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Abstract:

Recommendations on the use of sustainability assessment tools at local level

The ARE has produced recommendations on the use of tools for sustainability assessments at local level. The most relevant existing tools have been tested and analysed with the participation of a working group drawn from members of the Sustainable Development Forum (representatives of cantons and towns/cities). The findings of this testing and analysis were then used to draw up recommendations enabling such tools to be put into practice successfully in cantonal, regional and municipal public management.

Given the complexity of sustainability assessments and the wide variety of tools that are already available, the object of this project was not to produce a single standard tool for cantons and municipalities. Rather, it aimed to lay down *common principles* of coordination which will allow for the use of different instruments. Furthermore, even though tools already exist, few are actually used in practice. There has been no framework that would allow evaluation from a sustainable development perspective to be integrated into public-sector tasks at cantonal and municipal levels.

The project involved setting up a platform to facilitate exchange about sustainable development at the local level between interested cantons and municipalities. It also aimed to stimulate lively debate on this issue with a view to defining a coherent concept of sustainability assessment. This would be based on the sustainability assessments conducted by the Swiss Confederation and aimed at the systematic use of evaluation tools for the activities and/or projects of public collectives (cantons and municipalities).

The recommendations are based on:

- The tools used to evaluate projects according to sustainable development criteria, plus the way in which they are used in Switzerland, in line with the national sustainable development strategy and the methods developed in this field at federal level;
- The procedures which enable projects to be evaluated from a sustainable development perspective, factoring in the results gained from decision-making processes;
- The choice of a process and a tool suitable for the particular context, the available resources and the scale of the project.

To some extent, the recommendations deal with the substantive elements of the tools – choice of criteria, indicators used, degree of complexity, methods of aggregation, etc. However, they also set out the institutional framework within which these tools should be used – the parties involved, the resources needed, the rules that must be observed, etc.

In a first phase, the ARE had already drawn up an inventory of existing tools for project assessments according to sustainability criteria¹. This work was carried out in parallel with the assessment framework for the activities of the Swiss Confederation² (presented to EASY-ECO in 2005).

¹ ARE, 2004, "Instruments for sustainability assessment: What is available and how to negotiate the maze" (*Instrumente zur Nachhaltigkeitsbeurteilung: Bestandaufnahme und Orientierungshilfe*) in French and German

<http://www.aren.admin.ch/imperia/md/content/are/nachhaltigeentwicklung/13.pdf>

² ARE, 2004, Sustainability assessment: Conceptual framework and basic methodology

<http://www.aren.admin.ch/imperia/md/content/are/nachhaltigeentwicklung/7.pdf>