



Building Capacity for Local Sustainability The Fano Guidelines

The DISCUS Project - Developing Institutional and Social Capacities for Urban Sustainability

What preconditions need to be fulfilled before a local sustainability process can produce tangible results? In order to examine and understand the forms of institutional and social capacities that are required for sustainable development policy achievements, the DISCUS fieldworkers undertook research in 40 cities and towns all over Europe.

Based on the findings of the DISCUS project, the **Fano Guidelines** outline the factors and conditions which had been identified as crucial for building up the capacity within local government needed for the successful implementation of local sustainability policies. They have been presented to European local governments during the 'Governing Sustainable Cities' Conference hosted by the City of Fano/Italy, on 4-5 November 2004.

The full results of the DISCUS project are presented in the book 'Governing Sustainable Cities' by B.Evans, M.Joas, S.Sundback and K.Theobald (Earthscan/UK).

More information: www.governingsustainablecities.org

The DISCUS project is a co-operation between the following partners: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, European Secretariat, Freiburg/Germany (co-ordinator); Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Northumbria University, Newcastle/UK; Åbo Akademi University, Turku/Finland; WWF-UK, Godalming/UK; Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon/Portugal; FocusLab, Modena/Italy.



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1

Learning as an organisation

Investment in training on sustainable development for both officers and politicians builds capacity within local government.

We keep pace with social and technological developments in order to make informed decisions while working towards a sustainable future.

At a time when more and more public services are contracted to providers outside local government, local officers as well as politicians need to know what social, environmental and economic implications the different options and technologies for service delivery have, in order to be in the position to set effective sustainability standards and conditions. Building up this expert knowledge within local government requires a readiness of officers for life-long learning rather than trying to address future problems with yesterday's education. In the short term, hiring expert consultants may help initiate this learning process and prepare the ground for a solid local sustainable development process. In the longer term however, local governments must further develop their portfolio of expertise in order to be able to take part in the dialogue with local interest organisations and to facilitate the mediation between these. Therefore, mechanisms that systematically help identify the need for, and ensure the delivery of, training to both elected decision-makers and officers have to be established within local government. This could be extended by supporting training initiatives for private contractors to further embed sustainability principles into service delivery.

Action

- Provide dedicated training on stakeholder and community participation techniques and approaches (ranging from information and consultation to partnerships with stakeholder organisations), and on new public management tools and project management approaches, in order to enhance staff skills and stimulate a 'culture of integrated thinking' on problems and solutions.
- Develop techniques and working practices within local authorities to enhance and upgrade officers' abilities in project design, active listening, negotiation, and other result-orientated approaches.
- Highlight, market and disseminate results, promote "active" actors and the benefits of fruitful co-operation. Reward commitment in terms of public visibility, salary incentives, or increased competencies.



2

Moving away from 'policy silos' within local government

The complexity of sustainable development requires a response that combines knowledge from all policy areas, and utilises the maximum resources available.

We exchange ideas and approaches through cross-departmental working groups and co-operate across policy areas on a daily basis to respond to this challenge.

Historically, the differentiation of local government into departments with specialised responsibilities has certainly been useful in responding to the very specific problems of local society, and has allowed expert knowledge to enter the administration. Cities and towns taking on the challenge of planning their local development in a sustainable way have however experienced the complexity of modern decision-making in local government. It is widely accepted that in a complex world simple solutions are rare, thus the different types of expertise built up over time in many parts of local government must work hand in hand, refer to each other, and create solutions that are more than the sum of single measures taken separately. This requires a 'horizontal' approach - meaning that local government officers as well as politicians approach issues from a range of perspectives rather than sidelining these to one specific policy area. Such an approach requires adequate structures that facilitate the development of exchange and co-operation between all departments as a normal daily working practice.

Action

- Appoint senior leaders and motivated officers within departments as “ambassadors” for sustainability integration and create an administrative network of these ambassadors in order to provide appropriate technical input at the right time and place to any relevant plan or strategy.
- Establish cross-departmental integration by addressing environmental, social and economic criteria in all policies. If possible include targets, indicators, defined responsibilities, and monitoring procedures to evaluate performance.
- Establish cross-departmental working groups on projects thus bringing expertise and learning from different disciplines.



3

Making alliances with people and organisations

Business, organisations and individuals are all sources of influence and knowledge for sustainable development.

We work in alliance to benefit from their input and build mutual trust.

Although local government is the principal decision-maker on sustainability issues, it has to operate within a context where many decisions that affect the sustainability of the city or town are also made outside elected local authorities. Changing patterns of mobility choices, food consumption, tourism, housing preferences and a host of other issues, cannot be addressed only by political decisions but need to involve individual citizens in order to implement the changes required. At the same time, local businesses, organisations with a high profile in a local community such as universities or religious groups, and community-based organisations represent a valuable source of knowledge and additional resources. Working with these for the implementation of sustainable development policies requires a culture within local government that welcomes alliances with external agencies and interests. Rather than fearing a loss of decision-making power, local authorities need to be aware that alliances provide access to different groups within civil society, whose acceptance of, and contribution to decision-making processes, is of central importance to a successful local sustainability strategy and policy implementation. Furthermore, these alliances may be a good starting point for developing mutual capacity and stronger relations of 'trust' between local government and civil society.

Action

- Regularly assess stakeholder organisations' and citizens' experiences of participation and their perceptions of how their involvement has impacted on policy development and implementation.
- Build on existing effective partnerships and further develop informal relations with leaders within civil society. Combine formal and informal partnerships and links between local officers and stakeholder organisations.
- Critically assess the effectiveness of both formal and informal partnerships and monitor the evolution from informal to formal partnerships (and vice-versa).
- Evaluate partnership outcomes – which have resulted in action, learning and change.



4

Facilitating the process and developing credible leadership

Setting an example in sustainability management and activities builds up trust and credibility within civil society.

Our local government acts as a model for others, and at the same time as a facilitator of dialogue, bringing sustainability principles onto the local agenda and channelling participatory input into political decisions.

Public participation should not be misunderstood as a mechanism for local government to delegate the responsibility for sustainable development to citizens, even though progress in this clearly requires their involvement. Local government must be the driver that brings sustainability onto the local agenda, facilitates dialogue and manages planning processes. While input from civil society is important, only local government is in a position to take the conclusions from participatory processes into new policies. In order to build up credibility local government must go further in proactively applying sustainability principles in its own management and activities, such as procurement and commissioning, energy, water, waste and transport. Moreover, it is essential to make such activities visible to citizens and stakeholder interests. Only then can other actors and organisations become convinced of the need to implement such principles themselves.

Action

- Provide up-to-date training to local officers on relevant and new participation tools targeted at specific actors and organisations.
- Be clear and transparent about which level of involvement or participation to adopt: Distinguish between information dissemination, consultation on plans, and stakeholders' and citizens' contribution to implementing projects.
- Co-ordinate and optimise the inter-relationship between different existing bodies and forums for participation managed by different departments, in order to avoid overlaps in participation offers, inefficiency in the use of time and money, and poor quality of outcomes.
- Practice what you preach: Establish sustainability management instruments within your local government, and apply sustainability criteria for daily practices such as procurement, land-use planning, building and construction, energy management or transport.



5

Encouraging creativity and innovation in policy-making

Creative people within and outside local government are key to answering new challenges.

We pilot innovative activities to allow unusual solutions to be tried and tested.

Success in delivering local sustainability is dependent on innovation. New, often unusual, solutions need room to develop. There needs to be a climate of self-confidence within local government, so that new ideas are not perceived as threatening the usual 'way of doing things' but are perceived as welcome and exciting alternatives, even if there may be barriers to overcome in implementing these. Innovative policy-making for local sustainability could be described as the 'art' of finding and liaising with the most creative people both within local government and externally, and encouraging and supporting them in the development of surprising, and formerly untried responses to local needs without having to fear the consequences if they go wrong. Pilot projects for example provide a comparatively risk-free framework where the success (or conversely lack of success) of these cases can be observed and assessed first, instead of taking general decisions at once. The positive results of such projects can then be mainstreamed into the 'way of doing things' and thus lead the city or town to a higher level of sustainability.

Action

- Enhance the competition among local officers, planners, artists and other local individuals and groups for innovative solutions to local problems. Reward new ideas rather than arguing why they wouldn't work.
- Test new technologies and methods in pilot projects and transfer their positive outcomes to everyday practices.
- Adopt a learning approach incorporating action research models where the emphasis is on a cycle of action, critical reflection, improvement and monitoring.
- Provide training to officers and external partners to create awareness of and skills in project life cycle and decision-making processes (problem assessment, idea generation, project definition/design, project implementation, project resources and responsibilities, project monitoring).



6

Communicating to make a difference

Within a knowledge-based society, communication is central to raising awareness of the changes in behaviour that sustainable development demands.

We are open to our citizens' ideas, and we are active communicators using targeted channels and tools to reach out to our community .

Even the most sustainable local initiative is worth little if it is not communicated properly to all citizens and interest organisations. While in a knowledge-based society communication is one of the most important means to make issues appealing to individuals, sustainable development competes with many other issues that are marketed and communicated aggressively. Local government has to respond to this by being both out-reaching and reachable. Being out-reaching means using all channels available to communicate sustainability issues and activities to citizens and interest organisations. This may be through being visible at community events, continuously co-operating with the media, establishing information services, or training staff in information and communication skills. Such an approach involves more than just offering information as it includes the responsibility for making sure a message really reaches its intended audience and an understanding of behavioural change within society. Local government must also be approachable in order to be regarded as a trustworthy and serious level of government by citizens. In practice, this means offering citizen-friendly opening times and facilities, being able to answer requests and enquiries efficiently, and having systems in place for dealing with complaints and comments. This will not only improve awareness of local issues, but will also help citizens to understand the boundaries of what is realistic and achievable by their local authority.

Action

- Use multi-media and traditional communication channels as a mix of uni-lateral and bi-lateral ways of providing information and ensuring real dialogue.
- Provide attractive, easy to understand but scientifically sound information.
- Distinguish between information that aims to attract, to explain effects or causes, or to present success and failure of an activity.
- Articulate messages targeted to hearts (values), minds (rational), and eyes (aesthetics).
- Periodically monitor citizens' and stakeholders' perceptions of the communication tools used.
- Recognise that a linear 'information in, action out' approach to change does not work. Use more innovative models in behavioural change that attempt to define how the complexities of values, motivations, relationships etc impact on societal change. Develop understanding and apply these models.



7

Catalysing action through raising environmental awareness

Winning people's interest in sustainable development issues can be promoted through raising environmental awareness.

We improve the economic and social performance of our city by implementing high quality environmental management schemes and approaches.

Even though social and economic concerns may be most important in many cities and towns, environmental protection still remains one important starting point for the implementation of 'sustainable development' policies. It therefore seems appropriate for local government to catalyse interest and action on the broader aspects of economic sustainability and social equity through focusing initially on raising awareness of the environmental dimension. While this should by no means suggest that sustainability is restricted simply to environmental protection, it underlines the importance of aligning the social and economic agenda with environmental concerns. Within local government, establishing new environmental and sustainability management tools such as EMAS, ISO14001, social and environmental accounting, green and social procurement, environmental and social reporting, or participatory budgets, can be an appropriate starting point for developing an integrated management system for local sustainability.

Action

- Incorporate environmental issues in the local economic and social development agenda by integrating environmental criteria and indicators in single sector budgets, policies and local initiatives.
- Maintain coherence of local policies with the UN Agenda 21 objectives, the Millennium Development Goals and the Aalborg Commitments.
- Publish and promote local practices which have been successful in a 'triple-bottom line' (win-win-win: environmentally, socially and economically successful) sense, showing the synergies and added value of integrated activities for single actors as well as for the local community.
- Publish a periodical assessment of your local efforts and action towards global as well as local goals.



8

Maintaining commitment to achieving the long-term vision

Action for sustainability needs to be step by step whilst guided by the long-term vision.

We implement actions that are effective but acceptable, steadfastly working towards our vision.

The long-term vision for local sustainability may in many cases be very clear, simple to understand, and even attractive. However the path to achieve this consists of numerous small steps and daily decisions that are not always easy to link to the 'big picture'. Finding the courage to stand behind an ambitious but distant vision whilst at the same time not losing orientation while implementing it step by step, is crucial for achieving results. It is therefore of utmost importance that local government - both politicians and officers - have internalised the vision and are aware of the long-term objectives of local development whenever decisions are taken, even if they may appear to have no relevance to sustainability. At the same they need to think pragmatically about how to make each step acceptable to citizens and interest organisations.

Action

- Periodically celebrate your city or town's vision in order to maintain interest in and commitment to its implementation.
- Establish routines, such as a 'sustainability check', that link single council decisions and projects to your city or town's long-term vision.
- Frequently inform citizens and stakeholder organisations on active local groups and individuals, success stories and examples of innovative thinking, and link this explicitly to highlighting opportunities for participation.
- Promote or 'brand' your city or town as sustainable in order to help create a high level of identification of local citizens with the aims of sustainability, and attract the best human resources for improving local social and institutional capacity.



9

Sharing experience with peers

Networking with other cities and towns creates a common cause for the reorientation of local development.

By demonstrating our progress to others, we receive recognition and are encouraged to maintain our ambitious work.

Networking with other towns and cities both within and across countries creates a spirit of co-operation which can help to buoy up local authorities engaged in the implementation of sustainable development – a process that will tend to be slow and characterised by challenges rather than successes. Meeting with other like-minded local government representatives and learning from each other reinvigorates local action for sustainability 'at home'. It also helps local authorities to learn that others also encounter problems and make mistakes in policy development and implementation, and that this is a necessary part of the process. Presenting the experiences and good practices of a local authority builds up a positive image of a municipality externally, and a demand for the continuation of sustainability policies even if political will and commitment is not constant. Networking with other local governments can offer leading local officers and politicians a forum to present themselves as sustainable development pioneers. This in turn creates a greater sense of identity and confidence and thus strengthens the local process.

Action

- Develop projects in partnerships with other local authorities and promote your good practices to other European towns and cities in order to learn from each other, and to create innovative next steps for local sustainability management.
- Take part in regional, national and international conferences, meetings, pilot projects, and city-to-city exchange schemes.
- Make your city the host of national and international events in order to gain recognition linked to the theme of sustainability, and to attract national and international decision makers to become aware of your activities.



10

Influencing all levels of government

Working with other levels of government increases the opportunities for local level considerations to be included in national legislation and strategies for the promotion of sustainable development.

We support and are supported by a dialogue on the framework for local sustainable development.

To a large extent, regional and national government define the range of possibilities for local action towards sustainability. At the same time, they can actively influence acceptance and awareness of sustainable development issues for example through taxation and legislation. While it is crucial for local governments to influence these framework conditions in order to successfully implement their sustainability strategies, regional and national governments are dependent on the information and input received from the local level in order to design their funding and support programmes for sustainable development effectively, and to get support for the introduction of sustainability principles in legislation and taxation. Local government must therefore have an interest in liaising with other levels of government in its promotion of sustainability, and having a high profile in this arena may help it have its voice heard.

Action

- Explicitly link improvements in local sustainability to policies and strategies at other government levels (European, national, regional, district, neighbourhood).
- Highlight local achievements in relation to formal commitments to international or European declarations and their practical implementation.
- Maintain and stimulate sustainability mainstreaming in local policies by referring to relevant international frameworks such as UN Agenda 21, the Aalborg Charter and Commitments, Millennium Development Goals, and other relevant frameworks.
- Find a critical voice - demonstrating 'buy in' across the organisation, between neighbouring local governments and from local communities can go some way to reducing the likelihood of central government ignoring the views of local government.