Mutual learning through the ESDN and Peer Reviews

Reinhard Steurer & Gerald Berger
ESDN Office at RIMAS
www.sd-network.eu
How does learning in the ESDN work?
- The ESDN
- The ESDN Office
- Key activities

How does learning in Peer Reviews work?
- Overview
- Success factors and benefits
- Key steps

How can we link the ESDN and Peer Reviews?
Orientation

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Ø How can we link the ESDN and Peer Reviews?
Ø It is an informal network of public administrators dealing with SD strategies in Europe

Ø It aims to exchange experiences, knowledge and good practices regarding SD strategy processes

Ø The history of the ESDN starts with a workshop-like exchange of experiences in the Netherlands in 2002

Ø ESDN Office as network support mechanism established in spring 2006
Ø = 2 half-day positions fulfilled by 5 researchers with different backgrounds and qualifications

Ø Operated by RIMAS --- Research Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna

Ø Activities overseen and financed by the ESDN Steering Group (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK)
Functions of the ESDN Office

Facilitate exchange of experience and knowledge in order to make SD strategies more effective

§ Support the ESDN members

§ Contribute to ESDN Conferences

§ Assist Steering Group in developing the ESDN further

§ Website at www.sd-network.eu

• Support Northern Council of Ministers
• Start-up of Norwegian Peer Review

Next ESDN Conference in Berlin, 3-5 June 2007

ESDN Joint Understanding

One-stop-shop on SDS in Europe & ESDN membership section
Welcome to the website of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)

The ESDN is an informal network of public administrators and other experts dealing with sustainable development (SD) strategies in Europe.

This website serves as a one-stop-shop for SD strategies in Europe, and is the communication platform of the ESDN.

The activities of the ESDN are guided by a Steering Group with representatives from seven European countries. Since early 2006, the networking activities have been supported by the ESDN Office.

For further information about the ESDN, the Steering Group and the ESDN Office, please see the ESDN Joint Understanding and visit the section "About us".

Please note that this website is updated regularly. If you want to subscribe to the quarterly ESDN Newsletter, please click here.

For the latest ESDN Newsletter, please click here.
### ESDN Discussion Forum

Please note that the purpose of the ESDN Discussion Forum is to exchange information and experiences informally. Therefore, all statements reflect personal opinions and not official positions.

#### Evaluation and Review of NSDS

This thematic forum is part of the second ESDN Quarterly Report from September 2006 that provides an overview of different approaches to evaluate and review NSDS in Europe. [Show full forum description](#)

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**Clarification of concepts**

In the second ESDN Quarterly Report we argue that most policy documents, reports and academic literature use the terms evaluation, assessment, review, audit and monitoring synonymously without providing a proper clarification of how they differ from each other. Especially after reading the OECD report "A review of monitoring mechanisms for National Sustainable Development Strategies" ([http://www.oecd.net/other/documents/OECD_Review_final.pdf](http://www.oecd.net/other/documents/OECD_Review_final.pdf)) that uses different terms and concepts without specifying them in detail is necessary to first clarify these concepts. For example, the report refers to the approach taken in Australia as "external audit" whereas others speak of "internal evaluation". Moreover, does "internal" refer to evaluators/auditors coming from another country (as used in the OECD report), or from outside government?

Generally, we propose to distinguish between "process-oriented approaches" and "performance-oriented approaches". While this [...]
Learning and the engagement pyramid

Source: IISD, Strategic Intentions: Managing knowledge networks for sustainable development, p. 42

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Peer Reviews

Ø It is a „systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a state by other states“ (OECD, 2002).

Ø It aims to help the reviewed state
  • improve its policy-making
  • adopt best practices
  • comply with established standards and principles

Ø The rationale is mutual learning through a voluntary process

Ø The history of peer reviews is mainly associated with the OECD that began to use the tool in the 1960s Since then, it lies at the heart of international cooperation (EU, UN, WTO).
Success Factors

Based on the experiences with Peer Review in France:

Ø Strong political commitment (resources & follow-up)
Ø Clear objectives about reason and scope of the peer review
Ø Positive approach of and relationship between the peer countries (mutual learning, exchange of experiences)
Potential Benefits

- Improve strategy process and SD policies
- Reviewed countries learn from external perspectives („think out of the box“)
- Peers learn about administrative processes
- Close relationship between peer countries
- Networking with involved stakeholders
- Higher acceptance of outcomes among public administrators and politicians
Overview of key steps of a Peer Review

Ø Deciding to undertake the Peer Review
Ø Preparing the Peer Review
Ø Undertaking the Peer Review
Ø Disseminating the review findings
Ø Implementing the review findings

Source: European Commission, Peer Review Improvement through Mutual Exchange on Sustainable Development: A guidebook for peer reviews of national sustainable development strategies, February 2006, pp. 14-33,
Key steps of a Peer Review

 Ø Preparing for the review

- Secure commitment & resources
- Establish lead authority
- Select and involve peers & stakeholders

Define
- scope & focus of review and
- role of peers

Draft background material
- internally or
- with external support
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... and possible roles of the ESDN

Ø Preparing for the review

- Secure commitment & resources
- Establish lead authority
- Select and involve • peers & • stakeholders
- Define • scope & focus of review and • role of peers
- Draft background material • internally or • with external support
- Methodological guidance
- Organize exchange workshop
- Support selection
- Commissioned support

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Ø Undertaking the review

- Gather in depth information:
  - with peers, (external support)
- Prepare draft chapters of the review report (key topics and questions)
- Review workshop with peers & stakeholders
  - with Discussion & work on draft review report
- Finalize review report
  - with Focus on conclusions and recommendations
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Commissioned support

Make use of Discussion Forum in ESDN membership section
**Disseminating the review findings**
- Report back to stakeholders and the public
- Share experiences with other countries

**Implementing the review findings**
- Discuss findings with decision makers
- Adapt strategy process
  - Interplay of formal strategy and dynamic strategy process
... and possible roles of the ESDN

Disseminating the review findings
- Report back to stakeholders and the public
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Implementing the review findings
- Discuss findings with decision makers
- Adapt strategy process
  - Interplay of formal strategy and continuous exchange in ESDN

Dissemination through
- ESDN website
- ESDN Conferences
- Discussion forum
- Exchange workshops

Make use of continuous exchange in ESDN
The ESDN and Peer Reviews

Ø Similarities
- Cross-country exchange
- Mutual learning exercise

Ø Differences
- **Peer reviews**: more focused exercise (regarding themes and actors)
- **ESDN**: more continuous exchange

Complementary approaches with similar aims

Synergies desirable regarding learning and dissemination

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Thank you!

Reinhard Steurer & Gerald Berger
reinhard.steurer@wu-wien.ac.at & gerald.berger@wu-wien.ac.at

ESDN Office at the
RIMAS --- Research Institute for Managing Sustainability
Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration
Vienna, Austria

www.sd-network.eu