Webwatch

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The Global Footprint Network

<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/>

The Global Footprint Network, hereafter referred as GFN, was created in 2003 with the mission of encouraging and develop the utilization of ecological limits and similar measures as a key part of decision making at various levels, including international, national, regional, local, and enterprise level. Today the GFN includes a large number of partner organizations worldwide and develops its activities with a wide range of shareholders, either governmental or private.

The GFN is the main organization developing and applying the Ecological Footprint (EF) as a management tool to gauge the needs for land and water to produce the resources human societies need and to absorb the waste generated. This measure can be used to assess the current status of sustainability at different scales, and to assist in a more efficient and careful management of ecological assets. The GFN works to make the EF the world's leading resource accounting tool. Thus, besides calculating the national footprint accounts for more than 100 countries (full list available at the site), the GFN also promotes scientific research leading to the improvement and standardization of EF, internally within the GFN or with the support of external partners, in particular from a group of world renowned specialists that made up the Science and Policy Advisory Council. The GFN also tries to promote network building and awareness concerning sustainability issues through its newsletter, training, and media campaigns.

The site of the GFN was developed mainly to present and promote the main activities of the network. There it is possible to find a general description of the EF, how it can be applied to different sectors and decision making processes, and its main advantages. A special section of questions and answers (FAQ), deals with many of the issues concerning EF and its applicability. More specific information, including the EF standards available at <http://www.footprintstandards.org>, can also be found and some materials may be downloaded from the site, including data and methods. One section is devoted to news and events related to sustainability and the EF. A publication area presents a list of books and reports, many of them free of charge and downloadable from the site. A newsroom directory lists all the news relevant to GFN and EF, and there is a newsletter with instructions on how to subscribe it for free.

A companion site, <http://www.footprintforum.org/welcome.htm>, is mainly aimed to the registered partners of GFN. Before accessing the main part of the site it is necessary to register, with instructions on how to become to all people interested. The forum mainly serves as an online meeting point for partners to discuss issues about EF and to share experience and knowledge. The blog featured in the main page of the site is an attempt to create a general access forum, where people from different areas can discuss different themes and place their questions.

The site is simple and easy to navigate through the menu presented at the left side of all the site pages. In each page, direct links to related themes are given, a nice feature that helps people to find what they want. A search function is also available at the site. Although some relevant information is presented at the companion site, as an introduction to EF and its foundations, the site serves well to its purpose and it is of interested to a wide range of practitioners and decision-makers.

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The Lowell Centre for Sustainable Production

<http://sustainableproduction.org/>

The Lowell Centre for Sustainable Production (LCSP) was created in 1995 by two professors of the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Ken Geiser and David Kreibe, with the goals of doing research in the area of sustainable production and consumption, and to become an internationally recognized centre in these fields. Since its creation the centre has grown considerably as a result of the increasing importance of sustainable development and environmental protection. A full account of the centre history can be found at the site.

Besides fundamental and applied research the LCSP also engages in projects and partnerships with a wide range of partners that include other research institutions, governmental organizations, companies, among others. Examples of the already finished and ongoing activities can be found at the site activities section, with links to their web pages when they exist. The site also presents the ten principles of sustainable production that constitutes general guidelines to assist practitioners in their quest towards more environmental processes and products, and advice on how the centre may help achieving them.

An important part deals with the research activities and projects of the centre, each one with its own website, where it can be found the contacts of people and partners involved, goals and main results, including publications or recommendations. A publication link concentrates all the journal articles and books that have resulted from the LCSP activities, most of them downloadable from the site. They encompass a wide range of subjects, such as sustainability indicators, sustainable production and consumption, among many others classified according to the main areas of the centre expertise. An events and news section related with the LCSP activity areas can also be found at the site.

The site is simple and navigation is easy between the several pages. Although the focus of the site is the presentation of the LCSP activities, the material available will appeal to professionals in a wide range of fields.

SenterNovem

<http://www.senternovem.nl/english/index.asp>

SenterNovem is the agency of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs responsible for the conversion and implementation of policies in the areas of innovation, environment and sustainability, both within the Netherlands and abroad. Its aim is to obtain effective and tangible

results through the application of the best available tools based on practical experience or research studies.

The agency develops its activities in partnership with other organizations, in particular at International or European levels, and it is part of the extensive network of public or private research institutions at the Netherlands, as well as taking part in numerous international groups and platforms. The main activity areas of SenterNovem are innovation, climate change, sustainable energy, and environment improvement. In each one the agency engages in specific projects or programs to address specific themes such as promoting and assist in the transition to sustainable development, renewable energy systems, development of biofuels, among other 40 currently ongoing themes.

A specific section of the website is devoted to each project/program, where a description of the main partners, goals, specific tasks, and main results can be found. It is at this particular section that most of the information can be found. While they vary from one another, in particular, the graphical presentation and the organization of the available material, yet it is possible to obtain valuable information specific to a given subject. As an example, in <http://www.senternovem.nl/react/index.asp> the program in biofuels can be found, where guidelines can be found for producing and blending biofuels of different origins and feedstocks with fossil fuels, efficient use of energy in buildings, among others. In each section the contacts of different partner can be found, as well as news and past and future events.

SenterNovem is also keen to participate in new partnerships, as a way to disseminate knowledge, develop new management tools or support ongoing or future activities in its main areas of expertise. The relevant contacts are given at the site, either on the more institutional part as well as in each program. A search facility available in all the pages can help people visiting the site to find what they are looking for. Also, the site is simple to navigate, mostly through the links presented in the top of each page.

Although with a focus in the Netherlands and European contexts, and with some material only available in Dutch, most of the information available in the site are useful to people working in the same areas of SenterNovem.

Friends of the Earth International

<http://www.foei.org/>

Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) is an international network of environmental organizations. It was founded in 1969 in USA and became an international network in 1971. Today it has members from about 70 countries of all continents, most of them non governmental organizations, NGOs. Each partner remains independent of each other to

pursue particular goals or projects, although in some cases they coordinate their activities through the network that is based in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

The main objective of this organization is to mobilize people to tackle environmental problems in a combined economic, social, and political perspective. Therefore, FOEI engage in public campaigns at an international, national or regional context depending on the themes and available resources. The campaigns try as much as possible to address all relevant aspects of sustainability, and at present they have a global nature, although with a focus on the problems affecting especially the developing world. All campaigns always include the protection of human and environmental rights, biodiversity and a better distribution of wealth among people in earth.

Current priorities are climate change, corporate accountability, genetically modified organisms, public finance and credit agencies, trade and its impact on sustainability, and the environment. Examples of campaigns include the distribution of pertinent information in popular events such as music festivals, non violent demonstrations, among others. Also, FOEI promotes and strongly participate in the creation and implementation of joint initiatives with other partners that may include other NGOs such as trade unions or citizen organizations.

The website was designed to give a full account of present and future activities and/or FOEI campaigns. It is designed to people interested in engage on its activities, both at international, national or local levels, and thus has a simple structure where all relevant information is easily

found. So, a complete list of the ongoing and future campaigns is given at the site, with materials explaining their goals and targets. A directory of partner organizations can also be found, including their contacts, encouraging people to contact and interact with them. A publication link is also presented where publications, videos, and other material can be ordered or downloaded for free. A news and event section, coupled with a RSS feed and an online radio station is designed to maintain people updated.

Although FOEI activities are more related to environmental activism, the fact that they try to address all issues taking into account all relevant questions of sustainability makes it an interesting site not only for non-specialists but to researchers and policy makers. As an NGO supported with private donations that can be made online or through buying items presented at the site, FOEI gives an account of the views and beliefs of a significant part of the stakeholders involved in sustainability issues.

Final words

We will return on the next issue with a fresh selection of sites. If you know sites that are worthy of being presented, send us all relevant information to the following E-Mail address: amartins@fe.up.pt. Any suggestions will be considered with great attention for possible publication. In that case the contributors names will be acknowledge in this column. Surf well.