

## Agenda 2030 Compass: A strategic decision- support tool grounded in the SDGs



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The Agenda 2030 Compass shows promise as a way of assessing the potential value to a sustainable future of strategic decisions. It was developed and tested as part of an ongoing collaboration between SEI, Jernkontoret (the Swedish Steel Producers' Association) and Swedish steel producers.

### **Towards a sustainable steel industry**

In 2013 the Swedish steel industry presented a vision for 2050, called *Steel Shapes a Better Future*. The vision includes three commitments, focusing on technical excellence, creativity and partnership, and resource efficiency. Overall, the aim is to ensure that the only output of the Swedish steel industry in 2050 is products of positive value to society.

In order to turn the vision into action, Jernkontoret, SEI and Swedish steel producers launched a collaboration, initially funded by the Hugo Carlsson Foundation.

The collaboration's first project, in 2015–2016, developed a 10-point strategy for meeting the vision's commitments, using explorative scenario methodology to identify what would work under the broadest range of possible future conditions. The project determined that the 2030 Agenda (see box) was a potentially useful framework for assessing the societal value of different strategic choices by the steel industry.

The three principles of the 2030 Agenda were fundamental to this decision. The Agenda's ambition of transformative change is a good match for the Swedish steel industry's overall aims and its comparative advantages in technological innovation, creativity and partnerships. The universality of the Agenda stresses the need to understand the preconditions for creating societal value in any country of the region or the world, not just within Sweden. And the indivisible nature of the SDGs implies a comprehensive, integrated assessment framework that rules out "cherry-picking" of goal areas, looking instead at all aspects of potential societal impact.

### **The Agenda 2030 Compass**

The second project under the collaboration, running from late 2016 to 2018, developed a proof of concept of a process that steel producers (and potentially others) could use to assess the potential societal value of any new product or production process under consideration: the "Agenda 2030 Compass".

**Photo (above):**

Team welding robots © PABLO\_K / GETTY

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## THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In September 2015, 193 UN member states agreed to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; sometimes referred to as the Global Goals).

The SDGs rest on three basic principles: being transformative, universal and indivisible. The goals are transformative in that achieving them requires fundamental changes in how societies and economies are organized; they are universal in that they apply to all countries and all people (but taking into account their current level and path of development); and they are indivisible and interdependent: all goals are equally important and progress towards one should never undermine progress on another.

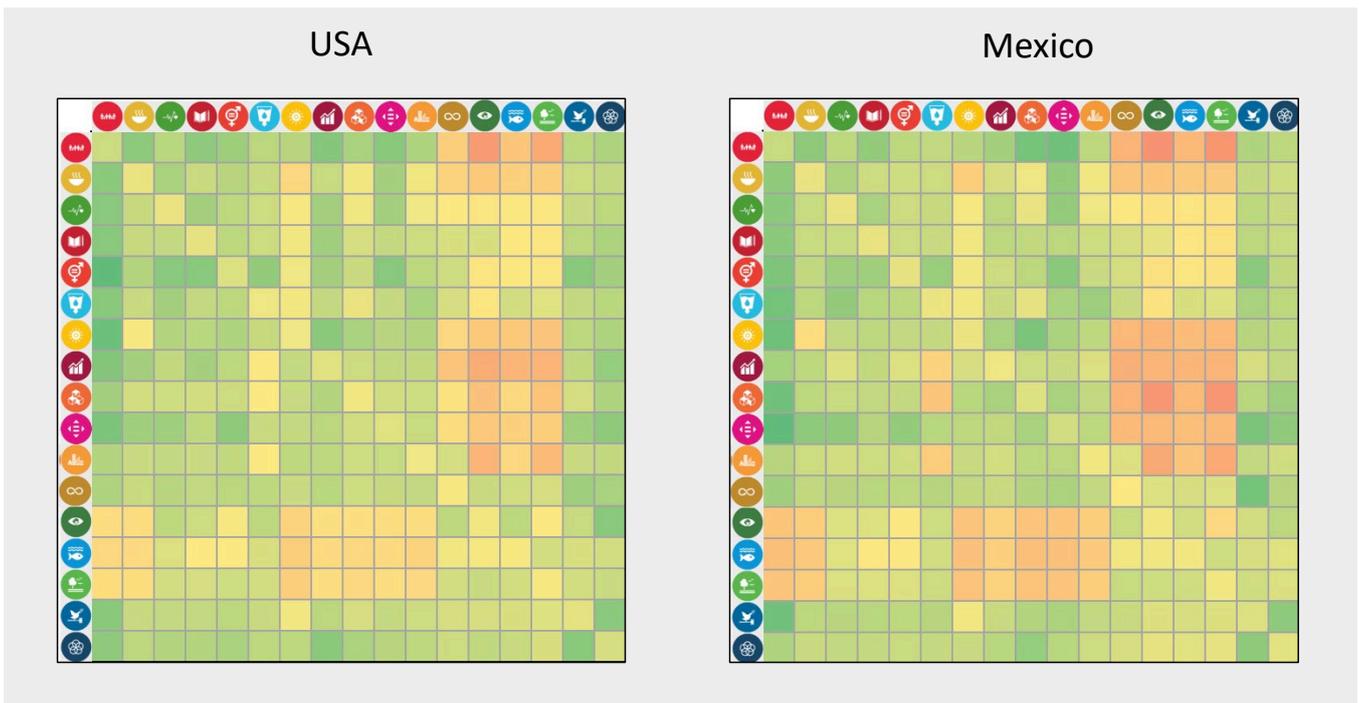
The SDGs can serve as a framework for assessing what is of value to a sustainable society: a society in which a basic level of human well-being is ensured while the ecological systems that underpin it are safeguarded. Agenda 2030 could thus be seen as the world's largest purchasing order for sustainable development, a guide for actors with foresight to identify future business opportunities.

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The process is based on a cross-impact methodology inspired by Weitz et al. (2018), which presents a new approach to understand how different SDGs interact and applies it to the case of Sweden.

The co-creation-based process is designed for making structured assessments of how a strategic decision would potentially affect progress towards the 2030 Agenda in a given country and political context. A series of workshops were held to look first at direct impacts of the decision on each of the 17 goals, and next at how indirect knock-on impacts could affect overall progress on the 2030 Agenda (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. How progress on one SDG affects progress on another depends on the specific conditions in the place and time. In this example (meant for illustrative purposes only) interactions range from dark green (+3) to dark red (-3).**



**Table 1. Characteristics of current and future “green” heavy vehicles, as used in one of the piloting workshops**

<b>Propulsion</b>	Diesel	Fuel cell
<b>Material</b>	Bulk steel	High strength, smart steel qualities
<b>Production</b>	Subtractive (moulding/milling)	Additive (3D printing)
<b>Maintenance</b>	High	Low
<b>Weight</b>	High	Low
<b>Soil packing</b>	High	Low
<b>Wear and tear</b>	High	Low
<b>Efficiency</b>	Low	High

## Piloting the Compass

The project organized six workshops, gathering a total of about 100 participants from steel and mining industries, government departments and agencies, academia and research institutes, along with other sectors.

The first three workshops tested different facilitation approaches and gathered initial data on how various steel products and processes might affect the SDGs. The findings were used to design a prototype of the Compass.

The other workshops, in early 2018, piloted the Compass prototype. The first compared how two different potential uses of metallurgic slags – for reinforcing asphalt and in water purification – might affect progress towards the 2030 Agenda. The second compared high-quality steel applications in the “greenest” heavy-duty vehicles of tomorrow (see Table 1) with, first, the current generation of vehicles, and second, additive manufacturing. In the third workshop, participants from the public sector, government ministries, parliament and authorities used the Compass to assess how different policy alternatives, such as a sharing economy, could affect progress towards the SDGs.

Each workshop followed a similar three-stage format, where participants first identified which SDGs were affected by a certain intervention, then assessed the intervention’s impact on the goals – positive or negative – using a scale from +3 to -3. Finally, the prototype Agenda 2030 Compass was used to calculate the dynamic effects across all SDGs. This calculation was based on expert assessments of how each SDG affects the others. As such, the Agenda 2030 Compass provides a form of multi-criterion analysis, taking into account the complexity of interactions between the goals.

## Decision support

The proof-of-concept work shows that the Agenda 2030 Compass provides a robust methodology with tool support for assessing the societal value implications of different courses of action, based on the best knowledge available. It helps to navigate the complexity of the multiple interactions that characterize not just the SDG system but also the real workings of human society and its relationship with the natural world. It supports crucial teamwork among people with diverse backgrounds. And it highlights areas where further analysis is needed.

## Key findings

- The project provided a proof of the concept behind the Compass, bringing together policy-makers, key actors from a heavy manufacturing industry and its key stakeholders in co-creation processes to discuss and assess concrete options for contributing to the SDGs.
- While most efforts related to the 2030 Agenda have focused on picking a few key SDGs and then measuring progress to date, the Compass takes a future-oriented approach, assessing the likely systemic effects of a planned action across all SDGs, and compares these effects to a baseline or to other options.
- The outcomes of the second set of workshops indicate that the Swedish steel industry has considerable potential to contribute to delivering on the 2030 Agenda, in Sweden and globally, through new products and processes.
- While the Agenda 2030 Compass has been developed in collaboration with the steel industry, the methodology can be applied in any industrial or government sector. This is the point of departure for a subsequent project that started in 2019, where the methodology, the modelling and the data inputs will be further developed, and verified through testing, with the aim of launching a fully functional model that can be used by any actor.

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## Reference

Weitz, N., Carlsen, H., Nilsson, M. and Skånberg, K. (2018). Towards systemic and contextual priority setting for implementing the 2030 Agenda. *Sustainability Science*, 13(2). 531–48. DOI: 10.1007/s11625-017-0470-0



Participants in the workshop © Karl Hallding

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