



PARTICIPATORY ASPECTS OF STRATEGIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES: EXPERIENCE OF LITHUANIA

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Abstract. While analysing the evolution of sustainable development concept as the basic criteria of periodisation, a number of dimensions could be used. Thus, it is possible to mark three stages in the development of the concept: a) two-dimensional sustainability; b) three-dimensional sustainability; c) four-dimensional sustainability. Sustainable development should be implemented in all spheres and levels of life, estimating economic, social, ecological, territorial, political and institutional aspects. All dimensions of sustainability should be considered in the process of strategic sustainable development planning. Local communities understood that strategic sustainable development plans, which realize their willingness to live following the principles of sustainable development, are important. Different methods of public involvement were used when creating sustainable development strategies for local communities. Sustainable development concept, principles of sustainable development and strategic planning, methodology for strategic sustainable development planning, and participation of local communities are discussed in the article.

Keywords: sustainable development, strategic planning, local communities, public participation, Lithuania.

1. Introduction

Obviously, local communities are very important participants of physical and social resources management. Transitional period and growing competition make municipal representatives look for rational planning and community management instruments, which allow a better coordination of sustainable development processes in seeking high quality of community living environment. Sustainable development strategic planning becomes a challenge for the administration of local governments and leaders of local communities.

On the one hand, a local community is too small to clearly feel architectural, social, economic, political and natural disbalance, which has a negative impact in our modern world; on the other hand, it might be too big to solve its problems by itself, according to the criteria of integration versatility and sustainable development. Sustainable development of communities should involve different areas and local development strategies should be based on the advantages of communities.

In Lithuania, as in other post-soviet countries, implementation of sustainable development

principles started only a few years ago. Usually strategic development plans were prepared in a way a planner understood it without really giving attention to the quality or purpose of planning. However, most investors, when choosing a place for the investments, analyse strategic development plans, and this is one of the main criteria for choosing place for investments. At present the importance of sustainable development is understood and sustainable development principles are being implemented, but during this process many obscurities arise. Thus, the **problem of the article** is introduction of sustainable development principles into strategic management, and the importance of community involvement into strategic planning processes. However, there is no general methodology for preparing sustainable development strategic plans for local communities.

Different aspects of sustainable development of the society in Lithuania were analysed by A. Buračas, J. Čepinskas, B. Melnikas, V. Pranulis, R. Rajeckas, L. Rinkevičius, A. V. Rutkauskas, D. Štreimikienė and other Lithuanian scientists. Useful theoretical analysis of sustainable development of the society was done by R. Ayres, U. Beck, F. Berkes, H. Binswanger, L. Brown, R. Costanza, H. Daly, S. El Seraly, C. Folke, R. Goodland, J. Holmberg, E. Lazlo, K.-G. Maler, J. Martinez-Alier, D. Meadows, R. Norgaard, C. Perrings, M. Munasinghe, H. Odum, J. Opschoor, D. Pearce, W. Rees, S. Schmit-Bleck, E. Simonis, R. Solow, T. Tietenberg, E. U. von Weizsacker and other authors.

The **object** of the article is the principles of community sustainable development strategic planning.

The **goal** of the article is to analyse the principles of sustainable development and possibilities of their application to community development. The following **objectives** have been formulated:

- a) to highlight the meaning of sustainable development concept;
- b) to present the principles of sustainable development strategic planning;
- c) to evaluate the importance of community involvement into the process of sustainable development strategic planning;
- d) to verify the use of participatory methods in sustainable development strategic planning of Lithuania's local communities.

The article was prepared using systematic scientific literature analysis, general and logical analysis, comparative and summarization **methods** and practical experience with sustainable development strategic planning in Lithuania's local communities.

2. Sustainable development concept: its evolution in the context of origin

Sustainable development as universal empiric phenomena was developed progressively, at the same time it was changing by the impact of various processes and dimensions. Seeking to analyse evolution of sustainable development conception as the basic criterion of periodisation, a number of dimensions could be used, which match the conception of sustainable development. On the basis of this affirmation we can distinguish three stages:

A) *Two-dimensional sustainability*

At the beginning of the evolution of sustainable development concept, the sustainability of businesses and natural environment was noted and the stress was laid on the fact that the economy and the environment must not limit each other but help find new possibilities. According to Čepinskas *et al.* (2002), the biggest attention was given to eco-effectiveness, which was understood as manufacturing and supply of competitive goods and services, allowing to improve quality of life and environment, commonwealth, not limiting possibilities to meet

the requirements for the future generations, and at the same time limiting usage of resources till the regenerative limit.

During the first United Nations (UN) world conference in 1972, which was held in Stockholm, the following attitude was formulated: economic development must continue using natural resources as effectively as possible and making as little as possible impact on nature. The term describing this process – ecological development – was offered at the Conference. In 1980, international environmental protection organizations and institutions declared a very important document – World Conservation Strategy, which was the base of sustainable development in fact. Čiegis (2000) noted that this document clearly declared that development and protection are not conflicting cases, and that a well-balanced use of natural resources is a part not only of economic development, but also of environmental protection.

Čepinskis *et al.* (2002) stated that during this period the necessity to base development on renewable resources (informational, financial, human, natural, recycling) was realized. The usage of the resources was based on rationality according to the principles of effectiveness and modern value creation principles.

B) *Three-dimensional sustainability*

The third dimension – social – was added to the two dimensions – environmental and economic – mentioned above and for some time sustainability between economic growths, ecological stability, and social development was dominating. Čaplikas (1999) noted that at this stage a concept of “social effectiveness”, which means connection between the value created by the socium and the activity needed to create it, came into being. The development had to turn towards commonwealth economics, to stimulate adequate preparation of ideological base for developing effective management means. It has been a qualitative turn to information technologies, the improvement of legal, management and technical environmental protection conditions, globalisation of political structures and businesses, integration of social institutes and markets that opened space for continuous social growth (National Strategy of Sustainable Development of Lithuanian Republic 2003).

During this period the concept of “sustainable development” was mentioned for the first time in the World’s Environmental Development Commission document “Our Common Future” (1987). This report (better known as Brundtland Report) stressed that the sustainable development should be based not only on matching economic and environmental interests, but also on guarantees of social justice in internal and international affairs. Poverty was identified as one of the basic difficulties while implementing sustainable development principles.

C) *Four-dimensional sustainability* (Fig. 1)

Eventually it had been noticed, that the three dimensions did not include a very important political dimension. Thus modern research works include political-institutional dimension. This dimension according to Čiegis (2004) requests development towards democracy and properly functioning institutions are essential for sustainable development.

In 1992, as the result of the international Rio de Janeiro Conference, a detailed program of actions “Agenda 21” (2001) was accepted (National Report on Sustainable Development 2002). It pointed out the ways how sustainable development should be implemented in all the spheres and levels of life, estimating economic, social, ecological, territorial, political and institutional aspects (Čiegis 1999). This could be shown using tetrahedron of categories of sustainability (Fig. 1) analogous to the economical terminology of human made, natural, social and human capital used, for example, by I. Serageldin (1996). This structure also could

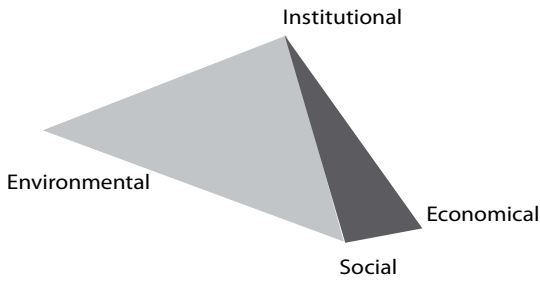


Fig. 1. Tetrahedron of sustainability categories

be found on the list of 134 indicators of sustainable development suggested by the UN Sustainable Development Commission (1996).

The action program also includes territorial (spatial) development aspect. This aspect originated because of the development of urban territories, which was a real danger to existing ecosystems. Urban development influences life of the surrounding com-

munities. The idea behind this aspect is the following: used territories should be exploited first, and only then the development of new ones should start.

It is supposed that the concept of sustainable development will develop in the future, and will include more dimensions of the environment thus becoming more complex and complicated to manage phenomenon. All the levels of management will have to consider more aspects and use a systematic way of thinking.

Having in mind the variety of sustainable development definitions and their different aspects, it is possible to state, that it is mainly agreed about the four criteria of sustainability (Pathways to a sustainable future 2001):

- justice within the frame of one generation and between different generations;
- international justice;
- integration of social, economic and ecological requirements;
- participation of all social groups in the formulation and implementation of strategy.

Sustainable development is not only a clearly expressed ideal vision; the concept of sustainability gives us more than only a practical guide to act.

3. Sustainable development strategic planning in local communities

Communities vary in size and number of population. Analysing sustainable development of a city, it is necessary to consider, that a city from its origin is unnatural and very dynamic environment, where various aspects of natural environment were sacrificed for creating urban agglomerations. According to Čiegis (2001), the fact that densely settled cities “put” a very big economic footmark is not only a sign of non-sustainability, but also the result of a special arrangement of spatial factors and specialization types. To implement a sustainable city policy it is necessary to have a strategy, which combines a lot of aspects, where social and economic interests match environmental and cultural interests as well as foresee progressive changes, stimulating this process.

Considering the growing tendency that the cities use a lot of not local resources, as noted in Gailius and Draugelis (2001), the sustainable development of cities could be described as “development warranting that local inhabitants can reach and maintain the level of well-being, which is acceptable for them and has a growing tendency, without causing danger to the inhabitants of neighbouring regions”.

Because communities are different in their territory, number of population, environment, political and social-cultural conditions, local authorities together with society of each of

them should find individual way of sustainable development. Participation of inhabitants in various aspects of local life is especially important, because communities in some sense are products of their inhabitants.

3.1. The role of local authorities in participatory strategic planning of communities

Participatory strategic planning is a process, which presents a possibility for various public stakeholder groups to participate in sustainable development strategic planning and the implementation process. Strategic plan helps create management and planning systems of municipalities, based on the principles of sustainable development, democracy and market economy, and to assist for more rational use of limited resources of municipal budgets and for better coordination and implementation of programs in various sectors. But the basic advantage of participatory strategic planning process is the possibility to concentrate on the main problems and ways of their solution, based on good knowledge of the present situation and future perspectives of local people.

It could be said, that preparation of sustainable development strategic plan with real public participation is a challenge to the planners and administration of municipalities, because it means:

- full organizational responsibility for success of the process;
- the society is given the main role in the planning process.

Responsibility of local authorities in this case is the following:

- to support and stimulate enthusiasm of participants during the strategy preparation process;
- to monitor the progress of the process;
- to formally accept (by the Council of Municipality) the prepared sustainable development strategy, its implementation and monitoring systems (ECAT 2000).

Local communities and local governments, which represent them, have to play a very important role in promoting sustainability. Chapter 28 of the “Agenda 21” (2001) states that the participation of local authorities is a determining factor in achieving the objectives set out in “Agenda 21”, because so many problems being addressed in the document have their roots in local activities. Many functions of municipalities are regulated by strategic documents, which should clearly show, what is being done and what will be done to follow the criteria of sustainability during the implementation of these documents.

It is possible to distinguish two main approaches towards sustainable development planning: “bottom up” approach and “top down” approach.

During the first five years of independent Lithuania, in most cases foreign experts initiated the preparation of development strategies. The strategies were prepared considering requirements of international foundations. Strategic plans prepared by foreign experts were very useful as methodical examples, but they could hardly be implemented, because they were “far away” from reality. Later municipalities invited local experts to prepare development strategies in collaboration with local authorities. In both cases, the public had little opportunities to have a say during the preparation process. With this top-down approach to planning, little responsibility and decision-making authority is given to people, thus limiting their interest and support of the planning and implementation processes. It should be

also noted that as a legacy of the soviet period citizens had little experience of participation in planning and decision-making. In such situation, “top-down” efforts are required for a “bottom-up” response to pressing problems in order to achieve sustainable development, thus, local authorities could play the main role in informing the society, getting it together and promoting an active participation. However, municipalities stimulating public participation in sustainable development planning process should not dominate and assure truly participatory process. Responsibility for sustainable development strategic planning should be divided between the participants of the process:

- a) inhabitants of the local community, who make the major part of the participatory planning process;
- b) community leaders, who take responsibility for wider involvement of the community;
- c) representatives of the municipality, who provide information and organize the process, and external consultants, who act as moderators in the process, providing methodological consultations and other help, and they should make the smallest group of the participatory planning process (Alijošiūtė and Gineitienė 2001).

Even at the beginning of the preparation of sustainable development strategic plan, representatives of various groups of the society should be involved. Some of them would like to participate in certain projects, such as the reconstruction of the community centre, plans of public transportation or others would prefer to participate in consulting groups or forums, where they could share their experience in the fields of various sectors (Governance for Sustainable development 2002). Plans and projects, which are well-designed but have not included public involvement, may face opposition which will slow or stop the project. There are considerable costs associated with this for both the local authorities and the investors.

Participatory sustainable development strategy preparation process should be based on partnership and cooperation; thus, as stated in Alijošiūtė and Gineitienė (2001), the administration of municipality should:

- write or edit sustainable development strategy only in agreement with other participant of planning process;
- consider ideas of all participants or suggestions of working groups and not to bring documents, which were prepared earlier;
- involve all possible participants, who have wish and abilities to do this, into the preparation of the documents;
- to contract consultants (if necessary) to help interested groups to clearly formulate their suggestions.

Continuous feedback (information flow from and to citizens) is important to assure an active participation. Consultations, opinion survey, discussions, SWOT analysis are the tools that give possibility for many people to participate in the planning process and to influence the result.

When choosing participatory planning process, officials of local government have to be prepared to certain possible challenges: during the process conflicts are possible between interest groups, between planning group and the municipality; participants may lose interest and willingness to participate.

3.2. Main elements of the community sustainable development planning process

It is relevant to discuss basic elements of preparation process of community sustainable development plans. First of all participants of the strategy preparation process should identify the main goal of the strategy, which is the idea of a sustainable community. The creation of the community vision is the next stage of the process, where representatives of the community usually participate most actively. *Vision of sustainable community* represents what should be created or implemented, and needs a longer time for actualisation. Vision should be persuasive, memorable and visual. Moreover, it should:

- give a picture of internally and externally integrated community;
- have no conflicting elements;
- have much in common with a dream, however, not to be far from the reality;
- form a picture of the functioning community in the future, but not an action program for the implementation of this image.

In this stage Gailius and Draugelis (2001) suggested to use methods of “brainstorming”, “talking wall” as well as other suitable methods.

The next stage of the sustainable development planning process is the *situation analysis*. During this stage the diagnostic data, related to the condition of the territory and its environment, are considered. Statistic data about the current status of the municipality is being collected and analysed. The *stakeholders’* analysis is the following step undertaken during the process. Stakeholders here are understood as institutional subjects and governmental organizations, interest groups in the territory of the municipality, which in one way or another depend on its functioning or can influence it. Basically, stakeholder analysis is analysis of potential supporters and opponents of sustainable development process.

A very important method of situation analysis in strategic planning is the *SWOT analysis* or the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. SWOT analysis gives basis for creating sustainable development strategy, which is viable under different circumstances. Practically it is very hard to classify the factors of sustainable development, because this causes a number of various dangers (weaknesses and threats) and stimulators (strengths and opportunities). Thus, it is possible to confuse advantage with opportunity or weakness with threat (National Report on Sustainable Development 2002).

Evaluation of the present situation prepared with SWOT analysis as an instrument and separation of problematic fields give the possibility to make the *analysis of* sustainable development problems. The goal of this analysis is to get information about the real situation, which could show basic hindrances and negative elements in the present situation of the community, as well as the relations between these elements from the point of view of realization of the direct goal of the community sustainable development. The final step of the problem analysis stage is the creation of the “*tree of problems*”, which helps identify basic problems implicating the biggest number of causes and outcomes.

After the formulation and realization of the basic problems of the community, *detailed goals* of sustainable development are identified. These goals could be defined after reformulating every problem (a negative situation) into the goal (a positive situation), which should be reached in the future. The sustainable development goals have to be clear and understandable to every inhabitant of the community and correspond to the SMART principle.

From the point of sustainable development the defined goals could be divided into *direct goals* in some spheres. Direct goals answer the question: where do we wish to go? For example, in the economic sphere the goal could be “sustainable economic development”, in the society sphere – “sustainable development of the society”; in the environmental sphere – “ecological order”, in spatial sphere – “spatial order”; in management sphere – “political-institutional order” (Alijošiūtė and Gineitienė 2001).

After detailed and direct goals of sustainable development are defined, the *logic structure* is being created. This is a form of the overview of strategic planning, which summarizes its results and helps prepare solid and realistic strategy, as well as helps manage its implementation and makes the basis for the monitoring of the implementation and evaluation of the results. The logic structure is presented in the form of matrix or table, which represents hierarchy and relations between:

- the detailed and direct, between the direct and main goals;
- the results and the detailed goals.

After the identification of goals and preparation of a logical structure, the *operational planning* phase begins during which activities/tasks are defined, as well as implementation timetable, budget, responsibilities, monitoring process, and possible sources of finance.

Summarizing the principles of sustainable development of communities, it is possible to separate three basic stages of strategic planning: 1) creation of a vision, 2) strategic planning, 3) implementing the plan. As a document the sustainable development strategy of a community should be short, clear, and understandable.

Participants should not forget the context in which the plan is being prepared. Expenses should be realistic, because in Lithuania a lot of expenditures depend on subsidies from the Government. Thus, the budget revenue should be realistically forecasted. Only the sustainable development strategic plans of separate communities, realizing their wishes to live under conditions of sustainable development, could help implement goals of global sustainable development documents.

4. Implementation of participatory sustainable development planning in Lithuanian communities

The hypothesis based on the goal of this article was that the participatory sustainable development planning could be successfully implemented in Lithuanian local communities, which are rather small. To prove the hypothesis for the process of sustainable development planning 8 local authorities were selected, according to the type of local authority (city, district, rural community) size and readiness for participatory planning. Some of them were Aalborg Charter signatories (ECAT 2001), which indicated a political commitment by a local authority to producing an action plan for sustainable development and to implement it. National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2003) states that implementation of sustainable development principles is impossible without extensive public participation and cooperation of different social groups, intergovernmental, governmental, municipal and private institutions and persons on equal basis.

Sustainable development planning process was initiated by the specialists of municipalities, guided by external consultants, and arranged according to the same scheme in all communities. The methodology used was developed in cooperation with the Umbrella association of consultants under UNDP office in Poland. During the strategic planning process municipalities had a possibility to involve local communities into the process of formulation of

development directions, to integrate environmental questions into the social and economical ones. Local sustainable development plans are not just a possibility to solve local problems, but also a foresight of global problems, implementation of universal solidarity and justice principles and a foresight of effects on future generations (ECAT 2001).

Public involvement into the planning process was rather complicated and among the problems to be solved: indifference and passiveness of the society, lack of participatory traditions, lack of experience how to involve public, negative attitude of local authorities towards public and vice versa, hope that governmental institutions will solve all problems, wrong expectations, lack of time and resources.

The preparation of a sustainable development strategy is a multi-dimensional process, which involves individual inhabitants, local associations, NGOs, religious institutions, private enterprises, governmental organizations, etc. Local governments can facilitate a collaborative planning process if only they do not dominate in sustainable development planning process. For this reason, an intermediary body between the formal governmental sector and the community was established. This “planning group” was formed in accordance with the principles of democracy and readiness to spent time for their community. It was considered that a broad consultation with and the contribution of all community members is an extremely important planning element of participatory planning. Thus, public opinion survey was carried out not only in order to consult with the community members but also to raise awareness and to let people feel part of the process.

During the preparation process strategic sustainable development plans followed the main “Local agenda 21” principles. Sustainable development strategic document consisted of three basic strategic planning elements:

- Analysis of present situation.
- Vision and strategic goals of the community.
- Implementation plan.

Based on the methodology worked out with the assistance of the UNDP, the sustainable development strategy preparation process with the “planning group” of was divided into four working seminars, which included such elements:

- report about the present situation in the city;
- vision of the community;
- analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and the analysis of stakeholders;
- list of goals of the community and the main goal;
- list of objectives;
- systems of strategy implementation and monitoring.

During the planning process it was very important to feel a support from the heads of local authority (mayors, council members, etc.). One of the main rules of the methodology used during the planning was that during all the stages of planning all participants of the process are equal and not divided into two “camps” – municipal authorities and ordinary people. Sustainable development strategy is a product of local community and all participants are members of the same community (ECAT 2005).

Elements of the strategy were prepared paying attention to the main four areas – environmental, economic, social and spatial planning. One of the lessons learned during the planning

relates to set how participatory planning will be subsequently implemented and monitored. This has been the most difficult element to the planning process.

It is possible to state that after finishing this process in a few communities, the system of participatory sustainable development planning was tried in practice. This could be a good example how to adapt the principles of sustainable development to local conditions. It was obvious that participatory sustainable development planning could be implemented into Lithuanian communities but it works better in smaller communities. The work proceeded as an interaction between the administration, citizens and different co-operating partners, was a new kind of learning to use participatory methods and procedures. As a positive by-product of the process, greater interaction, trust, and partnership between civil society and public sector should be mentioned.

5. Conclusions

1. Sustainable development as universal empiric phenomena was developed progressively; at the same time it was changing by the impact of various processes and dimensions. Seeking to analyse evolution of sustainable development conception as the basic criteria of periodisation, a number of dimensions could be used, which match the conception of sustainable development.

2. Strategic plans of sustainable development of some communities realize the goals declared in global documents of sustainable development, and the most important of them is the direct involvement of community and keeping it interested during the whole process. That is why the local authorities should give possibilities to the communities members to solve their general and specific problems in public meetings, forums, conferences, etc.

3. It is not possible to create a universal sustainable development planning system for all communities, because they are different in their areas, number of population, environment, political and social-cultural conditions. And this is the reason for authorities to find an individual way for their sustainable development together with the inhabitants of their communities.

4. There is no official methodology for strategic planning, and communities use various methodologies prepared by various consultants and institutions. Different methodologies are used by different levels of strategy preparation and the problem of making them to work together appears and becomes reason for failures of their implementation. Universal methodology for sustainable development strategy preparation could be prepared and used. As basis can be used the methodology, which was developed in cooperation with the Umbrella association of consultants under UNDP office in Poland.

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STRATEGINIO DARNAUS VYSTYMOŠI ASPEKTAI VIETINĖSE BENDRUOMENĖSE: LIETUVOS PATIRTIS

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma darnaus vystymosi etapų koncepcija, kurią sudaro dviejų, trijų ir keturių dimensijų paradigmos. Planuojant strateginį darnų vystymąsi turėtų būti atsižvelgta į šiuos etapus. Dar visai neseniai Lietuvoje vietos savivaldos institucijos ir akademinė bendruomenė priėmė darnaus vystymosi principus, tačiau šiuo straipsniu siekiama parodyti vietinių bendruomenių nuostatas šiuo klausimu. Paaiškėjo, kad ne visos vietinės bendruomenės grupės (dalininkai) suvokia pagrindinius darnaus vystymosi principus, kyla nepasitikėjimas savivaldybės veiksmais ir priimamais nutarimais, kyla nesutarimų ir konfliktų grėsmė darnaus vystymosi strategijos bei planavimo procese dėl metodologijos spragų ir netikslumų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: darnus vystymasis, strateginis planavimas, vietinės bendruomenės, visuomeninis dalyvavimas, Lietuva.

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