

Local Agenda 21 as an instrument of sustainable development. The Swiss situation

En 1999, Suiza cumplió con su compromiso al incluir el desarrollo sostenible en la Constitución. Este país está ensayando diferentes estrategias para fomentar determinados procesos del estilo Agenda 21 Local. En julio de 2005, tan sólo un 4% de los municipios suizos se habían involucrado en este proceso, si bien representan un 29% de la población. Las autoridades locales suizas, bajo un sistema federal, han disfrutado durante mucho tiempo de una autonomía considerable. Y los ciudadanos, mediante el sistema suizo de democracia directa, pueden participar de una manera más activa que en otros países europeos en la toma de decisiones políticas. A largo plazo, el objetivo de la Estrategia Nacional de Desarrollo Sostenible es incluir el desarrollo sostenible en todas las actividades y políticas de las autoridades públicas.

1999an Suitzak bere konpromisoa bete zuen, garapen iraunkorra Konstituzioan barneratu baitzuen. Herrialde hau Tokiko Agenda 21 delakoaren moduko prozesu zehatzak sustatzeko hainbat estrategia ari da probatzen. 2005eko uztailan, Suitzako udalerrien % 4 baino ez zegoen prozesu honetan sartuta; hau da, biztanleriaren % 29. Suitzako tokiko agintaritzek, sistema federalaren pean, autonomia handia izan dute denboraldi luze batez. Eta biztanleek, demokrazia zuzeneko sistema suitzarren bidez, Europako beste herrialde batzuetan baino zuzenago parte har dezakete erabaki politikoak hartzerakoan. Epe luzera, Garapen Iraunkorreko Estrategia Nazionalaren helburua garapen iraunkorra agintari publikoen jarduera eta politika guztietan barneratzea da.

In 1999, Switzerland made good its pledge by writing sustainable development into its Constitution. Different strategies and programs are going on to promote Agenda 21-like processes. In July 2005, just 4% of municipalities were involved in the process, though this does represent 29% of the population. In Switzerland, under the country's federal system, local authorities have for a long time enjoyed considerable autonomy and, under the Swiss system of direct democracy, citizens are able to participate more fully in all political decision-making than in other countries. In the longer term, the aim of the National Sustainable development Strategy is to include sustainable development in all the policies and activities of public authorities.

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1. SWITZERLAND AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 1999, Switzerland made good its pledge by writing sustainable development into its Constitution (Federal Constitution, 1999). In 2002, in anticipation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development held that year in Johannesburg, the Federal Council adopted a new «Sustainable Development Strategy 2002» (Swiss Federal Council, 2002). This document stresses the importance of involving public authorities, at cantonal, regional and municipal levels, into the implementation of sustainable development, and of encouraging them to adopt their own strategies.

In Switzerland, the task of promoting sustainable development falls to the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE). In addition to its work at the federal level, the ARE encourages the establishment of sustainable development programmes at the cantonal, municipal and regional levels.

To obtain a clear overall picture of the situation in Switzerland and make its strategy of promoting Local Agenda 21 programmes more effective, the ARE draws up since 2003 an inventory of sustainable development initiatives by Swiss municipalities, and cantons. The first part of this paper presents the results of this inventory.

In order to promote sustainable development in Switzerland, the ARE offers:

- A platform for the exchange of experience and information: the Sustainable Development Forum¹ for cantons and towns (takes place twice a year).
- Services to meet the needs of local players: 'Cercle Indicateurs' (sustainable development indicators for cantons and towns); guide to project evaluation tools, quality standards for sustainable development initiatives and support programme.
- Consolidation of the framework of reference (Sustainable Development Strategy 2002, sustainability assessment, MONET system of indicators).
- Provision of information on the Internet (enabling searches for processes and best practice).

These promotion strategies will be explained in more details in part two and three of the present paper.

Since June 2004, the ARE has also been involved in a European network of national agencies responsible for promoting local initiatives – the European Local Action 21 Roundtable. The ARE has undertaken to gather available information on the promotion of local Agenda 21, at the national level in Europe. This survey is not exhaustive, but it provides an

overview of what is being done in this field in a number of European countries in 2005. A summary of the results is presented in the fourth and last part of this paper.

2. A NATIONAL SURVEY

Switzerland's first local Agenda 21 programmes were launched in 1997. Since then, the number of such programmes has increased steadily, but not until 2003 was it possible to get a clear picture of the situation. The present state of development is now set out in the dossier «Progress with sustainable development programmes at municipal level» (DuPasquier *et al.*, 2004). What exactly is a sustainable development or a local Agenda 21 process? It consists of activities based on an approach to problems which takes the economic, social and environmental dimensions into account, and which is participatory in structure.

In 2003, in the framework of the Sustainable Development Forum for cantons and towns the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), in collaboration with IDHEAP² and sanu³, launched a national survey of the towns and some of the smaller municipalities concerned, so as to take stock of the situation at local level. The operation was a success where the towns were concerned, with 70% returning the completed questionnaire. From their answers, combined with those of smaller municipalities and information

¹ The Sustainable Development Forum for cantons and towns was established in 2001, on the initiative of the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), the Swiss Conference of Directors of Public Works, Planning and Environmental Protection (DTAP) and the Association of Swiss Cities (Union des villes suisses, UVS).

² Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration.

³ Partnership for environmental training and sustainability, Biel.

from other sources it was found that, in July 2003, 94 municipalities had embarked upon sustainable development programmes in the spirit of Agenda 21, and that a further 29 municipalities were intending to launch one in the short or medium term. This survey has been updated in 2004 and 2005.

2.1. The role of towns

Today, 3% of Swiss municipalities are involved in Agenda 21-type programmes.

By way of comparison, 70% of Swedish municipalities are operating sustainable development programmes, while the figures for Germany and France are 20% and 0.4% respectively. United Kingdom and Denmark have 93% respectively 85% because they do have mandatory legal basis. Despite Switzerland's poor showing, the municipalities committed to a programme nevertheless represent 30% of the population. The towns, in particular, are playing an important role, since they account for 90% of the population living in municipalities which have launched

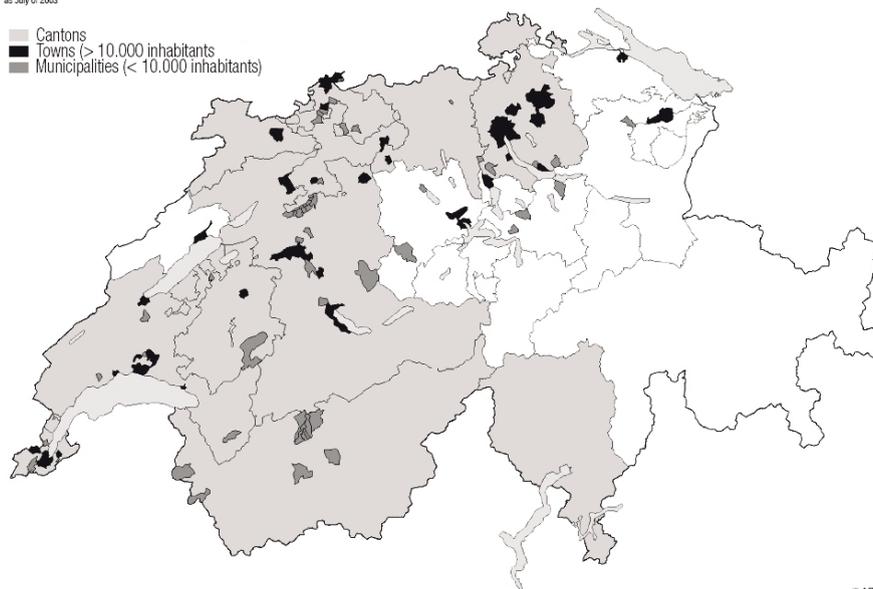
Figure 1

Overview of sustainable development programmes in Switzerland

Sustainable development programmes

as July of 2003

- Cantons
- Towns (> 10.000 inhabitants)
- Municipalities (< 10.000 inhabitants)

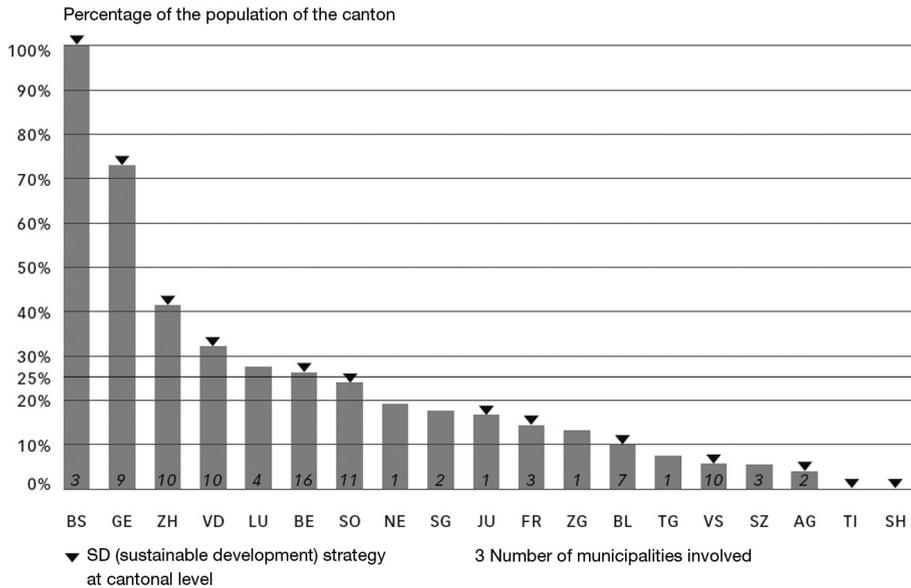


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Source: Dupasquier *et al.* (2004).

Figure 2

Distribution of programmes by canton, and proportion of inhabitants living in a municipality with a sustainable development programme



Source: Dupasquier *et al.* (2004).

sustainable development programmes. This is due in particular to the participation of eight of Switzerland's major cities: Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, St Gallen, Winterthur and Zurich. Thirty or so medium-sized towns are also involved. In total, 30% of Swiss towns are committed, and there is still considerable potential where the other two thirds are concerned.

The 140 municipalities committed to the scheme are spread over 22 cantons, as shown in figure 2.

Fourteen cantons have also instituted programmes at the cantonal level. A striking feature of this distribution is again the weight of the major cities. If we exclude the special case of Basel-Stadt, all of whose three municipalities are engaged in the same programme, we find that of the other nine cantons with over 25% of their population living in a participating municipality, five have one or, in some cases, two towns of over 50,000 inhabitants. At the other end of the scale, in the Valais, the 10 municipalities

involved represented a mere 6% of the canton's population.

There is also an obvious link between cantonal strategies offering specific support to municipalities and the number of programmes operated by the municipalities concerned. Good examples are the Canton Bern, with its «LA21 network for municipalities»⁴ (16 municipalities involved) and Geneva, which has produced a «Practical guide to Agenda 21 at municipal level» (DIAE, 2002) (11 municipalities involved in Geneva). Other cantons have introduced strategies which give priority to targeting the cantonal government and administrations (Jura, Argau, Schaffhausen) and for the time being have no – or very few – individually committed municipalities. However, the process is on-going: a number of other municipalities have announced programmes.

2.2. Reasons

The survey reveals why municipalities have not launched programmes. Small towns in particular lack the time and personnel. Other reasons cited were lack of financial resources and lack of political will. On the positive side, the reasons cited by municipalities for undertaking a sustainable development programme were, first of all, a desire to take account of the concerns of the population as a whole and the political drive to be a more «sustainable» municipality. Other reasons mentioned were the desire to solve a specific problem which was difficult to deal with by conventional means, and to

improve the municipality's image in the eyes of the world at large.

2.3. Issues

The issues most commonly tackled in Agenda 21 programmes are mobility and spatial development, together with conservation of nature and the landscape. These are complex issues, closely bound up with the three dimensions of sustainable development. Communication and awareness-raising are further strong points of emphasis of the programmes under consideration. Energy – also a priority issue – is another point of entry to sustainable development, as shown by the 23 municipalities (18 of them towns) awarded the «Cité de l'énergie» label. The more obviously social issues raised are health and integration. However, issues of international cooperation and gender equality – though part of the Rio Agenda 21 – are tackled only rarely.

2.4. The parties involved

In most cases, the executive bears responsibility for the programme, while the operational coordination is undertaken by the administration or an ad hoc committee. In a few cases, sustainable development delegates have been appointed. Many different players participate in programmes, but it is often difficult to include representatives of young people and the elderly.

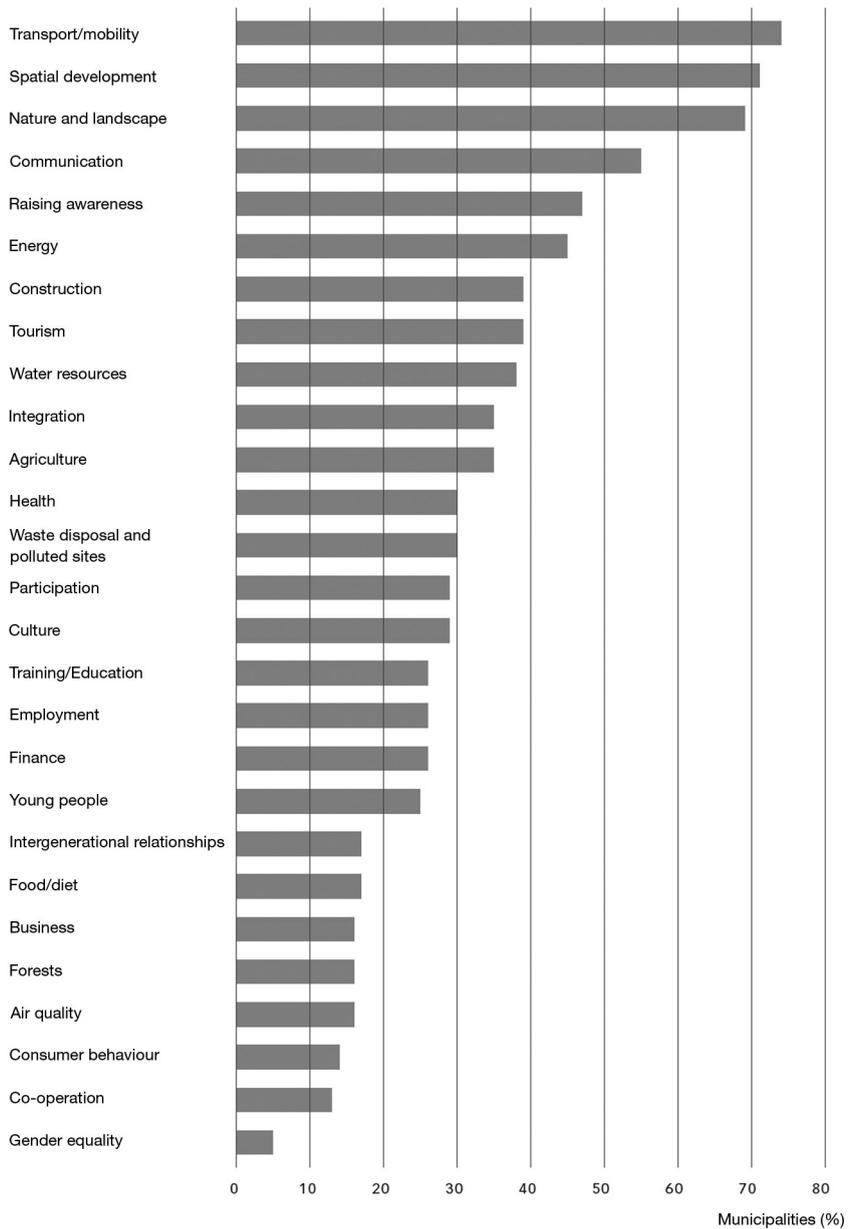
2.5. Difficulties and benefits?

Launching an Agenda 21 programme is not always plain sailing. The problems

⁴ Cf. www.kus.bve.be.ch

Figure 3

Mobility and spatial development are the issues most commonly tackled under Agenda 21 programmes



Source: Dupasquier *et al.* (2004).

most commonly cited are lack of financial resources or personnel, organisational difficulties, and problems arising from misunderstandings of the term sustainable development itself.

Although it is difficult to view so recent a development in perspective, some concrete results of sustainable development programmes are already evident. Improved municipal governance appears to be one of the most obvious benefits, thanks to better integration of sectoral policies, greater interdepartmental co-operation, greater efficiency resulting from the introduction of clear procedures, and more effort being made to include the various interested parties.

The municipalities also noted better communication between inhabitants, the administration and the political authorities, and opportunities to foster public participation. Agenda 21-type programmes have brought about changes in municipal regulations. In 20% of municipalities, these changes were of a legislative nature, such as the adoption of a charter, the reworking of local development or zoning plans, or the drafting of new building or transport regulations.

In 33% of municipalities, the changes were organisational, for instance the appointment of a delegate, a steering committee or interdepartmental working groups within the administration.

The results of the 2003 survey have highlighted some areas where more effort is needed. For example, political groups and parties – in particular legislative bodies – need to be more fully involved, for without broad political support there is no guarantee that the programmes can be sustained.

Global interest in local activities needs to be taken more seriously and communicated more effectively. Where issues are concerned, the social and economic aspects deserve to be given more emphasis, and education needs to be included in the process. As a longer-term goal, barriers need to be broken down between different fields and sustainable development integrated into all areas of public policy. Continuing efforts are required to make available expertise, methods and tools, as these are just as important as financial resources. Despite these deficiencies, the municipalities' commitment to the process of sustainable development is making significant progress, as proved by the efforts of the forty or so towns active in this field. It now remains to ensure the durability and quality of existing programmes and to encourage the start-up of new programmes. To this end, the Sustainable Development Forum for cantons and towns goes on. It provides a platform for information and the sharing of experience. For some of the 2,700 municipalities, including eighty or so towns, the launch of a sustainable development programme is an opportunity to be grasped as they start renewals of their land use planning.

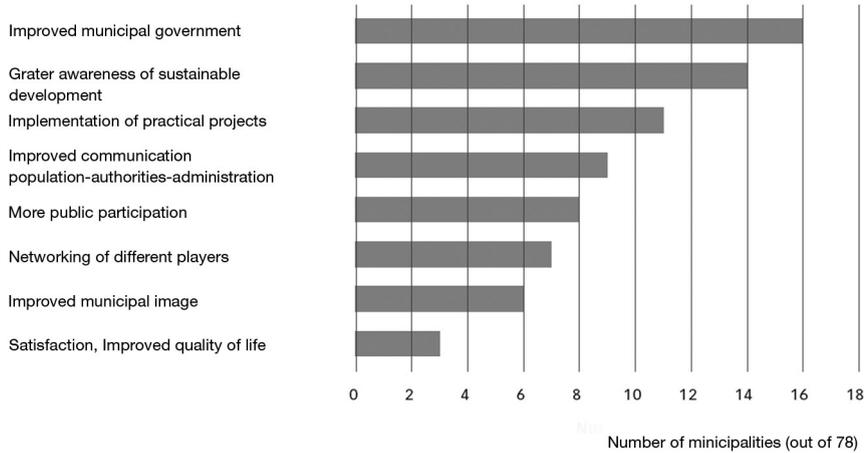
3. TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Quality criteria for a sustainable development process

As seen before, Agenda 21 and Agenda 21-like processes are very diverse, in terms of the actors involved, how they are organised, and their

Figure 4

Observed benefits



Source: Dupasquier *et al.* (2004).

content. In order that all can benefit from the experience gained and refer to a homogeneous definition of a high-quality sustainable development process, a list of criteria has been drawn up by a group of members of the Sustainable Development Forum for cantons and towns, under the aegis of the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE).

This working group from the Sustainable Development Forum for cantons and towns met on several occasions between December 2004 and August 2005. Its objective was to define some crucial quality criteria to be factored in to Agenda 21 sustainable development processes.

Based on accumulated experience to date, these quality criteria provide a reference framework for public authority

actors at cantonal, regional and municipal levels who are embarking upon a new sustainable development process or who wish to improve an existing process. The quality criteria put forward in the report are divided into three sections, covering «The fundamental principles of sustainable development», «Success factors» and «A process of continuous improvement». The resulting model is then presented in the form of a diagram.

The working group has drawn up a reference model for Switzerland which represents the ideal sustainable development process and should be interpreted as an ongoing improvement process. It also presents a number of evaluation tools from existing processes.

28 quality criteria have been defined, which can be summarised as follows: A

good sustainable development process must:

- Be founded on the principles of sustainable development.
- Guarantee a process of continuous improvement.
- Be capable of succeeding, on the basis of defined success factors.

The base of this framework are the 28 quality criteria chosen. It provides, first and foremost, a framework to stimulate reflection, rather than a procedure to be followed to the letter. More than just a recipe book to be scrupulously followed, it is a collection of fundamental principles.

3.2. Assessing sustainability

3.2.1. *Federal level*

In Measure 22 of the Sustainable Development Strategy 2002, the Federal Council stated that possible means of conducting sustainability assessments on Confederation projects should be investigated. A study conducted under the leadership of the ARE has confirmed in principle the feasibility of such assessments.

Sustainability assessments, which are laid down in a corresponding framework strategy, are aimed at the federal government's strategic, programmatic and conceptual activities and projects, such as its legislation, programmes, strategies and concepts. They are intended to provide a transparent basis for decision making in the policy process. The central focus is less on whether a project is sustainable or not in itself, but rather about optimising activities and

projects in the light of sustainable development factors.

The framework concept proposes three stages of work:

- (1) Relevance analysis, which should clarify a project's relevance in sustainability terms in a straightforward way.
- (2) Impact analysis, which investigates a project's impact on the three dimensions of sustainability (in outline or in detail, as necessary) and analyses where objectives conflict with each other.
- (3) The assessment, which applies specific criteria to the impacts that have been identified – such as whether an irreversible trend might be triggered.

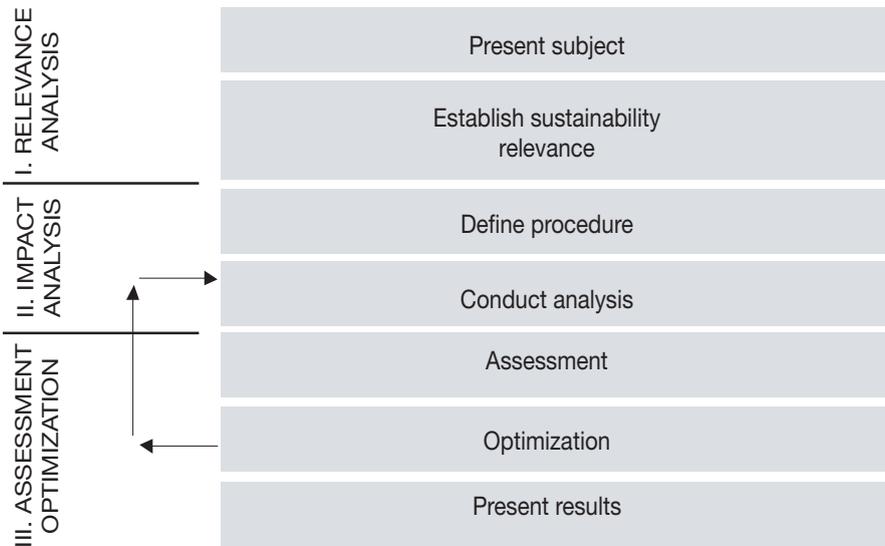
The methodology was tested using the agriculture example in the context of the 2005 Agricultural Report and the 2011 Agricultural Policy. Other case studies (sectoral transport plan (programme section), structural planning, aviation, ethanol as fuel) are currently being tested and developed. Meanwhile, further analysis is required of where sustainability assessments touch on and display synergies with other existing or planned assessment tools.

3.2.2. *Level of cantons, cities and villages*

In cantons, cities and villages sustainability processes are dynamic processes aimed at factoring environmental, social and economic considerations into laws, action plans and public projects at cantonal and local level as well as on a federal scale.

Figure 5

Sustainability assessment procedure



Source: ARE (2004b).

Although there are many tools available for practical sustainability assessments at local level in cantons and municipalities, up to recently, no overview existed for Switzerland as a whole. This gap was closed with the guidelines «Instruments for sustainability assessment: What is available and how to negotiate the maze» (ARE, 2004a). It provides cantons, town and city administrations and all interested individuals with a collection of the tools that presently exist for assessing project sustainability. Around twenty instruments are examined, two of which are from abroad. A grid with simple criteria is also given to help users choose the right tool for their needs.

The ARE has produced recommendations on the use of tools for sustainability assessments at local level. The most relevant existing tools have been tested and analysed with the participation of a working group drawn from members of the Sustainable Development Forum (representatives of cantons and towns/cities). The findings of this testing and analysis were then used to draw up recommendations enabling such tools to be put into practice successfully in cantonal, regional and municipal public management.

Given the complexity of sustainability assessments and the wide variety of tools

that are already available, the object of this project was not to produce a single standard tool for cantons and municipalities. Rather, it aimed to lay down *common principles* of coordination which will allow for the use of different instruments. Furthermore, even though tools already exist, few are actually used in practice. There has been no framework that would allow evaluation from a sustainable development perspective to be integrated into public-sector tasks at cantonal and municipal levels.

The project involved setting up a platform to facilitate exchange about sustainable development at the local level between interested cantons and municipalities. It also aimed to stimulate lively debate on this issue with a view to defining a coherent concept of sustainability assessment. This would be based on the sustainability assessments conducted by the Swiss Confederation and aimed at the systematic use of evaluation tools for the activities and/or projects of public collectives (cantons and municipalities).

The recommendations are based on:

- The tools used to evaluate projects according to sustainable development criteria, plus the way in which they are used in Switzerland, in line with the national sustainable development strategy and the methods developed in this field at federal level;
- The procedures which enable projects to be evaluated from a sustainable development perspective, factoring in the results gained from decision-making processes;

- The choice of a process and a tool suitable for the particular context, the available resources and the scale of the project.

To some extent, the recommendations deal with the substantive elements of the tools – choice of criteria, indicators used, degree of complexity, methods of aggregation, etc. However, they also set out the institutional framework within which these tools should be used – the parties involved, the resources needed, the rules that must be observed, etc.

In a first phase, the ARE had already drawn up an inventory of existing tools for project assessments according to sustainability criteria. This work was carried out in parallel with the assessment framework for the activities of the Swiss Confederation (ARE, 2004b).

Within a 2 years (of 2003 to 2005) project, several cantons, cities and offices developed, on the basis of already existing work, two indicator systems, one for the cantons and another for the cities. The principal goal of this central indicators is to evaluate the current state and to monitor future developments.

This project, called “Circle Indicators” (ARE, 2005), concentrated on the development and calculation of the chosen indicators.

Priority themes have been identified for each sustainable development. For each theme, an indicator for the cities and another for the cantons have been selected.

In 2005, the indicators were collected for the participating cantons and cities. These numbers will be used as a base for future monitoring. Today they are used for

a benchmarking between them participating entities.

4. MONITORING SUSTAINABILITY IN SWITZERLAND

The MONET (Altwegg *et al.*, 2004) indicator system (the acronym derives from the German for «monitoring sustainable development») offers an instrument for measuring sustainable development in Switzerland.

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) and the Federal Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL) joined forces to create the MONET measuring system. With over 100 indicators, this monitoring tool facilitates regular reporting on the status and progress of sustainable development throughout the Swiss Confederation. At present for about 50% of these indicators actual data exist.

MONET supplied a comprehensive picture of sustainable development in Switzerland for the first time in 2003. It concluded that the first investments in a sustainable development had been made, but that instead of living on the interest from those investments, we are eroding the capital of other countries and future generations.

5. SWISS ACTIVITY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

5.1. Background

There is a wide diversity of approach to this local Agenda 21 among the various

European countries. With this in mind, the ARE has undertaken to gather together available information on the promotion of local Agenda 21, at the national level in Europe. This survey is not exhaustive, but it provides an overview of what is being done in this field in a number of European countries in 2005. It covers 13 countries: Germany (DE), Austria (AT), Denmark (DK), France (FR), United Kingdom (UK), Italy (IT), Sweden (SE), Czech Republic (CZ), Finland (FI), Iceland (IS), Norway (NO), the Netherlands (NL) and Switzerland (CH).

5.2. Overview of the situation in Europe

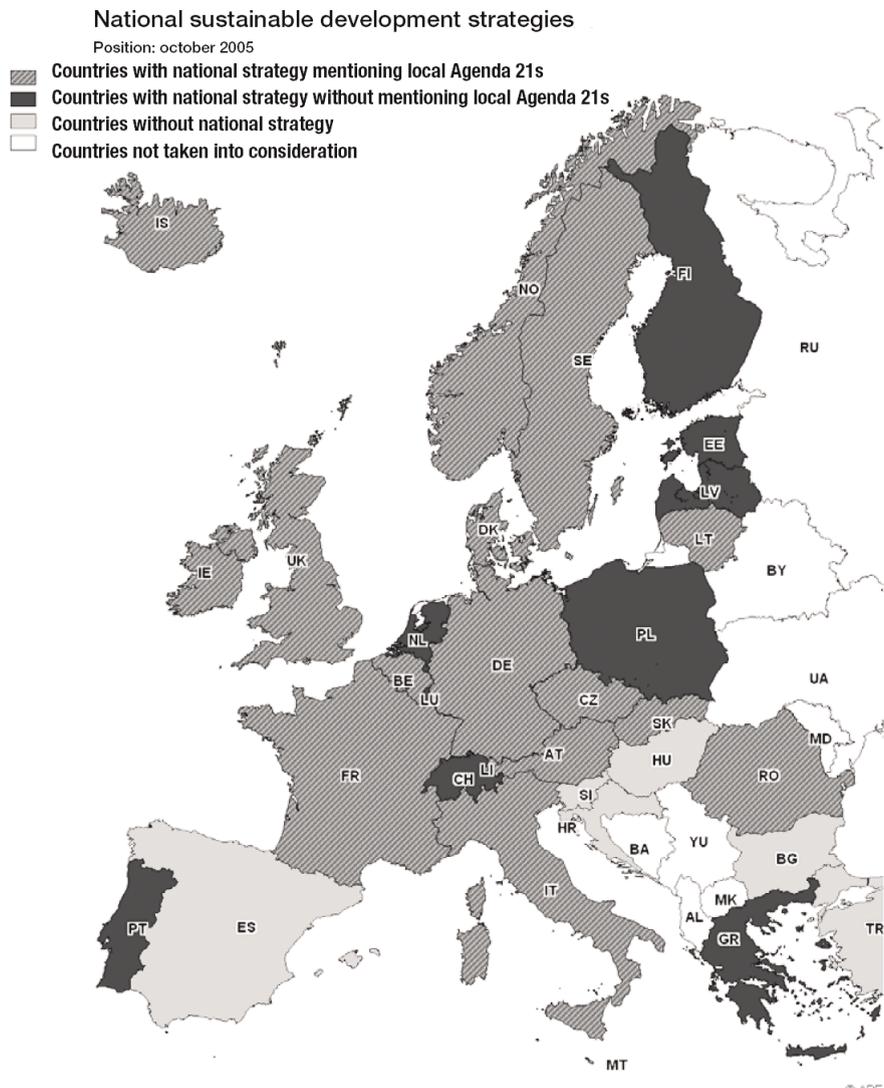
In Europe, 25 countries, 22 of which are European Union members, have a National Sustainable Development Strategy. Of these, seventeen have included the promotion of Local Agenda 21 initiatives (LA21s) in their strategies or make reference to them. The following map illustrates the situation as of October 2005.

Among the 13 countries covered by this study, three make no explicit reference in their national strategy to the promotion of LA21s: these are the Netherlands (NL), Finland (FI) and Switzerland (CH). In the case of the latter, it is noted that encouragement is given for partnerships with cantonal, regional and municipal bodies in order to put sustainable development into practice.

Where the European Union is concerned, it should also be pointed out that its Strategy for Sustainable Development⁶, adopted in 2001, does not refer to Local Agenda 21 as such. On the

Figure 6

Overview of national sustainable development strategies



Sources: www.europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/pages/links_en.htm; www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/natlinfo.htm; websites of the countries concerned.

other hand, in its communication on the subject, the EU Commission does mention Local Agenda 21 as an important way of encouraging sustainable development at local level. Moreover, the European Spatial Development Perspective invites Member States to take part in Local Agenda 21 programmes.

The European Union also provides funding in this field, through its various measures relating to regional policy (FEDER, for example Interreg) or sectoral policy (LIFE, URBAN, LEADER programmes, etc.).

5.3. Outlook

This survey of the approaches adopted at national level to promote Local Agenda 21 programmes reveals a wide diversity among the thirteen European countries included. It is therefore difficult to draw any conclusions as to the most effective procedures. This would require deeper analyses of the situations pertaining in each country, which was beyond the scope of the survey. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some observations and put them in perspective.

5.3.1. *Legal bases as a guarantee of long-term follow-up*

The existence of a specific legal basis for setting up an Agenda 21 programme undoubtedly has an important part to play at national level. Binding legal texts ensure the continuity of projects. Denmark and Great Britain, which have both enacted specific legislation, are also the countries with the largest numbers of municipalities that have an Agenda 21 initiative.

On the other hand, the absence of a legal basis implies that Agenda 21-type initiatives depend on circumstances, the political wind blowing at any particular time or the motivation of local players, without any guarantee of long-term follow-up. Norway and Sweden are good examples. In both of these countries, which were pioneers in the field but lack specific legal instruments, there has been diminishing interest in Agenda 21 programmes, and consequently a drop in the number of municipalities committed to them.

In the absence of legal texts, the fact that Agenda 21 initiatives are included in national sustainable development strategies demonstrates that political will exists, and this favours their adoption. Most of the countries analysed here have chosen this route.

5.3.2. *Coordination at national level to ensure coherence*

A clear structure at national level helps to ensure coordination and coherence between the different regions of a country. A reference framework can also be drawn up and disseminated. An overview of the various initiatives can be established, and general needs more easily identified. A national structure of this kind can also take effective responsibility for the development and/or provision of tools, such as quality criteria for Agenda 21 programmes or sustainability evaluation instruments geared to local conditions. It can also take a lead in managing promotion programmes.

5.3.3. *Adequate resources for active promotion*

Adequate human and financial resources need to be allocated to ensure

that the structure functions effectively, whether it is run from within the administration or delegated to an external body. The provision of financial support is, moreover, an effective way of encouraging local projects.

Since financial matters are handled and accounted for differently from one country to another, it is not possible here to draw parallels between the resources invested and the number of programmes in action in different countries. For example, no details are available of the sums allocated to promotion, nor of the precise ways in which they have been used. Neither does the available data tell us if the sums invested are solely or principally for measures in favour of the economy, the environment or preventative health or if, on the contrary, they are for transversal measures geared specifically to sustainable development.

It is also unknown whether social and environmental measures are included under other headings. But when people are asked to indicate weaknesses in the promotion of Agenda 21 programmes, those most frequently mentioned relate to a lack of personnel and funds.

5.3.4. Success depends on good communication and the involvement of many players

Good, well-coordinated communication and the dissemination of good practice are useful principles that are likely to prove effective.

The involvement in partnership of a number of players (NGOs, business interests) also increases the chances of success. The countries with a high

proportion of municipalities pursuing Agenda 21 programmes are those where there is effective collaboration between government and bodies of this kind.

Where national administrations are concerned, transversal commitment in all areas is also necessary. As most of the sustainable development structures in this study depend on their national environment ministries, inter-departmental coordination is particularly important. Political support at national level has also a decisive role to play as it encourages and stimulates local authorities to set up and implement LA21 programmes. A large network of players is therefore one factor determining the success of Agenda 21 processes.

5.3.5. From Local Agenda 21 to the integration of sustainable development into all the policies and activities of public bodies

As is often mentioned in national strategies, the long-term aim is to integrate sustainable development into all public policy. Local Agenda 21s are a means of achieving this aim. Local authorities, in particular, should be playing their part in coordinating Agenda 21 initiatives with other planning processes. The first Agenda 21 initiatives began about ten years ago and since then it has been a dynamic progress. It is interesting that the first countries to commit themselves have already begun a second phase. Great Britain, for example, after the Agenda 21 phase proper, has recently embarked on a new strategy: "Community Action 2020 – Together we can". The intention is to build on the Agenda 21 programmes and include

sustainable development in all public management activities.

6. CONCLUSION

Where the number of Local Agenda 21s is concerned, Switzerland is right at the bottom of the rankings. In July 2005, just 4% of municipalities were involved in the process, though this does represent 29% of the population. Hasty interpretations should, however, be avoided. Background conditions and political and administrative systems differ so much from one country to another that it is difficult to make comparisons. For example, at national level institutional issues (the political weight of local agencies in relation to central players) are often of great importance when it comes to drawing up a local Agenda 21 programme. In Switzerland, under the country's federal system, local authorities have for a long time enjoyed considerable autonomy and, under the Swiss system of direct democracy, citizens are able to participate more fully in all political decision-making than in other countries. The motivation to initiate an Agenda 21 process for institutional reasons and to foster participation is therefore less strong. It also needs to be remembered that Swiss

municipalities are on average fairly small (almost 90% have fewer than 5'000 inhabitants). The fact is that, for the time being, sustainable development initiatives are a mainly urban phenomenon.

From this overview of the situation, we can nevertheless draw the following conclusions:

- It is essential that the Confederation continues to actively support Local Agenda 21 initiatives.
- Political commitment and conviction are needed. Switzerland should take advantage of the review of the NSDS to reinforce this commitment to LA21s.
- Switzerland should examine the possibility of adopting and implementing legislation to support Local Agenda 21 initiatives.
- The necessary resources need to be made available.

In the longer term, it should be remembered that the aim of the National Sustainable development Strategy is to include sustainable development in all the policies and activities of public authorities. A Local Agenda 21 initiative is a means to this end.

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