

**Sustainability Impact Assessment of federal policy making:
institutionalization of a bottom-up assessment process.**

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Belgium is currently promoting the institutionalization of an assessment process at its federal level, which is in the near future meant to evaluate policy proposals in an *ex ante, participative and integrated* way, before these are submitted to political approval. Such evaluation mechanisms exist in various configurations and depths since recently also on the European level (i.e. Impact Assessment), in Switzerland or in the United Kingdom (i.e. Regulatory Impact Assessment). The philosophy of the Belgian SIA is to leave the assessment process mainly in the arms of inter-departmental ministerial working groups, hence creating an institutional network and bottom-up coordination mechanism promoting the integration of Sustainable Development into (sector) policies. Necessarily, this bottom-up policy integration is intended to be complementary to the more top-down mechanisms of the federal SD-strategy.

Currently, the institutionalization of SIA for the federal level remains only very vaguely defined, and many different options coexist to organize and coordinate the SIA-processes at federal level, between departments, as well as between administration and political actors, as well as with civil society, stakeholders and experts. Based on a 2-year research project concerned with the methodological and procedural exploration of the future federal SIA, the present paper intends to discuss the effectiveness and efficiency of a number of these plausible and desirable institutionalization scenarios of SIA. The discussion of the scenarios will be both theoretical and enriched with the results of an inter-institutional discussion process.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Impact Assessment; Institutionalization; Coordination mechanisms; Efficiency and effectiveness of evaluation processes.