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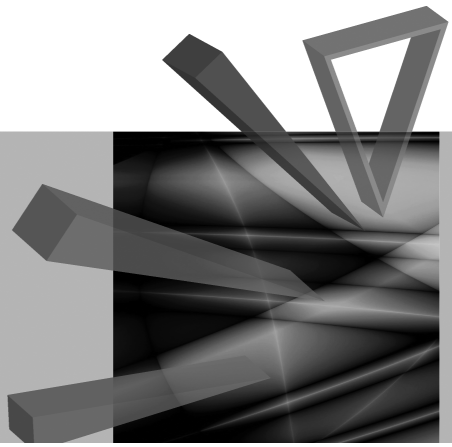
Polityka zrównoważonego i zasobooszczędnego gospodarowania



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A THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EU'S SMART, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH POLICY ON RESOURCE USE

Summary: In the article, it is argued that under current conditions, the EU's smart, sustainable and inclusive growth policy has elements of wishful thinking, and resource use is unlikely to be reduced. The theoretical support for this argument is based on elaboration of the following issues: priority of economic growth, factors hampering rapid technological change and multilevel governance. The identification of such factors may be useful in developing policy.

Keywords: smart growth, resource use, Europe 2020, technological change, multilevel governance.

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1. Introduction

The EUROPE 2020 strategy [2010] summarizes the European Union's (EU) growth strategy for the current decade. The document shows the aims to change the growth pattern towards sustainability and inclusiveness. While economic growth is required to face the current problems with government budget deficits and increasing government debts (from about 70% of GDP at the beginning of the 21st century to over 91% of GDP in 2012 in the euro area [*Robert Schuman*… 2012]), social and environmental issues are high on the agenda. Education, knowledge and innovation should be a stimulant of growth. Innovation should create a win-win situation through reducing resource intensity (lower environmental pressure), while creating permanent jobs. This sustainable growth should make the EU more competitive at the global level. However, it seems that the growth remains the main priority, which may lead to the impression that sustainable economic growth is a condition for sustainability in the social and environmental field [Platje 2011]. While targeting at improvement in the field of employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy, these aims may become easily neglected when not supporting such growth.

In order to enter a path of sustainable development, many conditions should be fulfilled. When aiming at sustainable growth, technological development needs to be sufficient in order to reduce resource intensity per unit produced, as otherwise natural resources will continue to be overused. Such technological development is related to the need of a wide range of multilevel socio-technological transitions [Grin et al. 2010] in the field of, among others, energy, industry, agriculture and urban development. While the achievement of many aims at the same time is very difficult (e.g., [Lomborg 2004]), changing a system in itself is a complicated issue where many factors interact, while different feedback loops support or hamper such a change [Sterman 2000; Platje 2011]. The author expresses the opinion that in order to produce and consume in a sustainable way, energy, transport issues and stable and transparent financial markets are fundamental. While many other issues are of great importance, without sustainability in these three key sectors, long-term survival of social, economic and political systems is questionable. When the mentioned technological development (change in production patterns) is not quick enough, a paradigm change or change in worldview is required, for example in the field of consumption patterns and demand for goods and services produced in a more environmentally sound way while supporting employment [Gladwin et al. 1995; Seyfang 2009].

When analyzing the EUROPE 2020 strategy, one may get the impression that besides growth, a necessary condition for social and environmental sustainability to be achieved is the EU's aim to become the most competitive economy in the world. Although lack of social and environmental sustainability threatens the survival of civilizations in the long-run [Toynbee 2000; Rao 2000], short term goals are likely to prevail. When in an economic downturn or the increasing international competition environmental issues often disappear from the policy agenda [Keijzers 2003], an economic crisis may threaten political stability as post-World War I Germany and many other examples have shown.

In this paper, arguments will be given for the hypothesis that under current conditions, the EU's smart, sustainable and inclusive growth policy has elements of wishful thinking, and resource use is unlikely to be reduced. The following reasons supporting this hypothesis will be discussed: priority of economic growth, factors hampering rapid technological change and multilevel governance issues. The idea behind this analysis is that when we are able to identify processes hampering change, this facilitates policy for and transitions to sustainable development [Meadows 1999; Platje 2011].

2. Sustainable growth versus resource use

2.1. Priority of growth

In literature, many arguments have been presented supporting the statement that economic growth is likely to receive priority over other issues. Below, some of them

will be presented. Scientists such as Galbraith [1958] and Veblen [1919; 2005] show that there are many social and institutional processes supporting the strive for increasing consumption, which in turn leads to the increased production (or the other way round). It may be, following Galbraith, that society might become in a certain sense "addicted" to increased consumption. Large companies aiming at increasing profits, expanding markets or creating an empire may try to convince consumers they need more consumption goods. This is opposed to a fundamental idea of the free market that voluntary exchange provides consumers with freedom of choice (demand determines supply). In this case, suppliers try to convince that people need more of their products. Such processes may be strengthened by the diminishing marginal utility of consumption and a changing level of reference for new generations. This means that while an extra unit of consumption provides less additional satisfaction, new generations take one level of wealth and consumption as given one (i.e., in a Keynesian sense autonomous consumption increases) [Begg et al. 1994]. The fact that some decades ago there were no restrooms or bathrooms in the house, does not increase the satisfaction of generations nowadays not having experienced the increase in wealth. Social aspects of consumption are also important. Veblen shows the importance of conspicuous consumption [2005]. One aspect is that the jealousy and envy of others may increase our satisfaction. However, when others have the same goods to show off as we do, the utility of the good possessed may decrease, providing an incentive for more conspicuous consumption. While there are more aspects regarding the mentioned issues, it shows that there are psychological and sociological reasons for the aim of ever increasing consumption and production.

The priority of economic growth tends to become embedded in formal institutions (e.g., government) and organizational aims (e.g., programmes of political parties). At this moment, a kind of institutional equilibrium exists where the formal political and organizational goals are supported by peoples' value systems, mental models and private goals. This institutional embeddedness is supported by other factors, such as the belief that economic growth and technological development will solve all social and environmental problems [Gladwin et al. 1995]. As a consequence, policies which try to solve environmental and social problems while negatively influencing economic growth are unlikely to receive large political support. At the macro level, investment cycles and change in economic structure create the need for economic growth in order to keep full employment [Stiglitz 2010]. Furthermore, politicians, economists and common people may take pride from the fact that "our economy is doing better than others." This pride of doing better than other countries (or aim of catching up with other countries) may be related to Toynbee's [2000] argument that civilizations need to expand in order not to collapse. While military and political resilience against outside enemies is determined by access to sources, an enemy quickly developing technologically, politically and military may threaten the existing civilization. Technological and military supremacy has been an important driving force in the colonization of other areas and countries throughout the last millennia. Such processes may lead to the

conclusion that military and political resilience accompanied by a sufficient resource base is a boundary condition for social and environmental sustainability. As the "sufficiency" of the resource base seems to be determined by developmental processes in other areas of the world, this is another argument why economic sustainability is likely to be a condition for sustainability in other fields [Platje 2011].

While the arguments presented above are of course a simplification of a very complex issue, they are useful in indicating a weakness in the European process of integration. The fundamental idea expressed by Robert Schumann [*Robert Schuman*… 2012] more than 60 years ago is that the opportunity costs of war increase when trade relations intensify. The focus on preventing war seems to be replaced by an intensified struggle for growth. The moment that an economic crisis appears, integration based on permanent growth may easily collapse, and different types of conflicts arise. This issue is relevant, as in system theory it is often assumed that it is not the question whether, but when a crisis appears, and whether society is able to deal with it [Sterman 2000; Toynbee 2000; Platje, Paradowska 2011]. This is an argument in favour of intensified integration in the field of politics, safety, education, culture, etc.

2.2. Factors hampering rapid technological change

As there are many processes which make it unlikely that reduction in production and consumption will be a feasible option, the question is whether technological development and change will be quick enough in order to reduce resource intensity. Reliance on technological development implicitly means that the EU adheres a kind of weak sustainability, where depleting natural resources may be replaced by artificial substitutes [Rao 2000; Borys 2005]. While this may be very difficult for many functions of ecosystems and biodiversity, it may be the only solution for dealing with the increasing need for energy in the face of depleting fossil fuels [Keijzers 2003]. While, as assumed by the so-called techno-centric approach, there may be much optimism about technological advance, reality may be different. Technological optimism might be related to a belief that markets are able to solve any type of problem. The idea is that, for example, when fossil fuels become more scarce, the increase in prices will provide strong incentives for the development of substitutes. However, for such a process to be efficient, many conditions should be fulfilled. According to the so-called Coase Theorem [Coase 1960], for markets to be efficient in solving problems, property rights should be perfectly delineated, transaction costs negligible and freedom of contract should exist. While none of the three assumptions is satisfied in reality [Graczyk 2002], accumulation of property rights in the hand of large energy producers may provide disincentives for technological development when this is in contradiction with their own vested interest. As Schumpeter [1934; 1942] argued, in case of a monopoly there may be an incentive for technological advance because of the expected monopoly gains. However, the question is whether and when the monopolist introduces such an innovation, and whether the new tech-

nology fulfills the needs of most of the people in society. This is an argument for active support of governments at different levels of administration (in order to solve different problems) for research and development.

Technological change can be expected to proceed slower than required for reducing resource intensity in production processes to a sustainable level [Platje 2008]. Due to, among other things, path dependency and vested interests, technological change proceeds rather incrementally. For example, in the car industry, the internal combustion engine as well as steel remain the boundary conditions within which innovation takes place [Nieuwenhuis, Wells 1997]. Innovation within the context of an accepted concept tends to lengthen its life-cycle [Orsato 2004, p. 286]. While the acceptation of incrementalism as a standard hampers fundamental technological change [Sharma, Starik 2004, p. 14], there are high transaction costs of implementing new technologies, in particular when supply change is long and involves many producers [Orsato 2004, p. 287; Nieuwenhuis 1998]. Furthermore, a complete new design in important industries like car production is not only time consuming [Wittenberg 1992], while in oligopolistic markets incentives for radical innovation may be weak due to large barriers to entry ([Ernst 1994] mentioned in [Castells 1996]). Other barriers for the rapid technological change are [*Op weg naar duurzaam*… 2001; Keijzers 2003, p. 100]: short time-horizons in investment, lack of focus on the functioning of the whole supply chain, and technological change for reducing resource use, which is not the main interest of management and many companies' stakeholders. In particular labour saving technological change providing large benefits for resource use may be resisted when no clear new employment opportunities become available. Furthermore, new technology may increase the need for education, which reduces the need for manual labour, and may lead to social exclusion of the less educated [Castells 1996].

2.3. Multilevel governance issues

As theory on institutional change and transitions towards a more sustainable society shows [Grin, Rotmans, Schot et al. 2010; Platje 2011], developing and implementing policy may be a very cumbersome process, with a permanent threat of failure. Important in this respect is the strength of institutions (e.g., well-defined and enforced laws and regulations) and an efficient policy network functioning according to the principles of good governance [North 1990; *European Governance*… 2001]. When rules and decision-making procedures are transparent, policy coherent, and decision-makers identifiable and responsible, there is a higher level of probability a policy measure will not fail.

However, in the reality of the EU, different countries not only have different rules and governance cultures, but also different levels of devolution with a range of differing competencies for particular levels of administration. As a consequence, problems of co-ordination of policy at different levels of administration differ, negatively influencing the probability of success of many elements of the EUROPE 2020 strategy. A useful approach in this context comes from theories of multilevel governance, which can be

interpreted as an extension of the so-called subsidiarity principle. This principle [Ahlt, Szpunar 2005] is based on the idea that policy should be developed and implemented at the level as close to the citizen as possible. The logic is that when society can organize itself, or the market can provide goods and services effectively and efficiently, there is no role for the state. Only in case of market failure, problems of collective action in self-organization, etc., the state should intervene. In the context of increasing regionalization, first there should be a role for the local government, then the national government, and only when all these options are exhausted, the EU.

Multilevel governance can be interpreted as a policy network with "continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, local" [Marks 1993, p. 292]. A complicating issue is that governments at different administrative and territorial levels not only consist of different units, but also possess different rights and competencies depending on the mentioned level of devolution, laws and customs in different countries. Furthermore, the kind of democratic rights for citizens may differ, while different stakeholders with different levels of salience play an important role in the policy network. Following this line of thought, a policy network may be defined as "a cluster of actors, each of which has an interest, or "stake" in a given […] policy sector and the capacity to help determine policy success or failure" ([Peterson 2003, p. 1], quoted in [Van den Brande 2008, p. 4]). On the basis of Van den Brande and Marks's definition and Freeman's [1984] interpretation of the notion of stakeholders, the author proposes the following definition of multilevel governance:

> "A system of continuous negotiation among nested governance systems [Marks 1993, p. 292] at different territorial and administrative levels. The governance of any political, social or economic system is "enmeshed in territorial overarching policy networks [Van den Brande 2005, p. 5]" including a wide range of stakeholders at different territorial and administrative levels being influenced by or having different levels of salience in influencing the development and functioning of such a system [Platje 2012].

As mentioned before, according to the author, financial markets, energy and transport are essential for sustainable development. Without financial markets, the potential for economic growth is seriously limited [De Haan, Oosterloo, Schoenmaker 2012]. Without energy, production is impossible. Finally, as Adam Smith [1998 (1776)] already argued in his *Wealth of Nations*, the extent of the market is determined by the transport infrastructure, while the market itself is an important determinant of economic development itself. While currently important problems exist with the stability of the euro zone, posing great difficulties for the EU, financial markets are rather global [De Haan, Oosterloo Schoenmaker 2012], which makes it even more difficult to manage them, as there is no real efficient global governance. Also energy policy is difficult, as markets are global and influenced by many strong stakeholders. An important instrument in order to achieve the goals for sustainable energy supply as described in the EUROPE 2020 document may be local supply systems based on renewable

energy resources, making them not only more environmentally sound but also more resilient against outside shocks. However, as long as the EU relies on global energy markets, also here efficient policy remains difficult. Regarding transport, a difficulty is to develop efficient infrastructure at different levels of political governance, where many different interests exist depending on the level of development of the area in question, while many conflicts between economic and environmental interests exist. However, also here a problem is that transport is becoming more and more global due to the globalization of markets. Thus, the point is that implementing the strategy for smart growth is already difficult in the context of multilevel governance due to the fact that institutions and policy related to smart growth have features of a public good, bringing up the question what element of this should be provided at which level of political governance. Besides interest groups and the free-rider problem, there is a negotiation, information and enforcement problem related to different priorities in structures of multilevel governance. Furthermore, effects of policies are not limited to one area – there are different spillover effects and interactions [Sandler 2001; Platje 2011]. Key-sectors for smart growth are to a large extent out of direct reach of the EU, increasing difficulties in achieving the aims. As a consequence, focus of effort by central authorities and already highly developed areas may eventually lead to the required technological boost, but regional differences may increase, posing challenges for the aim of social cohesion.

3. Concluding remarks

When aiming at sustainable growth, the EU smart growth strategy is a very useful document. It clearly expresses the need for more care for environmental resources and inclusion of a larger part of the population in the benefits of growth. These issues are important for creating a stable social and political system, facilitating long-term growth. However, the main argument of the article is that there are so many challenges, that much of the strategy is likely to remain wishful thinking. When focusing on growth, resource intensity should be reduced quickly enough in order to level out the increase in resource use due to increased production. This requires rapid technological development, which is very difficult to achieve. Also, many policies have to be developed at different levels of political governance, which is accompanied by high negotiation costs, among other things, due to different interests. While such a process is difficult in the European context, an additional difficulty is the globalization of key sectors for sustainable development (financial markets, energy markets, transport). In order to manage the complex multilevel transitions required for sustainable development, additionally to the aims of the EUROPE 2020 policy, good governance should be promoted in the context of more efficient multilevel governance. A proper management system for the required transitions and changes is an important determinant for their success, as otherwise the strategy, when successful in stimulating growth, is likely to lead to increased resource use.

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TEORETYCZNA OCENA INTELIGENTNEJ, ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ I SPRZYJAJĄCEJ SPOŁECZNEMU WŁĄCZENIU POLITYKI UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ KORZYSTANIA Z ZASOBÓW

Streszczenie: W niniejszym artykule autor stwierdza, że w obecnych warunkach polityka Unii Europejskiej, nastawiona na inteligentny i zrównoważony wzrost zapobiegający wykluczeniu społecznemu, przypomina „listę życzeń" i trudno będzie osiągnąć cel w postaci ogra-

niczenia zużycia zasobów. Artykuł przedstawia teoretyczne uzasadnienie tego stwierdzenia poprzez omówienie następujących kwestii: priorytetu wzrostu gospodarczego, czynników hamujących szybkie zmiany technologiczne, wielopoziomowego współrządzenia. Identyfikacja tych aspektów może okazać się istotna w projektowaniu polityki.

Słowa kluczowe: inteligentny wzrost, zużycie surowców, strategia Europa 2020, zmiany technologiczne, wielopoziomowe współrządzenie.