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European Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans: A Synopsis with regard to ethical reasoning and communication strategies

Preliminary Summary – Work in Progress



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Ann-Kathrin NEUREUTHER, Uta ESER, Hannah SEYFANG

Context

This synopsis has been prepared in the course of an ongoing study for the German Federal Agency of Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz, BfN). Under the working title “Prudence, Justice and The Good Life: A typology of ethical reasoning in selected European National Biodiversity Strategies” we are currently analysing ethical arguments in the German, Swiss, Austrian and EU biodiversity strategies. In order to be able to expand the scope of analysis to further countries, we have created this **overview of European biodiversity policies with a special focus on their ethical reasoning and their communication strategy**. Its aim is to provide the basis for a sound and inter-subjective case selection. With regard to this purpose, this pre-study provides certain basic parameters related to the strategies relevant for this selection.

Background

In a recent study, we have analysed ethical arguments in the German National Biodiversity Strategy with regard to its communication for the German Federal Agency of Nature Conservation. As analytical tool we have used the three categories Prudence, Justice and The Good Life and pointed out the strengths and shortcomings of each type of argument (ESER et al. 2011). The major result of this study was that the **discourse on biodiversity is dominated by prudential arguments**, which use economic and ecological reasoning. In contrast to this, inter- and intragenerational justice and the question how we want to live and what constitutes a good life are underrepresented in the debate. The gist of the argument is shown in the figure below.

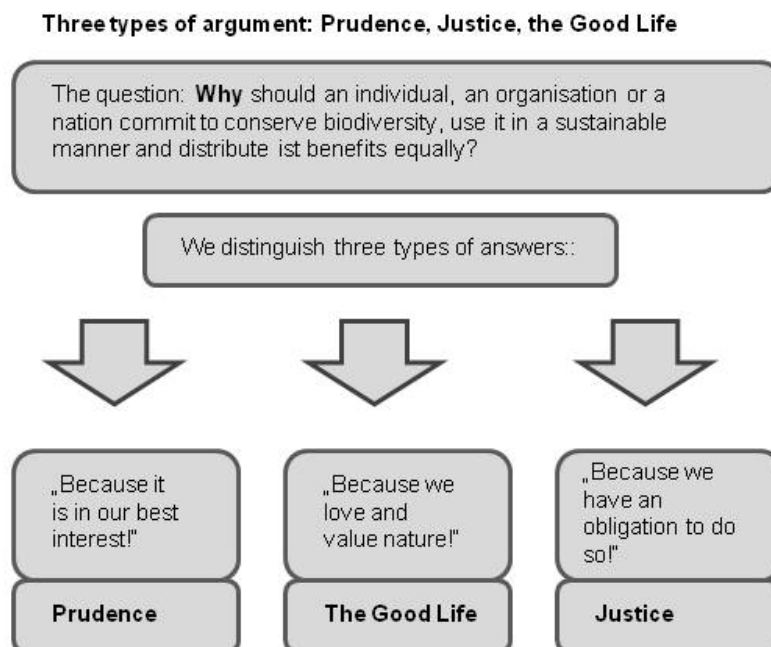


Figure 1: The typology ‘Prudence, Justice, and The Good Life’

As a follow-up to the first study, the BfN assigned us the task to expand the ethical analysis on other European strategies. The final report will be available by the end of 2011. While we currently are analysing Switzerland, Austria and the European Union in more detail, the

following summary of European National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) has been undertaken with the goal of providing a basis for selecting further National Strategies for a comparative study.

Scope

The paper at hand constitutes a very **preliminary comparative analysis** of European National Biodiversity Strategies. The analysis is based **on printed material** only – we have analysed the original documents as well as secondary literature. Hence, we have not gathered empirical evidence concerning the practical implementation. The Norwegian strategy has been included, too, as the country is closely linked to the European Union and a member of the European Economic Area (EEA). The other two non-EU members of the EEA, namely Switzerland and Iceland, do not feature a coherent national biodiversity strategy as for now¹. For some EU member-states no strategy or equivalent was available in English yet. They have thus not been considered here. Other than those, all national biodiversity strategies stemming from EU members have been analysed in categories accounting for different characteristics like document type, structure and agents (see “Categories”). The following paragraphs present these variables and their relevance for a comparison of biodiversity strategies with a focus on ethics and communication in more detail.

Reference: CBD

Reference document for all national biodiversity strategies is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which was opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992. The convention aims at the conservation of biodiversity, its sustainable use, and the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits. To implement the global convention on the national level, all parties committed to develop National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAP). While currently 193 countries are members to the CBD, 173 have developed formal NBSAPs, of which, according to Prip et al. (2010), a mere fraction can be considered to be substantive. Of the EU members, only Malta and Cyprus have failed to deliver so far. As will be evident from the analysis below, dates of CBD ratification as well as the initial publication of national strategies vary widely across the EU. Furthermore, some countries, such as the UK, already developed a second generation plan while others took longer to implement their first version. Cross-country comparison shows, that second generation NBSAPs tend to improve the first generation documents. They have a strong emphasis on mainstreaming across different sectors and are much more strategic and action-oriented. Furthermore, they have generally been prepared through a broader participation-process encompassing more stakeholders (Prip et al. 2010), which is a relevant feature from an ethical perspective.

Categories

The country cases will be presented in the final report in form of tables analysing three categories and nine sub-categories (see figure 2). The categories are chosen according to their helpfulness in providing a first overview as well as their relevance with regards to the research’s aim.

1. The category “**What?**” concerns the document type and its ties to existing initiatives
2. The category “**How?**” concerns the sectors, structures and special key aspects addressed by the document
3. The question “**Who?**” names addressers and addressees of the document

¹ Switzerland’s process of developing and implementing a strategy is being analysed in more detail in the ongoing study, along with the Biodiversity Strategy of Austria and the European Union.

1. What?	2. How?	3. Who?
Document type & ties	Sectors, structures & special focus	Actors and alliances
1.1 Document type (legal status and/or formal characteristics)	2.1 Formal characteristics	3.1 Addresser(s)
1.2 Thematic coverage	2.2 Key aspects	3.2 Addressee(s)
1.3 Ties to existing (international) strategies, conventions and initiatives	2.3 Specific country characteristics	
	2.4 Structure	

Figure 2: Categories used for the comparative analysis of European NBSAPs

1.1 Document type

A central question of our analysis is, to what extent national strategies address the three aims of the CBD. While some biodiversity strategies carry numerous references to the CBD and sometimes even copy its structure and phrases, other countries with a longer history in environmental policy-making base their strategies on pre-existing environmental documents. Thus, not all documents aiming at implementing the CBD are called ‘National Biodiversity Strategy’. For example, Norway’s current biodiversity strategy is incorporated into the report to the Storting (general assembly, Norway’s parliament) dealing with environmental matters. Some countries add special titles or subtitles to their strategy which function as a claim. In this manner, the Netherlands’ title “*Biodiversity works – for nature, for people, forever*” is quite telling in terms of the strategy’s scope and ambition. Some titles can be read as favouring one of the CBD’s three goals over the others. Hence, the UK’s “*Conserving Biodiversity – the UK approach*” puts a strong emphasis on conservation as opposed to sustainable use and sharing of benefits.

Besides the title the very layout of a strategy indicates its expected audience: some strategies, like the one from Slovakia, are extremely formal documents which are clearly aimed at policy makers and experts exclusively. In this vein, Romania’s strategy is an assembly of different legal texts but does not try to engage the public. Contrasting those approaches, the Finnish strategy – fittingly called “*Saving Nature for people*” – is neatly illustrated and tries to appeal to a broader audience. A few countries exhibit several documents of which one is specifically designed for laypeople. In these cases, we have analysed the documents that are specifically outlined for communication purposes with regard to our specific research interest.

1.2 Thematic coverage

As one result of their international comparison of NBSAPs, PRIP et al. (2010) point to the uneven coverage of CBD goals within national strategies. **Topics falling under the conservation objective feature dominantly** in nearly all strategies while sustainable use is tackled significantly less and only a mere 12% of CBD parties have adopted legal or regulatory Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) measures. Beyond PRIP et al.’s distinction between different degrees of emphasis on the three CBD objectives, one can also identify other policy priorities within the strategies. Relevant questions include whether the country focuses on technical matters, whether it stresses a cross-sectoral approach or whether it takes the approach of building new institutions and frameworks. Spain, for example, provides a broad and encompassing framework of social, scientific, economic, legal and institutional instruments, thus showing its understanding of biodiversity as not merely a technical but also a socio-political issue. Norway stresses the agricultural sector while the Netherlands are more concerned with their global footprint on biodiversity and therefore concentrate on production chains.

1.3 Ties to existing conventions, strategies and initiatives

Per definition, all of the analysed countries are part of the CBD. However, there are slight differences concerning the date of ratification within the country or whether a country entered by ratification or approval.

Some National strategies put special emphasis on relevant EU policies such as the habitats and birds directives while others focus on national or regional efforts.

2.1 Formal characteristics

This category indicates the date of publication and the length of the relevant document(s). The former can be helpful when considering the document's historic context, the latter when gauging its' scope.

2.2 Key aspects

Diverging from the more general category of thematic coverage, we aim at identifying certain variables crucial to our understanding of **the party's approach to ethics and communication** by scrutinising key aspects. Those key aspects include the pertinent question, whether a NSBAP is mainly concerned with biodiversity within its country or on a **global** scale. The Netherlands, for example, exhibit a very globally-oriented strategy which puts an emphasis on the role of Dutch consumption and Dutch production chain in global biodiversity loss. Other strategies like the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEs) concentrate clearly on biodiversity within their borders and hardly mention global responsibilities. Spain's document "*National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity*" identifies challenges and opportunities for biodiversity within Spain while at the same time upholding the principle of shared responsibility of all humanity which materializes in Spanish cooperation with indigenous communities abroad.

Another key aspect is represented by the question whether countries explicitly mention **reasons** for caring about biodiversity and if not so, which implicit reasons are carried by their documents. A few parties, like Belgium, dedicate a whole section to reasons behind biodiversity policies, while others mention the CBD itself as sole motivator for their policies. Naturally, countries with strategies addressing a broader public also outline more justifications for their policies than those with purely legalistic documents. It is very rare, however, that a country devotes a whole chapter to ethics. In summary, most countries prioritize Prudence whilst mentioning Justice and The Good Life only in passing – if they do mention it at all. Interestingly, there are some notable exceptions. The Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) accentuate the cultural value of biodiversity as well as the value of culture for biodiversity and the Netherlands put inter- and intragenerational justice on the forefront of their line of argument.

Public accessibility is a key aspect that does not seem to be influenced by regional or economic status. For example, among the Central European Countries Slovenia's strategy is inaccessible, Slovakia's is very formal and legalistic, the Czech strategy is obviously designed for a broad audience while the Polish strategy is an intermediate of the two. Another key aspect concerns the **inclusion** of different sectors, communities and indigenous people. Almost all strategies feature the buzz-word participation in some form or another. The decisive momentum is the **scope of participation** as defined in the strategy. The spectrum can be characterised by Italy on the one side, where participation in biodiversity policies is portrayed very narrowly as the creation of employment opportunities through sustainable use of resources, and Spain on the other, where the government is aware that traditional knowledge is lost and that the public needs to be included into planning and exercising biodiversity policies. As will be seen later, participation in drafting the strategy (primary stakeholders) was present in many countries. Yet, this momentum of extensive participation is lost, if the implementation process features no mechanism to involve the same stakeholders (PRIP et al. 2010).

2.3 Specific country characteristics

All good-will is futile if the measures taken with a strategy do not match the challenges on the ground. At the same time, external conditions such as a country's history, its specific path of development, its population, its integration into the global economy etc. are reflected in the policies it derives. Thus, it is impossible to look at NBSAPs independently from the specific conditions of the drafting process. Acknowledging that it is unfeasible to address all relevant circumstances, this analysis tries to isolate relevant variables. These are comprised of "natural" as well as "social/historic/economic" parameters, although these cannot be truly separated. The variability of specific country characteristics ranges from historic events, modes of agriculture over the challenge stemming from invasive species to extreme and unforeseeable natural events. The historic impact on a country's biodiversity situation can be studied on the basis of the Baltic experience. Soviet modes of production brought benefits for biodiversity in some places: restrictions on development of some regions and complete abandonment of others led to Estonia's coastal region being in much better shape than other European coasts. However, they also left negative impacts like Latvia's huge industrial centre which features many environmental problems (KEILBACH 2006).

2.4 Structure

The subcategory 'structure' differs from its counterparts 'document type' and 'thematic coverage' in so far as it specifically addresses the actual design of the document that can materialize in different forms. For instance, most countries present the national strategy and the action plan within one consecutive document. However, there exist a few NBSAPs that are published in two separate papers. What is more, the structure of a NBSAP can transcend the document analyzed in this framework. This is typically the case with countries that exhibit a strong federalism. In this vein, Denmark's biodiversity strategy does not encompass the Faroe Islands and Greenland but points to their national strategies. A slightly different approach is taken by the UK which has an integrating strategy paper for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that functions as an umbrella for the respective national documents. The Spanish national strategy is regarded as the logical bridge between the European and the regional strategies. Belgium's strong federalism has led to the scenario that the regional and federal levels have already adopted their own plans independent from the national strategy.

3.1 Addresser(s)

To apprehend NBSAPs it is crucial to answer the question "**Whose strategy is it?**" In their extensive comparison, PRIP et al. (2010) acknowledge the importance of intersectoral and interministerial coordination in the NBSAP drafting process. But not all parties involved in the process can act as publishers for the strategy. Characteristically, the Ministry of the Environment functions as the NBSAPs addresser. Only a small minority of NBSAPs considers biodiversity in a broader development context. Hence, development ministries are not often featured among the addressers. In this context, the Netherlands are an interesting example as the strategy was co-produced by the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation. Rarely, several actors take the responsibility for the strategy as it is the case with Belgium. In some cases, the addressers did not share a national, but rather an international background as has been the case with Baltic states, who were assisted by the UNDP, the World Bank and the GEF.

3.2 Addressee(s)

To understand a country's approach to biodiversity, it is also crucial to look at the **people at whom the strategy is directly aimed** – its primary and secondary stakeholders. We define **primary stakeholders** as parties that are involved with the document on a deeper level, either by being subordinated co-authors or by signing it. A very important primary stakeholder is epitomised by the institution that endorses a strategy, for example the Minister for the Environment. As NBSAPs evolved, there has been a trend towards higher levels of

adoption, like a parliamentary approval, reflecting the increased political attention given to biodiversity. While endorsement at higher political level is essential for a successful NBSAP, it does not in itself guarantee that the NBSAP will be successfully implemented (PRIP et al. 2010). Furthermore, it is important to look at the political competences of primary stakeholders: pure administrative decentralization without devolution of political authority is not helpful. This type of top-down decentralization can be witnessed in Romania.

In contrast to primary stakeholders, **secondary stakeholders** do not feature prominently in the drafting of a strategy but are assigned important tasks in the field of monitoring, evaluation and awareness spreading. Those secondary stakeholders typically include ministries, scientific bodies, NGOs, municipalities and sometimes even the broader civil society. Spain and the Netherlands, for example, emphasize the inclusion of private companies whilst the United Kingdom highlights the importance of volunteers.

Tentative conclusions with regard to ethics and communication

Even though only a small number of countries dedicate a whole section to the question why biodiversity should be conserved and used sustainably – among them the UK, Belgium and Germany – most countries utilise implicit reasoning throughout their strategies. Each one of these lines of arguments holds its own logic and set of values. For instance, the Netherlands put an emphasis on intragenerational justice and their own global biodiversity footprint while Finland stresses the cultural value of biodiversity. Other countries, such as Austria, put the rights of future generations at the forefront whereas economically less developed countries point to the role of biodiversity in achieving long-term development, as is observable in the Bulgarian strategy.

A future Europe-wide comparison of national biodiversity strategies will have to take these differences into consideration, as well as specific natural and socio-economic country characteristics. If all these factors are accounted for, comparing European biodiversity strategies will be a fruitful endeavour.

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