

**Report of the SynWiN-Workshop, 25.th-26.th June 2009, Leipzig (Germany)
Executive Summary:**

**Institutionalising Sustainability Assessment:
The Case of Land-Use Decisions**

Joint Statement of Workshop Panellists

Introduction

This SynWiN workshop on “Institutionalising Sustainability Assessment: The Case of Land-Use Decisions” gathered a group of experts with different institutional responsibilities, various research and disciplinary interests, from different agencies and academic institutions, coming from Europe and the USA, all involved and actively dealing with the variety of issues posed by the challenges related to land use and sustainable economics.

The workshop started from the general finding that science has developed a great richness of sustainability assessment tools (SATs) for land-use planning purposes but these tools are seldom applied in practice of land-use decision making. Our opening question was: “Do we need to change the tools (to make them better fit to institutional needs), or do we need to change institutions (i.e. to increase the institutional awareness for sustainability issues and promote the use of SATs)?” After two days of presentations and debate our answer was relatively straight forward: While there are potential improvements of all existing SATs with regard to their ‘institutional fit’, the key is to change institutions and make them adopt SA tools in actual decision making.

Improvements of SATs are possible

Our comparison of different SATs for land use such as, for example, the German Soil-Value-Balance, the European RESCUE-SAT and the SAT tools used by the US-EPA showed that there can be improvements in SA instruments. First and foremost, SATs must adhere to the principle of consultation of all important stakeholders. This will include land developers in land-use planning processes, most naturally. SATs should also carefully consider all existing stakeholder standards such as the National Green Building Standard (NGBS) or Green Building Rating System of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) in the case of green building. Moreover, they will gain wider acceptance in practice if they are easy to use, transparent and low cost.

The workshop “Institutionalising Sustainability Assessment: The Case of Land-Use Decisions” was convened by Reimund Schwarze and Stephan Bartke, Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, Leipzig.
The workshop presentations will be available on the homepage of the project SynWiN
– Syntheses Research Economics for Sustainability – at: <http://www.wi-n.org/en/104.php>.

Institutions must change

The bigger challenge is how to change institutions. This will need a strategy for a sustainable development that carefully considers three dimensions of land-use decision making, i.e.:

- Who decides,
- when,
- at what level (global, national, regional, local)?

Our corresponding recommendations are:

1. Sustainability is a cross-cutting, not a sectoral issue. In its essence it is politics and therefore needs to lie with the highest level of decision making. To be applied it must be a tool for those in power of making land-use decisions, i.e. majors at the local level, governors at the regional level, and the chancellor's or presidential office at the national level.
2. Sustainability assessment tools will be effective if used early-on in the process of land-use planning, when visions are still developing. They are of little use if applied in a late stage of the process, after much has been set and the space for visionary planning is very restricted. The charette-type of planning procedures, now widely applied in the U.S., seems a promising setting to apply SATs to help inform the stakeholder process.
3. Planning *at the regional level* should start from the strategic approach of 'Circular Land Use Management' (according to "Fläche im Kreis" 2005). The circle of land use departs from the release of new sites for construction, moves along usage and cessation of use, to finally being reintroduced to use after an interim period of abandonment and (potentially) interim-use. A helpful economic valuation concept at this level is estimation of *follow-up costs for infrastructure* development by new housing settlements (Koziol, BTU Cottbus). It sensibly demonstrates the full costs of greenfields development or, put the other way around, it convincingly demonstrates the relative advantage (of pre-existing infrastructure) of the reintroduction of brownfields into the land use circle.
4. *Strategic environmental impact assessment* (SEIS) is the current best practice – at least in Germany – to introduce sustainability issues into decision making processes *at the local level*. Land use plans ("Flächennutzungspläne") should be changed to systematically integrate an environmental impact assessment which determines and evaluates all possible impacts to the environment of inner-city versus out-of-city developments. This should be done with a clear understanding of the limitations of increasing the density of land use (and thereby decreasing the usage of out-of-city greenfield areas) while maintaining typical town structures such as city centre, town edges, etc. The preservation of 'typical town structures' should therefore be a sustainability goal in itself. A sustainability report would then be drafted as part of the SEIS, highlighting all implications of the environmental audit for the 'Bauleitplanung' (land use planning) and defining clear rules for follow-up planning procedures. A best practice case study of SEIS in land-use planning was provided in Ferber's presentation on developments in Prießnitz/Saxony (see Ferber 2009 for further details).

Sustainability should be the guiding concept

Despite all its complexities and its systematic need to adjust to context, sustainability should be the guiding concept for land-use decision making. Land-use planning is complex politics covering different environmental, economic and social dimensions of well-being, often with consequences reaching far in to the (unknown) future. No well-defined set of indicators or valuation methods is able to cover this complexity. And no attempt to simplify, be it money values or selected single indicator (such as land consumption) will achieve sustainability, and consequently acceptance by policy makers and stakeholders. As German chancellor Angela Merkel rightly said (in her progress report on the German government's sustainability strategy in 2008): *“Sustainability needs complex thinking, less will not work.”*

Sustainability goals should be demanding

A shared understanding among our panelists was that demanding goals, such as the goal of German land-use politics to restrict Greenfield consumption to 30 ha/day in 2020 (from currently 113 ha/day), are superior to more moderate goals of sustainability. Demanding and even over-demanding goals (such as the 30 ha/day aim by 2020 is in the view of many) assure a constant pressure on politics to achieve at least some progress and to monitor results, while moderate goals do not trigger a process towards sustainability and are prone to roll-backs (once the goals are achieved).

The mix of instruments is important

Changing institutions needs a clear understanding of ‘what institutions’. In fact, consensus was among panelists that the institutions to be reformed are not just planning institutions (zoning bodies, etc.) but are a rich set of ‘institutions’ such as

- public funding
- legal requirements
- relative prices (of energy and land)
- moral suasion and best practice examples (structured objectives, practices and processes to guide land-use decisions that anyone can adopt)
- education (or regulators and the public)
- corporate social responsibility (of private, business and public entities).

As known from other fields of environmental politics, the right mix of instruments is the key for success. In designing and implementing sustainability strategies at different levels of decision making, we need to pay careful attention to the interplay of different demand-pull (for example, CSR) and supply-push factors (such as regulation), as well as potential synergies and conflicts between both.

Intermediaries can help

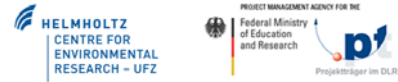
Participants also agreed that intermediaries such as expert panels (at the national level) or trained specialist (at the sub-national level) can be helpful to increase the acceptance and usage of SATs in practice. Platforms for the dissemination of scientific knowledge such as the Terra-, Aqua-, Site- Remediation Competence Centre (TASK) at the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ are valuable multipliers in getting SATs applied in practice.

List of Participants

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Institutionalising Sustainability Assessment: The Case of Land-Use Decisions



Participant	Background
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