



## Sustainability programmes: eclectic toolboxes or clear roadmaps?

**Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) programmes** are frameworks to systemically develop sustainability. New research has analysed three national SCP programmes in the UK, Sweden and Finland and concluded that, rather than provide a strong roadmap for sustainability, they tend to be a toolbox of good but scattered initiatives.

At the **Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development** in 2002, the attending countries agreed to promote a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national SCP initiatives. More than 30 countries have developed or are developing national SCP programmes and three of the most pioneering are Finland, Sweden and the UK.

The study analysed SCP programmes in these three countries, focussing on three types of organising principles:

- **Deliberation** reflects the informational elements of the programme and promotes learning, public participation, information sharing and consensus.
- **Efficiency** enhances the ratio of desired product output to negative environmental impacts, for example, creating more GDP per tonne of material or moving a car a greater distance for less oil.
- **Sufficiency** is focussed on the impact of resource use on ecological integrity. It aims to bring consumption and production within natural limits, or at least reduce demand for more resources.

The analysis indicated that, generally speaking, efficiency and deliberation principles were stronger than the sufficiency principle. However, the pattern was not uniform across the three countries. For example, Sweden's weak sufficiency highlights the government's emphasis on the role of responsible consumers. In the UK, the language of the SCP programme places greater emphasis on inspiring businesses to be more eco-efficient, but is not as concerned with consumers.

Sweden's "Think Twice!" SCP programme appears to have the best balance between the three principles, with 60 per cent of its proposals reflecting the efficiency principle, 40 per cent implementing the sufficiency principle and 70 per cent of the proposals having a deliberative element. In comparison, the UK's "One Planet Economy" SCP programme has the clearest focus on efficiency with 70 per cent of its proposals reflecting this organising principle. Deliberation is represented in nearly as many proposals, whilst only 10 per cent enhance sufficiency. As its name suggests, Finland's "Getting More and Better from Less" also focuses on efficiency with 70 per cent of its proposals promoting efficiency, 60 per cent promoting deliberation and 20 per cent promoting sufficiency.

The research identified a number of approaches that were present in all SCP programmes, such as life-cycle analysis and cross-disciplinary thinking. The programmes propose some bold visions for the future and concrete actions in the short-term, but tend to miss out medium-term targets.

In summary, the three pioneering SCP programmes were not considered to provide strong, clear and balanced roadmaps, but instead, slightly weak and diverse toolboxes. The study also noted a shift of responsibility in policy to non-governmental actors and the outsourcing of certain initiatives and actions, such as the promotion of green consumerism, to businesses, NGOs and individual consumers. This has the possible impact of confusing the picture as to who is doing what, when and how, and potentially making the SCP programmes less effective.

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