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Social innovation for sustainability

Research and Innovation

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Working in partnership for sustainability

Moving towards a greener economy while keeping the quality of development sustainable is a major challenge. This entails, among other factors, good policy-making, changes in societal and individual lifestyles, ethical consumerism and, perhaps most importantly, good research to understand all of the factors at play.

There is a strong need for further work on the interplay between social, economic and ecological systems. Successfully mainstreaming sustainability, building a more circular economy, where waste is minimised and recycling is a matter of course, means balancing social and environmental concerns with economic growth, and even human psychology. Transdisciplinary and multistakeholder approaches are required to achieve social innovation for sustainability. This means finding new ways of organising society .

Research Priorities

Through the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), the EU encourages new innovative ways of doing science, new innovative ways of implementing science, and new innovative partners that bring fresh thinking. It stresses the need to engage broad public representation in the dialogue on scientific issues and research results. This is not only made up of researchers and policy makers. It must go beyond the research and policy communities to include, where appropriate, other stakeholders and 'end-users' such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Through targeted research funding, the EU supports efforts to gather different stakeholders to work together around sustainability issues, to promote information exchange and dialogue in view of advancing the understanding and implementation of sustainability.

Knowledge brokering instruments offer opportunities to increase the effectiveness of this interaction, to better exploit existing knowledge and research potential. But the process of bringing in new voices needs itself to be properly managed. The concerns and desires of disparate parties may not always match.

The potential for progress is real. Key untapped resources include already existing but still unexploited scientific works, but also traditional knowledge, 'local science', especially where indigenous populations are involved, the people who know best the social context and the environment in which they live.

Described in the following pages are a number of innovative research initiatives being supported by the EU, from **involving CSOs in sustainability decisions** to **understanding sustainable consumption** to **linking science to policy**. All are ultimately aimed at better understanding the forces at work and focusing energies on better policy to achieve the sustainable future we all want.

Involving CSOs in sustainability decisions

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, called for the creation of a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector, all working together to secure a sustainable future. For the EU, bringing CSOs into the debate is an effective way to broaden the range of voices being heard.

CSOs are many and varied, ranging from big and well-known NGOs, trade unions and indigenous peoples' movements, right down to local consumer groups and neighbourhood associations. Being closer to the people, grass-roots CSOs can sometimes be more effective than government authorities at encouraging individuals to change their patterns of consumption.

That said, many of these groups, particularly the smaller ones, lack the necessary means to influence the sustainability debate. There is a real potential to better inform policy makers but there is a lack of coordination between CSOs and other social groups and movements. While they may be at the leading edge of societal transformation, many of these groups still face the challenge of rising above individual concerns to work with others towards common goals.

Voices of reason

FP7 is funding a number of key research initiatives that are broadening the push towards sustainability, bringing in CSOs and other interest groups, and providing ways for them to help develop concrete and realistic goals.

For example, the **CSOContribution2SCP** project seeks civil society's outlook on separating economic growth from resource use, now widely seen as a key issue for sustainability. Meanwhile, **AWARE** is selecting people from all over the world to work with scientists and policy makers on questions of coastal and water resources in the Gulf of Riga, in the Po river delta and in the Southern North Sea.

Forging partnerships for better decision making on sustainability: OPEN: EU'

*The EU funded **OPEN: EU** project was coordinated by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and brought together European and global leaders on resource accounting, policy and scenario development, stakeholder engagement and project management.*

The network of OPEN: EU's partners developed a comprehensive and forward-looking set of carbon, ecological and water footprint indicators, and then incorporated them into an interactive software tool for EU policy makers.

The 'Eureapa' tool shows the full supply chain impacts associated with 62 product categories, covering the food people consume, housing , transport and other goods and services they use.

Understanding sustainable consumption

Large industrial organisations and their production processes are responsible for a significant amount of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Targeted EU and national regulations have encouraged them to behave more responsibly, but how are we addressing the way people behave as individuals?

Recent years have seen major steps being taken to reduce the harmful effects of industrial activities, but there is now a widening recognition that more sustainable behaviour across society, as a whole, must also be addressed. Before we start, we need to know more about why people act the way they do, in the workplace, at home and in the wider world.

Governments, communities, industrial interests, all of us as individuals, when it comes to how we consume, we all have to strike a balance between economic, environmental and social considerations. How do we weigh these considerations? On what do we base our decisions? And can we use this knowledge to encourage 'greener' attitudes at all levels of society?

The EU-funded **Responder** project is carrying out research to try to answer some of these questions, focusing on attitudes and rationales behind consumption decisions made by people in their homes and the impacts of these decisions on policy. Researchers believe this work will help to improve how we manage potential political, social and economic contradictions with economic growth.

Everyone makes a difference

Too often in our society, consumption is seen as a measure of social status. Ambition, either personal or societal, not a bad thing in itself, always seems to end in the needless waste of resources. These are issues that many seem to care about, but translating concern into action can be difficult. Research projects such as **CORPUS** is looking at ways to encourage more sustainable patterns. The project has developed a self-sustaining database for policy-relevant knowledge on sustainable consumption.

As at work, so at home: LOCAW

*The EU-funded **LOCAW** project is examining how everyday practices in the workplace can promote a transition towards sustainable behaviour in the society. The project is carrying out a scientifically grounded analysis of the factors promoting or hindering the transition to more sustainable behaviour focusing on six case studies in different countries and different types of companies.*

Researchers will develop models to illustrate interactions among relevant actors at all levels, both within and outside a given organisation. This will include a detailed account of barriers to and drivers of co-operation in the move towards more sustainable behaviour.

The project also looks at how people may or may not transfer sustainable practices from one area of their lives to another.

Linking science to policy

The EU is making a considerable effort to support dialogue between research and policy-making communities, and going even further to link science, experience and local insight, all aimed at building better policy for sustainability.

Science does not take place in a vacuum. Research is done by people, who live in a larger society and who need to speak to each other. More importantly, perhaps, researchers need to communicate with other people outside of their own domain.

Policy makers are a good example. They need input from scientists in order to do their jobs, for more informed decision making. But the process isn't always easy. Scientists and policy makers work to different time scales and have a different outlook on things.

Given the increasing complexity of scientific, societal and policy issues such as climate change and economic crisis, coupled with rapid advances in knowledge and available technologies, the EU believes one key to moving forward is to create more efficient interfaces between science and policy. Research, science and innovation have a key role to play to inform policy making and provide sustainable solutions.

For example, the EU-funded **BESSE** project explores sanitation approaches in Europe which are still based on 19th and early 20th century technologies and management systems. BESSE is collecting, reviewing and systematising existing knowledge on sustainable sanitation, and then identifying the factors that hinder effective dissemination of knowledge to policy makers.

Meanwhile, the **Pachelbel** project is doing similar work in the area of climate change and consumption, investigating the validity of assumptions about human behaviour that are incorporated into policy initiatives. They are also promoting collaborative working relationships between governmental and voluntary organisations involved in developing and implementing sustainability policy.

Connecting research and water policy: PSI-Connect

Good water management is a highly complex task and managers are often challenged by a lack of factual knowledge. This situation is exacerbated by climate change. Although we know a lot about how climate change will impact water resources, this knowledge remains insufficiently exploited by policy makers and water managers.

*The central aim of the EU-funded **PSI-connect** project is to improve the interaction between policy and research communities in the context of climate change and fresh water management.*

The project partners test and evaluate together new and better-tailored knowledge brokering instruments such as group model building, scenarios and futures visioning in concrete situations, for example in developing the water defence systems in the polder areas.

Project List

AWARE – How to achieve sustainable water ecosystems management connecting research, people and policy makers in Europe
www.aware-eu.net

BESSE – Brokering Environmentally Sustainable Sanitation for Europe
www.besse-project.info

CONVERGE – Rethinking Globalisation in the light of Contraction and CONVERGEnce
www.convergeproject.org

CORPUS – Enhancing connectivity Between Research and Policymaking in Sustainable Consumption
www.scp-knowledge.eu

CRISP – CReating Innovative Sustainability Pathways
www.crisp-futures.eu

CSOCONTRIBUTION 2 SCP – Partnering to enhance civil society organisations' contribution to research in sustainable consumption & production
www.action-town.eu

CSS – Civil Society for Sustainability
www.project-css.eu

ENCI-LOWCARB – European Network engaging CIvil society in Low Carbon scenarios
www.lowcarbon-societies.eu

ESDINDS – The development of indicators & assessment tools for CSO values based projects in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
www.esdinds.eu

FOODLINKS – Knowledge brokerage to promote sustainable food consumption and production: linking scientists, policymakers and civil society organisations
www.foodlinkscommunity.net

GEO FAIR TRADE – GEOTRACEBILITY FAIR TRADE
www.geofairtrade.eu

GLOBIS – Globalisation Informed by Sustainable Development
www.lucsus.lu.se/globis

INCONTEXT – InContext: Individuals in Context: Supportive Environments for Sustainable Living
www.incontext-fp7.eu

LOCAW – Low Carbon at Work: Modelling agents and organisations to achieve transition to a low carbon Europe
www.locaw-fp7.com

OPEN: EU – One Planet Economy Network: Europe
www.oneplaneteconomynetwork.org

PACHELBEL – Policy addressing climate change and learning about consumer behaviour and everyday life
www.pachelbel.eu

PASSO – Participatory Assessment of Sustainable Development indicators on good governance from the Civil Society perspective
www.passo-project.org

POPP – Policies to promote sustainable consumption patterns
www.eupop.net

PRIMUS – Policies and Research for an Integrated Management of Urban Sustainability
www.iclei-europe.org/informed-cities

PSI-CONNECT – Policy Science Interactions: connecting science and policy through innovative knowledge brokering
www.psiconnect.eu/

RESPONDER – linking RESearch and POlicy making for managing the contradictions of sustaiNable consumption anD Economic gRowth
www.scp-responder.eu

SPIRAL – SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACES FOR BIODIVERSITY: RESEARCH, ACTION, AND LEARNING (SPIRAL)
www.spiral-project.eu

SUSTAINABLERIO – Sustainable development reflexive inputs to world organisation
http://sustainablerio.eu/blog/about/

SUSTAINERGYNET – Integrating civil, scientific and stakeholder knowledge towards African sustainable energy policy
www.sustainergynet.eu

VISION RD4SD – Producing a shared vision on how to harness Research & Development for Sustainable Development
www.visionrd4sd.eu

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Moving towards a greener economy while keeping the quality of development sustainable is a major challenge. This entails, among other factors, good policy-making, changes in societal and individual lifestyles, ethical consumerism and, perhaps most importantly, good research to understand all of the factors at play. The EU's Seventh Framework Programme supports research and innovation based solutions at transnational and international level.

Research and Innovation policy

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