Sustainable development strategy - a tool for strategic governance?
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Introduction
The national sustainable development strategy (SDS), its update and implementation in the Czech Republic has been worked on with varying intensity since 1998. In the historic overview one can illustrate the debate on sustainable development and strategic management in the Czech Republic and show the process of creating SDS as a process of continuous learning by all stakeholders on the one side, and as a process facing the current institutional and personal limits of public administration for strategic governance on the other.

Context of the Creation of Sustainable Development Strategies
Doubts about long-term sustainability of economic development which is fully dependent on consumption of limited natural resources led to the creation of the concept of sustainable development in the 1980s, with the emphasis on reducing the load on natural resources and eco-systems, which requires quantitative changes in the nature of economic growth and gradual separation of the growth curve from material and energy consumption (so-called decoupling).

The concept of sustainable development was approved by the UN General Assembly in 1987 as development which enables satisfaction of the current needs of the mankind without threatening the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The Czech Environment Act (No. 17/1992 Coll.) defines sustainable development in society as development which maintains the ability to satisfy the basic living needs for the current and future generations, which does not reduce the variety of nature, and which maintains the natural functions of eco-systems.

It is apparent from the definitions above that the concept of sustainable development is too general to be a definite guideline for creating policies: there is no "right" sustainable development. It is rather a "rhetoric cover" (Richardson 2004), in which there is a competition of various discourses with the attempt to dominate what a locally prevailing definition of sustainable development means in that place and at that time. Therefore, sustainable development is rather a definition of values for the way how to achieve a sustainable society on a long-term basis rather than a target state of society.
Although the concept of sustainable development was created primarily as a reaction to environmental threats and unsustainable consumption of natural resources, today it is an intersection of three development pillars, economic, social and environmental, which shows the needs to balance these interconnected development aspects. Safety seems to be more of an issue now in its widest understanding, which includes timely identification and prevention of all possible risks that society is facing today.

In the practical area, an important part of sustainable development is the procedural aspect of decision-making, in which various aims and interests interfere. Here I would like to remember the statement from Ulrich Beck that "the central social conflict is no longer the redistribution of profits and prosperity, but the distribution of risks and the redistribution of losses, and the key question is how to overcome the "organized irresponsibility" of modern societies and to bring in the principle of preliminary caution to decision-making (Beck, 1992).

The concept of sustainable development is part of the broader modernization framework, or the framework of environmental modernization of society, where environmental harms and risks are not understood as inhibition of growth, but on the contrary, attempts to remedy them are used as a new stimulus for growth with impacts on the economic and social area (Suša, 2004). Many critics also share this managerial approach and point out the need for deeper changes and speak about the need for a transition to a new environmental paradigm (Dunlap, 1992) or the need for cultural change accompanied by the change in values of subjective perception of the quality of life (Ortová, 1999). They build up on the prerequisite that only new framing or value anchoring makes it possible to view development from another perspective and to change formulations of the partial objectives of where society, its institutions and individuals are heading.

Despite the mentioned shortcomings of environmental modernization, in the context of the limitation of technical and managerial approaches, the concept of sustainable development is a generally accepted framework and the topic of governance, or sustainable development management, is an important part of the concept1.

With regards to sustainable development management, emphasis is put on improving the interconnection (coherence) of policies, the integration of environmental protection with decision-making, and the participation of all relevant stakeholders when negotiating various interests. The objective is to reach either a win-win solution or to find accord in mutual

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compromises, so-called trade-offs with regards to long-term effects and eliminating risks in society in the economic, social, environmental and safety areas.

The basic instrument of sustainable development management is the preparation and implementation of environmental development strategies at various levels of decision-making and the interconnection of strategic objectives at all levels. This includes interconnecting the objectives of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic, regional strategies to local strategies prepared within the Local Agendas 21. Each of the strategies deals with another topic corresponding to the level of decision-making at which they operate, but in general they should be interconnected.

To prepare national strategies of sustainable development as the regulatory framework for decision making, the states undertook at the World Summit on the Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) where the Agenda 21 (Art.8.3) was accepted. After ten years, the OECD prepared an analysis of the present experience in the preparation and implementation of SDS and formulated a recommendation for sustainable development management (OECD, 2002). From these conclusions we can emphasize the following areas of prerequisites for the successful preparation and implementation of sustainable development strategies:

1) Creating *capacities for sustainable development management* and having adequate *political leadership* at the national level. Preparation and implementation of SDS requires the coordination of current processes and setting up new ones, identification and settlement of potential conflicts, and the involvement and motivation of the main social stakeholders. The OECD analysis specifies the most common weaknesses in the process of preparation of sustainable development strategies as follows:

- Sustainable development strategies are not part of the mainstream of strategic planning,
- They represent a list of "wishes" - what should be done - without clear or attainable or measurable objectives,
- They result from "close" participation without key stakeholders involved,
- They do not support current processes, strategies or capacities; instead they suggest creating something new and they are managed from the outside (external companies, custom-made) without the necessary support from local government.
2.) Having a system of work among different stakeholders in public administration that complies with the principles of the deliberative approach. Deliberative processes are often mentioned as the basic prerequisite for the creation of sustainable development policies (Owens, 1997). In fact, it means that in formulating the vision of future development, defining the risks, opportunities and strategic objectives as well as in subsequent suggested measures, the following principles are observed: a) openness to various views of the problem, b) emphasis on reasonable argumentation and c) the preliminary prerequisite that output will be a consensual decision that will include added value for all. Positive added value is what makes the approach different from standard consensual decision-making, which usually ends up in zero benefit (Connelly, Richardson, 2005).

The deliberation process can be understood as a form of social learning (Reich, 1998) where the parties look for a mutual understanding of their different viewpoints in a controlled discussion process and they create a new shared understanding and shared values. It is crucial for the deliberative process that each participant has the same possibility to change the common outcome. Excluding some stakeholders and interests is stated as a frequent risk of the approach (Richardson, 2004).

The following text summarizes the current experience of the Czech Republic in preparing the national strategy of sustainable development and in creating conditions for its implementation.

**History of preparation of Sustainable Development Strategy in the Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Czech Republic (SDS) after two unsuccessful attempts as late as in December 2004. In January 2007, the government decided on the preparation of its updated form in connection with the update of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. The process was completed in January 2010 when the government adopted the Strategic Framework of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic.

The first proposal of the sustainable development strategy was prepared outside the public administration. The first proposal was prepared in 1998 - 2001/2002 within the research project "For Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic: Creating Conditions" financed by UNDP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The project was prepared in a university environment in an atmosphere of a prevailing lack of interest in sustainable development among politicians, officials and experts. Only environmentally-oriented professional institutions were involved more. It resulted in the creation of many
analytical outputs and draft of the sustainable development strategy that was not approved by the government.

Rejection of the proposal of sustainable development strategy less than one year before the Summit on Sustainable Development (August 2002) resulted in the need to create a new document which the Czech Republic could present there. The second draft of the strategy was prepared with time pressure and even without any ambition to be approved by the government. In January 2002, the Ministry of the Environment set up a work group attached to the Czech Environmental Institute (CEI), a professional organization of the ministry. The prepared document drew criticism for its unrealistic approach and fundamentalism. This draft was also rejected and in the end the Czech Republic did not present any sustainable development strategy in Johannesburg.

Based on the initiatives and conclusions of the Summit on Sustainable Development, in 2003 the Government Council for Social and Economic Strategy (operating since 1998) was changed to the Government Council for Sustainable Development (RVUR), which decided to submit the draft Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic before the end of June 2004. This document was also prepared with time pressure. Preparing the strategy was assigned to a consortium of three advisory organizations in January 2004. They only had four months to prepare it. Similarly to the previous two versions, this one also had low implementation potential with tens of priorities that were not hierarchically balanced and were to a great extent a list of information and objectives taken over from other documents. The government approved the strategy in December 2004.

**Preparation of updated Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic**

With regards to the update of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the government adopted a resolution in 2004 by which it assigned the task of preparing the update of the SDS of the Czech Republic to the Government Council for Sustainable Development by the end of 2007. Work on the task was started late and at the end of 2007 a document was presented to the government for reference only entitled "Principles, Tools and Proposal of Priorities for Completing the Updated Strategy of Sustainable Development in the Czech Republic". It was supposed to be a preliminary basis for the further updating process with the deadline before the end of 2009.

According to its assignment, the updated strategy was supposed to be a document that would express a broad social and political consensus regarding specification of key topics and problems of sustainable development of the Czech Republic, and that would propose the
respective measures for their solution. It has a covering inter-sectional character similarly to the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013, which it can be in agreement with. The update was supposed to help the mutual connection of the measures that are included in various strategic sector documents and possibly to identify problems for which there are still no corresponding policies and measures.

The updating process was carried out in several stages. Under the leadership of the advisory company Integra Consulting Services, s.r.o., the document entitled "Updating SDS CR - Initial Thesis" (May 2008) was prepared which was open to comments - the outputs of public discussions were summarized and published.

From July to September 2008, an analysis of background documents was prepared, i.e. strategic and conceptual documents of the Czech Republic, in order to identify and describe the main trends and problems related to the issue of sustainable development. The background was made up of documents from individual ministries; they comprised 2,000 text pages, from which the basic structure was created by the method of mathematical clustering, and mutual relationships and relations were looked for. Outcomes from this phase included the background documents and the TOWS analysis (alternative to SWOT analysis). Both documents were published in September 2008 and submitted for comments at www.mzp.cz/sur.

In October 2008, the Government Council for Sustainable Development started discussions on the shortcomings of the strategic work at the central level of public administration and ordered the Chairman of the Managing Committee to prepare a methodology for the preparation of strategic documents with the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for improving public administration procedures together with the respective government decree. So, works have been carried out since 2008 in updating the strategy on two levels:

1) The work group comprising ministerial secretaries prepared methodology under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance for processing strategies and for introducing a new practice in strategic work at the level of ministries. Work was interrupted by the Czech Presidency in the first half of 2009 which meant a great load on public administration, and also by the breakdown of the government in April 2009, the loss of the political mandate and changes in the secretaries.

2.) Together with representatives from ministries, Integra Consulting Services, s.r.o. worked on completing the analytical material of the updated SDS, which was submitted in April 2009 as the Draft Strategy for comments from the general public.
During summer and autumn 2009, comments were processed and negotiations between ministries went on regarding the name of the document and the manner of setting up the implementation system. At its meeting at the end of November, the Government Council confirmed that it was not a "Strategy", but a "Strategic Framework of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic" as it was not the basis for particular strategic decisions. The tasks of "preparing an implementation document for the updated Strategy before the end of 2010" and "setting up an implementation structure for the realization of the updated Strategy within the bodies of the Government Council for SD" were deleted from the government decree. These points were replaced by the task "completing the solution to introducing the Strategic Framework into practice and preparing improvements to the financial and personnel conditions for implementing the Strategic Framework from the internal reserves of the ministries and the Office of the Government, and submitting a solution to the government before 31.5.2010".

Therefore, the issue of the implementation mechanism remained open, but with a clear term for submitting the proposal to the government for resolution. Also, the existing way of monitoring through a set of indicators remained the same, which was introduced as early as in 2004. The Government adopted the Strategic Framework of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic in January 2010.

**Conclusions**

Comparing the process of preparation, involving stakeholders and the implementation potential of the "Sustainable Development Strategies" prepared in the Czech Republic in 1998 - 2009 is provided in Table 1.

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| SDS 1 (1998 – 2002) | Benefit: Preparing analytical documents, starting professional and partly also public discussions on the objectives of sustainable development in the Czech Republic when the concept of sustainable development was not accepted by the political representation.  
Shortcomings: It was a project ordered by UNDP without national political support, with significant environmental focus, the outcome of which was an academic piece of work without implementation potential. |
| SDS 2 (2001- 2002) | Benefit: Confirming the deadlock of how SDS cannot be prepared, but also an attempt to classify deep shortcomings in the system that could be the basis for lack of development sustainability (current understanding of economic growth). |
**Shortcomings:** Time pressure, without involving stakeholders, without the ambition to be the basis for decision-making (it was rather a provocative work for contemplation).

**SDS 3 (2003 – 2004)**

**Benefit:** Involving ministries in the process of comments, the attempt to achieve a balance in the economic, social and the environmental pillar, public discussion, identification of SD indicators, adopted by the decree of the Government of the Czech Republic.

**Shortcomings:** Weak implementation potential, without clearly defined priorities, time pressure affected the quality of public discussion and involvement of the public.


**Benefit:** Thorough analysis with the aim to reach broader social consensus regarding strategic priorities, including ministries in work groups, dividing preparation into several stages, including formulation of the common vision, public discussion at each stage. New concept of the SDS structure, not 3 pillars now, but 5 thematic priority axes with defined priorities and objectives. Opening the discussion and the attempt to resolve shortcomings of strategic work of public administration as a whole. Admitting the fact that this is not a strategy, but a strategic framework.

**Shortcomings:** Double-tracked process management, attempt to create inter-ministerial consensual document without the aim to name and classify conflicts between ministries and preparing a (alternative) document for the Government, the implementation mechanism was not created, no progress was made in monitoring.

Source: author

It is apparent from the overview that with the repeated preparation of the Sustainable Development Strategy, the process and contents of the final documents were improved. The over ten-year process of preparation of sustainable development strategies has been a learning process. During the process of updating the Sustainable Development Strategy in 2007-2009, these significant advancements took place.

1. For the first time, the question of the manner of strategic work of central offices of public administration was asked and some shortcomings were addressed: a) lack of interconnection of individual strategic documents, b) strategies are sometimes considered to be documents that do not meet the requirements for this type of document, c) strategies are not the basis for strategic management and completed documents remain unused.

2. Principles of good practice in strategic work were addressed as well as characteristics for documents that are called "strategies": a transparent way of processing which includes all relevant views of resolving the respective issue, and the final form of the
3. There was an attempt to lead the process of preparing the methodology of strategic work for the central level of public administration.

4. The process of preparing the SDS document was improved. The process included thorough analysis, communication with the general public, involving all the affected ministries and other stakeholders (non-government organizations, academics, industrial associations, municipalities, etc.) and their discussions in work groups.

5. A consensual document was prepared, comprising the main strategic objectives of sustainable development, which was prepared by all key ministries that have adopted the "Strategic Framework of Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic" as their document, a document that applies to them and that they want to fulfil.

6. The structure of the document is not based on the three pillars of sustainable development, but on thematic areas that correspond better to the sectional character of the document and which include views of all the pillars.

To conclude, we can say that after the over ten years of the process of preparing the strategies of sustainable development of the Czech Republic, which has been maintained in particular by international obligations of the Czech Republic and pressure from EU institutions since 2004, social consensus was reached regarding the strategic objectives of the sustainable development of the Czech Republic. Now the objectives have to be classified according to the urgency of their resolution (prioritized) and processed into particular tasks of individual ministries. However, there is a problem of the lack of established procedures of strategic work and coordination between individual ministries and the lack of a system of work with stakeholders outside public administration (including the general public) in preparing strategic documents. Processes are missing as well as institutional capacities and individual skills for deliberative processes in public administration that are the necessary prerequisite for the

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2 The Strategic Framework of Sustainable Development defines the priorities and objectives of sustainable development which are classified in 5 priority axes:

- Priority axis 1: Society, Man and Health
- Priority axis 2: Economy and Innovation
- Priority axis 3: Territory Development
- Priority axis 4: Countryside, Eco-Systems and Biodiversity
- Priority axis 5: Stable and Safe Society

Each priority axis contains a description of the main problems in the respective area and a draft of 3 - 4 priorities and objectives.
coordinated ruling and fulfilment of strategic objectives of sustainable development. Although these needs are being realized more and more for effective and purposeful operation of public administration, the question is whether their realization is strong enough now to receive the necessary political support so that reinforcement of systemic, institutional and individual capacities for strategic ruling becomes one of the priority goals of improving the work of public administration where governments are willing to invest financial and human resources.

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