowledged by EU and nationally in the Nordic countries. But as this seminar has shown there is still action needed to implement this political understanding.

The inclusion of environmental issues and their experts in the regional development context implies a need for new institutions (that can meet the new needs of analysing the whole spectrum of development, new ways of programming and planning etc). This will challenge existing power relations, professional and political boundaries and ingrained opinions. In order to understand what is and is not sustainable we need to analyse the “meeting points” and “cross-roads” between economic, ecological and social goals, instruments etc. Where are there conflicting goals and perspectives and where are there not? Are there win-win solutions to be found?

Experiences of implementation so far

Evaluations of how much the environment has been integrated in the structural funds and in other regional development programmes do show that there is a need for steps that speed up the integration efforts. This was shown at the seminar and this is also supported from other sources. Kevin Bradley, who has been working on the EU Commission handbook on SEA, states in his seminar contribution that the environmental dimension of the structural funds process has been strengthened considerably since 1993. But he also state that in spite of this encouraging developments it is still “extremely difficult” to achieve real synergy between environmental policies and regional policies on the ground. Keith Clement concludes, based on his evaluation the last round of structural funds (1997-1999), that they vary considerably in terms of environmental content and that if there is an environmental profile then this is seldom integrated effectively into the program. His evaluation of the Nordic EU member countries shows clear differences in their approach to integration of environment. This was described at this seminar and is more closely described in Aalbu et al 1999. Here the Danish North Jutland Objective 2 programme is put forward as a good example of integration of environment into a structural fund programme. If there is a connection to the SEA case study, presented by Anna

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Studsholt, in regional land use planning in North Jutland is not mentioned. The over all assessment of the level of environmental integration in the 1997-1999 round of structural funds gave positive results for Denmark and Finland but more negative for Sweden. Tord Céwe gave his first impression of reading the Swedish Regional Growth Agreements and concluded that there were more of environmental thinking and sustainable development in these than in the EU Single Programming Documents (SPD). His first negative impressions were later validated in Nordregios ex ante evaluation of how sustainable development had been integrated in the first drafts of the Swedish Regional Growth Agreements (Hilding-Rydevik, 1999). In Norway it is evident that the inclusion of environmental issues in the regional development context has not come so far but is being developed, as presented by Jon Fixdal.

The seminar has shown that practical steps are being taken in order to enable and enhance the integration of environmental issues into regional development programming practice. The steps shown are for example change of EU structural fund regulations and the publication of the EU handbook in 1999 on how to use SEA in the programming work for structural funds. In Sweden a handbook has been published in 1999 in order to help getting environmental profiles on and use of SEA in the next round of structural fund programmes. The demands on the Swedish Growth Agreements, written by the Ministry of Industry, Employment & Communications in 1999, were that every Agreement should promote ecologically sustainable development. In Finland there is an act that requires that regional development should be in accordance with sustainable development. For the second round of structural funds a guidebook was produced in 1999 to support the environmental assessment of structural fund programmes. In Norway the national policy states that regional planning should contribute to the development of sustainable regions. Since 1999 this policy is also to be implemented in the Norwegian regional development programmes called *regionale utviklings programmer* (RUP) which were introduced in 1995.

Implementation of SEA in the regional development context has just begun and the over all picture is that it has so far not played any major role as an instrument for integration of environmental issues.

Conclusions

Environmental concern and Sustainable Development is today on the EU, and on most Nordic national, political agendas in relation to the regional development context. This is very slowly also becoming the case for the implementation agenda in connection with regional development programming. The process to introduce new elements and new actors in regional economic development planning though is not fast. There are still major activities and changes needed at the implementation level. That's evident from the contributions to this seminar. We can clearly see that the issue of integration of environment into the regional development context needs more attention too speed up the pace of progress. Experience from for the integration of environmental issues into for example municipal land use planning processes in Sweden shows that we still are struggling to integrate environment into land use planning after nearly 30 years of discussion and efforts in this field. And we are still in need of research that can reveal why the pace of integration in this field is so slow. From this perspective the need for studies in the field of regional development and integration of environmental issues, as a basis to proceed, is huge.

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In order to shed more light on the level of activity concerning integration of environment into the regional development field Nordregio has initiated research projects - Overview of ongoing research- and development projects at the cross roads of economic development and environmental management at the regional level in the Nordic countries – and supports another project in this field – The role of environmental goals in project formulation in the EU rural programmes. Nordregio will also, in its coming three year programme 2001 – 2003, specially focus integration of environmental issues in regional planning and regional development planning.

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