

# Chapter 3

## The Evaluation of the Implementation of Sustainability Norms: An Exercise for Experts or Citizens?

**Helga Pülzl**

*University of Salzburg, Austria, & Rutgers University, USA*

**Doris Wydra**

*University of Salzburg, Austria*

### ABSTRACT

*Since the Brundtland report the world is still struggling to solve the riddle of sustainability. If there is no “blueprint” for implementing sustainable development, the practical meaning has to emerge out of an interactive process of social dialogue and reflection. Sustainability therefore goes through a constant process of redefinition and interpretation. This question of values and different approaches to implementation becomes particularly important when decision-making and the evaluation of the implementation is taking place in different fora. According to the dominant paradigm the policy process is a linear exercise of problem solving, i.e., the problem is identified, data for the problem analysis is collected and according advice is given to the policy-maker to enable his decision, which is then implemented. The implementation is evaluated by experts who determine the merit, worth or value of the result of this process, thus deciding upon its effectiveness. Against this dominant view, the authors hold that the purpose of evaluation and policy analysis is more than simply “client-oriented” advice, but should be rather about democratic dialogue and critique. Building on the methods of practical deliberation a model for evaluating sustainable development is built using the example of forest policy.*

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## **INTRODUCTION: EVALUATING SUSTAINABILITY - A NORMATIVE EXERCISE?**

Although it was the Brundtland Report “our Common Future” (endorsed at the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UN in 1987) that drew attention at the concept of “sustainable development”, a more radical environmental literature referred to it already in the 1970s (Meadowcraft, 2000, p. 38; Adams, 1990; Dobson, 1996; Lafferty, 1999). Later in 1980s the World Conservation Strategy issued by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and World Life Fund for Nature (WWF) coined the concept called ‘sustainable development’ (Pülzl, 2010). The Brundtland Report linked sustainability with the question of power and the removal of disparities in economic and political relationships especially between North and South (Baker et al., 1997, p. 4). The sustainability concept asked for a better life while meeting concerns of the poor and plied for inter-generational justice (Meadowcraft, 2000, p. 371; Dryzek, 1997, p. 126). It referred to the idea of environmental limits, regarded economic and social development as compatible with environmental protection and aimed to be a bridging concept between policies and interest (see also Porter & Brown, 1991, p. 25ff). Sustainable development thus combined economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Sustainability is therefore by definition normative. These normative decisions however on what to “uphold” are usually taken by a very limited number of persons, often experts in their field as well as politicians involved in the policy-making process, and evaluation is generally left completely to experts. The political aspects, for example the normative and value judgements involved, however, often tend to be neglected in the evaluation literature (for a similar argument see Rametsteiner et al., 2009; Fischer, 1995). But the question of values and different approaches to implementation become particularly important when decision-making and the evaluation of the

implementation is taking place in different fora, as is often the case for sustainable development, where policy goals are formulated by the international community and are to be implemented (and evaluated) at the national levels. As decision-making and evaluation are disconnected from each other a lot of space for value judgments opens up; the positivist tradition of the evaluation studies however sees experts as neutral evaluators of the implementation of policy goals, not performing any value judgments. The interpretative tradition exemplifies a rather different view.

This article builds on this second tradition to show how the implementation of the sustainable development notion, formulated at the international level can be evaluated at the national level involving value and normative judgements. Since the Brundtland report the world is still struggling to solve the riddle of sustainability, as the report did not explain how sustainable development should be practically achieved. It is argued therefore that if there is no “blueprint” for evaluating the implementation of sustainable development, its practical meaning has to emerge out of an interactive process of social dialogue and reflection. Sustainability therefore goes through a constant process of redefinition and interpretation (Jordan, 2008, p. 18) also during evaluation. The authors argue that the evaluation of the implementation of international norms cannot be left to experts alone as it is actually necessary to include stakeholders and citizens views in order to reach the essentially normative idea of sustainable development. Based on the evaluation literature the article puts forward an idea of how such an evaluation method could look like. This is exemplified with global forest policy and its implementation at the national levels. A number of international commitments exist in this area, but a comprehensive evaluation of their potential to reach sustainable forest management is still missing.

The article proceeds in chapter two with a review of the existing approaches for the evaluation of the implementation of policies; it provides an overview of the developments since the 1970s

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