

Summary

In response to the challenge of unsustainability, the MATISSE project was designed to propose procedures, methods and tools for better integrating sustainability into policy development processes and institutions. It did so by developing, testing and refining a conceptual framework for Integrated Sustainability Assessment (ISA). ISA is a pro-active, strategic and potentially transformative process, defined as:

'a cyclical, participatory process of scoping, envisioning, experimenting, and learning through which a shared interpretation of sustainability for a specific context is developed and applied in an integrated manner in order to explore solutions to persistent problems of unsustainable development.'

The project proceeded by: exploring the potential role of ISA as a complement to existing policy assessment processes in the EU; testing ISA in a number of case studies of unsustainability; extending and linking existing modelling tools in support of ISA, and developing new ones. The models and scenarios developed within the project were used in a series of case studies which:

- examined sustainability issues within the **agriculture, forestry and land use** sector;
- explored options to decouple overall levels of **resource use** from economic growth;

- scrutinised the role that ISA could play in triggering transitions in the **water domain** using the example of the Ebro River Basin;
- examined the role that **environmental technology** could play in sustainability transitions in Europe using the examples of transportation and the Czech Republic.

This work was accompanied by extensive capacity building, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities.

MATISSE's analysis of how policy assessments are currently being used in the EU showed that they are often limited in scope, focusing mainly on the economic impacts of new policy proposals. Furthermore, there are significant political and institutional barriers which prevent assessments from directly influencing new policies. Given the systemic nature of unsustainable development, sustainable development is likely to require broad structural changes (transitions), which depend on revising the institutional setting in which assessments take place, as well as the forms of assessment used.

The MATISSE project showed that while it is important to use conventional policy assessment processes to ensure that sectoral objectives are consistent with one another and with sustainable development, it is also necessary to use ISA to develop more comprehensive policy strategies that embed sustainable development.

ISA (operating at the strategic level of policy making) and the more formal processes of policy assessment (covering the more routine levels) are therefore complementary.

The MATISSE case studies provided a real-world context for testing and further developing the ISA methodology and tools. They have shown that using ISA can change how persistent problems are perceived and open up new opportunities for finding and implementing possible solutions. Given that the European Union is increasingly embracing the goal of sustainable development, MATISSE provides a valuable contribution to the evolution of decision making and institutional design in the Union.

