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(Green) public procurement: examining the real potential for sustainable innovation

It is a widespread opinion that sustainable public procurement supports sustainable innovation. This statement is based on the following understanding: Public bodies increase their demand for eco-friendly and fair goods and services. Competitive bidders reorganise their processes and/or products and offer sustainable product variants and services, ideally cost-effective. Unfortunately, this understanding ignores a variety of variables and thus is misleading. Sustainable innovation is more than greening ingredients or increasing energy efficiency within the production process.

The introductory keynote presents and discusses current achievements of sustainable public procurement. Special attention is paid on the question to which degree green and sustainable procurement practices have been successfully implemented into the “management routine” of public administrations. Thus asking for the real potential of public procurement to stimulate sustainable innovation. Which context conditions are supportive? What do existing cases show? The referee gives an overview on the respective European findings with a specific focus on German activities. A brief summary in advance: in Germany green and especially sustainable public procurement are still in their infancy. For the time being, GPP faces various other challenges but functioning as one main driver for sustainable innovation.

The referee relies on her expert knowledge from various GPP projects. Under contract by the German Environmental Agency, she joins a small team in charge of developing and implementing solutions to further improve green public procurement in Germany. Within the ECOPOL project one of the biggest eco-innovation initiatives within DG Environment, she consults the German consortium members on GPP-issues.