Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic: Third Attempt. Is it Sustainable?

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Abstract

The Czech Government has adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic (SDS) in December 2004, twelve years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The preparation of two previous documents aspiring to become a National SDS has passed nearly unobserved out of the environmental community.

The paper thus summarizes basic events of all three attempts with a special emphasis on processes and involved institutions. Partial conclusions point out key aspects of the path. Then several policymaking frameworks are used to compare the three attempts in order to identify the causes of such evolution and to gather a wider background of the preparation and implementation of the SDS. An overall costs estimation is provided.

Such approach reveals that the process of preparation of a strategy tends to stop in the early stages as the task is often considered accomplished with the adoption of a written document. Therefore the implementation potential of such strategy is one of the most neglected at all. The essential efforts in the near future should focus on leadership and communication.

1. Sustainable Development Strategies: Three Attempts

1.1 SDS.1 (1998 – 2001)

Between 1998 and 2001, the Charles University Environment Center has run a four-year project “Towards Sustainability: The Czech Republic. Building National Capacities for Sustainable Development“. The project was supported by UNDP through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aimed to enhance the capacity of Czech institutions and citizens to understand, analyse, evaluate and promote ideas and principles of sustainable development. Main “customer” of project outputs was the Ministry of Environment.

Head of the Centre and former Minister of the Environment appointed an interdisciplinary realization team of around 40 experts with diverse disciplinary and institutional background –
there were representatives of academic institutions, NGO’s, private sector, organizations financed from the state budget and independent experts. The team dealt with seven sub projects:

- Sustainable development analysis of the state of natural resources and environment
- Institutional dimensions for ensuring sustainable development in the Czech Republic as a context for a new version of the State Environmental Policy
- Integration of sustainable development principles into selected policies
- Local Agenda 21 and regional development
- Education and consciousness making in sustainable development issues
- Sustainable development indicators
- Building capacities for an active role of the Czech Republic within international effort in achieving sustainable character of economic and civilization development

Outputs of the project can be sorted in three main groups:

- Activities in the field of education, networking and promotion, such as support to a Legislative centre within an environmental NGO, networking of teachers from universities and secondary schools dealing with sustainable development issues, participation on some regional and local activities.
- Expert and scientific studies.
- Synthetic document „Proposition of a National Sustainable Development Strategy“

The last output was intended to be a consensual proposal for the government.

1.1.1 SDS.1: Process of Making

Until April 2001, part of the above-mentioned 40 members realization team prepared SDS.1. After a consensus on its structure and content was achieved within the team, SDS.1 first draft was sent in May 2001 to around 100 institutional and individual representatives of public administration at national and local level, politicians, NGO’s, universities and private sector with a request for comments that could enhance the quality and complexity of the document. A “live” feedback was made possible one month later at a one-day seminar, which provided some important inputs for the SDS.1 draft.
Second draft was then presented in September 2001 within a seminar organized by the Government Council for Social and Economic Strategies (RASES). The SDS.1 draft was again subject to several comments but as a whole it was recommended to be presented at government meeting and to become a support document for the Czech delegation to Johannesburg summit on sustainable development in 2002. The realization team still assumed that the draft could be adopted in short time by the government as a national policy.

In November 2001, Ministry of Environment, the major “customer” of the UNDP project, organized a wider consultation where several crucial comments appeared: the SDS.1 draft was not perceived as a strategy but just as an academic study with two non-interlinked parts – a SWOT analysis and a tentative set of indicators. Furthermore the draft concentrated mostly on environmental issues and dealt very little with social and economic pillars of sustainable development and concerned only selected partial policies. The Ministry of Environment thus decided to prepare within few months a document that would be worth of a label of a “National sustainable development strategy” so that the document could be presented at Johannesburg summit in mid-2002 as a relevant public policy basis.

In between, in December 2001, the SDS.1 draft was presented at a closing conference of the UNDP project where sustainable development was divided into four topics:

- Quality of life
- Landscape management
- Employing natural services
- Global sustainable development interconnections

1.1.2 SDS.1: Conclusions

- Environmentalists prevailed in the realization team whilst economic and especially social experts were missing. One of the consequences was that the SDS.1 proposal dealt mostly with environmental issues.
- SDS.1 draft has been worked out as an expert synthetic study but as the need for an adopted SDS.3 emerged with Johannesburg 2002, the realization team assumed that the draft could easily become a National Strategy.
- There has been no expressed demand from the government for such document and the process showed that the only interest comes from the Ministry of Environment but the
authors of SDS.1 still intended the government will accept the proposal and promote its further realization.

- The consultation process was quite formal and consisted in one-way collection of comments from previously selected respondents, without further communication or interactive handling.

- The first attempt has opened the sustainable development topic for a wider community than the environmental one but still it kept and even enhance a strong coupling with the environmental dimension, which is in the Czech republic perceived by majority of non-environmental community as a brake for the economic growth, prevalingly seen as the most important benchmark.

1.2 SDS.2 (2002)

In January 2002, Ministry of Environment set up a working group based on experts from the Czech Ecological Institute, a research and educational institution financed by the Ministry. This group has prepared a new SDS.2 draft in three months. Main mission of this working group was to work out a SDS.2 that would meet better the three-pillar requirements of sustainable development and could be presented on forthcoming Johannesburg Summit in August 2002. The group has widely used SDS.1 as a background for a new SWOT analysis and has reworked the strategic part in order to better express interrelations between the three pillars of sustainable development and to enhance complexity of the document.

1.2.1 SDS.2: Process of Making

The preparation of SDS.2 was not open to any wider discussion, mainly because of time restriction. It also respected Minister's requirement to make an expert strategy that would not consider its acceptability by other ministries and “representatives and ideologists of unsustainable ways of living”.

Final proposal of SDS.2 was published on the Internet in August 2002. It was sharply criticised by Institute for Eco-policy, an environmental NGO.

1.2.2 SDS.2: Conclusions

- The Minister of Environment declared the objective to fulfil was a “good written document”. Such approach has definitely led to a controversial document, not acceptable and recognized by other stakeholders.
• While elementary consensus was missing, it could hardly become a basis for a feasible and widely accepted public policy, especially while dealing with an abstract topic like sustainable development.

• There was no participation and only limited communication. Sustainable development remained an “environmental issue”.

• Different opinions of the authors of SDS.1 and SDS.2 deepened a controversial image of sustainable development (“Even the environmentalists don't know what they want…”).

1.3 SDS.3 (since 2003)

The Ministry of Environment continued its activities in the field of sustainable development. Together with the Charles University Environment Center it supported the transformation of Government Council for Economic and Social Strategies¹ (established in 1998) to Government Council for Sustainable Development in July 2003. The Council's mission explicitly operated sustainable development as a system of three equal pillars: social, economic and environmental.

The Council consists of 28 top-level representatives of public administration, NGOs, academia and regional authorities. Until mid-2004, its Chairman was the Vice Prime Minister for R&D, Human Rights and Human Resources, since September 2004 the Council's Chairman is the Vice Prime Minister for Economic Affairs whose main task is to prepare a Strategy of Economic Growth.

The first meeting of the Council took place at the end of September 2003. The Council adopted a time schedule of the realization of its two main tasks – preparation of a Sustainable Development Strategy, a basic strategic mid- to long-term document at national level (with a deadline at the end of June 2004) and organization of a Forum for Sustainable Development (a yearly summit within the Czech Republic). The Council also designed 7 Working Groups (WG) and 1 Committee:

• Committee for Communication

¹ Established in 1998, this Council was intended to become a kind of a Government Strategy Unit. Due to growing lack of political support to this body, it has been cancelled by the Government at the end of July in 2003.
- Working Group for Sustainable Development Strategy (became a Committee in December 2003)
- Working Group for Sustainable Development Indicators
- Working Group for Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Working Group for the Co-ordination of Regional Sustainable Development Strategies
- Working Group for the Co-operation with OECD
- Working Group for the Co-operation with the UN
- Working Group for Mid-term Conception of Economic and Social Development (an "inherited" task from the Council's ancestor, the Council for Economic and Social Strategies)

Later on, the Working Group for Sustainable Development Strategy became a Committee (December 2003), then two other working groups were established (WG for Local Agenda 21 and WG for Legislation) and in October 2004 the "inherited" working group was cancelled.

Chiefs of Working Groups and Committees are members of the Council. The Committee can make proposals to the Council whilst the WG only fulfils tasks assigned by the Council. Each Committee and WG consists of 10 to 20 members, experts in given area and representatives of different sectors (mostly public administration, NGOs and academia).

The Council's activities were supported by a Secretariat consisting of three or four workers until September 2004 and then the Secretariat was reduced to one worker. The Secretariat is designed as a service body with no own power but the Secretariat can influence the process by its level of activity as it deals with everyday work whilst the Council meets only 4 times a year.

1.3.1 SDS.3: Process of Making

Although the tasks of the Council were defined in September 2003, real work on the SDS.3 started in January 2004. Initial intention of a preparation of a widely discussed, consensual document failed while the time pressure became a dominant factor.

In January 2004, the Committee for the SDS.3 appointed a consortium of three institutions – Institute for Eco-policy (an NGO), DHV (a private company) and REC (an NGO) – and commended to this consortium the preparation of the SDS.3 until the end of May 2004. The contract was signed with the leading partner, the Institute for Eco-policy.
Although there was a low support to a wider public discussion of the SDS.3 drafts coming from the Committee for the SDS.3 and from the part of the Secretariat, the big effort of the Committee for Communication together with the support of one member of the Secretariat finally made possible to open the process to a wider public discussion through the Internet and to organize seven regional meetings in April 2004. Such informal coalition also promoted an open Forum of Sustainable Development in May 2004 where the second SDS.3 draft was discussed.

Unfortunately the public consultations were not followed by an appropriate feedback. Only few minor comments and suggestions from the public were included in the document, major remarks pursuing the structure of the document and pointing at its missing implementation dimension did not influence the final document.

Since June 2004, the Government was subject to political changes; therefore the Government adopted the SDS.3 in December 2004, after a newly appointed Vice Prime Minister for Economic Affairs “inherited” the sustainable development agenda.

In between the new Government took a strictly economic, growth-oriented direction and initiated a preparation of a Strategy of Economic Growth, a “strategy above all strategies”. It puts economic growth above any other dimension. Available documents and interviews with the Vice Prime Minister for Economic Affairs show that sustainable development is again strictly connected with environmental issues and considered as an unwanted externally induced brake for economic growth.

1.3.2 SDS.3: Conclusions

- The Czech Republic has a Sustainable Development Strategy, an official document adopted by the Government.

- The SDS.3 disposes of a very low implementation potential. It has no legislative impact, the administrative background for the Council consists in one employee and the composition of the Council and its Committees and Working Groups is subject to permanent changes.

- The content of SDS.3 provides tens of priorities of unbalanced level of relevance. An important part of the 60 pages offers a bare summary of goals taken from another documents.
• Actual Chairman of the Council for Sustainable Development does not accept the SDS.3 as a basic strategic document and perceives sustainable development as an appendix to economic growth.

• Communication activities have helped to promote sustainable development in its three dimensions.

• Political demand for sustainable development at national level remains low but is slowly increasing. Apart Ministry of Environment, sustainable development became a serious topic for the Ministry for Local Development and for the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

• Sustainable development is better understood and supported at local and regional level.

1.4 Overall SDS Costs Estimation

Basic direct costs estimation is quite easy to estimate – this total covers all “direct project costs”. In case of SDS.1 and SDS.2 it includes expert studies, travel costs, material and other direct costs declared in project budget. In case of SDS.3, it only covers costs for expert preparation of the SDS.3.

Table 1: Overall costs estimation of three Czech Sustainable Development Strategies attempts (in EUR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct costs</td>
<td>330 000</td>
<td>50 000</td>
<td>30 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other costs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10 000</td>
<td>80 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total costs (1998-2004)</strong></td>
<td><strong>500 000</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The estimation considers costs until December 2004.

• SDS.3 other costs estimation covers mainly HR costs and travel costs, it doesn't cover organizational fixed costs such as maintenance of buildings, IT etc.

Costs of co-operating 200 members are not considered although many of them have strongly supported the process.
2. Sustainable Development Strategies and Policymaking Models

To set up a common assessment framework for the three SDS.1, SDS.2 and SDS.3 preparation process, we can proceed from different schemes describing policymaking process and identify the extent in which real processes corresponded to these models.

2.1 Dror’s Optimal Policymaking Cycle Model

The first scheme to be considered is the “optimal policymaking cycle”, proposed by Yehezkel Dror initially in his Public Policymaking Re-examined (Dror 1968). Dror’s optimal model has three major stages; each of them involves another sub-stages:

Table 2: Dror’s optimal policymaking cycle model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major stages</th>
<th>Sub-stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Meta-policymaking</td>
<td>1. Processing values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Processing reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Processing problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Developing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Designing the policymaking system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Allocating problems, values and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Determining the policymaking strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Policymaking</td>
<td>8. Sub-allocating resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Making and prioritising operational goals and other significant values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Preparing a set of major alternative policies (including some “good” ones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Predicting benefits and costs of those policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Identifying the best policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Deciding whether the best alternatives are “good” policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Post-policymaking</td>
<td>14. Motivating the execution of the policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Executing the policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Evaluating the results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following table summarises in which stages the real process met the optimal one:

Table 3: Dror’s optimal policymaking cycle model applied to preparation of three attempts for Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Meta-policymaking</th>
<th>Policymaking</th>
<th>Post-policymaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td>10 11 12 13 14 15 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS.1</td>
<td>x X x x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS.2</td>
<td>x x X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS.3</td>
<td>X x x</td>
<td>x x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: X – the stage has been fulfilled in at least 50%  
        x – the stage has been initiated
This framework indicates that the policymaking process tends to linger in the first major stage. Besides that it also displays some discretion of the process as some sub-stages are missing.

2.2 Dalal-Clayton and Bass Continuous Improvement Approach to Managing Sustainable Development Strategies

Previous results correspond with the results obtained while using another scheme of policymaking process, a multi-stakeholder, continuous development approach, initially developed by Dalal-Clayton and Bass (Dalal-Clayton 2003) from International Institute for Environment and Development in 2002.

**Figure 1:** Dalal-Clayton and Bass Continuous Improvement Approach to Managing Sustainable Development Strategies (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002).

While using Dalal-Clayton and Bass approach, all three SDS attempts attained at most the second major stage and again some of sub-stages got skipped:
Table 4: Dalal-Clayton and Bass continuous improvement approach to managing strategies applied to preparation of three attempts for Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Communication, Participation, Co-ordination, Information, Learning</th>
<th>Monitoring, learning and adaptation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of SD issues and debate priorities</td>
<td>Consensus on vision and priority goals for SD</td>
<td>Plans and investment for SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment and capacity building</td>
<td>Mainstreaming SD, controls and incentives</td>
<td>Monitor strategy mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor strategy mechanisms</td>
<td>Monitor SD outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| SDS.1 | X |
| SDS.2 | x |
| SDS.3 | x | x | x |

Legend: X – the stage has been fulfilled in at least 50%  
x – the stage has been initiated

The Dalal-Clayton and Bass approach leads to similar results as the Dror’s one: the SDS.3 attempt has involved more policymaking stages than the preceding attempts but still it lacks in the depth of realization and remains at the very beginning of strategy building. Again the policymaking is more an initial pioneer analysis than a vivid, discussed strategy based on shared values and operated within a strong implementation and evaluation institutional background.

2.3 Another Comparative Frameworks

Other comparative frameworks (Palmer 1996-2005) would lead to similar results, i.e. process termination in an early policymaking stage:

- The policy process as an endless cycle of: policy decisions – implementation – performance assessment (H. K. Colebatch);

- A similar cycle but with more steps: agenda setting (problem recognition) – policy formulation (proposal of a solution) – decision-making (choice of a solution) – policy implementation (putting the solution into effect) – policy evaluation (monitoring results) (Howlett and Ramesh);

- An eight-step "Australian Policy Cycle": identify issues – policy analysis – policy instruments – consultation – co-ordination – decision – implementation – evaluation (Bridgman and Davis);

- A similar cycle: issue search or agenda setting, issue filtration, issue definition, forecasting, setting objectives and priorities, options analysis, policy implementation, evaluation and review, and policy maintenance, succession or termination (Hogwood and Gun).
Most of models that appear in the literature content the notion of a policy cycle that has its foundation in systems theory and scientific method. All these policymaking frameworks can be seen as projects – a specific production system designed to produce a unique output with respect to given inputs, such as resources, time horizon, output quality and institutional requirements. All projects integrate two basic types of processes (Fiala 2004):

- **Project management processes** – description, organization and execution of the project:
  - Initialization;
  - Planning;
  - Realization;
  - Controlling;
  - Evaluation;

- **Product-oriented processes** – specification and creation of the project output.

From this point of view, all SDS attempt dealt only with the initialisation stage of project management processes and with the product-oriented processes, with a focus on a single output – a written document.

**3. Striving for a Sustainable and Strategic Sustainable Development Strategy**

The initial description of Czech SDS history revealed that sustainable development is still perceived as a concept that is incompatible with the prevailing political emphasis on economic growth and with the concentration on short-term effects. Then the policymaking comparative framework displayed the low implementation potential of the SDS adopted in December 2004. If we also consider persisting diseases in the field of strategic approach at the centre of the government, we can conclude that the preparation of a sustainable and strategic SDS should follow very carefully the policymaking cycles proposed above in terms of fulfilling the cardinal stages of the process. To promote a viable implementation of sustainable development in the Czech Republic, the core endeavour should – in the near future – focus on communication and leadership.
References


Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic – English version