

## Regional Sustainable Development and the Contribution of Economy

DI Dr. Alfred Strigl  
Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development  
c/o University for Agricultural Sciences  
Lindengasse 2/12 , A-1070 Vienna

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1. Regional Sustainable Development - overview and discussion on "sustainability", "regionalization contra globalisation" and "local agenda 21"

### Sustainable Development

Sustainable development means improving the quality of life for people today whilst protecting (or increasing) the possibilities for at least the same quality of life for our children.

In practice this means working towards the following types of goals:

- A more efficient use of resources and less waste.
- Lower levels of pollution.
- A more diverse natural environment.
- Basic needs for everyone which are met more locally.
- More opportunities for work in a diverse economy.
- Improvements in health.
- Access to facilities, goods, services and people whilst protecting the environment.
- Less fear of crime and persecution.
- Access to education, training and information.
- People having a say in decision making.
- People valuing the neighbourhoods and communities in which they live.
- and many more ...

Sustainable development is based on a number of key principles:

Future Generations: Our actions should not have an adverse impact on the lives and the quality of lives of those who will come after us.

**Economic Development:** Sustainable Development seeks to compromise a qualitative growth of economy whilst improving the social and ecological situation of our precious planet.

**Environmental Protection:** We all depend on the Earth's resources to live. These resources should be protected (i.e. by taking care of biodiversity, natural resources etc.).

**Democratic Participation:** People should be able to share in decisions that directly effect their region of living, quality of life and the environment.

**Social Fairness:** Resources should be used to provide for the needs of the whole of the community without exclusion or disadvantage to any group.

Sustainable development means also enabling people to enjoy long, healthy and fulfilling lives, whilst protecting the fundamental resources upon which we depend. Over 150 nations, including all European countries are pursuing this goal through Agenda 21, the global action plan for social, economic and environmental development agreed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Measuring the success of our efforts towards these goals is a key undertaking of Agenda 21. Sustainable development is a continuous, controlled and democratic process of societal change at global, regional and local levels, aimed at improving the quality of life for present and future generations. Improving health is an essential part of this process. Sustainable development integrates environmental protection and efficient use of natural resources into other essential social, economic and cultural activities. Preserving biodiversity and reducing anthropogenic global climate change are examples of environmental goals of this process. Environmental, economic, social and health questions must be tackled simultaneously by implementing cross-sectoral approaches over the traditional sectors of administration. Community participation leads to an open forum that enables democratically sound local public policies and strategies to be continually evaluated and adapted.

## Agenda 21

In 1992 the conference on environment and development (UNCED), organised by the UN, was held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The world leaders present there signed a declaration which incorporated a number of principles, forming the basis for future policy developments. This Rio Declaration on environment and development underlies Agenda 21: the programme for action for the next century. This describes, for a large number of subjects, the precepts, objectives and means of implementation.

One of the objectives of Agenda 21 is for each local authority to have drawn up its own Local Agenda by 1996, in close consultation with its citizens. The principle of sustainable development must form a central aspect of this Agenda. A sustainable society is organised in such a way that people do not harm each other, nature, or the environment, and that the needs of all (future) inhabitants of the earth are met. Such an ideal society requires a genuine break with existing culture, which will make itself felt in various areas of everyday life.

## Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 is a central tool in bringing sustainability to reality. Local Agenda 21 is about thinking globally and acting locally - but with these activities undertaken with

global awareness. Global responsibility must be taken locally in all parts of the world, including major cities and small regions or valleys. We must start to measure progress in terms of the overall quality of our lives and our environment.

Currently production and consumption patterns are based on resource use, energy production and levels of pollution that cannot be sustained. Quarterly profit figures drive the economy, while globally there is a significant threat to security arising from the widening gap between rich and poor. Many major multi-national companies and finance houses, answering only to their own board and shareholders, wield more economic power than nations. Formal legislation is often unable to control huge international movements of assets that move through a labyrinth of computer networks, pulling and pushing unstable currency markets in the process, and at times taking whole economies to the brink of collapse. Do we really think that we can continue in this way?

Where does this leave the local economy and people? We seem largely dependent upon economic and political decisions made elsewhere, leaving our local economies unable to guarantee their own economic health. We need to shift towards strong "self-reliant" and "self-generating" local and regional economies. This implies a greater proportion of products, services and employment supplied from the region, with a much greater proportion of profits and economic decision making retained locally. This will involve a more human-scale form of economics, that builds local strength and creativity, enthusiasm and pride, creating local economies that enable people, the local communities and their companies, to work together to meet their own needs for products and services, and to generate more meaningful and fulfilling employment at the regional level.

## 2. Special Aspects of regional sustainable development: Agenda 21 and Local Agenda 21

Facilitating participatory LA 21 initiatives as an instrument of national and regional policies towards sustainable development:

Local Agenda 21 is very abstract. Agenda 21 - as the protocol of the Rio conference 1992 - is difficult to implement on regional scale because the document is very abstract, even "fluffy". To achieve efforts on the local level, goals have to be broken down and concrete activities and projects realized. A lot of citizens are involved in organisations on local levels: varying from dog clubs and sports clubs to cultural organisations. It is important to use these social structures of dialogue and trust when trying to integrate sustainable development and local agenda 21 on local or regional level.

### Example 1

#### Project "Last Chance" in Norway

The project "Last Chance" in Norway, where almost 100 percent of the municipalities are carrying out a local agenda 21, for example, aims to motivate local communities to register species in their region ("biodiversity mapping"). Seven pilot communities are momentarily involved in this project. According to plan, ninety communities will map the biodiversity in their surroundings in the year 2000 and in the year 2003 all 435 Norwegian communities will participate. The data are collected in a national database, so a national biodiversity monitoring system will be accomplished.

### Example 2

#### Forest protection in co-operation with farmers in Finland

Another example is a project aimed at achieving forest protection in a specific area (Finland). The forest is partly owned by farmers. Before, they refused to co-operate to protect the forest. But when they were approached in a very open way, asking how they could contribute to the protection of the forest, 50 were willing to sign a joint declaration on how to manage vulnerable areas and which areas to protect. In this way 50% of the forest is saved. This example proves that communication is an essential success factor for achieving co-operation and involvement of local actors. The motto: 'Believe that you can make a difference!' should inspire educators.

### Example 3

#### Local Agenda 21 in The Hague, The Netherlands

The city of The Hague has shown a lot of commitment to Agenda 21. The city decided to contract a professional consultant to facilitate the process. After an analyses of the situation, the consultant defined three important starting points for Local Agenda 21: 1. Develop a vision and make this vision visible. Show people what sustainable development could mean and make it concrete and understandable. 2. Identify partners and start a dialogue. 3. Do what can be done: identify potential projects. Examples of projects which were identified: a shared car project called Green Wheels, a manifest about mobility and a project aimed at creating more parking space for bicycles.

Another project in which The Hague started involving citizens in the sustainable development of the city, was titled "The Hague sustainable in 2025" and were facilitated through Master Classes. The project aimed to generate input for sustainable regional development in and around The Hague by visualising what the city would look like in 2025. Furthermore the Master Classes were Think Tanks producing ideas for what can be done at local level to achieve sustainability. A third central aim was to stimulate individual and social learning processes. Starting point of the method is "the wheel for social learning". One of the concrete results of the Master Class was the foundation of a financial institution aimed at supporting Sustainable Development initiatives on local level.

### Example 4

#### Sustainable Economy & Business in Devon County, England

The Sustainable Economics and Business Working Group of Devon County in England formulated their aim as following: "A sustainable economy that provides meaningful occupations and meets all human needs while enhancing the quality of human life and the environment, both locally and globally". Therefor the report "Visioning a sustainable economic community in Devon" were worked out and several local initiatives on a regional scale developed. One of the most popular is "Devon Food Links", with the four goals: alleviate poverty and promote rural regeneration in Devon; develop and educate people in Devon; promote a healthier Devon; protect Devon's environment. Since 1996 rural regeneration could be activated by: Production using indigenous businesses; Creation of jobs locally in agriculture and horticulture; Increasing turnover of businesses by average of 50% Adding value to local produce; Supporting self help and community initiatives; Producer co-operatives. Marketing, Education, Mentoring, Health work, Nutrition, Environmental Protection, Communication and Local Investment are the mayor obstacles in this encouraging process.

## Conclusion

A common acknowledge of all actors in realising local sustainable development and implementation of a local agenda 21 dialogue process is the fact, that the translation of "Local Agenda 21" into concrete actions is necessary. The Rio document is too abstract which has proved to be an important obstacle for implementation. Methods for achieving sustainable development on local level are not given in the document. As a consequence many local governments do not know how and where to start.

Exchange of information on LA 21 is essential: In the Netherlands for instance the National Committee for international co-operation and sustainable development stimulates the exchange of information and experience on Local Agenda 21. A platform LA 21 has been initiated through which NGO's can exchange ideas. Furthermore, there are funds available for activities. Another platform where exchange takes place, is the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, which has working groups and regular meetings on Local Agenda 21. A third example is the regular exchange of experience of ten municipalities which are working in an innovative way on Local Agenda 21.

Learning processes need attention: This chapter can be concluded by stressing that learning processes are of fundamental importance to sustainable development on the local level. It is necessary to identify key factors of success on how to involve citizens and local organisations in the process of sustainable development. Dialogues have to be started, and have to result in concrete actions.

### 3. Integration of companies into regional sustainable development - processes (experiences and success factors)

The main question for initiatives in establishing and education for regional sustainable development under participation of the business community is: How to interest the business community for such initiatives in regional sustainable development or in environmental education? Experience shows that companies are most often willing to support dialogues and projects if they are approached in conformity with their own strategies. So one must know which special "language" decision makers speak, and what values they have. Insight in these matters enables a tactic which makes win-win solutions possible.

#### Example 1

Natural Step for instance, has practical experiences within the business sector in The Netherlands. The initiative offers companies support to start thinking about their future direction. How does Natural Step set the correct targets for each company? Companies are supported to define and redefine their core-business. The core-business of Shell for example is not oil, but energy. The core-business of KLM is not aeroplanes, but "transport" and "mobility". And the core business of Coca-Cola might not be soft-drinks, but "fashionable things" and "life style". Approaching the core activities and future activities in this way, enables companies to create a new vision of the direction they want to choose in order to be sustainable.

### Example 2

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development offers education and training programmes for sustainable development in the business sector. The courses are all through internet, during the one-year course the participants meet three times for two days. Most courses are free of charge; the accompanying books have to be bought. The university is financially supported by company donations.

### Example 3

Workshops or conferences for business sector should be organized on a regional scale. In order to gain interest of the business sector for "regional sustainability" and an "environmental education", a meeting should take place in very strong co-operation of business, politics and experts. Using this principle as a starting point, working group are able to generate ideas for the business sector and the region. This workshops/conferences should be organised in co-operation with key figures from business and politics, involving trade unions and NGO's that are concerned with business. The aim of the workshops/conferences would be communication and training for sustainable development. Large companies which have incorporated sustainable development in their strategies are a potential target group. They need to exchange experiences in the field of training for sustainable development. Decision makers in the training and learning departments of companies, and in the human resource management departments are also possibly interested. Issues during the workshops/conferences could for example be long-term-planning, training for technical improvements towards sustainability, organisational changes, social issues, investment strategies and internalisation of sustainable development. Practical examples should play a dominant role in the workshops/conferences.

### Success factor 1

Gain interest for regional sustainable development within companies through prominent actors in the business-sector of the region rather than through NGO's which whom they have less bindings

### Success factor 2

It is advisable to present 'regional sustainable development' towards companies as a way of thinking on how they can improve and develop themselves and make profit on the long run, taking their ecological, social and economical strategies into account.

### Success factor 3

It is equally advisable to look at training and learning of employees as part of the process towards sustainable development rather than to look at sustainable development as a technical matter.

### Success factor 4

Opportunities for trans-boundary co-operation: Certainly there is a need within the business sector to know more about the way companies from countries abroad work on sustainable development. Organising a workshop/conference in an international setting in close co-operation with businesses is therefore a very fruitful idea.

#### 4. "Greening the local economy" - initiatives and their contribution to regional sustainable development

The Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development has been entitled by the city of Vienna (municipal administration MA 22 - environmental protection) to realise the research project for the Integration of "Greening the local economy initiatives into sustainable urban development" as well as "the realisation of a strategic action plan for the integration of companies into the Local Agenda process in Vienna".

The main issues of this project were:

1. Analysis of possibilities as well as resistance and obstacles in incorporating the economy into existing sustainable urban development programs
2. Identification of the (pre)conditions for involving the Viennese enterprises in sustainable urban development programs (i.e. local agenda 21 processes)
3. Elaboration of a realizable strategy for an integration of the local economy into the Local Agenda 21 in Vienna

Issue no. 1 has been accomplished by analysis of economically emphasized LA 21 processes in Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, England and Scandinavia. The preconditions, chances and objections for the participation of Viennese companies have been elaborated by means of interviews with decision-makers in the realms of economy, administration and bodies representing interests. Out of the whole results essential steps in favour of an integrative strategy have been developed including potential dialogue and project topics, recommendations for the dialogue process and identifications of the participants and their measurements.

#### Results (executive summary)

Every local agenda 21 - process is specific and unique. There is however one aspect that can be generalized: these kind of processes have a conciliatory and integrating character. The following recommendations should not be considered as „recipe“ for integrating enterprises into dialogue processes. But they can provide ideas for a successful implementation of companies into sustainable urban development and can also help to avoid mistakes. Some general aspects for setting up a Local Agenda 21 are:

- The Agenda office should be situated in the vicinity of the mayor's premises. There should be a sound budget for marketing and promotional activities.
- The first public event of a Vienna agenda needs to be thoroughly prepared with the help of media in order to get the most enthusiasm possible out of the initial impact such an event will have on its participants. Target group should be a broad and heterogeneous population. The initial enthusiasm should be used to establish groups and forums.
- The Local Agenda 21 needs celebrities and charismatic persons as multipliers. This way a wider range of people will get to know the project.

- A guiding image is of major importance for the success of the implementation of the Agenda. Incorporate identity will enhance the acceptance.

To get economy in general and entrepreneurs as individuals into co-operations and dialogue forums we identified some special aspects of importance:

- Companies are important partners in the dialogue. They should initiate projects which help to change conditions that are relevant for economical activities so that
  - companies are encouraged to take activities towards sustainable business
  - municipal administration will become a constructive partner and not act as controller and inhibitor of business activities.
  - the service idea of administration will be enforced
  - a relationship of trust will be created between economy, administration and politics
- Professional moderators as network facilitators are necessary to guarantee a professional organisation
- Current and established projects should be used to encourage the dialogue between municipal administration and economy in order to build up relationships with experienced people and profit from their network.
- It is important for the integration of companies into the process of sustainable urban development to build up personal relationships based on mutual confidence. Hereby invitations by the mayor or by VIPs from economy as well as positive mouth propaganda can be seen as a factor of success.
- Important topics and issues for the dialogue between municipality and economy are:
  - environmental aspects (environmental and resource management, eco-audit, eco-design, sustainable product and technology development)
  - increase of regional economic power
  - new ways of collaboration between administration and economy (public private partnerships / PPP etc.)
  - encourage economy to take on certain responsibilities
  - transformation of the supply system (social, environmental and sustainable standards)
  - promotion of investments into sustainable branches of economy
  - mobilisation of not used potentials (growing raw material, alternative energy)
  - new forms of sales and marketing promotions

In summary there is to say that the company's interest in sustainable economic development within the framework of sustainable regional development initiatives for Vienna can only be a long-term success if the implementation of sustainable actions in companies will not impede those to survive in the market. That means that projects and activities should open up to the companies future chances, innovation potential and scope of action which they would not have without such a program.