

# **Sustainable Regional Development: the squaring of the circle or a gimmick?**

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In 1992, 179 countries signed a global obligation declaration in Rio de Janeiro, which contains Agenda 21. The concept of Sustainable Development (SD) became a triumph in both speeches and potential concepts. The various meanings of 'sustainable development' led to a confusion of Babylonian proportions. The obvious overloading of the term to meet high expectations makes it much more difficult to set into practice. The clever construction of the Rio declaration allows for opportunities that must not be squandered. The strength of SD as a concept lies in the complexity of the problem and its high degree of commitment among signing members.

In the following, SD will be investigated for its applicability. The main point of this article is in the quality of the concept of SD and the handling of the complexity of SD. Because of the high expectations on SD, a two strategy approach will be developed; the difference between the global project 'SD' and the short-run mastery of the SD problem. Such statements need to be investigated under and measured against the global context of SD. SD can then be integrated into the concept of regional 'sustainable development'.

Keywords: sustainable development, regional development, regional policy

## **1.0 Characteristics of the concept of 'Sustainable Development'**

The official definition of SD is '*development, that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' (World Commission on Environment and Development (eds.) 1987:46). The single reference point, in which every evaluation and project must be measured against, is the necessities of current and future generations. Natural, economic and social systems are not an end in themselves, but must be oriented toward these distinct generations. SD is an *anthropocentric concept*.

### *The binding quality and range of the concept*

The concept of SD began within the realm of the global commons. The fundamentals were laid in 1980 during the 'World Conservation Strategy' from IUCN/UNEP/WWF. In the Brundtland Report (1987) the term SD found world-wide recognition. In the preparation meeting, PrepCom I - IV and in the Rio conference, around 1'400 NGO's put their stamp of approval on the contents and formulation of the official document. 39 alternative 'NGO Treaties' were constructed parallel to the preparation meeting. The demands reflected the point of view of the different levels of societies, groups, and treatment of tangent themes. Together with the official document, the 'state of the art' portrays the world political problem and the possibilities of solution.

The ratification of the concept of SD makes it internationally binding. It contains the moral responsibility of support of the drawn out solution of strategy and methodology of the various signatory states towards national conversion. "Its successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of governments. National strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this," (Agenda 21, Preamble). In some nations there already exists a parameter of conception to convert theory into practice, for example in Canada, Australia, Austria and others. In Switzerland the interdepartmental committee on Rio (IDARio) officially made a first status report, but a more binding commitment failed to find an adequate consensus between the members. The report states already in its preamble, that the federal offices which participate in the IDARio process made no commitment to actual do anything.

*The internal quality of the concept*

Contrary to actual discussion, the concept of SD is not primarily ecological in nature. Its strengths lie in its cross sectional character integrating economics, ecology and social aspects. With this understanding, SD opens up a whole new dimension of modernist thinking, that strives to increase welfare and human rights for everyone (Minsch 1993:18). To be more precise, the declaration of Rio states, 'Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible' (Principle 25). SD is comprised of three problem dimensions that should be analyzed in parallel (see Daly 1992:186):

Economical Dimension: The problem of efficiency dictates the necessary optimal possibility for the use of all resources: the focus is on allocation;

Ecological Dimension: The contingency problem describes the necessity to limit the total amount of overall non-sustainable resource use: the focus is on scale;

Social Dimension: The problem of distribution clearly defines the necessity of a relatively equal distribution of all resources, so that social and spatial cohesion is guaranteed: the focus is on distribution.

The complete definition of resources includes first the sum of nature's capital. Absolute scarce factors are for example the carrying capacity of the ecosystem for substances, biodiversity, health situations of the young, as well as the ability of nature to bear the brunt of pollution in the face of the speed of change. Secondly, the sum of reproduction of capital (man-made) contains machines, factories and infrastructure; lastly, social qualities and competence.

## Figure 1: Problem dimension of the concept 'Sustainable Development'

The concept of SD allows different types of interpretations: as a model, as a fundamental right, as a contract and as a political compromise.

### *The characteristics of the concept as a guideline*

The concept of SD is interdisciplinary and contains various single goals. Its' reputation, thanks to its visionary character as understood by the masses, envisions necessary and concrete ideas that serve as a point of orientation. A guideline differs from a vision and utopia through the orientation on a specific issue; it shares a middle-run time horizon, as does a vision, while the realization of utopia is settled in an unspecified future time (see Streich 1986:25). Because of the global problem and its being tied up coping with the concept of SD, the lines between guideline and vision are becoming fuzzy. SD is not an island within itself, but binds the whole of society in a global intergenerational middle point for current discourse. It includes the chance to substitute the deeply felt helplessness of our times by an newly mobilizing orientation towards the future.

### *The fundamental rights character of the concept*

SD shows a clear tendency toward fundamental rights. The similarities to the demands of the French revolution toward freedom, equality and brotherhood are obvious:

- its all embracing validity;
- middle precision: the goal of SD is easily understood but difficult to ascertain;
- emergence from an acute problem: engaged groups and individuals bring the idea into the spotlight, the ideals are then clarified by international organizations, so that the concept and its effect could be developed by those responsible in the government;
- three dimensional: the social dimension, which is usually ignored, is included.

To bring the quality of life as a concept for humans in the middle point of the societal-political consciousness is not new. This has been shown by the revealing debates in the 1970's and the early 1980's. The fundamentals are open to compromise much more so than the bio-central position of the independent right of nature or reverting to the Marxist discourse about capital exploitation. The clarity of the formulation is new. The strong focus on the needs of the human population is not hidden behind the formulation of 'needs of the population and economy' or 'equality of living conditions', as it is stated in article one of Switzerland's Swiss Federal Law on Regional Planning and in Germany's paragraph one of the 'Raumordnungsgesetz'.

Moral obligations cannot be put on trial, therefore the fundamentals do not carry the same weight as civil rights and are as such not a minimum standard. Such fundamentals would have a radical consequence for the individual distribution mechanism and lastly for the world wide use of resources. Compare the concept of SD to the wording of the UNO-human rights statement, therein lies the difference. The definition of SD states, 'needs of the present' and the Rio- declaration deals with, 'states ... countries ... present generations ... concerned citizens ... human beings ... all people', while the UNO - human rights statement begins almost every paragraph with, 'every person ...'. As a fundamental right to meet the needs, SD aims at groups of people and at regions with their inhabitants.

*The contractual characteristic of the concept*

The concept of SD is a comprehensive social contract, a solidarity pact, that extends further than the 70's and 80's North-South dialogue. The dialogue ignores the guilt complexes and focuses rather on the common responsibility of 'our common future'. This focus mirrors the view of the astronaut Neil Armstrong, that the earth is fragile and unique, an archetypical discovery. On the world scale, there is only unity which no one is seriously opposing. There are no borderlines, and the vague definition allows no room for offensive critical discourse. The extent to which concrete responsibility for ones own living space created from this world scale remains to be seen.

*The political compromise formula*

The use of SD in the Rio - Convention is a cleverly compromising political formula (see Sauerborn 1994:5). SD is a compromise between hoping for a forward-looking concept called 'development', which mentions nothing in regard to quality and quantity, with the cautious and protective attribute 'sustainable'. This compromise suggests that the conflict between ecology and economy must be overcome to reach the compromise of qualitative growth.

The clever and easily remembered concept is similar to a good commercial slogan - and indeed, Sustainable Development is a catch-all phrase in the advertisement campaign of the chemical sector, for example as used by Hoechst AG. In the political context, SD radiates awareness of problems and competence, its anthropocentric view demonstrates the returning to the concerns and wants of individual citizens. The concept SD illustrates the clear and concise political compromise and the various political interests that the engagement from Rio presents in reaching toward an optimum.

## **2. Problems of implementation of Sustainable Development**

Regardless of how convincing the concept of SD is, the extent of its success

will lie in the implementation on all levels under the scale of the worlds' definition. The implementation of this highly complex topic hides the political reality and a series of problems. These problems can be categorized into four types.

*Problem of 'wait and see'*

Over taxing SD is due to the complex connections that lead those who implement policy often to political stagnation because of the manoeuvrability of uncertain situations. This 'burden of proof' was at the center of the discussion at the first European meeting of the Rio - country committee at the beginning of 1995 in Courchevel. In the center of debate was the question: is it possible to have a more precise definition of SD and is it worthwhile? The points of dissent were divided. Some countries felt that defining the term would shed light upon necessary action and make efforts more coherent. Other countries believed that spending time defining the concept might delay action and eventually become a factor of blockage and rigidity. Normally the Swiss cultivate a defensive role, shown for example by the hesitating position on climate protection, ecological tax reform or on the protocol of the Alps convention.

*Problem of 'muddling through'*

The opposite of non-action is blind actionism which with all conceivable intentions is declared as part of the problems solution. With that the concept of SD would be a 'lowest common denominator' solution, as it is the case with the city of Zurich's 'local agenda 21'. The report of the city of Zurich contained the position of previously agreed rules; the guidelines mostly are oriented towards end-of-the-pipe environmental protection. The great challenge and the painstaking and detailed work on implementation of SD is squandered. In an extreme case this adds up to a collection of environmentally popular measures that contains the etiquette of 'SD', which ultimately is a false marketing of a region or a city.

*Problem of abuse of the definition*

Concepts that are judged especially negative or positive carry with them the danger of a systematic change of definition. While negative concepts through a 'beautifying' process are made less negative, positive concepts are used, because one can profit from its aura. Both counterfeit and discredit the use of the concept in the public eye. In the German language the almost forgotten digging up of the attribute 'sustainable' would become, for example, a trend word for all developmental plans: sustainable development, sustainable economy, sustainable building up of the competitiveness, sustainable borough, etc. (see Sauerborn 1994:8).

*Problem of improper limitation*

Especially with a complex concept there is the danger that it will become oversimplified. This is even more the case when the SD concept overstates only the ecological dimension, like it can be seen in the report 'Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland' (BUND/Misereor 1995) or the pilot-study of Baden-Württemberg (Renn 1994). It is certain that the main problem in the concept 'sustainable development' is the functioning of nature as a 'life-support-system'. In reference to resources, that is not enough, because 'in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it' (Rio-Declaration, principle 4). Material and social resources play the same crucial role in regional development. In addition, education and information, participation and subsidies, motivation and trust also belong to the distribution and opportunities of material resources (see for example Granovetter 1985, Lorenz 1992).

### **3. Strategies for Sustainable Development implementation**

The concept of SD included three compact dimensions of problems, that must be simultaneously analyzed, because the work on solving global problems is not one dimensional. An example will illustrate this problem: the clearing of the rain forest impacts water ways and the atmosphere and reduces bio-diversity. In the foreground this problem has a clear ecological dimension. Meanwhile, this doubles the economic and social aspects, for example the ability for small farmers to make an alternative income in the impacted regions, and the safeguarding of social distribution rights. The majority of the current strategies are limited to the material ascertainable and quantified criticism which judge a certain geographical area. (See Nijkamp, P. /Lasschuit, P. And Soeteman, F. 1992:40)

#### *Existing strategies*

The use of analyses of either physical flows or trade-oriented monetary flows serve to determine long- run equilibrium. In addition, SD means more than an essential balanced equilibrium situation. What might be neglected is, for example, the necessary attention to the degree of inter-regional labor distribution, the chance for participation or the problem of how to deal with ecological risks.

The use of measurement numbers to compensate for the appearance of a problem in the spatial and time view is mostly discussed for larger projects. For example the planting of new trees should compensate for the pollution produced by a new power plant. The qualifying of such a compensation service is encumbered and uncertain due to the future impacts on the environment, employment or income of the new power plant. A bit more

fundamental is the thought that compensation should be paid for by not using the resource. Maybe a region does without using land and resources, especially: water, landscape or soil. Those regions should be compensated accordingly. An excellent example of this is the preservation of the Greina, a Swiss mountain plateau of primordial natural beauty and biodiversity.

Extensive measuring concepts will be assessed to obtain the average land use per head on a global level. An example of this is the 'ecological footprint', an aggregate balance sheet of all land use per capita or per 'environmental space'. This approach is used as a common methodology for the European countries study and the EU study 'Sustainable Europe' (see e.g. Infrass 1995). The environmental space is made up of seven branches: energy/climate, air, material use, wood use, land use, water and biodiversity/landscape. The contents of the methodology is extensive but it limits itself to the material side of sustainability. Its meaning is to sensitize the population to the spatial extent of the problem.

An additional strategy which is discussed internationally is a market oriented strategy concerned mainly with individual buyers and producers behavior. This strategy for example is stressed by the 'Oslo Ministerial Roundtable Conference on Sustainable Production and Consumption' in April 1995. The meeting was mandated by the second session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and had to prepare elements of a working programme. The main focus of this strategy is the material side. In addition to quantifiable criteria, qualitative demands are taken into consideration as well as other extended aspects: political structural problems (international trade, subsidies, technology transfer), cultural response questions, demands dependent on cooperation and thoughts toward better information flows and research. The approach is extensive, but given the global point of reference it has been kept rather general.

The above approaches are general, the attempt to reduce the complexity of the idea in the first three examples through limitations have a majority in quantifiable criteria. In the fourth example, the structural connection between production, consumption and life style is moved to the fore.

#### *The requirements of a strategy*

In order to reduce the complexity of strategies it is necessary to give actors a simple transparent acting parameter. Certainly there is the danger that the complexity of the model can become so simplified as to disallow true use of the relationship; synergy effects and spill-overs lead to unexpected results. The attempt to implement SD into specific regions means no more than with the help of a transparent regional setting, to reduce the complexity of SD. Hopefully, in this setting there is a necessity to act on the spectrum of the

effects, to take on interdependence and feed backs.

The complexity of the SD concept brings with it a must for permanent analysis of its own spatial impacts and a must for cooperation beyond its own regional context. This increases the attention to the interaction between the various levels:

- The prevailing conditions of setting SD on a international, national and sub national level generate promoting or braking effects. This includes every element of political steering;
- the consciousness toward the necessity and common sense of SD in a social value system can create legitimacy;
- the relevant behavior of the individual, his motivation and engagement are necessities for participation and solidarity;

Realization of the concept of SD needs an intelligent, trustworthy and believable train of feedback between these three levels of action. The search is essential to implement the strategy of SD, so that it is not only tied to the complexity of the concept, but also takes into account the interaction between the individual, society and institutions. Is this the squaring of the circle or only a promising starting point?

#### *The dual strategy*

The dual strategy offers the possibility that the content of SD can be transformed from an abstract concept to a manageable policy instrument. This dual strategy should not only mirror the discrepancy between individuals and institutional strategy, but also take into account the different political levels in their vertical integration.

- 1) SD is understood as a global project, that has a long-run time horizon and contains change of values.
- 2) The global SD project is supplemented by a variety of parallel and intense short-run projects which are to solve problems on a regional scale, but at the same time are oriented to the requirements of the global project.

#### **FIGURE 2: Dual strategy for SD conversion**

The binding thread throughout the strategy is simply that in the long-run a learning process is built by which the population learns the value of SD, bringing nearer and contributing to the experience of cognitive and common sense. This learning process aims at the world population. Both the Rio

declaration and the NGO treaties are global in nature. They reflect fundamentals in a universal expression. Such fundamentals express and open up a deeper connection and legitimacy which lies in the European tradition as seen in the basic rights of the French revolution. To understand this learning process and to set signals, international agreements must be developed. The SD project can also be understood as a strategy to eliminate uncertainty; a project to establish meaning in times where we have to manage a rapid change of values. The quicker the change of the present which is the certainty of old knowledge, but not necessarily the change of the valid system of values, the more guiding knowledge will be necessary to mold the future.

The global SD project needs a time horizon that is measured in generations. Various problems are so acute that action is necessary now, e.g., man-made changes in climate, drinking water problems and social disintegration. The approach in managing short-run problems is understood under all projects, programs and concepts that solve ecological, economical and social problems in the context of SD. Along national guidelines, next to special political intentions, changes in laws, taxes and parameter settings need to come into effect. Useful solutions to problems or efficient enforcement is often settled on the sub-national level, that is on the regional or even the local level.

Such single activities should not be seen as isolated approaches, but should take into account how other dimensions and relevant interlinkages could be integrated. It could be that different projects, programs and concepts take place in parallel and take on more or less the attribute 'sustainable'. To avoid this, it is necessary to institute judgement criteria which can be derived from all three dimensions in the context of the global concept of SD.

#### **4. The region as a level to implement SD?**

The litmus test of the concept of SD is ahead of us. The concept has to bring a 'feet on the ground' approach, it has to get a handle on the political day-to-day activities with clearcut, legitimate, and evaluative questions. Therefore we have to ask for the characteristics of the regional level. Is it a useful and manageable level for implementing SD?

##### *The difference between the regional and global level*

For true conversion of the global project SD as a single policy instrument on the regional level, it is necessary to have a comparable political discussion process and a measurement of sustainability. It is not easy to transfer the scale of global SD. The difference between the global locality and a region is

three fold (Nijkamp, Lasschuit and Soeteman 1992: 42):

- The global system is a closed system dependent on sun light, while regions are economic and ecological systems more or less open. They interact with each other; resource flows circulate as inputs and outputs. Policy measures undertaken in the region may or may not hinder or hurt the development process of neighboring countries or other regions. This idea of space corresponds to 'the full world' conception of Daly, while the dominant economic theory of an 'empty world' is expiring (see Daly, H.E. 1992b:19). A region can be simultaneously distinguished as a 'clean' and 'sustainable' economy, at the expense of other regions by, e.g., exporting trash or importing energy intensive products.
- Contrary to the global system, regions have elected legislative bodies and legitimate authorities that have to represent the local commons and must deal with conflicting situations. The change of special topics depends on the parameters, within which the inter-regional integration must be taken into account. The economic competitiveness and the use of raw materials, have to be taken under the context of global connections; labor markets, transportation relationships and landscape protection do not stop inside of the regional political boundaries. Conflicts between regionally defined political jurisdictions are pre-programmed. Difficult areas are seen through a local political view, which is tempted by the use of 'narrow-minded' local politics. Trans-regional problems can increase jurisdictional delegations and lead to over taxation of capacities to solve regional problems: not every region has enough specialists to go around (what can be defined as a 'reverse Peter-Principle', see Thierstein/Egger 1994:19).
- Normally regions have different economic, ecologic, and social resources. That is one of the reasons why regions react under these circumstances so differently to trans-regional development, e.g., exogenous effects. Out of this development, different types of cumulative interactions are generated. Problem spaces and political scope of action collapse more often and solutions are sought through 'géométrie variable' (ROREP 1992:58). There is a difference between solution relevant structures, actors, instrumental methodology and spacial problems. A middle European brown coal industry takes a wholly different view of the climate problem than a Pacific island.

*The advantages of the regional level*

On a regional level in general, those measures are more successful which have a better perception of the problem, require the use of endogenous

developmental potential, and require increasing participation and subsidiary. When we talk about increasing the value of the regions as level of action, we refer to four functions of space (Fürst 1993, 302).

- The region is a resource space. The classical impact of resources (minerals, water, etc.) loses its meaning through globalization and technical innovation. Increasingly the ability to mold one's own living space takes center stage, including endogenous development potential and soft localization factors.
- The region gains in importance as a level for public politics. The tendency toward regionalization of sectoral policies and the necessity for a transparent arena for a mediating planning process is responsible for this change.
- The region within its institutional boundary is distinguished as a promoting power for identification, because affiliation today also is politically defined. The commons are normally easier to orient because the level of a community is more transparent.
- The region - even with an open definition - is beginning to be regarded as a room for networks of actors from different social areas, that depend on trust and high levels of communication.

The uniqueness of the conversion of SD at the regional level is summed up so:

### **FIGURE 3: Advantages and disadvantages of the regional labor level**

The question remains how useful are these advantages for the concept of SD? A spatially restricted level of action becomes a necessary precondition for implementing SD if one can agree on the important role which the individual and group-specific patterns of consumption, social behavior et cetera play. But SD means not only to strike at the roots of unsustainability, as formulated in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, but also to maintain the chance of development. Important and structurally unlimited resources of development are the communities' collective interpersonal or relational skills like trust, cooperation and consensus-building. Social energy generated in this way can be transformed into cultural, political or material wealth. This kind of energy though needs a manageable room to live as the main level of action. In economics for example the role of partnership, loyalty and trust is emphasized in theories of industrial districts (see e.g. Harrison 1992,

Bennett/Krebs 1991, Lorenz 1992).

## 5. Elements of a 'hands on approach' at the regional level

Which possibilities exist and which measures at the regional level bind the global project SD in such a way that the stated uniqueness of the 'region' as the 'level of action' is taken into account?

### *Regional and national level*

The dependence on national and international conditions shows that implementation of the SD concept cannot be done solely within the responsibility of a region. The inter departmental Rio committee in Switzerland argues much more decisively: When the environmental impact analysis and the sustainability impact analysis for sectoral policies and programs are split, the local and regional levels have, due to their competence, a tendency to be locked out from SD implementation (IDARio 1995:53). But this national statement contradicts the Agenda 21 and the European Union's 'Fifth Action Programme on the Environment' (see Patterson/Theobald 1995:773). Both promote subsidiarity, democratization and decentralization: "Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives", therefore "each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt 'a local Agenda 21'." (Agenda 21, Chapter 28).

The realization of the SD concept requires a far-reaching structural change with a new set of winner and loser regions as a consequence. To change both the structure and scales of distribution it is necessary to have recommendations on a national and supra-national level. Also an intensified transboundary cooperation needs a certain degree of hierarchical steering.

### *The region as a manageable level*

If the existence of a 'local Agenda 21' in many cities is important for implementing sustainability, then collaboration and co-ordination between localities is essential. It could be achieved through the development of a regional framework of sustainable development policies (see Patterson/Theobald 1995:776). On the one hand the region as an area of identity and interaction of actors is manageable. This may help in legitimizing concerted action and increases the likelihood of societal coherence. On the other hand, the regional level can probably better bring together the regional fragmented interests and avoid the strict limitation to local interests, what in Germany is called 'parish-pump politics'.

The regional level is apt to increase sustainability; in fact regional action is necessary for the both of the pillars of the dual strategy (see figure 2). Which strategies will be used first and which measures will be implemented first is for the individual regions to decide. Complementing a region's experimentation, regional efforts for promotion of sustainability can encourage learning effects outside the regional borders and thus generate learning spillovers.

*The evaluation of regional sustainability*

If one can use SD in the sense of a dual strategy on the regional level, then the question of evaluation takes center stage. The estimation of the material and money flows make it possible to establish the compensation service or to refer to the necessity of substitution through intra-regional circles and products. Neither economists nor political decision makers nor societies' interest groups are in the undisputed position to judge the overall absolute effects with regard to sustainability. The total economic, ecologic and social impacts in the near and far future can only be tenaciously assessed in most cases. In case of structural measures the prognosis tends to display an even higher level of uncertainty.

Quantified codes for material flows are helpful in any case. Coherent approaches, which encompass several regions, in the implementation of SD ideally need a common database similar to a 'sustainability index' like the 'indicators of sustainability' (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991:198).

Such an index allows for a region to be compared and find starting points for SD strategies. Quality aspects such as 'quality of life' are difficult to grasp. Quality of life is a complex structure and quality indicators are even stronger than quantitative facts subject to political discourse. The indicators which measure quality of life have been developed throughout the last thirty years into a stable and robust indicator. A helpful example from Switzerland are the results of an educational survey of young males in 1978 and 1987. Covering the whole of the country, they had to value the quality of life of the place they had lived the last five years (see Walter-Busch 1988). Although these results are a sound database, such indicators cannot replace the tool of a qualitative regional analysis, which deals with the interactions inside and outside the region. It is necessary, depending on the research agenda, to use a mix of approaches and methods.

## **6. What kind of policies?**

The elements of a 'hands on approach' at the regional level show three preconditions for the local and regional implementation of SD:

- To avoid conflicts there must be some basic political decisions from a

hierarchically higher level. Otherwise regional actors need techniques to handle normative conflicts.

- For using the territorially-specific resources a main focus of activity is to make use of the social relations of the community in the process of decision-making. This means participation of all kind of public and private groupings.
- To avoid watering down SD the elaboration of criteria of valuation is a central goal. In the case of basic conflicts a regional consensus on the way of 'decision-making under uncertainty' must be worked out.

One possibility to proceed is by 'steering through guidelines', with the guidelines deriving from the global SD project. An example of such guidelines are the 132 'actions' from IUCN/UNEP/WWF (1991), listed after the general principles, the areas of the various subjects and strategic points. The higher the number of these points followed, the stronger the compliance to SD. The advantage of the 'steering per guideline' is that a bundle of coordinated individual measures can be realized, coupled with the inclusion of a specific instrument, for example an existing promotion program which includes such a specific guideline. Because some guidelines address fundamental conflict positions and reflect values, it is difficult to get short-run acceptance for the contents.

It is said that the restriction to guiding principles can avoid 'a fruitless debate about the ultimate goal of sustainability' (Allanson et. al. 1995:1809). But it is not clear whether such a debate is really fruitless. Costanza and Patten (1995) argue for the need for some basic agreements on sustainability. These agreements seem to be not only problems of definition but preconditions for the concept. One precondition, for example, is linked with the problem of assessment. Although in politics, ex-ante evaluations are necessary and helpful, sustainability of a regional system can only be evaluated after any implementation has happened; an assessment has to wait until later.

Probably it is easier to formulate a catalogue of questions in such a way as to bring out the three most important points from all three dimensions of SD. Such a catalogue will include questions as: 'will there be a decision between X and Y?, will XY be heeded?' The catalogue makes it possible that all of the questions are discussed and therefore a fully conscious decision can be made. The transparency of the decision will be raised.

A necessary feature in the case of uncertainty about goals and criteria is the public discourse. Societies' judgement process can take place either through a participatory planning method, as in a 'lawyer' and mediator for future generations and nature, or through other public means. Included here are

methods such as questionnaires, referendums and ranking. The advantage of these methods is the establishment of legitimacy and - with a given pick of organizations - the independence from clientalism and established interest groups. These processes require a high level of organization, it is only applicable for measures with far reaching effects, like the formulation of the above guidelines (see Schnell/Walser 1995).

### **Conclusion**

The development of a dual strategy as presented is not new, the connection between long-run goals and short-run measures is a reliable method within regional planning. What is new are the time and spatial range of the goals in the SD concept. It demands a high wire act, a combination of coherent prospectives in a region's development and pragmatism. SD on every level has to be reached by a long-term process of trial and error and re-balancing. On the regional level alone, it is not possible to intervene and stop global warming (see Allanson et al. 1995:1798). Still, it is possible to fill some '*gaps of sustainability*'. For example land-use planning, with its secondary impacts, has a crucial leverage effect to many other sectoral policies. Therefore, the question in the papers' headline is not to be answered unambiguously. Nevertheless, the above argumentation should be regarded as a recommendation to value the opportunities, strategies and restrictions for implementing Sustainable Development on a regional level.

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