

Changing Peoples Attitudes – Capacity Building for Local Sustainable Development.

Silke Franke and Holger Magel, Germany

Key words: sustainable municipal development, good governance, civil society, capacity building, land management.

SUMMARY

In 2003 the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment financed an evaluation to give an overview of the Local Agenda 21 processes in the Bavarian municipalities. As a result, the research team of Prof. Magel (TU Muenchen) learned that Agenda 21 has lost of its visionary context, the reality scaled down the expectations. Agenda 21 is not always regarded as an effective instrument to achieve sustainability goals – it is too optional. On the other hand there are best practice examples of municipalities who took the demands seriously. Which lessons can be learned from them?

In several workshops 21 successful municipalities explained how they deal with sustainable development and discussed which aspects of capacity building are relevant. The 21 Bavarian examples proved that municipalities need a constant **mutual reflection** of the common patterns that lead to non-sustainable state of things. But local authorities can not be left alone with this.

Training for “good governance” turns out to be the central point: It is the interchange of ideas, perspectives and arguments that helps to recognize what makes the difference between sustainable and non-sustainable; and it is the **interchange** of (good and bad) examples as well as the mutual reassurances that helps changing attitudes.

Land management as a collective term for all activities dealing with a development of rural and urban areas is the key factor for municipality development. In a sense of *sustainable* land management this instrument is to be handled as contribution to good governance, where public, private and civil society sectors are working together.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“In spite of conferences and declarations, in many parts of the world the developments have been for the worse. The need for a change in attitudes towards sustainable development is greater than ever before” (FIG Agenda 21).

Since its remarkable breakthrough 1992 in Rio de Janeiro sustainability has become a slogan. At present topics like competitiveness, market access, yield return and economic growth marginalize sustainability matters to the economic sector.

According to the German social researcher MEINHARD MIEGEL, Director of the Institute for Economics and Society (IWG Bonn), there are limits to economic growth and continued welfare gains in the Western industrialized countries. Their challenges will be limitation, consolidation and – if required – reduction (Miegel 2006). Thus prosperity has to be defined in another way: From tangible assets to a new quality of life, to social cohesion and purpose in life.

ALOIS GLÜCK, President of the Bavarian Parliament, sees “active civil society” as the road map to revitalise the nation and to gain social cohesion. (Glück 2006). The concept of “active civil society” has to be understood as regulatory policy framework which describes a balanced, joint responsibility of citizens and the state. The state has to concentrate on core functions (like legal order, security, democratic participation, basic conditions for economy, social affairs and education) and on the same time enable civil engagement.

On the level of municipalities the approach is called „Bürgerkommune” (citizens` municipality): Local authorities, local government and citizens are parts of a holistic system. Basic principles of civic engagement are the ones described in the concept of „Good Governance“: In its resolution 2000/64 the UN Commission on Human Rights identified the key attributes as transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness (to the needs of the people).

The following section shows with the example of a research project at the Chair of Land Readjustment and Land Development Prof. HOLGER MAGEL, which topics „modern“ local authorities regard as major, of which relevance Sustainability, Good Governance und Civil Society are in municipalities and how its philosophy can be implemented in the view of the practitioners. The conclusion will describe the requirements for sustainable land management.

2. THE PROJECT “21 SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITIES”

In 2003 the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment financed an evaluation to give an overview of the Local Agenda 21 processes in the Bavarian municipalities. More than 50 % took part in a mail questionnaire survey that was sent to all 2.127 local authorities (Magel, Brand, Auweck 2004). More than one third of the municipalities are engaged in Local Agenda 21-Processes. But Agenda 21 is not always regarded as an effective instrument to achieve sustainability goals – it is too optional. On the other hand there are best practice examples of municipalities who took the demands seriously. Which lessons can be learned by them? The following section will give insight into the project „21 best practice-municipalities for sustainable development“ (initiated by the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment, 2004-2006, editors Prof. Holger Magel, Silke Franke).

The constitution of quality circles

The 21 municipalities taking part in this step were organised in seven thematic working groups called quality circles (each comprising three municipalities). The idea of the quality circles is (cf. Depple 1992) that colleagues with a common base of experience come together voluntarily in order to analyse a shared subject in moderated working groups and find solutions together.

The 21 selected municipalities were recommended by several experts because of their outstanding efforts for sustainability in the fields of:

- energy, climate change,
- settlement, land use,
- transport, mobility,
- natural resources, health,
- social actions,
- economy or
- sustainability management (policy-making, participation).

What attracted the experts’ attention? For example the municipality Furth bei Landshut set itself the goal “100 % renewable energy“. This small village of 3.000 inhabitants is one of the leading towns in Germany in the field of renewable energy: It built the first heating station run with wood chips and developed the idea of civil solar power systems. Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm (22.000 inhabitants) is well known for it’s activities in the fields of municipal land management, especially cadastre of derelict urban land. Pettendorf (3.200 inhabitants) created a play ground both for the young and the young at heart and tries to draw attention to the demands of the demographic change. And Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz (40.000 inhabitants) has developed a Local Sustainability Strategy which is linked to the urban development concept. More than 5.000 citizens took part in the “day of visions” where they were invited to develop ideas and 400 participated in the development of the strategy together with the municipality in several working groups.

The aim of the quality circles

In several quality circle meetings the mayors, representatives of the administration and of civil participatory groups of the 21 municipalities explained their approach towards sustainable development (Magel, Meindl, Franke 2005).

They were asked in which fields of action they realised projects and with which projects they had good experience in achieving sustainability or where they had to scale down their expectations. The descriptions were supposed to give a closer insight into the scope of sustainability and to tell for example which technical, financial or legal aspects set limits. But to the opinion of these practitioners, these are not the (only) crucial points for sustainability. There are enough project ideas, guidelines and methods for the different thematic fields of actions. Irrespective of this, they were very interested to learn from each other about the specific experiences concerning how to motivate civic commitment, how to hold on a once jointly established vision, how to argue against self-interest, scepticism or killer-arguments. This means: The top priority is not a change of actions, **but a need to change people's attitudes towards principles that are demanded in the "global trias 'Good Governance – Sustainability – Civil Society'"** (Magel, Jahnke 2001).

3. THE EXAMPLES OF THE GOOD-PRACTICE-MUNICIPALITIES

The 21 successful municipalities are outstanding because they did not only realize singular projects like civil solar power systems, local sewage plants or working groups on social affairs etc. which are "nice to have". They make use of structures and strategies that embed singular projects into a more comprehensive understanding. What they are working on is a change from government to governance, from service providing public authorities to a civil society. For this, changing people's attitudes is required.

3.1 Think sustainable – find out facts and existing attitudes

Create future instead of reaction to the present. Each municipality should be sensitive to present trends, future perspectives and appropriate attitudes like awareness, moral and ethics. The 21 Bavarian municipalities e.g. are concerned with facts like

- **Demographic change.** Germany is predicted to become a poorer and older society with less population but more segregation. What can municipalities do to sustain social cohesion? How can they provide schooling and employment for the youth?
- **Economic change.** How can municipalities face increasing competition? Are there possibilities to support local or regional economy?
- **Climate change** and exhaustion of natural resources. How can municipalities face increasing natural hazards and declining habitats? How and to which costs can energy and water be provided in future? Are there local solutions for global problems?
- **Municipal finance.** How can municipalities face narrow budgets? In which fields of activity will they have to reduce expenses? And how?
- **Land management.** How can municipalities accommodate the different requirements? Are there for example possibilities to maintain the basic infrastructure?

- **Democracy, civil society and subsidiarity.** How can municipalities activate civic commitment? Are there possibilities to facilitate associations and civic action groups?
- **Good Governance:** How can municipalities take the principles of good governance in? That means become more participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law? Are there possibilities to manage problems effectively, efficiently and in response to critical needs of society?

The solutions of yesterday turn out to be the problems of today (Senge 1996). Municipalities should question existing paradigms and attitudes: Are they still the right answers according to the future challenges and needs? Or do they shape up to be un-sustainable? Do they cling too much to old paradigms like “growth”? Are they too much single-task oriented? For example the Bertelsmann Stiftung calls for a more demographic-sensitive municipal finance policy (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2004). That means for instance that housing should consider alternating needs of a changing society and offer scope for multiple functions (family / singles).

3.2 Professional planning – Make use of instruments and experts

The 21 good practice-municipalities adopted a variety of instruments that give a systematic survey of over unused potentials and protect resources (e.g. like cadastral maps on derelict land and infill sites show potentials to reduce land consumption or an energy atlas shows potentials to reduce energy use) as well as framework development planning (e.g. urban and transport planning).

No municipality can cope with the increasing requirements. There is a need of professionals – planning experts, moderators and managers (e.g. for municipal energy- / mobility-/ habitat-/ finance-management etc.).

Great importance is to give to land-use planning (preparatory land use plan according to German law). The 21 municipalities regard it as *the* governing instrument par excellence – provided that the municipality has set up general principles on development which gives answers to questions like:

- What is our distinctive feature and what do we have to do in order to protect it?
- Which kind of development is wanted and which kind is not wanted?
- Is the designation of building land really “a must”? Will it really meet any demand?
- Do we liberalise the real estate market, allowing speculation or do we regulate actively?
- Which challenges and perspectives will the ongoing demographic and economic change bring forth?
- Which new possibilities does inter-communal cooperation offer?
- Where and how do we spend our financial resources? Who will benefit from it? Which consequential costs will arise?

These questions should not be answered by municipal government alone. The municipalities need their citizens as partners.

3.3 Civil Society: Citizens as Partners

Experts take it for granted that in the future there is no way for municipalities to get by without the partnership of its citizens: “Government policy-making becomes more complicated. It makes it harder for citizens to understand and to hold government accountable. Government’s limited resources make it difficult to ensure policy-making and implementation on its own” (OECD 2001). But civic engagement is not to be mistaken as a substitute for governmental responsibilities. It is a key for revitalizing of society towards a vital community and a better human cooperation (Glück 2004).

A lot of action groups have realized projects that bring benefit for common welfare and quality of life. Strengthening the government-citizen relationship offers a relief to administrative work, because citizens bring with them their personal experiences, new ideas and readiness for joint responsibility.

The Good Governance principles describe key factors for a new perception of the “community system”, in which citizens are regarded as partners. Their relevance has been affirmed by the statements of the best-practice-municipalities:

- Participation and responsiveness: There is no field in which the opinion of the citizens could not play a role – the different target groups like riparian owners, road users, consumers or seniors, adolescents and families know best what their needs are. Their point of view and input should be taken into account. There is a variety of methods like informational meetings, inquiries, working groups, open space, planning for the real etc. The communication between different groups (especially political parties) should always be fair and objective.
- Responsibility and accountability. Citizens (including the youth) who know that they take in a personal responsible part in the municipal development process will perform creditable. The results of their discussions and work should be taken seriously. Commitment is vital for success.
- Transparency due to the interaction of municipal council members, municipal administration and citizens. The co-operation should be based on transparently organized structures and rules for mutual information, final decision making, public relation etc.
- Community Empowerment: Civic commitment should be activated by ‘enabling structures’, e.g. workspaces, own budget, but also dedicated staff (single contact person), training courses and expert advice.
- Recognition culture: The voluntary contribution of persons and groups to common welfare should get public acknowledgment and expressions of appreciation, e.g. via rewards, festivals, reports in newspapers and newsletters, showcases of their work etc.

The 21 best-practice municipalities have long-standing experience in the field of civic commitment. It takes time to develop this understanding. Government-citizens relations are a very sensitive topic, because often there are accompanied by mistrust and fear of loss of power. Participation requires resources like time, funding, expertise. But these resources are well spent. They offer better policies, voluntary compliance, identification with the

community and more trust in government. The 21 municipalities have learned that civic commitment is necessary for the vitality of democracy.

3.4 Override boundaries

The tasks municipalities fulfil are increasing whereas the means (financial and personal resources, property) are often narrow. Municipalities can take advantage of cooperation with neighbouring municipalities (inter-communal cooperation), e.g. shared infrastructure and services, joint business parks, joint master plan.

Furthermore the exchange of experience in regional development projects, city-to-city-co-operations and municipal networks offer other perspectives, innovative ideas and concepts.

3.5 Set up sound policies

In order to implement the findings of the professional and citizen experts (analysis of the status quo, future trends, attitudes and needs) the municipalities should develop sound policies and strategies for example in the fields of

- energy policy (e.g. reducing dependency on singular energy resources)
- social policy (e.g. promoting soft skills, education, health)
- comprehensive land policy (land management, land pool, reduction of demand of land)
- financial policy (follow priorities, regard follow-up costs, activate citizens' initiative)

3.6 Be brave - Put principles into practice

Innovative enterprises, new paradigms and methods demand the courage to defend them against prejudices and anguishes. The new understanding of development, which is not measured by quantity and economical values, but by the means of quality of life and spiritual values is a big vision. The state of Bhutan has adopted it into its concept of “Gross National Happiness” (Bhutan 2000).

4. NEED FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Today development of municipalities has to be regarded and practiced as a strategic and highly professional process. Local politicians and government have to meet these challenges in an offensive manner and with the willingness to learn. They have to handle this new dimension more responsibly, certain attitudes in daily routine, especially decision making, have to be changed (Magel, Jahnke 2001).

What possibilities of capacity building are conceivable?

The central result of the quality circles with 21 good-practice-municipalities is: municipalities need training in the field of good governance, sustainability and civil society. The method of the **quality circles** provided the 21 municipalities with an interchange of different ideas, perspectives and arguments. The interchange of views and examples strengthens the ability to recognize what makes the difference between sustainable and non-sustainable, between government and governance. The dialogue with approved colleagues (at eye level) reassures the key actors if they are “on the right path” or gives hints where alternatives may be a better solution. This comes along with the definition of LENELIS KRUSE-GRAUMANN, vice-chairman of the German National Committee on the UN-Decade Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: Thus sustainable development means an open perspective with no rigid appraisal of „good“ or „bad“ development. These judgements have to be negotiated time and time again (Kruse-Graumann 2005).

The 21 best-practice-municipalities would like the quality-circles to be continued. They could imagine establishing a special network of excellent municipalities. This network is thought to prefer quality (and not quantity) and to work on high standards. Therefore they would create criteria for new “junior-partners”. Seniors would first ‘adopt’ new municipalities before they are integrated into the network itself. The network would deal with future topics (e.g. demographic change) and new methods. In doing so, the best-practice-municipalities would obtain their leading role and would take along newcomers. But they have made clear that they need external impulses and backing from professional consultants, moderators, planning experts and training.

According to the best-practice-municipalities the training should foster a new understanding of local authorities by

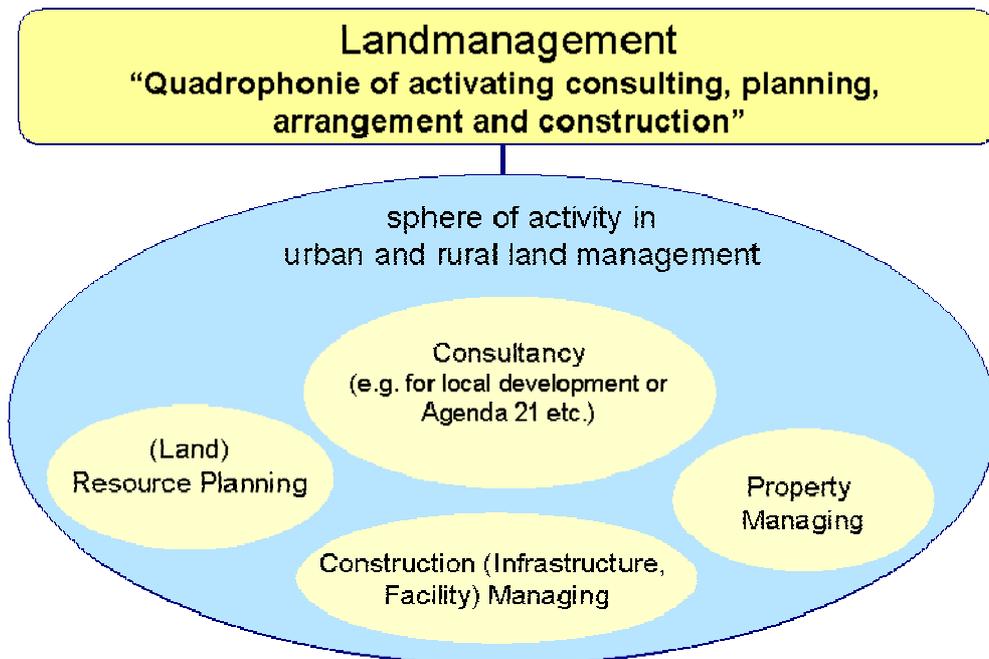
- shaping opinion due to the principles of the municipal code and the philosophy of good governance and civil society
- discussion of values (how do we want to live in the future?)
- competences in leadership and collaboration in the means of good governance
- competences in communication, motivation and argumentation
- project and process management
- expertise, management

Expertise is of great importance especially in the field of **land management**, i.e. in all activities dealing with the development of rural and urban areas. Providing a “quadrophonie

of activating consulting, planning, arrangement and construction” (Magel 2004) land management it can be used as tool for sustainability. It offers a dynamic and integrative understanding of municipal development.

LANDMANAGEMENT

The new challenge to urban and rural development



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5. CONCLUSION

Sustainable development is a vision. Capacity building for local sustainable development means to make this vision a strategic one: Sustainability should not happen by chance.

Municipalities need an increased awareness of future challenges. The term municipality is at the same time to be understood as a holistic system: Local authorities, local government and citizens are equal partners. They share responsibility for common welfare and quality of life.

Capacity building is first of all an open dynamic learning process in which attitudes are questioned and in which the understanding of “good” or “bad” sustainability as well as “good” or “bad” governance is carried out in joint discussions.

Quality circles are a good tool to improve awareness and understanding. The participants exchange ideas and positive (as well as negative) examples. They are able to compare different attitudes, different solutions for similar problems and reveal opportunities for further development.

Instruments, especially in the field of land management, include a potential for sustainable development. They can be used as steering tool for sustainability – provided they are combined with a clear mission statement.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Silke Franke

Diplom-Geographer
Researcher, Technische Universitaet Muenchen
Member of the Board of the Francis of Assisi Academy

Holger Magel

Co-Director of Institute of Geodesy, GIS and Land Management
Chair of Land Readjustment and Land Development
Director of Master`s Program Land Management and Land Tenure for urban and rural development
President of the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) 2003 - 2006

CONTACTS

Dipl.-Geogr. Silke T. Franke

Technische Universitaet Muenchen
Centre of Land Tenure and Land Management
Arcisstrasse 21
D-80290 Muenchen
Deutschland/Germany/R.F.A.
Tel: 0049/(0)89/28922519
Fax: 0049/(0)89/28923933
e-mail: franke@landentwicklung-muenchen.de
<http://www.landentwicklung-muenchen.de>

O.Univ. Prof. Dr.-Ing. Holger Magel

Technische Universitaet Muenchen
Centre of Land Tenure and Land Management
Arcisstrasse 21
D-80290 Muenchen
Deutschland/Germany/R.F.A.
Tel: 0049/(0)89/28922535
Fax: 0049/(0)89/28923933
e-mail: magel@landentwicklung-muenchen.de
<http://www.landentwicklung-muenchen.de>