

# SUSTAINABILITIES!

COORDINATE AND PLAN  
PUBLIC ACTION



## SUMMARY



**FRANCE STRATÉGIE**

ÉVALUER. ANTICIPER. DÉBATTRE. PROPOSER.





## SUMMARY

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We are going through a triple crisis: ecological, social and democratic. On all these fields, we risk exceeding the limits of what our societies and our environment can bear. And on all these fields, our public policies are struggling to provide coherent and sustainable responses. How can we renovate public action in order to face these cross-cutting challenges? How can we build a frame of reference for sustainable public action, capable of preserving the capacities of future generations without sacrificing the needs of the present?

### Conflicts of sustainability question our development model

**Humanity is facing a series of interdependent challenges that can be analyzed as “conflicts of sustainability”.** Preserving the habitability of the whole planet imposes its own pace and demands on public action. It implies fighting climate change and protecting biodiversity and sometimes contradicts the search for equity and social justice. On the other hand, demographic upheavals (ageing, migration) weigh on the sustainability of our social model. Tensions, or even international (geo)political crises - as we experience with the war in Ukraine and its consequences - can slow down the necessary transformations, particularly in the area of energy or food, and force us to revise the trajectories of the ecological transition...

We know that the costs of inaction will only increase, yet we often react too slowly and too shyly to these challenges. This inertia is due in part to the fact that the mobilization of traditional public policy levers (debt, growth, taxes, regulation, etc.) seems powerless to resolve these conflicts. Whether considering the question of repayment (or borrowing) capacities or of the tax base, the financial sustainability of our economic model is correlated with sufficient growth in our GDP. From the end of WWII, this model has made it possible to finance increasingly broad social protection mechanisms, growing coverage of social risks, public services and redistributive mechanisms to contain inequalities.

### The origins of this report

**A reflection** enshrined in the aftermaths of the Yellow vest crisis which had highlighted the difficulties of reconciling the challenges of ecological transition and social justice in the design and conduct of public action.

**A turmoil:** The Covid crisis, which broke out only a few weeks after the work began, shuffled the deck and placed the emphasis on medium- and long-term policies beyond emergency measures: the resilience of the health care system and essential services, the ability of France and Europe to keep their economies running despite the disruption of international value chains, and the widespread desire to “take back control” of our future. Acting both as a catalyst for environmental social and democratic tensions and as a revelation of our country’s strengths and weaknesses in dealing with them, this crisis has increased the sense of urgency to act and the conviction that we need a profound transformation of the way we produce public policy.

**A conviction:** We need to tackle multiple vital, interdependent and long-term challenges at once. Rapid, structural and radical reorientation of public action are required to preserve the planet’s habitability, transform production and consumption models, safeguard a social model weakened by demographic and economic changes, reduce inequalities, etc. This is especially challenging in a context of great mistrust and low democratic support.

**One ambition:** to build a framework for development fit to take into account the challenges of sustainability, transversality and legitimacy of public action. We need to develop a new frame of reference, i.e. a shared representation and operating principles that will enable actors to organize their perception of problems, time, space and resources; we need to compare their solutions; we need to define their action proposals and to ensure their implementation.

**A concept:** Sustainability. More comprehensive than the French “développement durable”, it helps to consider broadly and transversally the bonds between the “needs of the present” and “the capacity of future generation to meet their own needs.” The concept of sustainability links together dimensions that might seem remote at first: environmental and climate issues, but also social, economic, territorial, technological and democratic challenges.

**A history:** as an organization that conducts forward-looking analysis on social, economic and environmental issues, and as the heir to the Commissariat Général du Plan, France Stratégie has the resources to address these long-term questions and to bring together diverse expertise in order to develop proposals. Previous studies had already addressed the notion of sustainability, but they did not

systematically consider the plural and systemic dimensions of sustainability, nor the conflicts between sustainability objectives and their necessary coherence<sup>1</sup>.

**The mobilization** of project managers from all France Stratégie departments and the CSR platform, reflecting the multidimensionality of the interrogations and the investment of the entire institution.

**Two years of work:**

- Hundreds of contributors and thousands of participants in the seminars held since February 2020;
- A multidisciplinary approach involving economists, political scientists, geographers, engineers, sociologists, historians, philosophers, lawyers, biologists, health professionals, civil society actors, elected representatives, public officials, social partners, etc.;
- Sessions in partnership with expert institutions (High Council for Climate, HCAAM, HCFIPS, DGT, ANCT, OECD, CNDP, etc.) and civil society organizations;
- A call for contributions “For a sustainable ‘after’: seven questions to prepare for tomorrow” (April 2020) and a synthesis of the 450 contributions received (June 2020);
- A platform forum to discuss our synthesis with six citizen consultation platforms (July 2020);
- Three reflection cycles with different formats and objectives:
  - Cycle 1: conceptual framework and mapping of sustainability, concepts, models, indicators, arenas (2020): five webconferences and three podcasts;
  - Cycle 2: public policies through the lens of sustainability (first semester 2021): thirteen thematic workshops, three open sessions (on time, resources, space), five published Sustainability Papers;
  - Cycle 3: the transformation of public action in the service of sustainability: a working session with a hundred participants and numerous hearings (second half of 2021).

**This alliance between economic growth and social progress seems to have reached its limits.** Growth has structurally slowed down in the Western world. Once boosted by post-war reconstruction, it relies on the extraction of fossil fuels. Thus, its structural decrease is not explained only by the multiplication of crises and the productive limits of a largely service-based economy, but also by the physical limits of resource regeneration and planetary limits.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the note “[Quelle soutenabilité pour notre modèle de croissance?](#)” (*What sustainability for our growth model?*) published in 2013 as part of the foresight exercise *Quelle France dans 10 ans?*

Should it be revived at any cost and under any conditions? Growth is essential to repay public debt, to finance social security and to invest in the ecological transition. But in its current form, it implies the consumption of scarce resources and increased environmental pressures: there lies the rub.

The effects of these “unsustainable” trajectories are already being felt, in particular the multiplication of environmental disasters. They are, in turn, increasing the populations’ need for protection and requiring more intervention by the public authorities in order to take charge of them and guarantee purchasing power... and therefore more resources. The very financing of the transition is therefore based on a development model which sustainability is increasingly uncertain and a source of tension.

How can we get out of what appears more and more clearly to be a dead end? **The two main paths are green growth and sobriety. In the search for progress that is more respectful of ecosystems and people, they must undoubtedly be explored together and articulated.**

- Rethinking the content of growth that is both decarbonized and less resource-intensive. Despite the importance and reality of “green innovation,” it is not realistic to rely on a scenario of “absolute decoupling” between growth - even “green” growth - and greenhouse emissions / consumption of non-renewable resources<sup>1</sup>:
  - First of all, these innovations are uncertain and their industrialization is slow. By the time they are developed and produce their effects, the risk is that greenhouse gases will have accumulated beyond what is sustainable;
  - Secondly, green innovation, including that based on the development of digital technology, can generate demand for an increasing quantity of resources, in contradiction with the requirements of the environmental transition and respect for planetary limits.
- Prioritizing the preservation, or rather the increase, of our well-being in the broadest sense (climate, air quality, health, social cohesion, etc.) over the continuous increase of production and consumption volumes. This path requires that the indicators that measure progress reflect our collective priorities and integrate the limits imposed by the finitude of resources, climate change and the collapse of biodiversity. This means we have to rethink about our collective and individual needs and on the ways and means of greater sobriety so that our ways of moving, living, producing, consuming, etc. become sustainable. Let’s not ignore the fact that such transformations would themselves generate tensions, and even conflicts of sustainability. How to define and prioritize these needs? How to

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<sup>1</sup> See IPCC (2022), [Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change](#), Sixth Assessment Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, April.

guarantee equity and justice in the distribution of these efforts? How can we undertake these major transformations in a context of great democratic mistrust?

We need a **new contract that mobilizes and engages the entire social body** around the reorientation of our development model and the search for new articulations between individual and collective action. But how can this be achieved in a context of great democratic mistrust?

## The difficult democratization of long time

**These immense challenges are especially difficult to meet in a context of concerns about the sustainability of our economic and social models. Indeed, the fragility and inequalities, both real and perceived, that are aggravated by the environmental crisis, put democracy under pressure and contribute to undermine adherence to the social and political contract.**

Sovereignty, understood both as the power to act and decide "of the people" and as national independence, is in fact exercised in a complex interplay of interdependencies on a global and European scale. Globalization and European integration, international and European commitments, but also, at the other end of the scale, the territorialization of institutional competences and conflicts linked to sustainability issues are all well-known phenomena that frame the room for maneuver available and the transformative capacities of the general will. The State's capacity to implement orientations that result from the expression of collective preferences and an appreciation of common needs therefore appears limited for many citizens. Their interest in participating in the democratic game is correspondingly diminished. The democratic crisis is certainly not a very French phenomenon, but it takes specific forms in our country that can be related to the particular nature of the Fifth Republic.

"The movement of mistrust has [indeed] been accelerated in France due to a greater verticality in the relationship between citizens and institutions, as well as in the decision-making and functioning of institutions<sup>1</sup>."

"Our democratic model seems to escape the citizens, who, as a result, escape from it<sup>2</sup>." If they are drifting away, as surveys tend to show, it is first of all because they feel that their voice does not count and that they are not involved in the choices that really shape the present and the future. This disengagement takes many forms, from disaffection with the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Hearing of Yann Algan on 6 May 2021, quoted in Assemblée nationale (2022), *Rapport d'information sur les modalités d'organisation de la vie démocratique*, report n° 4987 presented by Rupin P. and Schellenberger R., February, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Agacinski D., Beaucher R. and, Danion C. (2021), *L'État qu'il nous faut. Des relations à nouer dans le nouveaurégime climatique*, Boulogne-Billancourt, Berger-Levrault, preface by Rol-Tanguy F.

structures of representative democracy to revolt and legal challenges. The high level of abstention, the crisis of intermediary bodies, the spectacular crumbling of the traditional model of aggregation of preferences by the classic political parties and the multiplication of protests reflect a distrust of institutions that can be explained, in part, by their inability to resolve conflicts of sustainability. Though more and more defiant, abstentionist and “disaffiliated” politically, the French are not necessarily less informed or less willing to make their voices heard. On the other hand, more of them, especially among the younger generations, prefer to use means they consider less intermittent than voting to make their demands: demonstrations, boycotts, campaigns on social networks and, of course, local mobilizations... Mistrust and de-institutionalization weigh heavily on the acceptability of large-scale measures and projects perceived as “coming from above”, especially those required by the needs of environmental transition. Consent is all the more difficult to obtain that the efforts to be made are considerable and the “common good” is not precisely defined or the subject of social consensus.

**This feeling of disenfranchisement and of democratic powerlessness is also fed by the structural difficulty of integrating the long term, the complexity of the issues and their interdependence<sup>1</sup>. into the democratic process.** Indeed, there is no social and political actor called “humanity” or “future generation” whose will could be mobilized politically to protect the interests of the future aside of the interests and desires of the present. Moreover, the projection of collective preferences into a future that is by nature indeterminate is a particularly delicate exercise, especially in the shortened and simplifying political and media temporalities that we live in. The relative low weight of “youth” in the votes cast can be a factor as much as a consequence of the difficulty of formulating the future in political terms.

In any case, we are experiencing a form of “crisis of the future” that translates into demobilization, civic withdrawal, and “free rider” behavior. The extreme interweaving of issues and scales and their high technicality also increase the cost of their appropriation as well as that of democratic participation, which the low level of confidence in experts does not make it possible to counterbalance.

The ecological imperative and the narrowness (whether perceived or real) of the possible ways of dealing with it often leads to fears or claims of the inevitability of freedom restriction and increased social control, or even of authoritarian drifts. This fantasy of a “green dictatorship” is likely to translate into political forms of radicalization that are sterile for the public debate on sustainability. In this context, basing a sustainability narrative on the idea that “there is no possible alternative” would be disastrous. If planetary limits are indeed inescapable constraints, the paths to decarbonization and to the preservation of the world’s

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<sup>1</sup> Rosanvallon P. (2014), “Democracy and the management of the long term”, in Rosanvallon P. (ed.), *Science et démocratie*, Paris, Odile Jacob, pp. 299-313.



habitability must remain open. Otherwise, the risk of reinforcing what has been described as a “citizen’s disengagement” would be major and paralyzing.

## Is the State tooled to conduct sustainable public policies?

**In addition, public power seems hampered too often to steer the long term by its very functioning and the methods by which it “manufactures” public action.** While the Covid crisis showed that the State was capable of deploying considerable resources extremely quickly to protect the people, it showed that significant weaknesses and even failures. The metrics on which public action is based today do not always make it possible to measure or take into account the imperatives of sustainability. Indeed, taking into account systemic and long-term issues would change the way public actors work and interact. It forces us to question the rationality, efficiency and accuracy of the procedures and standards that prevail in the conduct of public action.

**This is well illustrated by the example of the fight against climate change.** We are far from the goal, despite social demand, despite the adoption of a clear strategy broken down into sectoral objectives and intermediate stages (carbon neutrality by 2050, with a target date of 2030) and despite the concerned public policies. Although progress has been made in many sectors, particularly in the building and energy conversion sectors, the reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions is still insufficient to meet our commitments. Achieving the goal of a 50% reduction between 1990 and 2030 will require a significant acceleration of efforts and a much more pronounced alignment of sectoral policies than it is today. The lack of systematic upstream control of the inclusion of these objectives in all areas of public action (reindustrialization, employment, training, housing, etc.) and the insufficiency in monitoring of their effectiveness prevent the development of effective management. This paucity of alignment is far from being limited to climate issues, and the recurring difficulty of integrating several dimensions into a public policy field is obvious. Public action is not short of strategies or plans and indicators to achieve the objectives it sets. But the lack of coherence and overall articulation between them and between the different sectoral policies that contribute to them, as well as the scarce of anticipation on how to achieve them, all too often prevents them from being achieved. The corollary of this is a risk of diluting resources and piling up plans and procedures, which makes them complex for public actors and illegible for citizens.

The need to build more crosscutting policies still comes up against the historical structuring of public policies into sectors. **Responding to the challenges of sustainability implies finding ways and means of overcoming a tendency to sectorisation which can be detrimental to a comprehensive long-term approach. It requires several prerequisites:** first, the capacity to establish supported and shared diagnoses of all the crosscutting factors affecting each policy. Second and maybe more important, a change in administrative culture should prevail on the competitive logic of arbitration, in order to

ensure the coherence in choices and allocation of resources, consensus and cooperation, between ministries and administrations and with local authorities. At a time when the investments required to make the transition to a sustainable model should be very high, and in a context where budgetary constraints have not disappeared, the State must become more efficient and rearm itself in its capacity to adjust continuously its actions and expenditures according to its results and priorities.

**This requires both a thorough review of the administrative procedures for making and steering public policies and the tools/indicators that underpin them.** Today, tools exist for a sustainable and systemic vision of public action, such as impact studies, socio-economic assessments for public investments, investment programs (PIA), etc. But they are currently insufficiently integrated into decision-making processes to transform them substantially, and insufficiently linked to shared objectives (such as decarbonizing our economy) to ensure that they are achieved.

**More generally, we can question the methods of State reform used in recent decades in terms of sustainability.** Do they meet today's expectations of individual protection and tomorrow's major challenges? From the "General Review of Public Policies" in 2007 to the "Public Action 2022" program in 2017, they have essentially sought to reduce costs and focused on objectives of rationalization, reorganization and simplification, which have sometimes led to a loss of expertise, skills and meaning. A "sustainable" transformation of the State should be based more on a reflection on the missions and the perimeter of public action in the broad sense (central and local administrations and powers). In addition, this should be reflected in appropriate budgetary and human resources. A forward-looking management of jobs and skills is necessary both to train public agents appropriately and to define strategically which skills we should develop.

## **Sustainability: a way to rethink the frame for public action**

Despite the growing awareness of the breadth and urgency of these issues, their interactions and the conflicts that affect them, there is currently no "turnkey" solution, either in theoretical or operational terms, that would allow them to be articulated together in order to respond globally.

**The concept of "sustainability" seems appropriate in order to design a new grid for analyzing and conducting long-term public action.** It refers not only to production processes that do not exhaust the resources they use, but also more generally to the systemic configurations of human society that ensure its sustainability. In the common language, what is sustainable is what can be supported, endured, what resists the passage of time but also what can be defended, supported by serious arguments. The term therefore refers not only to the requirement of long term, but also to that of transversality

and legitimacy<sup>1</sup>. It offers “more plasticity [than sustainable development] and allows us to speak more clearly about the question of limits<sup>2</sup>”. The concept of sustainability invites us to think of plural and collectively imagined responses to deal with the challenges of unprecedented complexity and scope that face us. The notion is thus useful to think simultaneously and coherently of social, environmental, economic, but also democratic and institutional issues. The use of plural underlines the interactions between the crises, between the challenges, between risks and emphasizes the need to integrate into each stage of the production of public policies parameters that might at first seem remote from them. Finally, the concept has the advantage of marking out the field of possibilities: what is not economically, ecologically, socially or democratically sustainable should be excluded from our collective choices, beyond some exceptional and transitory circumstances.

Thus, the sustainability approach aims to build a reference framework for a **long-term oriented, systemic** and **legitimate** public action. This framework should integrate both the long term and the depletion and finitude of resources. It must be systemic, based on a multidimensional and crosscutting vision of the issues and must arbitrate potential conflicts between dimensions. Its legitimacy would rely on new deliberative methods.

## Anticipating, diagnosing, extending: which tools to build a long-term strategic vision?

**This new frame must help at developing new or renewed tools in order to build a long-term vision that reflects our collective preferences and integrates the interests of future generations.** Such tools cannot replace political will. But, without them, such a will would risk being disarmed, holding in its hands an apparatus for public action designed and deployed for other circumstances and other objectives. This does not mean that the models, indicators and evaluation devices we currently have are all obsolete. But they do have some limitations, either in their design (they are not aimed at ensuring sustainability) or in their use (they are insufficiently used); they need to evolve and be completed to increase our capacity to anticipate our future needs in a world that is both more risky and uncertain.

The construction of a coherent framework for public action in which public policies would intervene (and to which they would contribute) must be enshrined in a **shared collective narrative**. Narratives have long been mobilized by politicians to root their action in an imaginary worldview and a reading of the state of reality. But what we need are narratives

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Carnoye L. and Petitimberty R. (2020), “Interview with Valérie Boisvert - La durabilité forte: enjeux épistémologiques et politiques, de l'économie écologique aux autres sciences sociales”, *Développement durable et territoires*, 11(2), July.

that explain the possible choices, based on scenarios that integrate ecological, social and economic issues and that allow everyone to appropriate them in order to form an opinion. Many examples of these types of scenarios exist today, most often embedded in narratives that allow us to project ourselves into a low-carbon society and economy by 2050. Produced by public bodies, associations or think tanks, these prospective exercises vary in their method, approach or scope. They converge towards the objective of decarbonization, but offer different paths to achieve it.

Indeed, the means to reach the common target is common, differ according to technological, lifestyles, social choices, and the level of sobriety associated with these choices. By helping to develop visions of the future that are both sustainable and desirable, these narratives should fuel the democratic debate and encourage everyone to take ownership of these issues before making the political choices that will guide public action.

**Once the need for action has been identified and the path has been mapped out, the next step is to anticipate the impacts of the policies that are about to be implemented in order to ensure that they are well coordinated and contribute this path.** Tools do exist for the systemic analysis of public policies: bills, budgets and investments, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), new wealth indicators, impact studies, well-being and resilience indicators, socio-economic and environmental assessments, etc. But they are not sufficiently articulated with the social and economic dimensions of the problem, and they are insufficiently articulated with the final decision making. We propose ways to mobilize them more systematically and effectively in the process of making public policies and to transform them into real instruments for steering sustainability. The impact study in particular could be reconfigured to become a real tool for diagnosing and steering sustainability. In order to ensure that public action is continuously oriented towards the achievement of sustainability objectives, we also propose a process of *in itinere* evaluation aimed at readjusting (or even stopping) policies that prove to be unsustainable.

**Finally, beyond the day-to-day production of public policies, the consideration of sustainability issues will only be effective if it is based on a shared culture.** This implies integrating it into the production and transmission of knowledge, both for the entire population and public decision-makers. The systemic analysis inherent in this culture implies crossing environmental, social, economic, democratic, technological and territorial issues to better assess the risks inherent in their intersections. It requires a culture and a multidisciplinary dialogue that requires several prerequisites:

- having the knowledge to understand these interactions and the variability of their scales, which implies more organized and systematic interactions between transdisciplinary scientific expertise and public decision making;
- continuing training for public policy actors;

- sharing professional views and experiences in order to build a culture of cooperation and transversality within the State that reflects concerted and coordinated public action processes.

## Towards renewed forms of planning

**Having the appropriate tools and skills is necessary, but it will not be enough to ensure the achievement of the objectives of sustainability of public action without convergence of objectives and, above all, without political will.** The necessity to engage in massive, rapid, orderly, coordinated efforts that are consistent with our international and European commitments provides an obvious purpose for **a planning approach** that would articulate ecological issues and constraints with the issues and constraints of our other collective preferences, particularly in terms of social and territorial justice.

Both the Covid crisis and the imperatives of the environmental transition have contributed to the rehabilitation of the idea of planning, which plummeted during the debate in the 2022 electoral cycle.

Although there are now many cross-cutting plans (Programme d'investissements d'avenir, "France 2030", resilience plans<sup>1</sup>, etc.), schemes and plan contracts at the local level and even more sectoral strategies, the procedures and instruments that make it possible to organize and coordinate public action in the medium and long term have yet to be (re)invented. Only renewed coordination instruments and implemented at the highest level would make it possible to avoid the dispersion and complexification of public action and to increase its effectiveness. This assumes that such tools:

- contribute to ensuring the coherence of public policies and guarantee the continuity of action around major strategic objectives, between sectoral policies, between levels of intervention, between territories, and between public and private actors;
- give the meaning of the action of public authorities to the citizens, but also to the public agents in charge of implementing it;
- articulate political temporalities on the basis of a long-term vision;
- are based on quantified objectives and precise deadlines, but also qualitative, by identifying priority sectors with all stakeholders and territories.

**A broad spectrum planning would make it possible to give substance to the principles enshrined in the Constitution, and more specifically in the Charter of the**

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<sup>1</sup> The October 2021 [National Recovery and Resiliency Plan](#), the March 2022 [Economic and Social Resiliency Plan](#) announced (and not referencing the first) in response to the war in Ukraine, etc.

**Environment**<sup>1</sup> which reads “in order to ensure sustainable development, the choices made to meet the needs of the present must not compromise the ability of future generations and other peoples to meet their own needs”, “public policies (...) shall reconcile the protection and enhancement of the environment, economic development and social progress” (Art. 6)

**A renewed planning, which could not be a copy of what was done in the second half of the 20th century, should:**

- be part of a narrative that is able to attract the support of public and private actors, citizens and civil society actors;
- remain a political document, more than a technocratic one, co-constructed with the economic world and civil society in a spirit of commitment and responsibility;
- provide an overall framework for the initiatives already underway in terms of multi- year programming of public policies (such as the Future Investment Programs or the “France 2030” plan);
- be a sufficiently binding framework to guide the development of sectoral strategies and provide a reference for territorial strategies;
- aim at making the budget and means of action consistent with the targeted objectives, whereas they are often mobilized one by one at the moment action. This includes programming public investment and stimulating private investment, tax modulation, conditionality of public aid, public ordering, state participation in companies with strategic interests, intervention on prices, enactment of evolving standards, programming of research, organization of sectoral regulations, adaptation of the training system and organization of reconversions, etc.;
- inform annual budgetary arbitrations with regard to their capacity to respect the trajectory defined over several years;
- set objectives of results and guarantees of process, like the international and community legal standard do, leaving a certain flexibility in the means implemented and a capacity of adjustment in itinere.

This planning approach could be reflected in the adoption of a national strategy at the beginning of the legislature based on a political framework which could take the form of a programming law, resembling to the old "planning laws". Ecological planning, the need for which has been acknowledged by the President of the Republic, would be the first step.

Its long-term objectives (ten, twenty or thirty years) could be built around the SDGs which is a widely shared reference for sustainability. Its exact scope would have to be specified in the framework of its democratic elaboration. Necessarily broad, this Strategy could be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/la-constitution/la-charte-de-l-environnement>



articulated around the decarbonization imperative, whose vital nature, quantified, dated and shared horizon justifies its foundation, without excluding or prioritizing the other environmental and social sustainability objectives. For example, consumption, production and work, housing, food, education, health care and transportation could be the main themes, since they are crosscutting and interdepartmental by nature.

To give binding force to this long-term national strategy, one possibility would be to append the strategy's program to a legislative text, **a five-year programming law, like the former "planning laws"**. This programming law would specify the objectives to be achieved over five years with regard to their long-term trajectory (twenty, thirty years) including those defined in compliance with our international commitments, of an environmental, economic and social nature. The vote of this "programming" law would be preceded by a consultation phase articulated with the parliamentary and budgetary debate (and articulated with the public finance programming law). Thus, as soon as it is elected, any new majority could present a five-year program that would provide the political framework for the national strategy according to the logic of a legislative contract. The Prime Minister could then make an annual presentation to Parliament on the progress of this strategy and any proposed adjustments. Given the time required for the concerted development of the Strategy, the first bills prepared by the new executive (and in particular the first Financial Budget Plan) would be framed by the general policy speech.

## Deliberating about the long term

**The democratic ambition of planning therefore presupposes the collective definition of precise objectives.** "Planning means choosing, and choosing for the long term"<sup>1</sup>. The exercise would be based on the search for an agreement on the definition of priority needs and essential services that justify the allocation of common resources (financial, human or other).

This would allow for an in-depth debate on public priorities and their concrete translation: what effort should be made for early childhood or for youth? What trade-offs should be made between, for example, the level of pensions and care for the elderly? What are the objectives in terms of long-term territorial balance, etc.? What are the "unsustainable" activities, with regard to criteria of well-being, social, economic or territorial balance, and which should then be reduced in a concerted and anticipated manner? The willingness of private actors (individuals or companies) to accept heavy constraints that a global ecological and social transition would imply could be strengthened if the restrictions, prohibitions, standards or taxes were decided upon after a broad and thorough consultative

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<sup>1</sup> Asseh B. and Potier F. (2021), "[Balance ton #plan! Relance économique, planification et démocratie](#)", Fondation Jean Jaurès, June.

process. Planning can thus be the occasion for a broader reflection on our social contract, leading to a questioning of the priorities assigned to our productive system, the strategic choices that lead to autonomy or dependence, the distinction between what can be left to the multiple “logics of the market” and what deserves to be excluded from it. This can be done either through services directly provided by the public authorities, or through markets that are more closely regulated at the national or European level, around standards dictated by risk prevention objectives for instance or even by the implementation of “sovereign” strategic tools.

**Behind long-term planning lies a fundamental reflection on the ways and means of developing, collecting and translating collective preferences into policy.** If it is part of a narrative capable of involving public and private actors, citizens and civil society actors, such a strategy could constitute a new democratic object, implying a revitalization of the relationship between citizens and their representatives. The modalities of its elaboration may indeed provide an opportunity to articulate citizen participation, stakeholder consultation and political decision in a **renewed “deliberative continuum”**.

Beyond the multiplication of arenas and formats of citizen participation, consultation or deliberation, at both local and national levels, making participation “an additional link in the chain of construction and implementation of public policies<sup>1</sup>” implies rethinking its connection in the circuit of political decision and implementation of public action, particularly at the national level.

Numerous proposals to enable this articulation exist, covering various modalities of integration into the legislative process. Some of them imply deep institutional transformations (even a change of the Constitution) to recognize and institutionalize a “normative competence” of citizens.

Others, more modestly, call for a reinforcement and improvement of the use of more specific mechanisms: citizens’ assemblies on the model of the Citizens’ Climate Convention, “forums for the future”, citizens’ juries, etc.

**The ability to legitimize a long-term strategy through this type of mechanism and throughout its deployment requires in any case that a certain number of conditions be met:**

- **clarifying the objectives and the outcomes:** whatever the procedural quality of the participation mechanisms put in place, recourse to citizen participation will only have a “legitimizing capacity” if there is a political will for this word to be taken into account,

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Fesneau, Minister in charge of Relations with Parliament and Citizen Participation, at the launch by the DITP of the network of ministerial “citizen participation” referents on September 29, 2021.



in other words, strong political support for the process. It is therefore up to the political bodies to say precisely what they will do with the results of these consultations;

- **co-constructing the questions:** there must be a time (which can be the time of the elections, or the beginning of a participatory process) when, within the given framework, all the options are opened, all the possible choices are explored, their very appropriateness is debated, and the reformulation of the questions to be addressed is possible;
- **thinking about the process and the timetable in relation to the political decision and/or administrative action**, in order to avoid surreptitious decisions on important points during the debate and to guarantee that the conclusions are transmitted to the decision-makers and producers of standards in a timeframe that really allows them to be appropriated;
- providing a scientific and political perspective on the issues at stake. **It is necessary to "clarify the controversies"**, to make visible the plurality of analyses and expertise, even those internal to the State. The public debate must be nourished by open and transparent information accessible to all (complete in content, sufficient and objective), translated into readable, synthetic and usable documents, but also refutable.
- **for the local and sectoral versions, clearly identifying the stakeholders** (particularly at the level of each territory) and broadening their spectrum as much as possible to ensure that all the key players are involved; articulating the voice of those who have "an interest in acting" (NGOs, users, representatives of economic interests, unions) and that of the citizens, consulted "as citizens";
- **organizing the different formats and moments of participation as a continuum from upstream of the political decision to the implementation of public action:** development and sharing of a common vision, formulation of objectives, evaluation, possible changes, etc.

The questions of temporality and the objectives of participation are fundamentally the same. To take seriously the question of deliberation outcomes requires that its articulation with the political decision be precisely constructed, first in terms of temporality. In the case of the elaboration of a strategy involving the medium and long term, the exercise is so arduous that we should not underestimate it. The first edition of such an exercise would necessarily take some time, especially if the administrative machinery to manage is designed at the same time. There would probably be a time lag between the first budgetary exercise of the mandate and the deployment of the National Strategy, which only political impetus could partly limit (given, for example, in the context of the Prime Minister's general policy speech).

If the elaboration of such a Strategy is above all a political process, its democratization is essential to its legitimacy, its instruction, its follow-up and its sectoral and territorial declinations. Its appropriation by public agents also requires that it will be translated into

action. We therefore propose to reform the political and administrative processes of elaboration of texts and public policies, what we could call **the political-administrative “machinery”<sup>1</sup> in charge of guaranteeing the taking into account of sustainability** (long-term approach, coherence and legitimacy) and of overcoming their conflicts in the conception and conduct of public action.

## The orchestration of sustainability

Faced with threats that are now felt to be imminent, the need to go beyond declarations of principle and to create institutions that will guarantee or at least safeguard the interests of future generations is reflected throughout the world in numerous proposals of that aimed at "correcting the natural bias of short-termism.

Several proposals aim to organize the State and its administration to enable this convergence, put forward by think tanks, associations or researchers. While they generally stem from a desire to take charge of the “ecological transition”, they can inspire the “orchestration” of a perimeter extended to other sustainability issues, or at least they can constitute the first step. It has to of design the political-administrative “machinery” likely to guarantee the reconciliation of the various sustainability objectives by ensuring, in particular, the capacity of institutional and administrative processes, at all stages of their creation, to translate a long-term vision into coherent and articulated public policies.

At this stage of the work undertaken by our seminar, we propose to set out the **principles and functions** of such an orchestrator, assuming the need to institutionalize the consideration of sustainability in the making of public policies. There are seven main functions, organized around the life cycle, from the development to the implementation of a long-term national strategy. They are not intended to be fulfilled operationally by a single, oversized organization, but coordinated and articulated at the highest level of the State by a clearly identified pilot.

1. **Instruction, preparation and monitoring of a National Strategy, integrating key environmental, economic and social objectives**, developed on the basis of a political framework and having been the subject of citizen and parliamentary deliberations. Orchestration would translate the Strategy into shared objectives and sustainable indicators, i.e. long-term, systemic and legitimate. It would monitor the achievement of these objectives, alert the government to obvious deviations from the set objectives, update these objectives as needed, and, if necessary, suggest or advise

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<sup>1</sup> *Machinery of Government* (MoG) refers to the interconnected structures and processes of government and administration. The term is used especially in international structures in the context of public transformation.

the government on the need for substantial changes or modifications to the framework with the involvement of the actors concerned.

2. **Advice to the government and preparation/formalization of trade-offs;** “real time” alert on risks of unsustainability and potential conflicts of policy coherence, preparation of the annual presentation of the state of progress to the Parliament.
3. **Foresight and expertise:** coordination and programming of multidimensional foresight exercises (narratives, scenarios, models, indicators, risk maps) based on the sectoral or generalist production of the sustainability ecosystem; exploitation of the results of these exercises and control of their coherence and completeness within the framework of the functions of animating public debate (upstream of the elaboration of the National Strategy and its follow-up), advising the government and preparing the arbitrations of the "orchestrator" on the one hand, and leading the public debate on the other hand; creation and/or provision of the common methodology to promote the territorial and sectoral declination of the national scenarios.
4. **Ministerial roadmaps, concerted territorial strategies and coordination:** the orchestrator provides support for administrations in drafting sustainable ministerial and/or sectoral roadmaps that are consistent with the National Strategy; it facilitates the appropriation of the National Strategy by stakeholders at different territorial levels and coordination of local variations of this Strategy while respecting the prerogatives of each; it compiles monitoring data for these ministerial and territorial roadmaps to ensure their overall convergence towards the objectives set in the National Strategy.
5. **"Checkpoints" and in itinere evaluation:** laws and decrees (or some of them) could have to prove to the orchestrator that they are compatible with the National Strategy and that they take into account potential conflicts of sustainability. The orchestrator could thus contribute to, or even be responsible for, the preparation of new impact studies and/or at least examine their quality and internal and external consistency. It could also be mobilized to ensure in itinere that they are consistent with the objectives of the Strategy.
6. **Facilitating public debate:** at a minimum, the orchestrator should ensure that the participation of the public and stakeholders is guaranteed in the framework of major decisions on the Strategy and its implementation, and if necessary contribute to organizing it and providing it with expertise and prospective data. Symmetrically, it should ensure that the results of citizen consultations are transmitted to decision-makers through their integration into arbitration and evaluation documents.
7. **Resources, documentation and training:** setting up a resource center to document sustainability issues; leading, training and equipping a community of public agents committed to sustainability issues; distributing publications; creating a methodology to

promote transversality between actors, between administrations, and building common practices; etc.

The institutionalization and coordination of all of these functions could take extremely varied forms that need to be further investigated. However, it seems to us that a few **principles and orientations** can already be retained in order to think about the “machinery” of taking sustainability into account in the making of public policies:

- the orchestrator is not the composer: the political framework as well as the final decisions must come from the political authority, invested with elective legitimacy;
- **the orchestration of sustainability should be carried out by an entity of sufficient weight** and institutional centrality to be able to direct or re-direct action... without resulting in excessive centralization or hypertrophy and bureaucratization of coordination;
- **the orchestrator would be collaborative by nature.** It would act both as a complement to and in relation with the administrations of the ministries and local authorities, but also with the whole universe of operators and agencies with perimeters and missions that are tangential to the issues of sustainability;
- **the design of the related machinery**, whether it takes the form of the creation or reform of existing entities, **would require a fine articulation, as un-bureaucratic as possible, with all the organizations in the sustainability ecosystem.** This should be done with a view to avoiding duplication, redundancy or encroachment in fields of competence already covered, on the one hand, and the multiplication of procedural burdens, on the other. In this respect, a prefiguration mission involving these actors could propose mergers (partial or total), delegations or coordination between the various entities concerned, whether existing or to be created.

**The question of the political authority from which the steering of sustainability issues would come is essential.** Given the crosscutting and structuring dimension of these issues for all public action, it seems that the orchestrator should be **the head of government**. This attachment to the Prime Minister would have the advantage of a symbolic position that is overhanging and systemic in nature, theoretically sheltered from purely sectoral interests and benefiting from the political weight of the central authority, including for the orientation of resources (financial and technical),. This remains true whether the model chosen is a productive administration or a lighter structure, limited to coordination functions without its own production. The collaborative dimension of the orchestration of sustainability could also be reflected in the creation of a network of referents or contact points, with dedicated resources in each ministry and operator concerned, as well as in the territories (in prefectures and/or local authorities). It remains to be determined precisely the nature of the normative framework within which such an institution would operate. The challenge is to propose an orchestration capable of

“synchronizing” medium- and long-term projections and objectives, in order to achieve solid commitments. One possibility, again among others, would be to construct a dual mechanism that would make it possible to define both the objectives pursued and the modalities for their implementation and institutional articulation:

- a “major general law”, a sort of “LOLF<sup>1</sup> of sustainability”, a general framework setting out the new organization of the State and the executive branch, instituting
- the orchestrator, depending on the choices made concerning its nature and functioning. This law, which could be an organic law<sup>2</sup> to ensure the durability of this organization beyond electoral deadlines and changes of majority, would also determine the main principles of public action with regard to the objective of building long-term, systemic and legitimate public policies. In particular, it would specify how these major principles should be reflected in the law of five-year “programming”; the five-year programming law mentioned above, linked to the public finance programming laws.

In any case, the “machinery of sustainability” must allow for early and effective intervention in the preparation of the bills concerned in order to formalize informed decisions. It must also bear the requirement to evaluate the public policies that will have passed through its filter, and the requirement to take into account the results of the evaluations. Ultimately, the right institutional architecture for the orchestration of sustainability will be the one that makes it possible to secure the “public decision making process” in its capacity to make tenable and robust commitments to move towards democratically adopted long-term objectives. This will involve orchestrating the activity of existing institutions in a coordinated ad hoc process capable of guaranteeing this security.

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<sup>1</sup> Organic law on finance laws.

<sup>2</sup> This would require a constitutional revision.

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