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***The Impact of Long-Term Scenario Exercises  
on Sustainable Development Policy-Making***

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***Abstract***

Scenarios, and scenario planning, are repetitively promoted as tools to trigger thinking about sustainable development and sustainable development policies. The use of scenarios and prospective exercises is typically recommended in situations where complexity, uncertainty, cross-scale and cross-sector interactions, long-time horizons, non-linear dynamics and heterogeneity are the rule. Successful scenario exercises cannot eliminate these uncertainties and complexities, but can provide to specific user groups some order and coherence in their perceptions of future pathways. However, in policy-making, ineffectiveness, and a general failure to impact on strategic decisions, have been depicted as recurrent outcomes of scenario exercises, even if they are integrated into long-term planning processes. In the present paper, we address conceptually and empirically the impact of scenario exercises on SD policy-making, with an emphasis on the influence of the mode of integration of scenario exercises into planning and strategizing activities. This linkage, which appears as central to the definition of the impact of scenarios, is especially interesting today as 'new' forms of SD-policy approaches (e.g. Transition Management, Adaptive Governance...) emerged recently with the aim to rethink this linkage.

Scenario exercises are occasionally analyzed for their 'technical' and 'procedural' robustness, but only few approaches integrate the question of adequacy and applicability of the scenario exercises' outcomes and processes for policy-making. Generally, scenario utilization is described with two different stances; i) participating to institutional and organizational 'strategizing' (e.g. contribute to the development of long-term, strategic policy pathways), ii) generate 'policy learning' and 'institutional capacity development' (e.g. contribute to 'policy change for sustainable development', 'reflexive governance'...). On a conceptual level, we will discuss both issues; i) scenario exercises as *policy instruments* in strategic thinking, ii) scenario exercises as operationalizations for *policy learning*. The paper will furthermore analyze the results of a qualitative exploration of the felt impact of scenario exercises, led with policy agents (e.g. policy-makers, decision-makers, stakeholder groups...).

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