

Sustainable Regional Development:
From Rhetoric to Practice

Sustainable Regional Development: From Rhetoric to Practice

Summarising Reflections Inspired by the Nordregio Academy Seminar
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Stockholm, Sweden
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Preface

This volume reports on the proceedings of the workshop organised as the final stage of the Nordic research project, 'Regional Development Programming Processes and Regional Partnerships in the Nordic Countries and their Potential to Contribute to Sustainable Development', financed by Nordregio. It was assumed from the beginning that the integration of sustainability into programme-based regional development activity is essentially a learning process, in which boundaries and barriers between policy sectors, professional practice and academic knowledge need to be re-assessed, both critically and openly. The first two stages of this project involved a national and regional level cross-Nordic comparison of how partnership methodology is implemented as a means of integrating sustainability into regional development programming. The first stage, with documentary analysis and national-level interviews, was reported as a Nordregio report in 2005 (Implementing Sustainable Development in the Regional Development Context – A Nordic Overview) while the second stage, where regional focus group interviews provided the main data, will be reported in the form of academic articles (currently under review). The third and final stage saw the bringing together of, and the provision of a forum for, mutual learning and dialogue for the stakeholders involved in this learning process. Here the Nordic arena remained the main focus, though the seminar was also opened up to interested parties from outside the Nordic area.

Nordic national-level policy ambitions have in recent years focussed on the promotion and implementation of sustainable development in regional development and growth programming. As such this theme provided the main target of our investigation. What then does this promotion require from organisational practice? What types of learning and organisational change does this entail? How are such processes of organisational learning becoming socially embedded? The process of responding to these questions was very much an iterative one, where the findings of the national-level analysis were included in the research strategy and plan of stage two on the regional level, as well as in the final, thematically and academically broader approach of the third stage, i.e. the workshop. The editors hope that the proceedings will also provide inspirational to those who did not attend the seminar, but continue to work with these questions, either within academia or in the policy arena.

Tuija Hilding-Rydevik, Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith, at the time both from Nordregio, in association with Sofie Storbjörk, from Linköping University planned and designed the project, with the initial assistance of Malin Hansen, who was followed in stage three of the project by Sara Östberg. The planning committee set up for the organisation of the workshop involved Tuija Hilding-Rydevik, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith, Richard Langlais, Susan Brockett and Sara Östberg from Nordregio, as well as Maria Håkansson and Sylvia Dövlén from Royal Institute of Technology. In the final stages of the drafting of the proceedings report, Richard Langlais kindly agreed to take the project responsibility for finalising the final outcome in the form of the proceedings publication, as Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith changed jobs. Chris Smith assisted with the language editing and Liselott Happ-Tillberg with the layout of the proceedings report. The contribution of all these colleagues is greatly appreciated, as is that of the truly excellent and inspiring presenters in the workshops and the enthusiastic and critical contributions made to the dialogue by all the workshop participants.

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1. Introduction and background to seminar

1.1 Sustainable regional development – background and contents of seminar and the proceedings

By

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The motivation for the seminar was provided by work undertaken at Nordregio by Tuija Hilding-Rydevik and Keith Clement in cooperation with a number of other colleagues beginning in the late 1990s on the issue of sustainable development and in particular on the possibility of integrating sustainability into the mainstream regional development policies, both in terms of the methodologies and policy instruments. One of the issues that seemed to show particular promise as an instrument for this integrative work was identified from an early stage as the partnership methodology. The partnership methodology was viewed as a potent tool to embed sustainability work further in a situation where the degree of institutionalisation and policy development had already been achieved to a significant degree, but the final cultural and organisational change required to genuinely change the way of thinking about regional development and sustainability's role within it was in need of a further impetus (e.g. Hilding-Rydevik, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Storbjörk 2005, 12) Though there is no clear evidence-base for the 'final assessment' of partnerships as contributing to integrative approaches to sustainable regional development, potential and realised benefits have been referred to in a number of studies and for instance include the innovation of providing robust models for finance, as well as that of supporting innovative processes, and in the longer term, the rather more indirect contribution to the enhancement of the quality of the actual living environments (e.g. Viehhauser 2007, 7).

In many cases environmental interests have continued to be perceived as the 'poor cousin' of economic growth and competitiveness in terms of the regional development agenda, and thus as something of the underdog in the sphere of programme-based regional development. This has been reflected in the partnership practices implemented, as partnership has become the main vehicle for pursuing a broader sustainability agenda in the regional development arena. As argued by Östhol and Svensson for instance, the partnership process has brought new actors into the regional development policy process, even though public actors generally continue to dominate. The 'third sector' has been markedly absent from these partnerships however and voluntary organisations, local movement groups, women's groups, and representatives of small-scale environmental groups for instance have also rarely been involved. Moreover, where they were involved, it was usually because they had been very persistent lobbyists and had more or less forced themselves into the partnership. Once there, however, it seemed that there was little that they could do except to keep themselves informed (Östhol and Svensson 2002, 128). This oppositional or minority position did not bode well for

the establishment of a more substantive role for the third sector in particular, neither for upsetting the traditional consensus struck between those arguing for an economic sustainability agenda nor for those arguing for an ecological one. Seldom then was the social 'corner' of the sustainability triangle addressed.

As illustrated in some of the regional case studies on partnership methodology, in some cases organisational innovation has been the way forward. New organisational structures have been established to accommodate the cross-sector focus necessitated by the sustainability agenda. Here issues such as creating a sufficient level of trust, as well as network governance ensuring the commitment and stability required for the new organisational models to be sustainable in themselves, are essential preconditions for success.¹ The network governance perspective may be seen as a parallel or complementary approach to organisational learning in this regard, as it also relates to the necessity to balance self-organisational and adaptive aspects of embedding partnership practice (e.g. Dedeurwaerdere 2005, 3) with the need to support or in some cases steer external support for the partnership.

Though the case for partnerships as a working method is inconclusive, it is today extensively used as a governance method across policy sectors and territorial scales. Many of the aspects are similar to those of network governance, where questions such as the inclusiveness, form and relevance of the partnership and the network, clarity of mission and commitment of the network partners to it, as well as the distribution of labour and responsibility within the network, the dialogue, transfer, exchange and diffusion of knowledge, information and the level of expertise are central to the embedding and mobilising effect of the network in question. On the micro level and across individual partnership constellations, leadership has also become a particular object of study in its own right, not only in its traditional field of management literature (e.g. Macdonald, Burke and Stewart 2006, Powell 1991), but also within regional governance (e.g. Sotarauta 2002). The practices of network governance are particularly central to these approaches, where the internal workings and working practices are seen in the open system perspective and context where they are embedded, thus also prone to external influences of all kinds. The question thus becomes whether the practices in place supporting network governance are positively linked to external links in the form of networks and whether the networks and partnerships that are at play are able to sustain change and to respond to changes in the external environment (as well as the organisations and individuals within it) (Kuitunen & Haila 2007, Sørensen & Töftling 2007).

These aspects were at least implicit in some of the presentations and even more in the debates that occurred over the two days of our seminar. Importantly, the issues of trust and commitment emerged as key when linked to broader institutional and instrumental issues, such as the commitment to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment and the commitment to implement their findings (Emmelin's presentation 'From programme rhetoric to a lack of project practice' was illustrative of this). The move from assumed though often rhetorical integration to genuinely committed and embedded integration was another key topic in this regard, as illustrated for instance by Britt-Marie Söderberg Torstensson's and Janne Hukkinen's more localised cases of integrative action.

The proceedings summarised here are based on an open call to contribute to the report in different forms, which could fit under the topic of 'musings or reflections' on the seminar themes and their discussion, rather than a strict summary of things already said at the conference. Many of the presentations have already been documented in the form of academic articles or reports and others will follow. The intention of this publication then was essentially to provide room for the reflexive processes of relating the presentations and both their practitioner and researcher/evaluator perspectives to broader, more localised discussions and elaborative processes. This entailed a more open process of reporting and thus necessarily falls short of providing a balanced account of all the presentations.

¹ In some cases the trust issue is explicitly addressed, as for instance the Swedish cases, e.g. Dalarna have shown (Hilding-Rydevik, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Storbjörk 2005, 85).

1.1.1 Regional development and sustainable development

In the Nordic countries the regions are traditionally expected to contribute to economic growth through the promotion of different policy measures and project activities. Today they are also expected to implement the broad political goals of sustainable development. Moreover, the new regionalism (regions emerging as the locus for endogenous economic development in their own right) and similar regional development theories, the 'greening of the market', new legislation and the recent focus on sustainable growth have all focussed more interest on growth-oriented regional development activity, most often implemented through programmes, strategies and planning instruments. This focus has also brought the issue of sustainable development to the forefront of the debate on regional development. The focus on regions and not only on nations or states as crucial entities for economic development, has thus gained tremendous support both in terms of research and in politics more generally. Evidence for this can be seen in both the USA and in Western Europe, not least in the context of current EU policies, reflecting the goals of targeting growth and international competitiveness as is the case with the Lisbon Agenda (and the subsequent Gothenburg process). The strong emphasis on regions as an important and natural basis for the practical implementation of sustainable development has moreover triggered the emergence of an entirely new field of research, namely the field of sustainable regional development. This can be seen as an example of the ways in which the goals of SD are moving to arenas where environmental and social concerns have traditionally been perceived as constraints and not as opportunities.

1.1.2 Sustainable regional development in the Nordic countries

It was concluded in the previous stages of this project, as well as in other similar research undertakings that the Nordic countries already have general national-level SD strategies, but the degree to which SD is *explicit* in national policies and documents in respect of regional growth and development varies. Finland and Sweden have an explicit focus on SD, while 'robust' and 'balanced' regions have been the main focus in Norway and Denmark (Hilding-Rydevik, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Storbjörk 2005)99-100). There are clear differences between the various countries in the extent to which the national authorities have taken measures to promote or secure the implementation of SD in regional programming. Many of the continuing differences are due to the organisational forms and cultures connected with SD as a whole, for instance how the work with SD and in particular its link to sector policies, is dealt with (environmental policy, regional policy and innovation policy being perhaps most central here). Whether there is a tendency to work sectorally or in a more cross-sectoral or horizontal fashion is thus of relevance here.

- In Denmark SD at the national level has traditionally been assumed to play the role of an overriding goal though the main initiatives are left to the regions to take, though the introduction of Regional Growth Strategies as a programme method and the centrality of the growth theme in general has raised questions as to the persistence of this predominance. The new form and firm regional embeddedness of the 'Regional growth Strategies' may also be a positive additional resource and organisational working method for the sustainable regional development agenda: it remains however too early to judge at this stage what its ultimate impact will be.
- In Norway the main effort has been invested in the promotion of the 'greening' of business and industry through the Industrial and Regional Development fund. In addition, the Regional Development Programmes (RUP's) were, at least initially, expected to play a role in furthering SD. The partnership working method is still in the early stages of implementation. Undoubtedly this will however undoubtedly precipitate the emergence of interesting research questions in the years to come.
- In Sweden the central-level regulative structure is strong, as is the commitment to the sustainability agenda as a whole, with a wide range of national SD guidelines, guide-

books, and national regional development regulations, including SD, bearing witness to this. On the national level a range of initiatives and processes of specific relevance to the SD agenda as a whole exists, including recent attempts to bring the various interests around the SD agenda into closer dialogue through the government-led commission for SD set up by the government. This body was specifically designed to bring business interests, the R&D sector and the various political interests around the climate change issue into closer dialogue. In the Swedish case however a parallel, more regionalised process also exists where dialogue with regions is facilitated in relation to regional growth agreements (RTP) and regional development programmes (RUP).

- The Finnish case exhibits clear national-level dominance, as it is national level legislation that demands impact assessment as a part of all regional programming work. Differences in the ability of regions to implement SD in their own contexts of course vary, while the national level seeks to facilitate some processes of dialogue and learning, mainly through the Ministry of the Environment. The role of the regions as the main players in regional development is however of relevance, while the role of the regional level is expected to be strengthened further through the re-organisations envisaged in the current governmental programme.

It is thus the case that all Nordic countries investigated here pursue a strong national commitment to SD and have strategies in place to promote it, accompanied by other regionally and locally embedded processes. The links between the two are however not always very clear and this is also where the question of organisational learning becomes essential: how can professional practice be developed in ways that allow for closer dialogue and better coordination between the different levels and for the level most affected by the issues at hand to take a leading role? These organisational aspects may require completely new competences and learning processes.

The definition of sustainable regional development is by no means uncontested. In most cases it is the broad SD-definition of the Bruntland commission that is referred to. The environmental perspective of SD clearly then still dominates the interpretations of SD used at the national and regional levels. In Sweden the concept of '*sustainable growth*' is used in the regional development context. In Finland the notion of *sustainable regional growth* has only recently made its entrance into policy documents in regional development, motivated and inspired in the main by the EU's Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies. In Denmark and Norway the SD approach, in general, focuses on robust and balanced regions i.e. seeks to create equal development opportunities across the national territory. In the national-level documents on regional development in Norway and Denmark however SD is barely mentioned at all. Thus far then SD has emerged as an overriding *political* goal, though in practice it has not made a major imprint on regional development policy at the national level. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that national policy integration has been lacking. Here questions focus on what actually occurs in terms of regional growth and development practices, while what is seen on the ground, i.e. in relation to policy measures and projects is clearly central. This was also one of the main reasons for organising the seminar, as it was felt that the concrete experiences of working towards SD in the regions, or through policy practice in individual cases, would best help us to identify 'change in the making', something that may still be under the surface rather than already translated into policy discourse and national-level rhetoric.

1.1.3 A state of inertia and the need for change

Evaluating the integration of the horizontal goals of ecologically sustainable development, gender equality, etc., as parts of the broader SD goals in regional development programmes in the Nordic countries clearly indicates that the integration process has not yet been achieved to any significant extent. The lack of integration in respect of environmental issues and the broader goals of SD in the regional development field is, moreover, hardly surprising, considering that this is still the case in most policy fields. Seen from the point of view of the

recent introduction of these SD goals into the regional development field, at least in the Nordic countries, this is understandable. Studies from other policy fields do however indicate that the integration of SD poses a significant challenge and that major power struggles are likely to persist into the future.

1.1.4 Examples from the integration of environmental perspectives as a part of the broader SD effort

Examples of inertia in relation to organisations' ability to engage in change processes and to transform professional practice can be found in the efforts to integrate environmental concerns and perspectives into other policy areas. Even if it may seem then that most of the institutional settings and a number of the instruments and measures for successful environmental work are today already in place, a number of difficulties on the level of *praxis* undoubtedly remain. The baseline for several existing environmental problems is thus that major problems undoubtedly exist in turning around negative environmental trends, for example, in the area of climate change. It also seems, thus far, that the achievement of the generally accepted level of development within modern societies leads to firstly, the reproduction of old environmental mistakes and environmental pressures and secondly, to the creation of new environmental problems. One example here is the constant introduction of new chemical compounds with detrimental environmental and human health impacts. We do not necessarily lack strategies and policies aiming at solving existing environmental problems and preventing new ones, rather, it is in the implementation and institutionalisation of environmental goals and ambitions that is the main challenge. In particular, policy areas outside the environmental sector and every-day professional practice beyond the environmental sector in many instances still encounter numerous difficulties. This is evidenced by reference to a number of studies concerning environmental management practice. The struggle for acceptance becomes particularly evident when environmental, social and economic issues are to be judged and handled in relation to each other in the same context within policy, planning and decision-making. Difficulties and a certain level of inertia as regards change thus appear when efforts are made to integrate and relate different policy areas and practices to each other in order to achieve sustainable development.

The difficulties highlighted in these studies have to do, in part, with the fact that many actors and sectors within our societies still perceive of, and react to, the notion of sustainability as posing a threat to established modes of thinking and acting. Problems also arise in relation to the existing barriers and differences in both status and power-resources between different professions, competences, and perspectives. Even though legislation and knowledge exist within local governmental establishments this is, in itself, no guarantee that the integration of environmental and sustainability perspectives will run smoothly. Hierarchical, sectoral and closed organisations with diffuse routines and roles that marginalize environmental perspectives and lead to territorial disputes have been identified as a hindrance in terms of sustainability work. Moreover, the different statuses of, and opportunities for, the various participators in the process render it inevitable that unequal terms for genuine interchange exist. As such, the presence, or absence, of meeting places for actors and professions with differing interests and perspectives constitutes an important condition for, or impediment to, learning.

1.1.5 Focus issues for the plenary and workshop presentations

First plenary session:

The cross-cutting issue of the whole seminar focused on the necessary conditions for learning and change to occur or, in their absence, *not* to occur, in relation to SD. The assumption made when preparing for the seminar was that the inertia experienced and described above emanates from conditions and attitudes at the micro level, i.e. in organisations responsible for

implementing SD in practice and in every-day professional work practice. National directives and policy measures are designed from a macro perspective, neglecting the difficulties that may appear at the micro level. For instance sector-specific interests are supposed to be compatible and consolidated even though it is obvious that society as a whole and the public administration in particular remains separated into different sectors with different interests, competencies and perspectives. In many planning situations where different sector interests are to be weighed in relation to each other, environmental concerns remain delicate and conflict-laden issues. The implementation of SD is not a task for a single profession or sector alone, rather it can only be achieved jointly in co-operation by practitioners and stakeholders representing different sectors, competencies, interests and cultures. Preparatory work and decision-making within planning are not simply instrumentally rational processes guided solely by explicit 'facts', goals and means. Success or failure depends to a great extent on the implementation level, the context, the design of organisations, routines, rules, interaction- and co-operation processes between professionals and other actors involved. Tuija Hilding-Rydevik, in her introductory note to the seminar describes a number of research projects based on these assumptions and investigates regional development programming work and its links with the implementation of sustainable development. Professor Dian Hosking who specializes in organisational learning gave a keynote presentation on this topic from her theoretical approach to change as a constructive process. The issues of learning and change were however also highlighted throughout the presentations given in the context of this seminar – by the main speakers and in the subsequent discussions that took place.

Workshop 1: Experiences of organizing for sustainable development work

Part of the work to achieve change in an organisation is to re-organise. Studies from Sweden and Finland show that in order to be successful in making SD an integral and self-evident part of every day regional development work a number of measures need to be taken. In the regions a number of organisational solutions have been tested, e.g. sustainability working-groups and sustainability controllers. In the Finnish case the role of intermediary organisations such as Regional Development Agencies was investigated as an example of the 'organisational embeddedness' of SD in broader regional development work in a previous stage of the project (Hilding-Rydevik, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Storbjörk 2005 and 2007). In this workshop representatives from the regional level, Eeva-Liisa Koivumäki from Jyväskylä in Finland and Mats Lindquist from Gotland in Sweden, presented their experiences of their own regional contexts in organising for regional development in ways that allow for the promotion of SD.

Workshop 2: Bottom-up approaches

In Sweden and Finland the goal of including SD in regional development and regional development programming work is often initiated through top-down government initiatives. Efforts to promote SD can however also emanate from bottom-up initiatives. In this workshop two very different 'bottom-up' initiatives were presented. Britt-Marie Torstensson described how a very local gender and regional development initiative grew into a national and European network for regional women's resource and development centres. Janne Hukkinen in turn addressed the challenges of multilevel regulation in respect of reindeer management, drawing on the findings of a research project where the challenges of modernity for reindeer management were addressed, as a concrete micro level example of seeking to integrate sustainable development into Europe's Sub-arctic and Boreal Regions.

Workshop 3: Innovation and sustainable development

The current policy agenda calls for innovation as an instrument to reconcile the conflicting aspects of sustainability within our knowledge economies. How does innovation foster sustainability? What are the interfaces between different types of innovation (ranging from technological to social) and sustainable development? Sanna Ahvenharju from *Gaia Consulting*

Ltd in Finland addressed this question through the concrete case of ‘eco innovations’. She asked whether and how new, radical innovations can improve eco-efficiency and de-couple economic growth and environmental pressure, as well as offering an opportunity for new businesses to emerge. Jari Kaivo-Oja from *Finland Futures Research Centre* provided further analysis of the ways in which technological innovation can be brought into closer proximity with social innovation and in so doing, how it can help foster new environmental concepts and technologies, which can have major implications for shaping policy.

Workshop 4: Experiences of tools and techniques

The mere use of tools, such as SD-Swot analysis, SD indicators, Strategic Environmental Assessment etc, provides, of itself, no easy panacea overriding the need to establish a wider SD commitment by a government or regional organisation. However, applying a good ‘tool’ can result in heightened efficiency and effectiveness in the sequence of policy development, implementation and evaluation. This workshop focused on the experiences of tools use in order to promote SRD. Lars Emmelin highlighted experiences gained in relation to the EU Structural Funds and the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment, while Michael Viehauser brought the focus closer to the local level in his presentation of partnerships for municipal development - dividing costs and responsibilities, where planning tools can be used in combination with other factors to achieve more sustainable planning solutions. His example involved the utilisation of urban development contracts as one means of influencing urban growth and regional development.

Second plenary session

This final plenary session was divided into three parts. *Keith Clement* was unable to attend the session due to illness, but his presentation was available for the participants. In his presentation Clement approached the role of the EU structural funds as a means to promote SD – the politics of the structural funds and the growing level of demands on how to conduct regional development programming work has had a significant impact on how regional development programming is being conducted in the Nordic countries. His perspective is also included in the proceedings as a written summary of the Structural Funds practice in this area. Here it is important to note that he does see the SD perspective as gradually gaining momentum in the context of SF activities, thus moving from a reactive to a proactive position. There is no one pattern or model of success however, as the different types of programmes have performed differently and at different speeds. Important tools have been introduced via EU-level practice which were also discussed in other presentations during the seminar, e.g. in relation to SEA. The role of EU rhetoric is in Clement’s view important both in an aspirational and an inspirational sense – as a catalyst to the practical realisation of SRD.

Keith Clement’s contribution was important in the context of the workshop particularly as the mainstream ‘Nordic’ perspective was complemented with an additional external (UK) dimension, which has in itself been an influential element in the integration work. It often seems to be the case that the Nordic countries tend to think of themselves as the ‘best in class’ without giving particular credence to the influences of their external environment. It is therefore often useful to bear in mind the fact that the learning involved requires a mutual process and in this regard the Nordic countries have been both teachers and students in the European context.²

² The assessment of Structural Funds Programmes as Instruments of Integration in the Sustainable Regional Development is an area where Clement and his colleagues have been active throughout the 2000s, and this topic has been one of the central building blocs of Nordregio’s profile and research portfolio in this area, as the publications referred to by Clement also show, i.e. 2001/8 Sustainable Regional Development in the Nordic Countries; 2003/1 Sustainable Regional Development: Learning from Nordic Experience; 2004/4 Tools for Sustainable Regional Development: Experiences and Prospects; 2004/7 Environment and Sustainable Development Integration in the Nordic Structural Funds.

Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith approached evaluation as a tool for learning. Is the current policy practice within regional development requiring a variety of monitoring, assessment and evaluation exercises able to address and promote broader, horizontal concerns such as sustainability? Is the knowledge base thus developed also feeding into policy-making or are the learning loops severed? It was suggested by Lähteenmäki-Smith that encouraging signs of more integrative working practice, such as using evaluation as a means of supporting decision-making in working places and on the level of organisations, as well as a broader interest in evaluation as a learning tool (e.g. on-going and process evaluation with empowerment potential) are now increasingly apparent. Together this type of organisationally-based utilisation of evaluation could be an element in moving from legitimisation and 'defensive' evaluation to development and learning policy practice, which already today provides interesting examples of how sustainable regional development is pursued on the ground.

Finally, *Rasmus Ole Rasmussen* gave some critical reflections on what had been discussed during the seminar and on the specific topic of 'the need for action' particularly relating to who should engage in this action. In his summarising presentation, Rasmussen concluded on the tensions between the 'top down' and 'bottom-up' processes of learning and organisational change. Interest in the overall effects begs the question of how to ensure that the interests of local communities or individuals are reflected into 'realities' on the macro level and whether it is possible to ensure that the interests presented by individuals or local residents are reflective and acceptable for the community as a whole. In connection with his main focus, Rasmussen identified a variety of possible dimensions for research and policy action, from involvement, empowerment and cultural aspects to coping strategies and the restructuring of organisations. The presentation drew attention to the traditional inter-linkages and tensions between policy and research, science(s) and reality (realities), in themselves reflective of the theme at hand: constructed and constructionist realities for sustainability work. The potentials and bottlenecks in achieving the effective integration of sustainability across regional development work discussed throughout the seminar and summarised by Rasmussen included, for instance, institutional, organisational and network weaknesses. Needless to say, the vulnerabilities associated with such processes of change are many. Some include cross-scale vulnerabilities such as a lack of trust or lack of confidence, dependence on institutional structures of corporatism and what was coined by Rasmussen as 'participating tyranny', whereby the rules are set by outsiders and adjustments undertaken on the devolved level though communicative processes (including information exchange, learning and confidence-building through evaluation). Rasmussen identified a significant trend towards more developed working practice also through moving from government (bearing responsibility) to governance (devolved levels assuming responsibility). He reminded the participants of the versatile and at times conflicting and contradictory processes. The diversity of processes of adjustment across scales, regions and organisations was a central topic, as it was summarised by Rasmussen that the restructuring of organisations and organisational measures involves the delegation of responsibilities and the introduction of new types of policy measures, e.g. moving from fixed measures to 'sustainability bandwidths and in this regard hitting increasingly 'moving targets'. Adjustments are not only about learning, rather they are also about 'opting out' or 'coping' with failures of transformational change. Other types of coping that were summarised by Rasmussen included coping with markets, which are unable to adjust, unable to handle the transformation needed, as well as coping with failed or weak institutions, which are again unable to handle the transformations required.

For the reader

The presentations and commentaries below have all been developed on the basis of the seminar itself, either as a further reflection on an initial presentation or based on a conversation or exchange that emerged in the discussions over the two days, or on a more individual, personal reflection of the seminar's initial outcome. Tuija Hilding-Rydevik finally reflects upon one of the main concluding points made in the seminar, i.e. the fact that the general tone of the discussions and presentations was relatively pessimistic or indeed often critical. Is this a reflection of sustainability in particular or should it be interpreted more as a reflection of the Nordic culture of self-criticism? This self-criticism and those aspects of the presentations that may be perceived as 'pessimistic' from the outside, may rank among the reasons for Nordic success in already achieving the relatively robust regulative, political and organisational preconditions for the integration of SRD, even though, at the same time, the transformative work itself continues to lag, for various reasons, in some important areas. Some of these reasons may be inherent to the consensual nature of governance in most Nordic countries, while others may be connected to the long and firmly established sector-based policy-making and implementation systems prevalent across the Nordic countries. The achievements of integration and its limits remain however interesting and as such both will be touched upon in the reflections provided below.

2. Sustainable regional development: Structural funds programmes as instruments of integration

By

Keith Clement

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2.1 Introduction

In presenting this overview of sustainable regional development (SRD) within the Structural Funds, the paper addresses the following four themes: the characteristics of the Structural Funds, including the evolution from environment to SRD; Structural Funds in the Nordic Countries, drawing upon Nordregio research from the previous programming period; the Northern Periphery Programme, comprising a recent example of SEA within *ex ante* evaluation; and SRD in Scotland, with examples of innovative practice in two partnerships.

2.2 Structural funds characteristics

The Structural Funds represent a cluster of different types of funds, each with different objectives. These include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

From an SRD perspective, the ERDF is of greatest interest. It is implemented through financial plans and programming documents for regional development, prepared by the EU Member States and submitted to the European Commission for approval and co-financing. The ERDF has a unique operational framework, characterised by a hierarchy of committees, conventions, programming documents, budgets, timeframes, territorially defined assisted areas, EU strategic guidelines and regulations. It is dynamic in nature and highly innovative, increasingly attracting interest from outside Europe.

The transition towards SRD has taken place over 25 years. During the 1980s, the Structural Funds were perceived as social and economic programmes, with no environmental dimension. Nevertheless, they have a history of negative environmental impact related to the period.³ In the 1990s, following protests from non-governmental organisations, the environmental dimension of the ERDF was given greater attention. The European Commission published guidance on horizontal integration, developing tools such as economy-environment SWOT analysis and development path analysis, and environmental profiles began to appear in new regional economic programmes.⁴

³ Clement K (2000) *Economic Development and Environmental Gain: European Environmental Integration and Regional Competitiveness* Earthscan, Kogan Page, London.

⁴ ECOTEC (1997), *Encouraging Sustainable Development through Objective 2 Programmes: Guidance for Programme Managers*, ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd, Birmingham; ECOTEC (1999) *Integrating Environmental Sustainability: Guidance for Structural Fund Programmes*, ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd, Birmingham;

In 2000, the broader concept of sustainable development (SD) came into focus with the project *Regional Pathways to Sustainability*, which involved 12 pilot regions assessing the main problems, solutions and lessons.⁵ Finally, in 2003, a thematic evaluation on sustainable development in the Structural Funds was produced, looking at practice and deriving methods, indicators and approaches for SRD, tools to steer regional sustainability, and a checklist for a project pipeline⁶ (Commission of the European Communities, 2002).

In the current round of programmes new expectations and opportunities have emerged. The SF Regulations for 2007-2013 make continuous reference to SD, with greater use of sustainability terminology at a broad level. In particular, the ERDF Regulation 1080/2006 aspires towards 'sustainable integrated regional and local development'. Thereafter, among the different Articles, the stated priorities include environmental investment, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage preservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy, transport impacts, and cross-border strategies for sustainable territorial development. Accordingly, at this level, the rhetoric is very strong and the prospects for integration are promising.

2.3 Nordic structural funds

Nordregio has produced a series of projects investigating SRD. Report 2001:8, *Sustainable Regional Development in the Nordic Countries*, provided an overview of initiatives that approximated to SRD. It revealed considerable diversity, lack of knowledge, and a conceptual overlap in comprehension of SRD. Report 2003:1, *Sustainable Regional Development: Learning from Nordic Experience*, was a follow-up project with selected case studies, seeking to derive SRD benchmarks. Report 2004:4, *Tools for Sustainable Regional Development: Experiences and Prospects*, examined Nordic practice and compared it with Canadian experience, focusing particularly on the institution of the Commissioner for Environment and Sustainable Development. Report 2005:5, *Implementing Sustainable Development in the Regional Development Context – A Nordic Overview*, compared and analysed political goals, statements and corresponding activities that promote SD in regional growth and development programming.

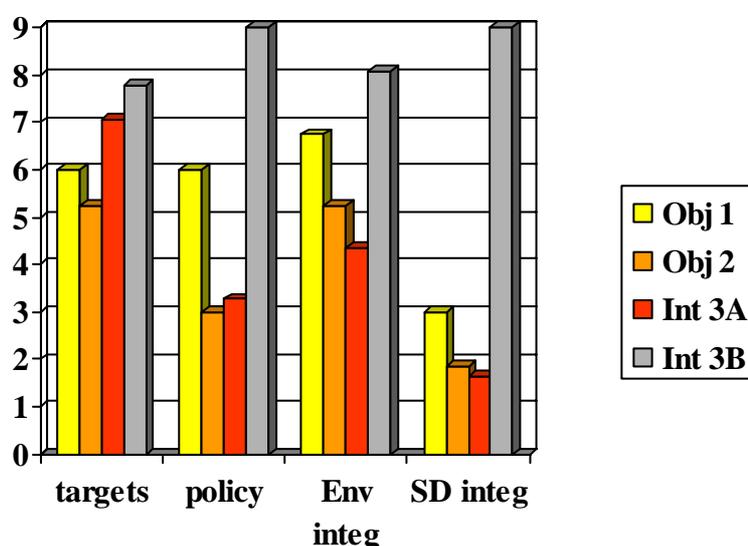
However, it is Report 2004:7, *Environment and Sustainable Development Integration in the Nordic Structural Funds* that forms the basis for this section. It comprised a review of 26 programming documents for the 2000-2006 period. These included Objective 1 (lagging regions), Objective 2 (restructuring regions), and Interreg 3A and 3B (cross-border and territorial co-operation). For each programme, twenty attributes were scored (for example, thematic coverage, EIA, indicators, budgetary allocations, integration, continuity, policy awareness etc). The results of the appraisal found that the environment was well represented through environmental SWOT analyses, EIA, environmental working groups, indicators and project selection criteria. In contrast, sustainable development was mostly subsumed within the notion of the environment, and only three programmes (all Interreg 3B programmes) performed well with regard to SD.

ERM (1998) *Environmental Appraisal of Regional Development Plans and EU Structural Funds Programmes: A Handbook for Programme Managers*, Environmental Resources Management, London.

⁵Moss T and Fichter H (2000), *Regional Pathways to Sustainability: Experiences of Promoting Sustainable Development in Structural Funds Programmes in 12 Pilot Regions* European Commission DG Research, Brussels.

⁶Commission of the European Communities (2002), *Thematic Evaluation on the Contribution of the Structural Funds to Sustainable Development: A Synthesis Report*, DG Regio, CEC, Brussels.

Figure 1: Nordic structural funds programmes: results by theme Sustainable Regional Development:



By way of example, Figure 1 illustrates the average scores by programme type for the four themes of targets (environment or SD), policy awareness, environmental integration, and SD integration. The programme distribution comprised four Objective 1, eight Objective 2, eleven Interreg 3A and three Interreg 3B. From this selection of themes, it is clear that the Interreg 3B programmes scored very highly, and, when scored against all themes, they were in the top eight programmes. One of the Interreg 3B programmes was the Northern Periphery Programme (NPP).

2.4 Northern Periphery Programme

The NPP has now progressed to an Interreg 4 programme. For the 2007-2013 period, its spatial coverage includes regions in nine countries. Those Member States and bordering non-member countries comprise Finland, Eire, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Scotland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and the Faeroe Islands.

As part of its *ex ante* evaluation, the likely impacts of the NPP were to be assessed against social, environmental and economic needs. From an environmental perspective, the procedure followed Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which meant assessing the affects of the programme on the environment and preparing an Environmental Report. However, the SEA findings were not binding on the programme managers.

In terms of the SEA methodology, the first step was to review how other Interreg 4 evaluations for the North Sea and the Baltic Sea had approached the task. Both cases had used an identical approach, presumably conducted by the same consultants. This involved presentation of EU data on the environmental context, but drawn from European level reports rather than region-specific material. The impact assessments addressed directions for support, highlighting possible issues and their relationship to the EU 6th Environmental Action Programme. They also included brief guidance on project assessment.

For the NPP, a different approach was adopted, favouring a bottom-up rather than top-down method. The steps comprised forming an environmental baseline using regional environmental data from each country, then the identification of strategic environmental issues, and finally an appraisal of the programme elements against the EU Sustainable

Development Strategy (SDS) and the 6th Environmental Action Programme (EAP). In practice, comparable data proved difficult to obtain for the baseline, and the working committees were already fully engaged, meaning that available assistance was limited. However, a network of environmental specialists was rapidly constructed, comprising a combination of national ministry staff and consultants, while four strategic environmental issues were identified, namely climate change, tourism, waste and marine pollution.

Although the SEA was primarily environmental, there was scope to adopt a broader perspective, especially with the inclusion of the SDS in programme appraisal. This was used as a basis to highlight the programme's credentials and potential in an appraisal that considered the extent to which each programme element (vision, priorities and objectives) fulfilled the criteria of the SDS and 6th EAP. Subsequently, it identified the potential for these actions to resolve the identified strategic environmental issues.

2.5 SRD in Scotland

Outside the Nordic countries, two useful examples of SRD practice can be drawn from Scotland. The first is provided by the Eastern Scotland European Partnership (ESEP). This organisation is well known for its innovative practice with EU Objective 2 programmes, and it has for some years participated in EU networks of knowledge transfer, promoting SD at the regional level. ESEP applies the concept of mainstreaming, where SD principles are carried through from programme design to project implementation. The key document supporting this work, the *Sustainable Development Project*, tested and revised the ECOTEC guidance, deriving 12 SD core criteria to be used in project selection and monitoring. Initially, an equal division of four social, economic and environmental criteria was sought; however, in practice, the nature of the criteria were too inter-related to make such clear distinctions. Over time, this manual has become an essential reference text.⁷

In 2007, ESEP secured a new role as an Intermediate Administrative Body (IAB) to manage the Structural Funds programme for Lowlands and Uplands Scotland, 2007- 2013. To accommodate the task, eighteen new members of staff have been engaged, including a Research & Policy Officer. The SD tasks of this post include:

- Sustainable development training and awareness-raising
- Undertaking research into SD
- Identifying examples of good practice in sustainable development and sharing experience with project sponsors
- Disseminating examples of good practice in SD through regular newsletters etc.

This appointment echoes previous work by the Strathclyde European Partnership (SEP), which formerly employed a Horizontal Themes Officer, who spent three-quarters of his time on SD issues.

The second Scottish example relates to the Highlands and Islands Programme Partnership (HIPP) and its Special Transitional Programme implemented during the previous programming period. With the assistance of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), HIPP developed six categories for evaluating SD effectiveness:

- Sustainable use of the region's resources
- Sustained viability of localities
- Increased public participation
- Sustained regional biodiversity
- Sustained business competitiveness

⁷ Eastern Scotland European Partnership (1998) *The Sustainable Development Project: Final Report*, ESEP, Dunfermline

- Economic sustainability of projects.

Linked to these six categories, the partnership prepared very detailed SD project guidance for applicants. This included statements that if proposals contained no SD actions, no funds would be forthcoming, and that recording comments on the application form such as ‘no negative impacts’ or that it ‘fits with policy’ would be unacceptable. Moreover, applicants were expected to quantify expected impacts.

To help further with this task, a checklist of 76 SD questions was prepared by a focus group, and advice was made available on building design, energy efficiency, waste management, and social inclusion, among other themes. This represented a substantial provision of support materials and a concerted effort to realise a sustainable development dimension. Any envisaged negative impacts of projects would require mitigation, monitoring and management. Overall, this is a very good example of moving effectively from SRD rhetoric and integrating it into programme development.

2.6 Conclusions

Within the Structural Funds, there is undoubtedly now a gathering SD momentum, over the years clearly moving from a reactive to a proactive position. In meeting this challenge, individual programmes have performed differently and at different speeds, and there still remains scope for regions to adopt distinctive approaches when incorporating the principles and practice of SD. Tools such as strategic environmental assessment offer opportunities to support SRD, and although this technique is constrained by the narrower focus on the environment, as opposed to sustainable development, the inclusiveness and orientation of the SEA can be developed advantageously. Lastly, EU rhetoric regarding SRD is both aspirational and inspirational in character, and each of these qualities has been a catalyst in realising SRD in practice.

3. Some change(d) possibilities: a relational constructionist perspective

By

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Only since the early 1990s have the social sciences, outside sociology, embarked upon detailed reflexive discussions of their own philosophical assumptions and claims to a scientific methodology. These reflections have explored, for example, the ‘received view’ of science and threats to scientific rationality, different ‘paradigms’, ‘thought styles’ or ‘social science perspectives’ and distinctions between modern and post-modern styles of thinking. Some refer to these discussions as ‘the science wars’ and as an unhelpful distraction - ‘let the philosophers do their job i.e., provide the context of justification so that we social scientists can get on with our empirical work (the context of discovery). A more positive construction could point to the considerably greater diversity of thought styles and related practices that now characterise social science literatures. Post-positivism and its critical realist assumptions is now more generally accepted as one of a number of possible social science perspectives though it is not seen as the ‘only game in town’.

3.1 ‘This and that’ thinking

Naïve reification treats some-one or some-thing as a unified, bounded, and independently existing entity requiring its own explanatory theory.⁹ So, for example it is possible to identify dualist distinctions between ‘individualistic’ and ‘culturalist’ approaches, between individual action and social structure and between ‘individualist’ and ‘holistic’ social science perspectives. Dualist constructions of ‘this’ separate from ‘that’ have huge implications for the ways in which relations and processes¹⁰ are understood. When things (including persons) are represented as unified, bounded, and independent then *relations* are understood as being within and between independently existing entities e.g., between individuals and organisations, between leaders and groups and between scientist and research object.

3.2 Subject-Object relations

‘This and that’ constructions embrace some extremely important assumptions about realities and relations. These assumptions seriously limit our discourses of *Self* and *Other* and how they are related – for example – via the senses, mind operations, linguistic representations and the instrumental acts of bounded individuals. Some have referred to these as ‘subject-object’ (S-O) assumptions, others use the broader term of ‘hard differentiation’, noting that other assumptions and thus other constructions are also possible.

⁸ Hosking 1999-2007; See also www.geocities.com/dian_marie_hosking

⁹ Separate from the processes by which it was produced and separate from other reified objects, persons, and events; see e.g., Latour, 1987.

¹⁰ These may or may not come to the same thing depending on your perspective.

First, and by definition, S-O assumptions are implicated in discourses about an active and responsible agent (Subject) relating to *Other* as a more or less passive and available to be acted upon Object. Second, the empiricist ‘received view of science’ (Woolgar, 1996) invites the scientist to explain actions, relationships, and outcomes through reference to the assumed characteristics of assumed entities such as organisations or environments. Third, the S-O construction positions the *Subject* as active in building his knowledge of whom or what *Other* really or probably is. So, for example, the (post)positivist meta-theory of science positions the scientist as the knowing *Subject* - it is only the scientist who knows how to produce objective knowledge about *Other* – including other people’s subjectivities.

Fourth, the knowing *Subject* is assumed to use his knowledge to influence, form or structure *Other* as object. For example, organisational leaders have to achieve ‘power over’ *Other* e.g., their organisation and its relations with the environment (Gergen, 1995; Hosking, 1995). Similarly, the knowing scientist must use his knowledge to design and manipulate the inquiry process (‘methodology’) in order to be able to predict and control some other(s). Fifth, the S-O construction reduces relations to instrumentalities for S and only S. *Other* is an instrument for the *Subject* in his/her pursuit of the supposedly rational and value-free purposes of constructing knowledge that is free from individual bias – viewed as knowledge that has some truth value in relation to the world ‘as it really is’.

S-O assumptions are implicit in the empiricist hypothetico-deductive approach to Science, implicit in many social scientific theories, and prescribed by a scientific methodology in which the scientist and the research object must be separate so that objective knowledge may be produced.

3.3 Post-positivism

‘This and that’ thinking, the ‘received view of science’ (RVS, Woolgar, 1996), and strong versions of empiricism embrace assumptions that have received much critical comment. Criticisms include: the naïve and simplistic assumption that linguistic categories represent ‘innocent descriptions of segments of the natural world’ (Danziger, 1997); the assumption of causal relations; the assumption of induction as a way to develop theory; the logic of verification; the assumed independence of theory and data, and; the assumed independence of the observing subject from the observed object (see e.g., Gergen, 1994). Some of these criticisms have been, to some extent, addressed in the shift to post positivism - a meta-theoretical shift which accepts that *we cannot know* that we know the world as it really is and which accepts much less ambitious notions of truth (see e.g., Guba and Lincoln, 1994). However these epistemological reconstructions have not been accompanied by much change in scientific practices and theories. To do ‘post positivist’ science, the scientist still strives to be separate from *Other* (the object of his inquiry), still acts to create knowledge ‘from the outside’, and still tries to produce knowledge about what is real. Post-positivism continues to prescribe S-O relations in the conduct of scientific inquiry. S-O themes remain in the continuing centring of the human subject whose characteristics include a singular Self (I think) with a knowing mind (I *think*¹¹) and language ability along with other personal characteristics such as motives and personality. The blurring of S-O is primarily epistemological and objective-subjective knowledge is about real objects, imperfectly knowable.

3.4 Relational constructionism

Instead of centring mind and ‘real’ reality relational constructionism centres the processes in which relational realities are constructed - including constructions of what it is to be a person, of ‘the world’, nature, science and so on. Broadly speaking the term ‘relational constructionism’ is used here to refer to a focus on relating as the medium in which realities

¹¹ See Hermans et al for an excellent discussion of this.

are constructed. We are however still not speaking of relating as something that goes on within and between fully-fledged persons – a view in which relating is explained by reference to peoples' already existing characteristics. Rather we are speaking of relating as the way in which persons, viewed as cultural artefacts, emerge and go on emerging. Relating constructs *local* realities and relations – what Gergen called 'local rationalities' (Gergen, 1994) and Wittgenstein called 'language games' and 'forms of life' - including the 'form of life' that some call 'science'.

Relational constructionism can be briefly summarised as follows. Talk of the individual self, of mind operations, and of individual knowledge gives way to a centring of relational processes. The latter are viewed as inter-actions that (re)construct 'forms of life' that are local-cultural and local-historical. 'Local' could be as broad as Western or post-enlightenment depending on the scale of inter-actions; inter-actions, and particularly regularly repeated ones, 'make history' so to speak – and history is always in the making. The locals (including scientists) may take it for granted that their particular constructions are universal, timeless facts however relational constructionism assumes stabilised effects are artful productions that are always already ongoing.

Inter-action goes on in conceptual language, in listening, in touching... in all forms of communication. The unitary conception of Self gives way to a conception of multiple and particular Self-Other relations that are always ongoing i.e., always in (re)construction. The internal conception of Self relating to an 'outside' Other¹² thus, in addition, gives way to the construction of self-other as a relational unity. Inter-acting may construct Subject-Object relations – but need not do so; other and softer lines of differentiation are also possible. Following this line of thinking we can see that inter-acting constructs *both* stability *and* change in local realities and relations. Relational processes close down or open up possible selves and worlds for example, in practices that might be called social science investigation or evidence-based intervention.

3.5 Change works in 'soft' differentiations

Avoiding S-O constructions in *Self - Other* relations calls for ways of relating that accept both/and, ways that allow and support interdependent, different but equal relations. Change-work of this sort seems to include (a) opening up to possibilities rather than closing down through problem identification, solutions, and 'off the shelf' change programmes, and (b) creating space for multiple, local rationalities grounded in 'unforced agreements' as reflected in coordinated action¹³ (e.g., Rorty, 1991). Certain practical themes seem important in opening up possibilities, multiple realities, 'unforced agreement' and 'power to'. These should be thought of as 'orientations', as attempts at practical theory and not as neutral methods or theory-free techniques.

View all acts as potential contributions to influence. Attempts at non S-O change-work recognise and give importance to the influence potential of all acts - asking questions, voice tone, words used, posture, including 'artefacts' - interview findings, percentage summaries, and diagnostic classifications. Any and all actors have the potential to contribute to the (re)construction of local realities and relations depending on whether and how they are supplemented. This view clearly locates change agency in inter-actions and not in an individual.

Accept multiple local rationalities in different but equal relation. Letting go of S-O means that inquiry/change-work (we can call it consulting) attempts to articulate and work with multiple local-cultural realities and relations rather than trying to suppress or homogenise them through sample statistics or consensus-oriented change methodologies. In general terms, multiple local realities and relations may 'go on' simultaneously in non-hierarchical ways that

¹² Including the body (in mind-body dualism).

¹³ But here I am not talking about knowledge (as is Rorty) but inter-action... and in this case 'agreement' means we can go on coordinating our actions without questioning or being questioned; we do not have to share the same story (agree) about what we are doing (see e.g., Hosking and Morley [1991]).

value difference and ‘power to’ rather than ‘power over’. This may mean including everyone who has an interest in some issue through large-scale ‘methodologies’ with multiple, interrelated networks of participants (see e.g., Bunker and Alban, 1997).

Work in the present and with possibilities. The view that relational processes construct realities has major implications for all change work. For many it means working with what is positively valued locally i.e., working ‘appreciatively’ (Cooperrider and Shrivastva, 1987) rather than re-constructing a world of problems, deficits, failure, and blaming. Of course it also requires acceptance of multiple local realities and relations and therefore different constructions of value – of what can be ‘appreciated’. The shift to possibilities invites, for example, change work that helps participants learn how better to improvise and helps participants to imagine new ways of going on together (e.g., ‘Imagine Chicago’ and other similar projects¹⁴).

Orient to transformation. Change-work shifts orientation from the S-O discourse of ‘intervention’ to change ‘from within’ i.e., to ‘transformative’ change-work. At the same time, the distinction between inquiry and intervention collapses through recognition that e.g., future searching is present making – working in the ‘here and now’. Attention shifts from ‘knowledge that’ and power over, from inquiry and intervention, from observation for ‘finding out’, from language as representation, to a changed aesthetic concerning ‘how we do our lives together’ in different but equal relations.

Work with embodied inter-action. An important aspect of this ‘changed aesthetic’ concerns the way we theorise interactions – particularly in relation to language. We have seen that the S-O discourse positioned language as a means of re-presenting external reality while relational constructionism discourse addresses language rather differently: as a form of communication, as a medium for ‘doing our lives’, for constructing relational realities. In addition to this changed construction of language, other contexts have also changed. So, for example, our interest in relating is no longer directed by an interest in ‘knowledge that’, or constrained by discourses of ‘the mind’, rationality, instrumental relations and neutral, rational purposes. Letting go of these contexts opens up the possibility to re-consider our discourse of language, to reconsider the role of the body and to explore how these might be related to the ways in which we can seek to live our lives.

¹⁴ see e.g., <http://imaginechicago.org>

4. Learning through the 'evaluation practice' instrument: moving from Rhetoric to Practice in sustainable regional development?

by

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As in any seminar or conference context, each of the participants and presenters observes and interprets the thematic discussions and presentations through their own professional and academic lenses, tinted also by the policy framework one is most familiar with and necessarily also by the politics of sustainability that we embrace in our own lives (*as personal is also political*, as the Women's movement has already taught us, and the environmental movement has followed in the same vein). The perspective of the current author is marked by the interest in the *political* within the policy perspective, as well as the links between the organisational, institutional and individual perspectives in making the political dimensions of regional development and the sustainability agenda within policy more visible. The starting point here was that if we assume, as was done in planning and organising the seminar, that *for the purposes of achieving integration between sustainability and regional development on the level of policies and policy practice, organisational change is required, how can evaluation support this change?* The underlying hypothesis here is that if 'politics' and administrative constraints are not addressed, organisational change cannot result in policy change and will therefore not be translated into reflexive and learning-enabling policy practice.

Sustainable development has for a considerable time now been included as one of the analytical elements in evaluating programme-based and project-form regional development activity, both through national and regional initiatives and in the framework of Structural Funds programmes. Some meta-evaluations have indicated that the level of awareness and integration is quite encouraging (e.g. CEC 2002), as the Structural Funds as the main policy tool here have progressively increased their contribution to Sustainable Development. This has been a consequence among other things of regional decision-makers having gradually understood the integrated nature of regional development while recognising the need to relate investment programmes not just to economic or employment outcomes, but also to social and environmental goals (*ibid*, xiv). It has further been concluded that this understanding and political 'good will' needed for change can be promoted by increasing focus on social capital, interaction and mutual understanding (*ibid*, 62), as the more traditional economic goals are to be incorporated into a more environmentally sound and socially aware policy for sustainable regional development.¹⁵

¹⁵It should however be noted that other studies have already highlighted the persistent predominance of the environmental dimension of sustainability and noted that environmental integration is still the most familiar theme and measurable task for at least the Nordic regional development community and while techniques for integration are relatively advanced, and the exercise is less complex than the demands made by SD integration, the two terms are nevertheless still often mistaken as being synonymous. (e.g. in the

Policies and programmes are developed within individuals within policy communities. These findings in themselves reflect the general perception that it is the individual level that needs to be addressed. Only through individual awareness can improvements in integrating sustainable regional development can be achieved. On the micro level sustainable development seems to be an integral part of regional development: this was apparent in the presentations and discussions during the seminar. Regional examples referred to partnership-based structures and working methods that necessarily include the three dimensions of sustainability, though the need remains for a better understanding of the interfaces and linkages between these. Network governance and other means of enabling knowledge and information governance seemed to be key aspects here, whether we are talking about vulnerability situations or preconditions for innovation support and foresight with a more 'win-win' approach to sustainability, or otherwise. Evaluative research can thus provide one means to creating better comparative information on 'what works', as this still seems to be the one question that is difficult to grasp. Through individual cases we can see when a region or a policy programme has been successful in implementing an integrative approach, but we need to understand the dynamics of the generic aspects of this 'success' in order to promote such good practice in different stages of policy development.

There is much more room for constructivist approaches within evaluation that first meets the eye. The fourth generation of evaluative practice (Cuba and Lincoln 1989) has in particular taken the constructivist turn seriously and replaced the positivistic ideals of objective knowledge about policy efficiency and effectiveness with more empowering and inclusive approaches driven more by the need to understand than simply to assess and verify. Thus the concern with verifying policy *ex post* 'independently' and 'in a objective fashion' has become more enlightened (and at the same time complicated) by the surrounding societal interests while these interests themselves have increasingly been seen as a central variable, as the previous concern with objectification has been replaced by an increasing focus on the diverse interests and knowledge needs underlying any evaluative exercise, i.e. the knowledge interests and the conflicts between them have emerged as one of the factors of study in their own right, where more constructive interpretations are required (e.g. Guba and Lincoln 1989, van der Meer and Edelenbos 2006, 213). This has opened the way for more constructivist readings of what and how societal impacts are created and how the societal and social processes can become part of the integrative exercise also through evaluation, rather than merely building evaluation on legitimising and justifying, external concerns and motivations.

In addition to this instrumental cognitive interest which is central in establishing evaluative practice (in this case for sustainable regional development, though this would also apply to other areas requiring cross- and multi-disciplinary practice and understanding to emerge), there is a more reflexive and transformative interest present here. The focus on legitimising programme activity, with its underlying drive for accountability as the policy ideal for instance has increasingly been seen as only one starting point for the evaluative endeavour, with increasing interest now being shown in solving and influencing broader societal strategies and influencing policy. This has necessitated the integration of the research community on a more organizational or even on an individual level, into the evaluative sphere of activity. Evaluation has become a complex, inclusive and reflexive developmental process, where both the interests of the researchers and their clients and stakeholders are seen as relevant (while the 'stakeholders', an increasingly varied group in themselves, range from other researchers and the academic community to businesses, public organisations, the 'third sector' and various other intermediary organisations). More inclusive and developmental evaluation practice is thus emerging in various quarters, with the needs of the researchers themselves being brought into closer focus in addition to the broader organisational focus. Self-evaluation can thus be seen as one of the possible steps in a process where methodologies are developed in order to include

case of SF programmes; Clement, Bradley and Hansen 2004, 135). The policy practice can thus still benefit from evaluation knowledge also in the form of achieving a better understanding of what we are talking about when we talk about 'sustainable regional development'.

the various interests in the developmental process, thus focussing on the interfaces between constructivist approaches to evaluative research and learning approaches emerging from below (Saari et al. 2007, 1).

Change is inherent to the system itself. As was indicated for instance in Ahvenharju's analysis of the linkages between innovation and sustainability, the policy context is always in a state of flux. Both innovation and SD policies are in a state of continuous change in a very complex and dynamic environment. Evaluative research can provide us with some useful tools for assessing this change and its directions, as can forecasting activity, reported by Kaivo-oja's presentation. Both presentations also clearly demonstrated that we need to better understand the actual drivers of innovation and sustainability and the existing and potential barriers of governance in order to effectively outline policy options and promote policies that can have an integrative impact.

All of these possibilities brought about by the broad knowledge-base already existing constitute a very important factor in promoting learning through evaluation. It was also however striking here that despite the dynamism and learning visible in policy initiatives, learning and attitude changes first and foremost take place on the individual level. Thus the barriers to integrating sustainability in the policy realm within regional development at large do not seem impenetrable. The qualitative leap that has taken place in creating awareness over the notion of sustainability as a whole seems to be particularly promoted through the pressing nature of the climate change agenda. The current specific problem may thus also carry the seeds for its meta-solution. In order to take these individual level learning processes further up to the policy or institutional level more research, better planning instruments and a more broadly-based policy community is required. As was indicated in Ahvenharju's presentation, the linkages between innovation policy and other policy sectors of relevance for sustainable regional development (e.g. industrial policy, regional policy, environmental policy etc.) are of particular interest here and the while traditional innovation policy as such can enable, and to some extent, steer aspects of technology push, it can do little to influence market pull. 'Sustainability actors', i.e. policy actors, experts etc., with expertise in sustainability issues should however engage more directly with innovation policy, creating 'sustainability push'.

This links once again to the role of the individuals, be they citizens, experts, evaluators, policy makers or consumers. Individual mobilisation is clearly needed. While however individuals are willing and able to learn a certain level of inertia remains on the organisational and policy levels. Some of this inertia is connected to traditional tensions in policy systems and policy rationales, such as the lack of policy coherence, different imperatives, rationales and priorities for different policy sectors, the lack of, or at best a poorly functioning division of labour, and inadequate co-operation and coordination between policy sectors, with their divergent policy goals and programme objectives.¹⁶

The linkages between the innovation and sustainability agendas and policies may once again be illustrative. Innovation policy typically obeys an economic growth imperative and rationale and the perception here is that there are few systemic limitations to the innovation-driven economy. This can be a problem when innovation policy is supposed to be better integrated and co-ordinated with policies such as environmental policy (Ahvenharju's and Kaivo-oja's presentations were once again illustrative in this regard). Sustainable regional development policy does have much in common with innovation policy in its network-governance and systemic focus, but it clearly also has a rationale more cognisant of the system limitations, such as the carrying capacity of the globe's ecosystem (e.g. OECD). In addition there are a number of restrictions on the 'good governance' ideals, e.g. 'policy coherence' and 'coordination', which seek to overcome the fragmentation of our policies and governance mechanisms. Policy thinking and implementation is still in many cases driven by sector-objectives and steering

¹⁶ These have been studies for instance in the OECD's MONIT project (Monitoring and Implementing National Innovation Policies), where the interfaces and degree of integration between innovation and sustainable development were studied as one of the thematic case studies (co-ordinated by Gaia Ltd). OECD 2005.

mechanisms, which render co-ordination particularly challenging. This is once again where policy analysis and evaluation could make a more concerted effort, in order to understand and reveal the dynamics and effectiveness of horizontal policy objectives.

In order to achieve the necessary changes, learning needs to be enabled from the individual to the institutional level. The dimensions of analysis reflected in the various presentations included the group of actual and potential policy actors; the resources available (e.g. amount and quality of information, skills and expertise available); as well as the environmental factors, e.g. existing policies, societal values, ideologies, public opinion and cognitive paradigms. It was also suggested by the current author that these are in fact largely already in place when it comes to integrating sustainable regional development, and yet limitations remain. Why the persistence pessimism then? Nutley's and Webb's 'enemies of evidence-based policies were taken as an analogue to institutional learning and organisational change and it was claimed that though evaluative and research findings provide us with an ample basis for accepting the 'necessity' of integrating sustainable regional development, barriers remain specifically connected to a number of dimensions from *bureaucratic logic* ('the logic that says things are right because this is the way they have always been') to the increasing focus on the *logic of the business environment* in the public sector or the implicit preference within the system for consensus (requiring extensive consultation to find the solution that works, which then can turn out to be a solution that is based on the 'smallest common denominator') and *civil service culture* (strong distrust of information generated outside the system) etc. Another barrier here is that of time. As summarised by Nutley and Webb, 'No wonder there is so little room for evidence-based policy: there is scarcely room to think'. While these are, naturally, exaggerated or stereotypical notions of inertia within the public sector, they may provide us with some indications of what kind of measures *should* be promoted or of what elements of the policy environment *could* be addressed. And finally, let us not forget that politics always has a role to play, and since it is 'the art of the possible', politics is also a type of art of muddling through.

5. Climate change as a qualitative shift in sustainability work: scoping the case of Swedish municipalities

By

Richard Langlais
Nordregio

Issues related to climate change are having an increasingly important role in the suite of activities that are collectively known as sustainable development. We are curious to know why the climate change issue is motivating some Swedish municipalities, more than others, to respond *actively* and *concretely* to its implications, and whether this is different from how they have responded to more general calls for sustainable development. What are the motivations that succeed in making a shift to *acting* on climate change? This is especially interesting since the key literature on the subject laments the fact that this is *not* happening. Have key individuals made the difference or other stakeholders perhaps? Is it the particular local conditions that are important? Is it informed global altruism, or crass economic calculation, or even both? Succinctly put, we want to know if, in the work for sustainability, the increasing focus on climate change marks a significant *turning point*. The potential answers are many; the work in this project is beginning to reveal some of the answers. Knowledge about these questions has sector relevance and is thus also relevant for social planners.

Action on climate change gains relevance from, but is not solely explained by, its relation to sustainability. To what extent is that relation vital? Part of the answer lies in comparing the basic premises and messages, in asking how similar they really are, and in analyzing how various actors have interpreted them. A powerful perspective for discerning these fundamentals is gained by asking to what extent their attributes are gendered, which in turn leads to wondering *who* the creative agents have been, and are, and *how* they have been proceeding. A common conjecture in Sweden is that much of the work on such sustainability programs as *Local Agenda 21* has been led by, typically, well-educated idealistic young women who have nevertheless had little power in the local organizations they were supposed to influence. We question this view and want to compare it, in detail, with the present gender dynamics of those cadres who are active in respect of climate change responses in Swedish municipalities. We already know (Winblad, 2005) that women are in the minority there, but has the relative gender balance changed, and if so, has it meant anything? Are there gendered variations in how climate change has been framed, i.e., as risk, threat, or stimulus to innovation? Are gendered strategies discernible in the response spectrum? We feel that the answers to those and related questions reveal not only if this is a turning point, but whether its implications are sustainable in the long term. By studying the responses that are being made at local or municipal levels, we seek to discover if there is something different about climate change, why that is so, and how that is being transformed into effective social change.

If we take sustainability as an issue for governance, we see that by now it has been discussed on numerous policy levels. The *Brundtland Commission* stabilized it as the slogan of a new global consensus in the 1980s, and it has been moving in a top-down manner ever since, from global to international, to national and regional and on 'down' to local levels. Now that climate change is joining it at those levels, with varying degrees of conceptual blending, it is

possible that this marks a ‘tectonic shift’ in the overall direction and quality of response, where the first local-level actions are generating feedbacks (now bottom-up) to the national and international levels. At the same time, the relations of power and the space for change are being re-arranged. The local appears in some cases to be superseding the national, and the relative weights of different jurisdictions are in flux. We need to know to what degree this description is correct, since it indicates the manner, directions and speed with which planners, stakeholders and decision-makers will be expected to (re)act. To recapitulate, the following suite of questions captures the research logic and the *milieu* of enquiry with which we are addressing the above objectives:

- *How* and *why* has climate change action at the municipal level emerged? What – and who – has made it meaningful for municipalities to take steps, even the most minimal, beyond those they are ordered to perform (by the national government, among others)? Are there discrete identifiable influences that lead to more tangible results, and have more power, than others?
- What are the different types of discourses and governance modes that characterize the processes of formulation of local climate change responses? To what extent have they been ‘engendered,’ and has that changed? How does the (re)contextualisation of climate change from mitigation to adaptation, from the global to the local – when it happens – affect the types of actions instigated to deal with it? In the absence of direct threats, i.e. local flooding, why do some municipalities still invest so heavily in climate change-related actions? Is global altruism at work? How does the gender perspective add insight to a human ecological perspective on risks and threats? Does it frame them in terms of ecological security?
- Which municipalities in Sweden are currently acting most concretely? Who is doing what? Are any of their actions especially innovative when considered from an international perspective? Do they demonstrate that they understand the scientific ‘story’ and knowledge about climate change in different ways? As programmatic responses proceed, are specific spatial and regional development impacts (changes in employment, mobility, etc.) generated that can be of concern in Sweden and in the countries of the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions? How does that feed back into the originating municipalities? Can planners cope with explanations provided by gender studies, or with the need to develop 100-year plans?

The fundamental image underlying this project is based on several findings from the last few years. The first is one of the main results of a study by SMHI, the Swedish Meteorological & Hydrological Institute. In its survey of all of Sweden’s county administrations (*Lämsstyrelser*), selected municipalities and other actors, it found that, ‘With few exceptions, no concrete implemented measures of adaptation to a changed climate have been able to be identified’ (trans. ours; Rummukainen, *et al.*, 35, 2005). That statement, striking as it is, is echoed by one made to us recently by Tom Hedlund, leader of a major government study (Sweden, 2006) of Sweden’s vulnerability to climate change: ‘Very few municipalities have begun concrete measures. There is as yet no deep-probing study of the climate-related responses of Swedish municipalities.’ That suggests that his study would be complemented by our present research and the other projects that we are developing.

The two quotes above create, for us, a ‘bird’s eye view’ of Sweden as a flat landscape of uniform contour stretching away monotonously from one horizon to the other. Only a few mild protrusions of active response – the ‘few exceptions’ noted by SMHI – appearing like small hills rising from the plain, have until now been visible to disturb that uniformity. The surprise today is that something has changed; the flat landscape has been modified, only two years after SMHI’s report, by more than just ‘a few,’ or by even as many as ‘a dozen or so,’ examples of municipalities that have embarked on programmes of concrete response to climate change. Their number and degree of involvement appear to have grown. Our own pilot study indicates this. That this may reveal a turning point is reinforced by studies showing that climate change has moved to the centre in sustainability work in the UK and Germany, and

that this alters the relative involvement of national and local bodies, even though the concrete actions themselves remain minimal (Bulkeley, 2006; Bulkeley & Kern, 2006; Wilson, 2006).

What then has happened in only a few short years? The increase, however modest, is still a noteworthy phenomenon, since, if negative aspects of climate change are to be averted or adapted to, municipalities will likely need to be engaged, even if it disturbs the judicial and political balance (Engel, 2006), and raises the ever-present spectre of tensions for democracy (Lundqvist & Biel, 2007). What works to galvanize municipalities to act concretely is not obvious; Wilson (2006) affirms this in her analysis of the intransigence of UK planning professionals and local political officials to engage in climate change response. The SMHI study gives us a snapshot of that, but no analysis. It is urgent, therefore, that the actual responses we are seeing in Sweden are studied in much greater depth.

We look forward to assessing our results in the context of numerous scholarly works. Nightingale (2006) discusses how gender is conceptualized in relation to environment and Hunter, *et al.*, (2004) present how gender varies in environmental behaviour. Hukkinen (1999) shows how planning officials are co-opted in making sustainability-related decisions, even when they 'know better.' Dolšák and Ostrom (2003) open the way for management of global-scale resources at local, human ecological levels in terms of trust, social capital and common property. Detailed resolution of such processes of political ecology and the role of power in local-level sustainability policy and decision-making is found in Flyvbjerg (1998) and, with regard to reflexive governance, in the rich anthology by Voss, *et al.* (2006). Lundqvist and Biel's (2007) work, on interaction between national and local governments in climate change programmes, is instructive. The role of businesses (Holliday, *et al.*, 2002), of the economy (Stern, 2006) and of innovation-motivated professionals in ecological modernization (Cohen, 2006) is provocative. On social action, we have written on the inclusion of individual agency (Bruun & Langlais, 2003), knowledge networking in problem-solving (Bruun, Langlais & Janasik, 2005); the gendered nature of regional policy and entrepreneurship (Pettersson, 2004; Forthcoming, 2007; Pettersson & Saarinen, 2005); how empowerment and envisioning are crucial for disadvantaged communities in setting ecological sustainability aims, and how imperatives of national and international security clash with those aims at local levels, including where aboriginal peoples are in the majority (Langlais, 1995; 1999; 1999b).

5.1 A note on methodology

In the research to which we have referred here, the approach implemented is question-driven and uses actor-network-theory in its most methodological sense, as a *sociology of associations*. Its theoretical aspect, classically speaking, claims that our notions of sociological concepts are rediscovered and re-represented as we follow and describe the actors themselves, as they move through their actions and interactions, as strings of mediators, thereby constituting actor-networks. Speaking with Latour (2006), our task is to '*deploy* actors *as* networks of mediators'; as such, they *are* 'the social.' The very idea of 'the social' itself exists in the configuration and description of the actor-network: materially, spatially, temporally and abstractly; it lasts as long as the actor-network has meaning for the actors. In other words, the *performance* of a study based on actor-network-theory, by virtue of its intricate and 'thick' description, seeks to expose as much as it can of the complex interactions between actors so that they are clearly discernible, so that as much knowledge as possible can be gathered, inscribed and preserved, until the extent of the enquiry suffices (Law, 2004; Latour, 2005; Langlais, 2006).

When checking the literature for precedents, we find some theoretical postulations (see the above section) about how processes of municipal response to climate change might, could, or should, take place, but disproportionately little empirical research that describes or analyzes actual *concrete* attempts at *active* response. One reason for this is that, to date, such active responses have been few, thus making it even more imperative to study how they proceed, and why (Lundqvist & Biel, 2007; Wilson, 2006). Bylund (2006), for example, studied a Stockholm Local Investment Programme case that concerned sustainability, not climate change response

(although it is a good example of using actor-network-theory fruitfully). Wiklund's (2005) study on women in climate change work gave only the most superficial quantitative analyses of the status quo.

There is however a slowly expanding body of literature that considers how different kinds of knowledge integration take place in sustainable development work. Since integration takes place over time and usually implies the simultaneous implementation of policy, the involvement of multiple levels of government and governance is often essential. As far as a turning point is concerned, it is fascinating to consider the role of the individual bureaucrat or stakeholder in that complex interaction. In their research on how high-level policy (i.e. the Kyoto Protocol and Swedish national policy) is implemented across and between multiple levels, even to that of the 'individual,' Lundqvist and Biel (2007) conclude, following Dietz, Ostrom and Stern (2003), that 'nested layering' of institutional arrangements, a mixture of institutional types and 'analytic deliberation' among the parties and the public can increase legitimacy of implementation processes in multi-level settings. In the same context, the specific issue of cost instruments, trade-offs and the associated social dilemmas is discussed by Hammar and Jagers (2007). Pierre and Peters (2005) develop a typology of models of governance, between the extremes of 'state-centric' and 'governance without government,' and use it to analyze institutional linkages and changing intergovernmental relationships, for example between the EU and domestic institutions. Vastly simplifying their sensitive and detailed analysis here, they argue for a middle way where institutions and the state continue to play important roles, but in an intensive complex of interactions both vertically and horizontally, between various actors in a flux of power relations.

When it comes to the actual implementation of policy, it is often left to planners to have to consider the implications of the trade-offs chosen so that the intended synergies can be secured and the potential for further synergies increased. Often, conflicts, hazards, costs, decoupling and risks are among the decelerating (Hibbard, *et al.*, 2007) factors that are implicated when choices of strategies are closed. Schmidt-Tomé (2006), in his recent study on the integration of risks, natural hazards and climate change into spatial planning practices, echoes, interestingly, given the perspective, the conclusions of several of the authors above (Nilsson & Eckerberg, 2007; Lundqvist & Biel, 2007; Pierre & Peters, 2005; Dietz, Ostrom & Stern, 2003) in an insistence on the importance of detailed communication processes that ensure 'inter-disciplinary, inter-regional and inter-governmental cooperation to obtain multi-dimensional views [. . .] the development of appropriate adaptation strategies [in spatial planning] is a slow process that should integrate all relevant actors and stakeholders' (pp 27-28). In so far as those studies have made progress in identifying the important components in achieving appropriate combinations of different aspects of sustainable development, we in turn proceed to look at concrete responses and to follow the actors themselves, in search of the meaningful patterns.

In order, then, to perform this theoretical and empirical enterprise, several techniques are being used. The first priority is to identify the target municipalities. To do that, we were inspired by the technique of micro-array pattern-recognition used in genomics, whereby large numbers of samples are scanned in order to perceive their level of activity for a given condition (Law, 2004; Latour, 2005; Bruun, Forthcoming 2007). Every municipality in Sweden was therefore contacted by telephone in order to conduct standardized interviews with those in charge of sustainability-related matters, to find candidate municipalities. Secondly, several detection indicators were applied in order to identify candidate municipalities. The results of the telephone survey were cross-checked with other data from other sources (e.g., municipality membership in international climate change organizations and networks, consultations with national authorities). Candidate municipalities will then be re-assessed for usefulness as final choices for further study. This approach was tested in a pilot study, which produced a first-level scan of candidates. (Step 3) The data from Steps 1 and 2 will be used to produce a map of all the Swedish municipalities, showing the coarse levels of climate change response activity, which will then be over-lain upon a map of climate change threat levels already in our

possession. (Doing so also has heuristic value for selecting the municipalities in a preliminary fashion).

Our preliminary study (Langlais *et al.*, 2007) indicates that we will find at least several municipalities with high threat levels, but little or no response. (Step 4) The latter municipalities will then be assessed as controls (negative candidates) for the municipalities (positive candidates) chosen in Step 2. (5) Key actors in each of the (negative and positive) selected municipalities will then be identified through further analysis and interviews, then verified, using triangulation, for their relevance. 6) Actor-network discovery, elucidation and translation will be performed in each of the chosen municipalities. To do this, in-depth interviews (recorded, where possible), text analysis (reports, public records, policy statements, decision documents, etc.), thick description and archival searches will be used. Steps 1-6 will dominate the first 2 years, although it is planned that data accumulation and writing of results (as a series of papers) at regular intervals will be carried out in parallel, with a final status check performed just prior to the end of the third year.

Nordregio has stipulated that ‘Sustainable Development & Climate Change’ is one of its 4 main priorities, in addition to its legacy focus on spatial planning, regional development and innovation. *Nordregio* has long-standing experience and active networks in spatial planning and sustainability and, in-house, a staff of experts from numerous disciplines and countries. Building a team of research fellows and technicians in a trans-disciplinary strategy for research on the social dimensions of climate change is the current stage of this strategy and our study one of its cornerstones.

6. Seminar comments

By

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The Nordregio Academy Seminar on *Sustainable Regional Development: From Rhetoric to Practice* explored ways of improving the integration of environmental concerns into regional development, with an emphasis on the establishment of the conditions for learning that leads to change. The brief comments below focus on the question of how regional development programme statements and procedures can be designed to assist this process of learning and change. They began as reflections during the seminar, and were then developed through studies of two regional development programmes in Sweden and two in Scotland.

1. Does the way in which the environmental objectives of a regional development programme are expressed help applicants to understand the meaning of sustainable development? Statements about the goal of an 'attractive' or 'good' environment portray the environment in cosmetic terms, whereas statements that talk about the ecosystem services that sustain the economy and human life, or about the maintenance of natural capital, relate much more to sustainability and sustainable development questions. The difference between these two societal views of the environment was highlighted long ago by Allan Schnaiberg, when he distinguished between the environment as 'home for mankind' and the environment as the 'sustenance base for society' (Schnaiberg 1980, pp. 10-11). The latter concept emphasises the economic significance of the environment, and thus is probably a more effective way of communicating the message of sustainable development than the former.

2. Do the selection criteria for project funding help applicants to understand the meaning of sustainable development? A common criticism of regional development programmes is that they do not provide a clear or accurate understanding of what sustainable development involves, and allow varying interpretations. Carefully worded selection criteria can be very effective in helping applicants gain a practical understanding of the different aspects of sustainable development, particularly when they are backed up by workshops for potential applicants that examine actual applications.

3. Do the questions that project applicants have to answer about the environmental aspects of their proposal assist them in integrating environmental objectives into their project design? Questions that ask whether the environmental impacts of a proposed project are negative, positive or neutral encourage a view of the environment as something to be thought of *after* the project has been designed, and as an external obstacle to be overcome in achieving the core economic aims of the project. On the other hand, questions that ask what measures have been taken in designing a project to maximise resource efficiency, for example, immediately integrate environmental and economic objectives. Such questions encourage applicants to make environmental considerations an integral part of their project design, not something to be thought about after the project has been developed, and thus get applicants thinking about how being more environmentally sustainable might actually add to the economic sustainability of a project rather than being a cost burden.

4. Are the staff of organisations entrusted with the management of regional development programmes and those applying for project funding able to call on advice from people with

expertise in sustainable development? Programmes have generally depended on environmental advice from the staff of environmental protection agencies and their equivalent, but these people generally have expertise and experience only in protection and regulation, not in integrating the environment into economic development. Some programmes have been able to call on sustainable development advisors to help their staff learn new skills and assist project proposers, and they claim that this has been of considerable benefit to the quality of those projects that do attract funding.

5. Do programme staff have the capacity to assist applicants for funding to improve their project proposals? Some programmes not only help applicants with workshops and advice before an application is submitted, but also work with applicants after submission to improve their project proposals in a constructive learning process.

6. How does the application process deal with potential goal conflicts? Sustainable development involves designing projects that meet multiple objectives, some of which may conflict. Integration requires that projects learn how to minimise these conflicts, and to manage those that remain and can be justified. If the programme guidelines and forms specifically ask applicants to identify conflicts and consider how these will be managed then the resulting project is much more likely to see a good integration of economic and environmental objectives.

7. Is the regional development programme managed by a partnership? Programmes that are managed by partnerships made up of groups representing different interests are conducive to social learning, through the dialogue between sometimes conflicting viewpoints. The partners may then apply this learning to situations other than the regional development programme and so help to spread the concept of sustainable development. Programmes managed by a bureaucracy, on the other hand, are likely only to have an effect on the projects that they deal with.

The point of these comments is to illustrate the rather simple ways in which the guidelines, forms and procedures of regional development programmes could be designed so as to better assist in learning about sustainable development, and so lead to changes in understandings and attitudes. Regional development programmes in both Sweden and Scotland provide examples of what can be done.

The seminar was fairly pessimistic about progress thus far in achieving an integration of environmental issues into regional development programmes and projects. In the interviews I had with regional development programme managers and their advisors in Sweden and Scotland after the seminar I asked them for their assessment of whether any progress had been made over the last five years. In one case I was able to interview a programme manager who two years ago had written about the lack of integration, and to ask if the situation had changed, and in what ways. My impression from the answers I received and the reasons given for these answers was that some progress had been made, although none of the people I interviewed were satisfied with the extent of integration. Personally, this made me a bit more optimistic.

On the other hand, the presentations and discussions made one more aware of the fact that regional development programmes can have only a secondary and indeed a rather small impact on sustainable regional development as such. The impact is mostly limited to the projects that are funded and the partners that are involved in programme management. The vast majority of economic activity in a region is unaffected by such programmes. Does this new field of sustainable regional development then also include all of this activity, and must it consider the variety of ways in which we can try to make the whole of the regional economy more sustainable? What, ultimately, is to be the content of this field? This will be a major question for the future.

7. To conclude: are we being too negative?

By

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After two days of presentations, workshops and lively discussion on potential for, and already existing real-life examples of, integration between the different areas of sustainability in regional development work, we were struck in the final stages of the seminar by one of the participants who quite agitatedly commented in one of our final discussions: *Why are you all so negative!* The participant felt that not enough credit was being given to all of the work that is, and already has, been done in order to promote sustainable development in the field of regional development and in evaluative practice. The role and responsibility of researchers and evaluators was brought into critical focus in a way that we felt justified closer attention from all of us. It also relates to the comments made by another more distant external commentator, Aleric Maude in his brief comments and questions that emerged.

The reaction, and the underlying frustrations it reflects, regarding the state of affairs in respect of integrating sustainable regional development made us realise that these issues should in fact be addressed more directly, as they are certainly not only connected to one national context or to the context of individual programmes or types of interventions: the role of evaluation and the utilisation of evaluative information is a universal concern worthy of reflection then in its own right.

The concern expressed by the participant was that the presentation on evaluation encapsulated what was common to so much of the seminar, an aura of negativity. The participant wanted the presentations to give more credit to the evaluation practice and integration achieved thus far and to the fact that evaluation already plays a role as a learning tool in the current situation. It was further felt that even getting to the traditional evaluative cycle of *ex ante*, mid-term, *ex post* evaluations is an important achievement in itself and that the challenge for practitioners and evaluators alike is to, at one and the same time, achieve a better understanding of what is needed and of what evaluation should deliver, as well as the of the ways in which evaluation information and knowledge is diffused and distributed. This is obviously true and in fact the pervasiveness of evaluation has also focused more attention on different aspects of programme work, which has had implications for the quality of policy formulation, as well as for implementation. There are a number of methodological aspects and issues here relating to the evaluation criteria (relevance, validity, impartiality etc.) that can be seen as relevant for the quality of the policies pursued. A number of methodological instruments and tools (e.g. SEA practice) have had an impact on the integration of various aspects of Sustainable Regional Development, though there was general scepticism voiced by many as regards the precise degree to which integration has been successfully achieved. The point made by Keith Clement in this proceedings report certainly does support the idea that a certain level of ambition has been achieved across the EU and that the EU rhetoric regarding SRD is both aspirational and inspirational in character, each of the qualities also having been an important catalyst in realising SRD in practice.

The challenge that was so clearly articulated by this one participant echoed the more common concern however in respect of the perceived need to find a balance between criticism and optimism regarding the ongoing work in this context and the extent to which it has already been achieved. The concern relates to notions of instrumental rationality (namely, 'what is it

the policy-makers and practitioners *really* want’) as opposed to transformative substantive change. The role of different knowledge-bases, actors, and organisations was also extensively discussed here, as it was argued that the role of research as an ‘evidence base’ may be secondary in relation to evaluation practice and therefore that the role of evaluators may be more central than that of the research community. The response to this was however that evaluative practice, research and forecasting may be parts of the same puzzle: sources of knowledge and factors in achieving a deeper understanding and as such all necessary. Whether we consider the balance to be negative or positive may be simply a matter of scale and judgement, as well as the criteria set for the degree of success (e.g. in relation to integrating SRD). One of the presenters at the seminar reminded us of the difference between the optimist and the pessimist; with the optimist thinking that we are living in an ideal world, and the pessimist *fearing* that this may indeed be the case. In-built evaluation as practice could also be seen as part of action research, as even if it is an external evaluation, they are aboard the process and committed to the process of change and in so doing willing to ‘feed’ evaluative findings back into the realm of practice, rather than simply providing an external evaluative assessment, a report that no-one is going to read and even fewer use, as was feared by the critical commentators. Thus the crux of the matter may be evaluation *for* change, rather than evaluation *of* change, or perhaps *evaluation as change*, with evaluation as learning being the key.

The commitment to societal motivations and transformative practice as part of the firmer integration of the sustainability agenda into the regional development agenda, as well as promoting a more active involvement in an evaluation practice that does not simply address the effectiveness or efficiency of policy interventions, but rather engages and commits itself to a more ambitious agenda for societal transformation is vital here.

- Does a problem focus enhance the potential to promote change in favour of sustainable development?
- Were the presentations and perspectives too negative?
- Why was the participant upset and frustrated?

7.1 Does problem identification enhance the potential to promote change in an organization in favour of sustainable development?

Diane Hosking’s presentation focussed on recent developments in organizational theory and change i.e., on the move from a modernist to a postmodernist approach. Traditional or modernist organizational science usually approaches the challenge of change by starting to map and identify what does not work and then proposes measures designed to come to grips with the identified problems. The problems raised are fully in focus here. Diane Hosking rightly pointed out in her plenary presentation that traditional change work is usually applied in a top-down manner and via a ‘big-bang’ approach (change should happen at one moment in time). Gergen and Thatchenkery (2006) summarize the critique of the modernist basis on which most of the current organizational science is based: *‘Thus, if the organizational researcher makes a rational assessment of inputs and their effects on time and motion, worker behaviour can be reliably maximized. Notwithstanding some of the dehumanising qualities of early Taylorism, the general orientation gave rise to the belief that management is a process of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. Such beliefs continue to pervade organizational science theories and practice. In short, the prevailing assumption is that individuals are in charge of the organization, and that through the development of their rational capacities (to think, plan, discern, create, etc.) they can effectively direct or lead the organization.’* The traditional view thus focuses on the role of a strong leader, regulation, top-down management, finding universal laws, methods and techniques of organization and control, favours rational structures, standardized procedures and routine practices etc as important ingredients in change and motivation in

organizations (Brewis *et al* 2006, Hatch 2006, p 14). This approach seems however not to have been successful: ‘*Current organizational change literature points to the continuing high rate of failure for transformational change¹⁷ efforts in large organizations*’ (Henderson 2002). Experience thus far of the implementation of the goals of sustainable development in various planning contexts indicate that transformative change and learning is needed (Dovlén and Hilding-Rydevik 2007).

Assuming then that the prevailing organizational science approaches have not been successful – what alternatives are there? This was the focus of Diane Hosking’s plenary presentation at the workshop held at *Nordregio* – to present a post-modernist perspective on how to view an organization. How then to view an organization that has the task of implementing the goals of sustainable development in regional development work. This alternative approach, the so called ‘relational view’, is based on a social constructionist approach to reality and this approach has implications for how to approach change work. Social constructionism is the main theoretical orientation. In this orientation, human beings are seen as social, reality is socially constructed in communication and interaction between people. Taken-for-granted knowledge is criticized; knowledge is considered to be historically and culturally dependent and is constructed and reconstructed in social processes. Language is seen as a precondition for thought and is a form of social action (Berger & Luckmann 1979, Gergen 2001, Burr 1995). A relational view of organizational change is now being developed and applied (e.g., described in Hosking and McNamee 2006). Dian Hosking’s (2006) own words will be used to summarize the difference between the post modernist and the modernist view of organizational change work: “To shift assumptions about what exists away from entities and individual acts is to shift the locus of change to co-action – to *relating*. Attention now goes to processes and how they construct, reproduce, and change social realities and relationships. Patterned co-ordination becomes both the ‘unit of analysis’ and the ‘the unit’ of transformation. Note, however, that processes may simultaneously construct multiple social realities – ‘*how things are*’. The present view does not presume, for example, that a newly announced mission statement for an organization is something about which all could and should agree. Rather, relations between realities now are viewed as matters of *power* rather than as differing knowledge about how the worlds really is, when some knowledge claims are deemed (by someone – by some community) as more true than others.’ She also points out that: ‘Change work of this sort seems to require opening up to possibilities rather than closing down through problem identification, solutions, and generalized change programmes’ (Hosking 2006). The post-modernist approach to organizational theory ‘focuses on the organization as a community sustained by human relationships’, as ‘webs of meaning that are jointly created’ (Hatch 2006, p20). Thus the focus of organizational change work will be based on more inclusive forms of organizing, revealing marginalized and oppressed viewpoints (e.g. sustainable development); procedures adopted by the organization, the role of language and relations etc (Hatch, p 14).

A strand of organizational change work called ‘Solution Focus’ is based on the ‘possibility’ approach rather than a ‘problem focus’ approach. Reaching the stage of getting to a solution is not understood as something ‘to do next’, rather ‘externally required’ (McKergow and Clarke 2007, p 5). One basis for this is the social constructionist and relational view as outlined above. The focus in this change work is simply on what works and thus the need to utilize this and do more of it. Exploring future possibilities, hope, optimism and positive expectations are vital in any change effort. In solution-focussed change work the stories of success from the past are used as an input. Language use is considered crucial in the change work. There is a goal here to simplify the language used and also to use the language used ‘by the people involved in going

¹⁷ Transactional change in organizations – modification and redesign of systems and processes in which individuals interact; Transformational change in organizations – changing the way people in an organization perceive their roles, responsibilities and relationships... fundamental change of the character and culture of the organization; Transformative learning – how individuals change their perspectives, primarily through the process of critical reflection (Henderson 2002)

about their everyday business, rather than an abstract and generalising language imposed by observers'. The solution focus approach also includes the assumption that every change case is different and that generalized ill-fitting theories should be avoided (McKergow and Clarke 2007, p 8). The 'solution' focus appears to be a very successful approach in respect of change work.

After this brief overview of the thoughts behind Dian Hosking's plenary presentation, the answer to the question of whether problem identification enhances the potential to promote change in an organization in favour of sustainable development, must probably be negative. As outlined above this approach seems not to have been successful in change work. We will however return in what follows to the implications of this statement for the contents of the seminar.

7.2 Were the presentations too negative?

Looking at the programme and recalling the contents of the presentations provides us with a diverse picture of current sustainable development practice as a part of regional development activity. In the context of the programme we witnessed a number of presentations stating the existence of inertia in relation to organizational change in organizations co-ordinating regional partnership work. Another presentation pictured a success story in relation to the promotion of gender issues from a 'bottom-up' perspective. There were also presentations by regions on how they approach sustainable development work that either did not mention sustainable development or pictured it very ambitiously. One presentation focussed on the innovation potential following sustainable development goals while another focussed on the lack of impact assessment practice in regional development programming work. Critical perspectives were presented in the plenary presentations of current organizational change work and also of current evaluation practice in terms of the promotion of learning. Evaluations including sustainable development as a topic to be addressed in the structural funds programmes for instance report both progress, and increased momentum while at the same time highlighting the existence of difficulties. In summary the programme seems to have highlighted both problems via the success and possibility perspectives. Both micro and macro, bottom-up and top-down perspectives were presented.

Moving more critically though the perspective of the seminar – as outlined in the invitation – background presentations and the introduction to the seminar provided a clear problem-oriented approach. The question is thus relevant to pose – did the presented perspective, including the presentations, give too negative a picture? Any answer to this question is of course dependent on what the purpose of the seminar was stated to be and from what angle or perspective the situation is viewed.

The positive side of the situation is that all Nordic countries have placed the issue of sustainable regional development firmly on their policy agendas together with some regulatory and practical solutions to allow for policy integration within this theme. All Nordic countries thus work with SD across policies and also provide examples of regions where SD is an important part of the current regional programming work (i.e. with concrete measures taken to promote SD within the regional development context) (Lähteenmäki-Smith *et al.* 2007). From a macro perspective then the formulation of national and regional policies and the necessary rhetoric as well as some of the regulations are thus already in place. On the problematic side we find e.g., that the policies and documents concerning sustainable regional development do however, on occasion, convey rather contradictory messages in relation to SD (Storbjörk *et al.* 2007, Isaksson *et al.* 2007). SD continues to be viewed, primarily, in terms of ecological sustainability and potential goal-conflicts are generally not acknowledged on the regional programme level (Lähteenmäki-Smith *et al.* 2007). Even though some signs may lead to the conclusion that SD does in fact influence policy thinking, others suggest that SD is not seen as a key issue in many of the main regional development arenas. Actors working to promote the SD experience in fact face a constant struggle to raise the questions that are often seen as

peripheral or difficult to grasp in practice (Flynn, Netherwood and Bishop 2003, Storbjörk 2007 in Storbjörk *et al*). The identification of these problems further highlights the fact that the introduction of SD into the regional development arena is of quite recent origin and that the integration of economic and environmental perspectives, even at the rhetorical level, remains in its infancy in many regions (Storbjörk *et al* 2007).

Looking at the policy implementation situation in the Nordic countries, thus provides a picture of a situation where there seems to exist some kind of momentum in relation to implementing sustainable regional development. At the same time however, only a short period of time has expired in which a regionally-based practice could be developed in the context of the every-day professional regional development work that on a more profound basis integrates sustainable development goals. It is this every-day professional planning-, programming-, project-financing etc, i.e. the micro level perspective that was the focus of the conference. Having this focus in mind the overall picture remains then quite problematic, thus far at least. The answer to the question of whether the presentations were too negative is then both yes and no. The overall picture given did not perhaps adequately acknowledge the fact that much has happened from a macro perspective in terms of bringing the goals of SD into the field of regional development while efforts on the national as well as the regional context are ongoing in order to ensure that this goal is implemented in regional development practice. In relation to the micro-level implementing situation the overall picture was thus not overly negative.

7.3 Why was the participant upset and frustrated?

There is of course no way of knowing the precise reasons for individual participants' frustrations *vis-à-vis* the negative or critical tone of the seminar. We can only be grateful that he vented his frustrations so openly, because it triggered a process of reflection based on an external perspective, and thus on the assumptions and perspectives behind how the seminar's contents were put together and presented. The cross-cutting issue of the whole seminar was the conditions needed for learning and change to occur (or not to occur) in relation to SD in regional development organizations. One condition for integrating sustainability in general and environmental aspects in particular into the programming process is that learning can take place, with the development of established professional, disciplinary, sectoral etc., discourses and perspectives. Though regional development actors are guided by discourses, institutions, routines and conventions, they also have the capacity – if there is an opportunity - to reflect upon and review these, and make more deliberate choices i.e., to realize and abandon what they find to be dysfunctional and obsolete knowledge and perspectives and open themselves up for new issues and perspectives i.e. to learn. 'Revealing' and putting words to processes can open them up for reflection *vis-à-vis* older perspectives, rules and norms, thus opening the way for new perspectives – learning and change can then take place. In our attempt to open the way for this type of reflection we, as researchers tend to do, focussed on the identification of existing problems. As outlined above, in the short description of the trends in respect of organizational change theory and practice, we could instead have chosen a focus on what works, and on how to utilize and amplify this while also exploring in more detail future potentials in relation to different contexts. Thus the focus of the next seminar could be, '*A solution focus to sustainable regional development – an exploration of change work*'.

The participant also raised the similarly 'old' but persistent issue of the relationship between the role of the researcher and the world of practice beyond research, in itself relating to the ways in which different types or kinds of knowledge are produced and valued in society.¹⁸ Our aim here was not to provide advice or a summary of evaluative exercises on

¹⁸ Here the assumed division between the world of the practitioners and policymakers as opposed to that of the researchers and evaluators, themselves each locked in a 'reality' of their own and therefore also

achieving the integration of SRD. The aim was rather simply to open the way for discussion, reflection, and the exchange of experiences and ideas in order for each participant and actor to draw conclusions of relevance for his/her specific context in respect of how to change practice in order to promote SRD. The aim of the conference was thus in line with current theories of learning and organizational change, as outlined above. It is clear that the agenda remains highly topical and that the discussion and study of the issues summarised will continue in different contexts, venues and research platforms across the EU and beyond. The questions posed also seem to necessitate more discussion and deeper understanding of the networks and methods by which regional development programmes are able to engage in processes of change and innovation outside the ambit of the programmes themselves.

assuming the pursuit of their own agenda as to the questions posed and methodologies by which they may be addressed is a further question with important epistemic and philosophical implications. Interesting re-thinking of these divisions relating to evaluative practice has been developed, for instance, by Schwandt 2001 and 2003.

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Appendix 1

Conference programme

Programme Monday 26 March

Time	Activity	
12.00 onwards	Registration	
13.00	<i>Welcome!</i>	Ole Damsgaard, Nordregio
13.10	Introduction: <i>Why change and learning in relation to Sustainable Development</i>	Tuija Hilding-Rydevik Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
13.30	Keynote: <i>on organisational learning</i>	Dian Hosking University of Utrecht
15.15	Coffee break	
15.45	Workshop 1: Experiences of organizing for sustainable development work <i>Regional case of Jyväskylä</i> Eeva-Liisa Koivumäki, Jykes Ltd <i>Regional case of Kalmar</i>	Workshop 2: Bottom-up approaches <i>The Renman Case</i> <i>Reindeer herding coping with multilevel regulations</i> Janne Hukkinen, Helsinki University of Technology <i>Regional case of Västernorrland</i>
17.00	<i>Reassembly: reporting from the workshops</i>	
17.30	Gathering for the walk to museum and dinner	
18.15	Guided tour at the National Museum	
19.30	Dinner at Atrium, National Museum	

Programme Tuesday 27 March

Time	Activity	
9.00	Workshop 3: Innovation and Sustainable Development <i>New environmental concepts and technologies and their implications for shaping policy</i> Jari Kaivo-Oja, Turku School of Economics <i>From innovations to sustainable business?</i> Sanna Ahvenharju, Gaia Consulting Ltd	Workshop 4: Experiences of tools and techniques <i>Strategic Environmental Assessment</i> Lars Emmelin, Blekinge Institute of Technology <i>Partnerships for municipal development – dividing costs and responsibilities</i> Michael Viehhauser, Nordregio
10.15	Coffee break	
10.45	<i>Structural Funds as a means towards more integrative sustainable regional development</i>	Keith Clement
11.15	<i>Learning through evaluation?</i>	Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith, Nordregio
11.45	<i>Critical reflections: à la minute statements based on the seminar: challenges for learning in order to promote Sustainable Development? What need for action is there and by whom?</i>	Commentator: Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, Roskilde University Centre
12.30	Lunch	