

## The Need for Sustainability Evaluation in EU-Accession-Countries

A summary of papers presented at the C-2 parallel session within the EASY-ECO2 European Conference on the *Evaluation of Sustainability* held on 15 – 17 May 2003, Vienna

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Four papers were the focus of the session that addressed the need for sustainability evaluation in EU candidate countries. The authors that contributed to the session were: Eva Csobod from the Regional Environmental Centre in Budapest with a paper on "*Evaluation of sustainability in Hungary and accession countries*", Tomasz Zylicz from Warsaw University with "*Evaluation of sustainability in Poland*", Kosta Trajkovski from the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning with "*Developing process on national assessment report on sustainable development in the Republic of Macedonia*", and György Hajnal from the Hungarian Institute of Public Administration with "*Sustainability strategy or strategic sustainability? The case of civil service training assistance projects*".

All papers related to the issue of sustainability in CEE countries and analysed the current situation of developing a strategy for sustainable development (SD) at the national level, except the fourth paper that investigated sustainability from a different point of view, *i.e.* the sustainability of strategies adopted by Western donors whilst providing technical assistance to the public administration sector in transition economies.

Considering the comments that the authors have made with reference to the evaluation of the current institutional and legal framework that would make sustainability assessment possible, it could be concluded that Hungary and Poland are at a more advanced stage than Macedonia in adopting regulations, signing conventions and implementing regulatory bodies to deal with sustainability issues. Nevertheless, all countries are at the start of the process (in fact like most of the advanced economies), as neither of them has adopted a comprehensive strategy for SD at a national level. More specifically, although Hungary and Poland have not designed any sustainable development strategy at the national level, such concerns are *de facto* addressed by other frameworks provided by international agreements and newly set up national and local governmental and non-governmental institutional bodies, whereas Macedonia is at a more incipient stage in fostering the vision for sustainable development.

It is worth mentioning at this point Zylicz's paper on Poland, which takes a strong critical stand and puts more emphasis on the urgent need to speed up the process of maturing the knowledge regarding SD. This is because Poland is characterised by little political and popular support to address sustainability issues. For example, Poland has not even reached an agreement on the word that would best translate the sustainability concept, with the government addressing in their official papers more the issue of environmental protection instead of sustainable development. In addition, the Polish society seems not to have shaped any sense of ownership regarding the need for sustainability evaluations. However, the author notes the positive fact that a number of business corporations and local authorities have begun to commit themselves to good management practices that addresses more or less directly real sustainable development issues.

Hajnal's paper also deserves a special attention as it delivers relevant findings as to what regards the effectiveness and sustainability of civil service training assistance projects run

in Central and Eastern Europe by major Western donors. The author identifies an interesting pattern of features characterising the main types of assistance strategies and their potential lasting impact. Basically, he distinguishes between *direct sustainability / elitist* strategies and *critical mass* strategies. The former has been mainly adopted by DFID and USAID and involved the “training of trainers” with the objective of creating a multiplier effect of knowledge, *i.e.* without any additional inputs, the training services provided automatically exert their beneficial effects in the long run, whereas the latter typically adopted by EU within PHARE projects has involved training the beneficiary civil servants without assuming any multiplier effects. Hajnal finds that most of the projects run within the first category of strategies were characterised by cost ineffectiveness, low transparency, seldom relevant content and no lasting impact, as senior civil servants are time constrained and often display a high turnover, which ultimately hinders the development of the assumed multiplier effect. Thus, the author argues for the adoption of *critical mass* training strategies that are more transparent, display higher efficiency of training and might provide a more lasting impact of knowledge disseminated.

Summing up the main findings of the respective papers and the group discussions that followed the presentations, it seems that the concept of sustainable development has created plenty of confusion amongst countries in transition. As Zylicz pointed out, there is a clear reluctance in adopting strategies related to SD matters, as the notion is often perceived by officials and by the public as an imported matter that has to be carried out because the government has committed itself to it and not because it would benefit the society at large. Furthermore, the adoption of EU regulations is perceived in most CEE countries as a process that hampers real sustainable development, which emphasises the potential conflicts between national and EU interests.

Finally, the parallel session concluded in the rapporteur’s view, with two major challenges and three potential options related to the promotion of sustainable development values in transition economies (to note that the challenges and options presented below more complement than substitute each other):

- Challenge 1: The relationship between transition and sustainable development has to be fully investigated and understood, as transition economies might wish to focus more on general development and less on sustainable development;
- Challenge 2: A clear methodology on evaluating sustainable development has to be urgently adopted by the EU. Nevertheless, this should provide a flexible framework to give the CEE countries the opportunity to insert their own real needs and priorities regarding SD;
- Option 1: The EU has to work rigorously on its own strategies and perhaps let the transition countries define their own priorities and promote their own local values;
- Option 2: The term of sustainable development should be less insisted upon in accession countries (as there is no public awareness and vision regarding SD) and probably is should be to a greater extent substituted with other more familiar concepts, such as the idea of improving the *quality of life*;
- Option 3: The concept of SD should be closely linked with transition and inserted into general development issues, as terms such as *transition* and *development* have a greater political appeal and recognition amongst policy makers and the general public.