Preface

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Energy is a crucial factor in the sustainable development of societies. It is energy that drives economies, and it is the balance of economies in relation to nature that ultimately determines the degree of sustainability. The present work deals with only one aspect of energy – renewable electricity; in one region – Europe. The book constitutes the final report from the SUSTEN project, an initiative within the Programme for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society (ProSus) at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo, Norway. ProSus is a ‘Strategic University Programme’, financed by the Research Council of Norway (RCN), with the intention of promoting strategic–applied research for more effective national policies for sustainable development. The emphasis of the programme is on governance and policy for sustainable development, with an increasing focus in recent years on: national strategies for sustainable development; environmental policy integration (EPI); the promotion of renewable energy systems; and the interaction between business and government in pursuing sustainable production and consumption.

The specific task of the SUSTEN project has been to analyse and assess the implementation of the so-called ‘RES-E Directive’ in eight selected European countries. The RES-E Directive is officially designated as: ‘Directive 2001/77/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2001 on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market’. The Directive sets ‘indicative targets’ for all EU Member States in terms of the proportion of electricity consumption that is to come from ‘renewable energy sources’ (RES) by the year 2010. It also designates specific areas where Member States are to initiate policies for standardizing ‘certificates of origin’; removing barriers to the integration of RES-E in national electricity grids; and improving administrative procedures for certifying new RES-E plants and installations. The Directive was to be brought into force (‘transposed’) by the EU-15 ‘not later than 27 October 2003’; and the EU Commission has had the task of monitoring and assessing compliance with the legislation.

The principal idea of the project has been to use the RES-E Directive as a common ‘probe’ and set of standards for assessing the promotion of green electricity in Europe. Given that both the Member States and associated states of the European Union are legally bound (however loosely) to implement the prescriptions of the Directive and to work towards achieving the indicative targets, how have selected states pursued this task, and how has the European Commission conducted its particular role as ‘over-seer’ and ‘facilitator’ of the process? Eight countries were selected for the analysis: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria and Spain. All are Member States of the EU-15, with the exception of Norway, which is an associate state. Norway has also taken on the obligations of the Directive within the cooperative framework of the European Economic Area (EEA), and has conducted its own discussions with the EU Commission as to an indicative target and the other prescriptions.

Three aspects of the present report should be highlighted at the outset.

First, the SUSTEN project has been conceived and carried out within a specific analytical framework. As the design of the comparative approach was being finalized, it became apparent that the large majority of projects devoted to the promotion and assessment of RES-E in Europe placed major emphasis on either technological development or market penetration. Identifying this orientation as the ‘techno-market approach’, it became a major goal of SUSTEN to supplement the approach through a more ‘context-sensitive’ design. While the principal research orientation of the ‘techno-market approach’ is to maximize generalization and standardization, the principal goal of the contextual approach is to maximize situational understanding and national–regional–local adaptation. As conceptual aids for applying the contextual approach across the different national settings, we rely on the ideas of path dependence and path creation.

Second, the reader should be aware that the selection of the eight countries chosen for structured case-study analysis reflects the overall analytic approach. The countries have not been chosen as ‘best examples’ of RES-E achievement, or even as representative examples of the spectrum of RES technologies covered by the Directive. They have been chosen on the basis of previous cooperative work with ProSus (providing the project leadership with greater depth of knowledge and insight into the cases), and because they represent more than enough regional, constitutional, cultural and economic variation to support the analytic ambitions of the contextual approach. Most importantly in this regard, the sample represents eight national contexts with highly different ‘dominant energy systems’, a key prerequisite for assessing both the impacts of path dependence and the potential of path creation for the promotion of RES-E.

Third, as with most comparative (and ‘probing’) projects, SUSTEN has served to focus on at least one major analytic question which wasn’t fully anticipated in the project design: a ‘tension’ between the promotional standards and monitoring effects of the European Commission, and the standards and lessons of effective RES-E promotion that emerge from comparative contextual analysis. This tension – and its implications for promoting green electricity in Europe – has become an important sub-theme of the research narrative. It is also an issue that will be followed up in future ProSus studies.

As with all projects that involve cross-national research, SUSTEN has required considerable time and effort. The project was initiated in 2004, and progressed through a series of workshops and interactive research dialogue until the autumn of 2007. Numerous people at the participating research institutions have provided significant help in bringing the project to a happy conclusion, and project leadership at ProSus is greatly indebted to them all. Thanks are particularly due to the responsible authors of the national case studies for working so closely and continuously with the project leadership. We would also like to thank the previous coordinators of the project: Maria Gjølberg, Olav Mosvold Larsen (who also served as an important co-author of the Norwegian chapter) and Karoline Ehrenclou. Their administrative efforts were crucial to the smooth running of the workshops and the constant intercommunication among the project team members. Special thanks are also due to Jørgen Knudsen at ProSus for his valuable comments and assistance with the final manuscript. Finally, our special and most heartfelt thanks to Camilla Skjelsbæk Gramstad, who served as project coordinator and editorial secretary during the final, very demanding, period of manuscript preparation.