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GETTING TO GRIPS WITH GREEN PLANS

National-Level Experience in Industrial Countries

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study reviews and compares 20 recent green planning initiatives in ten industrialised countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Latvia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the USA, together with regional initiatives in Eastern and Western Europe (they are listed in Table, page 5). The majority are government sponsored initiatives, but two were conducted by non-governmental organisations, and one was a programme of the European Union. They include activities which preceded the 1992 UN Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED) and others which were undertaken in response to UNCED, particularly Agenda 21. The initiatives include a wide range of different approaches (environmental plans, strategies, legislative instruments, reports to parliaments, sustainable development commissions, etc.).

The book is presented in two parts. Part 1 (Chapters One - Eight) provides an overview and synthesis of the main green planning approaches and processes followed in the countries studied. Part 2 (Chapters Nine - Twenty One) presents details of the green planning initiatives in each of the selected countries and in the European Union.

PART 1

Chapter One provides a background to the study, reviewing the origins and scope of 'green planning', and the challenges of developing a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) - as called for in Agenda 21. A number of dilemmas likely to face those charged with developing an NSDS are outlined, based on lessons from experiences mainly in developing countries. Drawing from these perceived dilemmas and lessons, a questionnaire was designed (Appendix 1) and used for a series of semi-structured interviews with key individuals involved in the selected plans and strategies who have been responsible for managing those processes. These interviews provided the basis for the country case studies presented in Chapters Nine to Twenty One. The aim was to focus on the particular perspectives of these key players.

In **Chapter Two**, a detailed comparison is provided of the key characteristics of the different approaches in the strategies and plans studied. As already noted, some initiatives preceded UNCED, others were a response to it. Many were undertaken as a direct response to public concerns about the environment. Most had an official government mandate. The involvement of Cabinets and Parliaments is discussed. Some led to legal and/or institutional changes.

The focus of the different plans and strategies vary. For example, some have a dominantly environmental focus, some are concerned with the broader issues of sustainable development, a number are concerned mainly with federal areas of responsibility, some have set targets and time horizons whilst others do not, and a few are designed around special issue studies. Most of the initiatives are dominantly internal government exercises - only a few are independent. They mainly involve cross-government and inter-departmental processes but some have been undertaken exclusively within single ministries/agencies. Extensive stakeholder participation has been a feature of only a few of the strategies and green plans concerned, but most have involved some form of consultation with industry, NGOs and the public.

The stimulus for green plans and strategies provided by UNCED, and the demands for government action in response to growing public concern about the environment in many countries, is discussed.

Chapter Three considers in more detail the focus of the green plans and strategies reviewed in three categories: strategies concerned dominantly with sustainable development, environmental strategies or plans, and special focus studies. However, whilst these distinctions can usefully be made, in reality there is a continuum of approaches and experience suggests that environmental plans and strategies can evolve to become sustainable development strategies with time.

In trying to deal with sustainable development, a range of different approaches are evident. For example, in Australia, the concept of ecologically sustainable development has been the main focus. The Canadian *Projet de société* devised innovative Choicework tables to address trade-off issues. In the USA, the President's Council for Sustainable Development has developed principles for sustainable development which aim to integrate environmental, social and economic goals and objectives. The Dutch Friends of the Earth pioneered the concept of 'environmental space', whilst the UK Strategy cautiously raises the concept of 'ecological footprints' (but without resolving the government's view).

Environmental strategies have generated a broad range of responses. For example, the Canadian Green Plan (1990-1996) - arguably the 'mother' of green planning - was primarily concerned with environmental decision-making and was an action plan to address specific issues (e.g. climate, fisheries). The various Dutch National Environmental Action Plans (NEPP 1989, NEPP+ 1990, and NEPP2 1993) concerned themselves with a range of environmental source and process themes (e.g. acidification, waste disposal) and set environmental targets. The USA EPA's environmental goals projects sets goals around environmental targets as well. Norway introduced the idea of a 'green budget'. Some countries have instituted periodic environmental progress reports (e.g. Denmark). The French Plan National pour l'Environnement provided a vehicle for reform of public administration of environmental management, whilst Poland's National Environmental Policy aimed at 'green reconstruction' of particular economic sectors. Sweden's Enviro 93 programme also aims to shift environmental responsibilities to sectors.

Chapter Four examines the duration, time frames, mandates and management approaches of green plan and strategy process. They have varied between about six months and three years and most have adopted or been based on some time frame for the visions they contain or for implementation of actions. Usually, strategies initiated by governments have had some form of official mandate or terms of reference issued by the Head of Government or a Minister, or drawn up by civil servants and endorsed subsequently by government.

Few strategy documents describe the process by which they were developed. Australia's National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development is a notable exception. A wide range of mechanisms were established by governments for the development and management of the green plan and strategy processes reviewed. Examples include: core teams; steering committees; cross-government negotiations; representative Councils and Fora involving senior figures from industry, academics, NGOs, etc.; advisory groups and roundtables; informal meetings; working papers released for public comment; seminars, workshops and public meetings; drafting teams; Cabinet scrutiny; and, in a few cases, Parliamentary approval.

Non-governmental or independent strategies tend to adopt additional, and more innovative, approaches including: a Secretariat performing a 'facilitating' role rather than coordinating/directing affairs, participatory stakeholder round tables and assemblies deciding directions and taking decisions; and inputs by volunteers.

In **Chapter Five**, the issue of participation is dealt with in detail. The more open green plans and strategies have experimented with different approaches to participation including: stakeholder roundtables, providing financial support to enable NGOs to become involved, funding NGOs to undertake commissioned work, involving target groups, and adopting traditional approaches (e.g. in New Zealand, traditional *hui* were used for meetings with Maori organisations). The Canadian *Projet de société* arguably represents the most participative national-level strategy process so far attempted. It was developed as a consensus process involving over 80 businesses, government and independent organisations in a National Stakeholders' Assembly. The roundtable approach, pioneered by Canada, is reviewed.

But most green planning and strategy processes in industrial countries have adopted a 'consultative' approach in which participants are restricted to listening and providing information (through public inquiries, media activities, telephone "hot-lines", etc.) or are consulted (e.g. through working groups and meetings held to discuss plans and policies). They have little effective say in building consensus on the main strategy elements or in decision-making on the policy, strategy or its components. In the Netherlands, the NEPP2 process placed great emphasis on persuading target groups to 'participate' in discussing what changes they should make and to become involved in monitoring implementation. This led to the agreement between industry and government of innovative Covenants to help meet NEPP targets, as complements to existing legislation..

A number of plans and strategies have been developed dominantly as internal government processes: e.g. in Western Europe, Denmark's 1995 Nature and Environment Policy and Sweden's Bill 1993/94.111; and, in Eastern Europe, Poland's National Environmental Policy. It needs to be added, however, that after decades of central planning, the government of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are not oriented towards people's participation. At the same time, the publics are not accustomed to 'participating' in government decision-making.

Chapter Six discusses the links between national strategies and green plans on the one hand, and other strategy and planning processes on the other hand, e.g. regional strategies and convention-related strategies. Particular attention is paid to the efforts launched in 1993 by the European Union to develop a strategy for sustainable development - the Fifth Environmental Action Plan, building on a series of previous five-yearly environmental action plans. However, there has been no attempt to coordinate national planning and strategy exercises. In North America, Canada's Green Plan interfaced with various regional initiatives, e.g. the Circumpolar Conservation Strategy, the North American Free Trade Agreement, etc.

In Central and Eastern Europe, action to halt and reverse environmental degradation is being promoted and coordinated through a regional Environmental Action Programme (EAP). The EAP document has been used in some countries in the region as a "handbook" for the development of national environmental plans.

Some strategies have been directly linked to government budgetary processes (e.g. Canada's Green Plan, the Dutch NEPP2, New Zealand's Environment 2010 Strategy, the Norwegian Report No.46 to the Storting). It is not easy to determine, from documentation and discussions, the extent to

which green planning initiatives and sustainable development strategy processes have seriously influenced, or are linked to, mainstream national planning. However, some links are clear in a few cases: Denmark's 1995 Nature and Environment Policy, the 1990 French Plan National pour l'Environnement, and New Zealand's 1991 Resource Management Act.

Only in a few cases are national plans and strategies linked formally with (i.e. built directly on, or led directly to the development of) sub-national strategies at the provincial, territorial or state level. Nevertheless such sub-national strategies are common, notably in federal countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA. Examples of these are discussed. Consideration is also given to the explosion of local Agenda 21s and similar initiatives throughout industrial countries - those linked to national strategies, and those initiated independently. In most countries, green plans and sustainable development strategies have been developed independently of national plans required by the conventions on climate change and biodiversity.

In **Chapter Seven** the domestic political influences that have shaped the development of green plans and strategies are examined. The Canadian Green Plan and follow-up initiatives were greatly influenced by the agenda of Conservative government in the late 1980s, and the programme of the subsequent Liberal government. The fortunes of Australia's 1992 National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development were strongly influenced by Prime Ministerial change. Various other influences are discussed. The involvement of Cabinets and Parliaments in initiating and/or approving plans and strategies is reviewed, and the legislative and institutional consequences of various strategies is also described.

Chapter Eight presents some conclusions. The extent to which the green plans and strategies reviewed match up to the requirements of genuine and effective sustainable development strategies is considered.

The government-led processes have been fashioned mainly by prevailing political, bureaucratic and cultural circumstances in the industrial countries concerned, and have usually adopted approaches consistent with routine government practices for such initiatives. Furthermore, the different plans and strategies have been developed to address particular domestic environmental, social and economic conditions and circumstances which differ in each country. Whilst the initiatives covered can all be described - and indeed are promoted by their principal architects - as green planning processes, in practice they represent a range of quite different approaches (e.g. environmental plans, strategies, legislative instruments, reports to parliament, Commission processes) and are aimed at fulfilling a variety of different objectives (some visioning, some goal-setting, some for implementation, etc.). They are not equivalent processes and it is not possible to compare them as if they are.

In approaching the challenge of developing National Sustainable Development Strategies, it is fair to say that the countries of the North and the South have much to learn from the experience of each other. Some comparisons are therefore made between approaches in developed and developing countries (see Table 1).

Past research and analysis has shown that a number of steps appear to be common to the more successful strategies in developing countries (see Box 8.1). But this is not surprising since many of the approaches have followed a basic framework developed for National Conservation Strategies and subsequently built on and improved for National Environmental Action Plans, Tropical Forestry Action Plans and similar initiatives as experience has grown. Furthermore, these

approaches have been promoted in developing countries mainly by donors who have provided the financial support and technical assistance to replicate the models in different countries as a framework for aid support. In many cases, the expatriate technical experts and advisers have worked on strategies in several countries and have translocated their experience and approaches.

But the situation in developed countries is entirely different. No common approach is apparent in the processes adopted. As already noted, they have all been fashioned according to domestic agendas and have followed national government styles and cultures rather than those of external agencies. It is still too early to say whether any of the basic requirements which appear to characterise strategies in developing countries apply to those in developed countries (see Box 8.1).

Table 1: Basic Comparisons Between Developed and Developing Country Strategy Processes

Developed Countries	Developing Countries
<p><i>Approach</i></p> <p>Internally-generated Internally-funded Indigenous expertise Political action Brokerage approach</p>	<p><i>Approach</i></p> <p>External impetus (IUCN, World Bank, etc.) Donor-funded Expatriate expertise frequently involved Bureaucratic/technocratic action Project approach</p>
<p><i>Aims</i></p> <p>Changing production/consumption patterns Response to 'brown' issues (pollution) Environment focus</p>	<p><i>Aims</i></p> <p>Increase production/consumption Response to 'green' issues/ rural development Development focus</p>
<p><i>Means</i></p> <p>Institutional re-orientation/integration Production of guidelines and local targets Cost-saving approaches Links to Local Agenda 21 initiatives Awareness-raising</p>	<p><i>Means</i></p> <p>Creation of new institutions Development of project 'shopping lists' Aid-generating approaches Few local links Awareness-raising</p>

For example, logic suggests that green plans and strategies in industrial countries should move closer towards the 'ideal' of sustainable development strategies if they are cyclical, i.e. they are periodically revised to take into account feedback and lessons from review following implementation. and thus become genuine 'learning by doing' processes. But to date, of the initiatives reviewed in this study, the only genuine second generation processes are the second Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan, NEPP2 (1993), building on the NEPP (1989) (it is assumed that the NEPP3, planned for 1997, will build further on this experience), and the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme building on previous programmes.

A serious question which will need to be addressed by industrial countries, if they are to make progress towards addressing the challenges of sustainable development, is to what extent will it be necessary to adopt the approaches found to be successful in developing countries (i.e. as suggested by the key tasks listed in Box 8.1) ? In particular, to what extent will it be necessary to move towards being more participative, integrative, and cyclical processes ?

Some of the initiatives discussed in this study have made impressive progress in this direction; others have been little more than environmental planning and policy-making as usual. The question to be asked is whether governments are serious about moving their societies and economies towards a sustainable future, or are merely paying 'lip service' and responding to the issue in a traditional way by driving Agenda 21 into an 'environmental rut' ?

Another question which only will be answered in the future is whether or not National Sustainable Development Strategies will have any lasting influence on the development and implementation of public policy and economic development, and on social attitudes and behaviour. Will they, as some observers predict, merely "sit on the bureaucratic bookshelves gathering dust like earlier generations of master plans" (Rowley 1993) ? In this report are described examples of approaches and innovations which provide a positive basis for hope.

PART 2

Chapters Nine to Twenty One represent case studies, each providing details of the key green planning or strategy processes in the selected countries, based on structured interviews undertaken with the coordinators and key individuals involved in these exercises. In Chapter Twenty Two, brief descriptions are provided of recent initiatives in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Portugal and Russia.

Finally, two appendices are included. Appendix 1 is the questionnaire used as a basis for the interviews, whilst Appendix 2 gives details of these individuals and useful contact addresses for those requiring further information on the planning and strategy processes covered in this book.