

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Abstract

Environmental issues are enhanced by crowding together pollution sources as it is occurring in urban areas. Meanwhile urbanization is a continuous process that comprises larger and larger proportions of population. Therefore, urban environmental management is amongst the most important challenges to be addressed by local authorities. The paper aims to provide guidance in finding the most appropriate framework to approach this issue by presenting the most representative international and european initiatives and programs. Sustainable City Programme, the Aalborg Commitment, Local Agenda 21, and the Thematic Strategy for Urban Environment are presented as initiatives that could provide toolkits to address urban environmental management in an integrated manner that respects the principles of sustainability.

Keywords: urbanization, environmental management, Sustainable City Programme, Aalborg Commitment, thematic strategies

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POLITICI ȘI PROGRAME DE DEZVOLTARE URBANĂ DURABILĂ

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Rezumat

Problemele de mediu sunt amplificate de aglomerarea surselor de poluare așa cum se întâmplă în zonele urbane. În același timp, urbanizarea este un proces continuu care cuprinde o proporție din ce în ce mai mare a populației. Prin urmare, managementul de mediu urban se numără printre cele mai importante provocări care trebuie abordate de autoritățile locale. Lucrarea urmărește să furnizeze o serie de repere pentru identificarea celui mai potrivit model pentru abordarea problemei prin prezentarea unor inițiative internaționale și europene reprezentative. Programul Orașul Durabil, Angajamentul Aalborg, Agenda Locală 21 și Strategia Tematică pentru Mediul Urban sunt prezentate ca inițiative care pot asigura metode și tehnici pentru a aborda managementul de mediu urban într-o manieră integrată care respectă principiile dezvoltării durabile.

Cuvinte cheie: urbanizare, management de mediu, Programul Orașul Durabil, Angajamentul Aalborg, strategii tematice



1. INTRODUCTION

Cities concentrate social and economic activities, host the events of the most important decisions and businesses, transform space and leave behind the path of nature. Here everything can be sold and bought, including ideas, labor, and people. The last decades have witnessed an intense urban development, which led to the increase of cities number and size. The largest urban areas of the world held tens of millions of people (Tokyo: 36.7 million; Delhi: 22 million; Sao Paulo: 20 million) (UNFPA, 2011). The urban population's proportion accounts for more than half of Earth's total population and the process is continuing. It is expected that in 2030 more than 60% of population will live in cities, representing 4.9 billion people. Homo urbanus is featured by a crowded habitat, tolerance to strangers, predictable behavior supported by accepted rules, good access to information and almost complete rupture from natural rhythms (Candea et al., 2006).

The urban phenomenon is in continuous renewal since it responds to a certain form of civilization, to a certain era, being a record of transformations from the first embryonic state of the ancient period to the modern city of today with its persistent paradox – the incapacity to acknowledge its own limits. Cities concentrate numerous individuals who perform mainly non-agricultural activities, have political and administrative functions, held a significant industrial, commercial, and socio-cultural potential and are related to their surroundings by a complex interdependencies. Today's world is a world of cities, since cities allow connections among places and peoples in productive units able to adapt to a dynamic environment.

The economic importance of cities is growing continuously. In most of the cases, cities' contribution to national economy exceeds the proportion of their population. Therefore, cities could be considered engines of development, representing centers of great attractiveness and influence on regional level. The attractiveness is built through the large number of economic opportunities. Population is attracted by these opportunities for various reasons that range from escaping poverty to valuing business opportunities. Another evidence of urbanization's contribution to development is depicted by its positive correlation with the human development index. Thus, states with more than 70% urban population record the highest level of this index (Bran et al., 2007).

Concentration of people and intense economic activity raise the question of environmental sustainability. Cities ecological footprint always exceeds their actual area, but this does not necessarily indicate their unsustainability. Nevertheless, urbanization could be regarded as an important environmental challenge since in urban settlements a large number of pollution sources are also

concentrated. Air pollution, municipal waste, sewage are the most common environmental issues to be addressed by urban environmental management.

The trends of urbanization and the unfolding environmental crises are the main drivers of sustainable urban development policies and programs. By applying the principle of global environmental management assumed by the sustainable development concept (Rojanschi et al., 2006), it becomes necessary to identify and understand these policies and programs in order to identify guidelines and good practices to underpin managerial tools for public administration of these areas. Our paper intends to explore these policies and programs, presenting the most recent understandings of sustainable urban development worldwide and at European level.

2. SUSTAINABLE CITY PROGRAM (SCP)

United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and United Nations – Habitat launched the SCP in 1990 with the goal of developing capacities of environmental management of urban areas based on public-private partnership, improving corporate know-how, and increasing technical and financial resources available for solving urban environmental problems.

The topic of sustainable urban development was of early interest for environmental agents. Thus, the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, already makes the outlines for local policies and action plans. Based on these guidelines, it is adopted the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) to be applied at city level. The SCP is a key instrument for implementing the environmental dimension of this agenda. SCP operated at many levels, deriving support at country, regional and global levels for the needs and priorities identified and city level. At city level, SCP strengthened the capacities through technical cooperation within municipal authorities and their partners in the public, private, and community sectors for environmental planning and management, while at global level: SCP facilitated information and experience exchange among various stakeholders and helped the advance of the environmental managerial know-how through networks (e.g. the Urban Environment Forum). SCP involved a partnership with more than 40 cities from all around the world where new advances in environmental management were implemented. The structure of SCP projects considering their repartition on continents is presented in fig.1. The bulk of these projects were deployed in Africa, where urban development poses the most challenging environmental issues, followed by Asia and Pacific and the Arab States. The SCP projects are different, their design being adapted to the local features of environmental challenges. Thus SCP projects comprised: LA21 cities, demonstration cities, cities in preparation, regional level projects and national level projects (Tanzania, Nigeria, and Philippines).

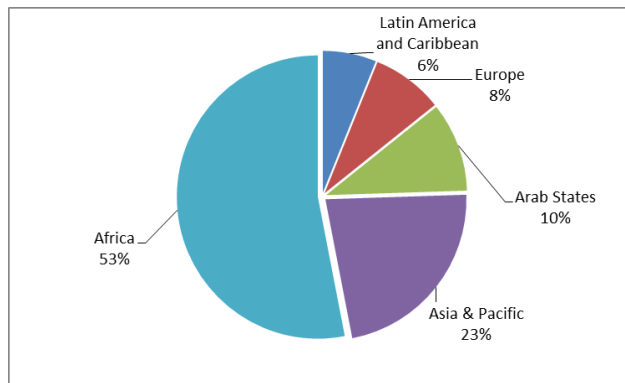


FIG.1 - STRUCTURE OF SCP PROJECTS BY CONTINENTS

Source: UN-Habitat and UNEP (2001). Sustainable cities programme - 1990 to2000. pg.3 (modified)

In terms of SCP a sustainable city is the city where achievements in social, economic, and physical development are made to last. It has a lasting supply of the environmental resources on which its development depends, using them only at a level of sustainable yield, maintains a lasting security from environmental hazards that have the potential to threaten development achievements, allowing only for acceptable risk (UN-Habitat and UNEP, 2001). SCP provides a useful insight on the structure of city priorities from an environmental standpoint. This structure of priorities is presented in fig.2.

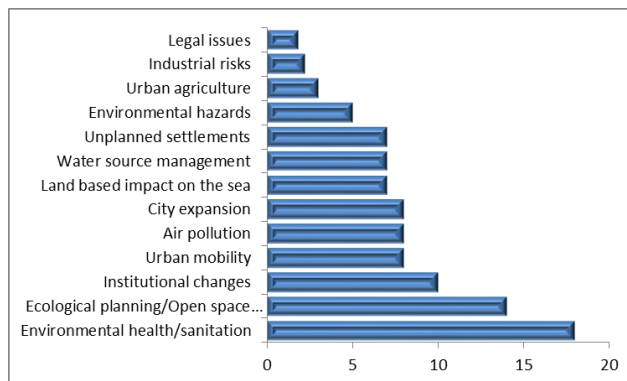


FIG.2 - STRUCTURE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES ACCORDING TO SCP AND LA21 PARTNER CITIES (%)

Source: UN-Habitat and UNEP (2001). Sustainable cities programme - 1990 to2000. pg.11 (modified)

SCP used a range of thematic tools to support strategic urban development planning. These tools include: environmental management information system (EMIS), gender responsive environmental planning and management, and urban air quality management. EMIS combines a information system on environmental concerns with mapping in geographical information system (GIS) in order to produce meaningful maps. Based on the experiences of applying these tools in various cities there were edited and published the handbooks and toolkits which provide practical solutions for individual stages and could guide and support other strategic urban planning actions.

Another important role of SCP was of mobilizing resources worldwide and facilitating information and experience sharing. Thus, the program acted as an inter-agency by collaborating with a full range of international support organizations and yielded the Urban Environmental Forum (UEF) which has the potential to develop into a mechanism through which cities and programmes around the world can collaborate directly in working out appropriate approaches to urban environmental problems. UEF covers a network of over 350 cities and 50 international support programs.

3. THE AALBORG COMMITMENTS

The European area is featured by a high level of urbanization, with more than two thirds of the population living in cities. Interest in urban development and cities sustainability grew, numerous cities adopting LA21. In 1994, the adoption of this development model was institutionalized by signing the "Charter of European Cities and Towns toward Sustainability at the European Conference on Sustainable Cities held in Aalborg (Denmark).

The goal of this document is represented by decoupling economic growth from environmental impact and increasing the quality of life. In this respect, it is necessary to integrate policy, economic, social, and environmental concerns in urban management. The charter expresses the signatory parties' consensus on:

- The role of European cities;
- Concepts and principles of sustainability;
- Local strategies toward sustainability;
- Sustainability as a creative local process for balance;
- Solving problems by negotiating with a wide range of stakeholders;
- Urban economy toward sustainability;
- Social equity toward sustainability;
- Sustainable use of land;
- Responsibilities regarding climate change;
- Preventing the contamination of ecosystems;
- Local governance as a precondition;

- Citizens are key actors and community needs to be involved in all decisions regarding urban development.

Since its adoption in 1994, the Aalborg Commitment was signed by 659 municipalities from 35 countries. Most of the engagements came from Spain (329), Italy (136), Portugal (57), France (17), Sweden (15), and United Kingdom (10) (fig.3).

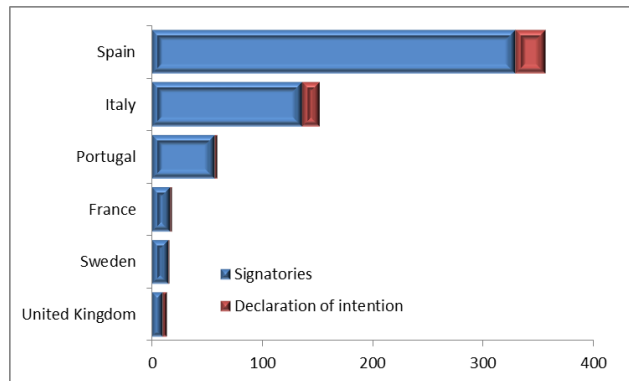


FIG.3 - TOP AALBORG COMMITMENT SIGNATORY COUNTRIES
Source: Aalborg Commitment's web site (www.aalborgplus10.dk)

Building on these milestones it was planned an implementation campaign for the sustainable city concept and the guidelines for Local Action Plans toward Sustainability were stated. Currently, numerous European cities adopted the LA21 development strategy, being more or less advanced in this process (table 1).

TABLE 1 - PROPORTION OF CITIES THAT INITIATED LA21 IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN STATES

Country	% cities	% population
Austria	8.00	-
Switzerland	4.00	29
Czech Republic	6.00	13
Germany	20.40	-
Denmark	85.00	87
France	0.42	-
Italy	6.00	20
Island	50.00	85
Norway	83.00	73
Netherlands	34.00	-
Sweden	70.00	75
Finland	73.00	86
Great Britain	93.00	-

Source: Federal Office of Spatial Development (ARE) (2005). National Promotion of Local Agenda 21 in Europe.

LA21 implementation was favored by factors such as (ARE, 2005):

- Cooperation among central and local governmental authorities: Denmark, Austria, Italy, Sweden;
- Cooperation among different sectors of administration and local actors: Czech Republic, Sweden;
- Innovative educational approaches: Sweden
- Support of Prime Minister: Great Britain;
- Support of Environmental Ministry: Czech Republic;
- The fact that LA21 is part of the national sustainable development strategy: Great Britain, Germany;
- The fact that LA21 is a high quality management tool.

The most important restraints were related to the lack of human and material resources, lack of political support and an incomplete legal basis.

LA21 was also implemented in Romania in a number of cities and counties, such as Ploiesti, Giurgiu,

4. EU'S THEMATIC STRATEGY ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Urban development is in focus of EU's environmental policy too. Thus, for the implementation of the current environmental action plan (the sixth ones) there were elaborated a number of thematic strategies. These comprise the Thematic strategy on urban development, which was adopted by the European Commission on 11th January 2006 based on the interim Communication "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment" adopted in February 2004.

This strategy takes in account the outcomes of voluntary initiatives such as the Aalborg Commitment and outlines the priorities of urban development at EU level (European Commission, 2006). Most of European cities are facing a set of common environmental issues such as air pollution, waste generation, incomplete sewage systems, noise pollution, unplanned development, low quality buildings. Nevertheless, history, geography, climate, economic and social structure create a variety of situations, with particular issues to be addressed in various moments.

The appropriate level to address sustainable urban development is local administration, since it has the capacity to identify causes and the particular pattern of their interdependencies. This will allow an

integrated approach in order to avoid the cancelation of certain expected effects by the development of side effects. Meanwhile, there are actions to be taken at regional, national, and even European level. The thematic strategy was adopted based on the range of actions to be performed by EU in order to support local authorities. This support consists in information brokerage and funding of various projects and is transposed in the following measures:

- guidance for integrated environmental management;
- guidance for sustainable urban transportation;
- support for a wide experience exchange throughout Europe: demonstrative networks and points, national focal points network for urban issues;
- European Commission's page for local authorities;
- Training;
- Using other programs to support communities.

The strategy's goal is to improve the implementation of EU's environmental policy and environmental legislation at local level by supporting local authorities in the adoption of integrated approaches for urban management toward sustainability. Its outcome will be an improved urban environment, more attractive cities and lower pressure of urban areas on their surroundings.

5. CONCLUSION

Urbanization is an unfolding process that will comprise more and more people challenging the management skills of urban settlements in various ways. Environmental issues are amongst the most demanding problems that could amplify due to the patterns of urban environment, but which also could mark significant progresses in the quality of life if they are approached in an integrated manner. In this respect, the paper provided insights on representative international and national voluntary and governmental initiatives that target sustainable urban development.

The path of urbanization and the increased awareness of environmental issues created a fertile ground for the development of these initiatives. The United Nations SCP focused on cities from developing countries since here urbanization trend is overlapping with the expansion of slums, amplifying the most common environmental concerns in health and even life endangering problems. In case of developed countries the most important voluntary initiative is the Aalborg Commitment, along with the adoption of LA21. Meanwhile, at EU level there is adopted the Thematic Strategy for Urban Environment which

helps local authorities to find the most appropriate solutions of environmental management in urban areas that respect the principles of sustainable development.

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