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A Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give a comprehensive and cohesive description of the most recent version of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD), and also to describe and discuss the overall method for developing the FSSD, elaborate on the general rationale for and general benefits of a framework of this type, and validate benefits of the FSSD through examples of its application. The purpose is also to point to pertinent future work. In preparation of this paper, we have reviewed previous publications and other documents related to the FSSD and reflected on the 25-year learning process between scientists and practitioners. We conclude that the FSSD has proven to aid organizations in thoroughly understanding and putting themselves in context of the global sustainability challenge, and to move themselves strategically towards sustainability, i.e., to stepwise reduce their negative impacts on ecological and social systems at large while strengthening the own organization through capturing of innovation opportunities, including new business models, exploration of new markets and winning of new market shares, and through reduced risks and operation costs. Specifically, we conclude that the FSSD aids more effective management of system boundaries and trade-offs, makes it possible to model and assess sustainable potentials for various materials and practices before investments are made, and offers the possibility for more effective collaboration across disciplines and sectors, regions, value-chains and stakeholder groups. We also conclude that the FSSD makes it possible to prevent damages, even from yet unknown problems, and not the least, to guide selection, development and combination of supplementary methods, tools, and other forms of support, which makes it possible to increase their utility for strategic sustainable development. Finally, we have shown that the FSSD is useful for structuring transdisciplinary academic education and research. Several examples of ongoing FSSD related research, as well as ideas for future work, are given.

Keywords: Backcasting, FSSD, Strategic Sustainable Development, Sustainability Principles, Sustainability Science.

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