ICLEI
Local Governments for Sustainability

# LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY 2012

# TAKING STOCK AND MOVING FORWARD

# GLOBAL REVIEW

This global review is part of the documents ICLEI is publishing on the occasion of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro 2012 (Rio+20). It is accompanied by the publication 'Local Sustainability 2012: Showcasing progress. Case studies'.

Both documents are published as 'ICLEI Global Reports' - a series of research and analytical reports produced by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability. By featuring different themes and characters ICLEI Global Reports contribute to international discussions and policy developments. ICLEI Global Reports are available at www.iclei.org/globalreports or in print for a cover fee.

The Local Sustainability 2012 reports can be downloaded at: www.iclei.org/local2012
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# FOREWORDS

1992-2012 - these two decades mark a global success story. What was kicked off by the call for "Local Agenda 21" at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and ten years later reinvigorated by the launch of a decade of "Local Action 21" at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit has resulted in the largest-ever movement of cities and local governments worldwide for a common purpose.

About ten thousand local governments have engaged the local community and local stakeholders in a participatory, local, sustainable development process - Local Agenda 21. ICLEI's Local Agenda 21 Campaign, UNDP's Capacity 21 and UNEP/UN-Habitat's Sustainable Cities program have been the early drivers of the movement.

The two decades of local sustainability work have not only brought about tens of thousands of local initiatives and urban projects improving local and global environmental conditions, but - most importantly - introduced and anchored a participatory governance culture in many cities, towns and counties. As a long-lasting effect, the integration of public and stakeholder consultation and participation in defining visions, setting goals, defining projects and reviewing progress has become a routine in planning and decision making processes.

This study shows the different ways in which cities and local governments have taken up the work towards sustainability over the past two decades: what has happened, what were the drivers, what experiences have been gained, what lessons could be learned? The understanding of the past will help us define the next goals and design the most effective policies for the decades to come. How the future of human civilization on our planet will look like will chiefly depend on the performance of cities and local governments. The future is shaped by us in every moment. We must get today's plans, projects and decisions right.

I would like to thank the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for having enabled us to carry out this study, and the ICLEI expert team for having reviewed and analyzed two decades of local action for sustainability. The Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development has provided the occasion for this review, and ICLEI and its partners have drawn conclusions and will map out the future path for local action for global sustainability, because Local Action Moves the World.

**KONRAD OTTO-ZIMMERMANN**
Secretary General
ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

The present report, conceived by ICLEI, meets the need to highlight the importance of local implementation of sustainable development. Nowadays, almost everyone claims to be doing "sustainable development": the concept often enables any deeper queries to be eluded. A territorial approach, on the contrary, provides the opportunity to make sustainable development the lever of genuine change.

Territories are far more than physical spaces: they are communities, systems of relations, and they represent the most suitable level for managing the economy, social cohesion and relations between society and the environment as a whole. But, as the present report illustrates through many examples, it presupposes a mode of governance based on joined-up relationships between stakeholders, sectors and their know-how, that creates the conditions for jointly working towards the common good. This represents a real cultural and institutional revolution, and implies a new ethic of co-responsibility, a new social contract. In other words, the territorial approach to sustainable development corresponds to the need for governance of all levels of society based on the principle of co-responsibility (c.f. www.ethica-respons.net)

The exchange of experience between cities is the condition sine qua non of developing new knowledge. These different local experiments help build more responsible societies. The issue in these exchanges is to discover shared principles that need to be respected, and to show how these principles can be implemented in every specific case. The present report contributes to the vast and long-standing effort to build perspectives for tomorrow's world, by the balanced exchange of experience. Our foundation has supported this effort for more than twenty years. We are proud to welcome the present report as an important contribution to the recent international web database dedicated to local governance and cities: www.citego.info

**PIERRE CALAME**
President of the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind

**JULIEN WOESSNER**
Responsible of the urban programs in the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind

Launched at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was a watershed moment for cities and local governments who were looking to tackle global problems previously thought beyond their reach. Equally importantly, the LA21 paradigm prioritized participatory processes in urban decision-making. Ever since then cities have been at the centre of global sustainability efforts.

LA21 has been as much about process as product, and continues to provide a useful approach to local authorities. It is clear, however, that the range of approaches that cities are employing has expanded. Local Sustainability 2012 explores the achievements of LA21 over the past two decades, its current status in a variety of urban contexts and the general state of urban sustainability efforts in cities around the world.

Twenty years later many cities remain committed to the broader goals of LA21. There are distinct differences in approaches depending on the city size, institutional setting and development context. Yet most of these cities have tended to increase the involvement of all their stakeholders and maintain a holistic view of sustainability.

However, other cities have shifted away from LA21 in name or approach. Climate change and biodiversity have become dominant entry points into local sustainability action. Environmentally, many of these cities are achieving higher levels of efficiency at lower levels of impact.

At the same time, very few cities have been able to address the deeper structural challenges to sustainability, namely rapid urban growth and unsustainable consumption and production. Nevertheless, Rio+20 is a tremendous opportunity to revisit global urban priorities and give new impetus to local sustainability efforts.

As we enter the third decade since the Earth Summit, it is clearer than ever that cities are going to have to deliver on global sustainability targets. Cities have inherent advantages related to density, connectivity and efficiency that allow them to innovate, achieve more linked-up governance and consume fewer resources. Whether and how they harness these advantages is the challenge that faces them. UN-Habitat and its global community of partners stand ready to help them.

**DR. JOAN CLOS**
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director,
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

# INDEX

# OVERVIEW

This study is part of ICLEI's contribution to the international preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as the Rio+20 Conference. It focuses on the role of local governments in the last two decades of global action for sustainable development, looking back at achievements and proposing recommendations for the future.

The first chapter highlights the importance of the Rio+20 Conference as the twentieth anniversary of Local Agenda 21 and provides an overview of previous studies conducted by ICLEI to monitor its implementation worldwide. Adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro 1992, Local Agenda 21 inspired local governments worldwide to engage in voluntary sustainable development initiatives. The chapter discusses issues related to evaluating local sustainability today and outlines the methodology of this study.

The second chapter argues that what has emerged in the last two decades is a global movement of local governments committed to sustainable development and discusses how the notion of Local Agenda 21 has evolved over time.

The third chapter outlines a governance-oriented typology of local sustainability processes, based on the main initial drivers behind local processes. Five key types of local sustainability processes are described, characterised by the political level and the type of organization that initiated them. They are: Local Government Strategy, Civil Society Initiative, Concerted Action, National Policy and International Cooperation. The potential and limits of different framework conditions are then discussed, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the development of local sustainability processes and distil critical issues for further progress.



The fourth chapter lists main reference frameworks used by the local sustainability movement in order to steer and evaluate local initiatives. The authors distinguish between bottom-up initiatives coming from the local governments themselves and the top-down ones, developed by regional and international organizations to "localize" their strategies.

The next chapter looks at changes in terms of how local sustainability has been understood and governed over the last two decades, as well as at the changing role of local governments. Starting from the concept of sustainable development, the authors reflect upon progress in terms of managing local sustainability processes and evolving local priorities, as well as upon the enhanced culture of public participation in sustainable development processes. Finally, the chapter explores the link between decentralization processes and local action for sustainability and moves on to describe the growing importance of local governments as international actors, pointing to their active role and increased recognition in global policy processes, e.g. in the field of climate change and biodiversity.

The last chapter offers ten key points that serve as conclusions and as recommendations for the future, based both on the results of the study and ICLEI's 20 years of experience in working with local sustainability processes. The chapter presents local governments' views on the challenges that the global community is facing and their proposed solutions to achieve the future we want.

The study is accompanied by a collection of case studies, published separately as *Local Sustainability 2012: Showcasing Progress. Case studies*, which showcases examples of innovative local actions for sustainable development from all over the world. To read the case study collection and find out more about local government activities in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference, visit www.iclei.org/local2012.

# 20 YEARS OF LOCAL AGENDA 21

In June 2012 global leaders meet in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as Rio+20. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced it as "one of the most important meetings in UN history", crucial for determining our collective future.[1] With urban areas home to 50% of the world's population and accounting for 75% of carbon emissions, it is increasingly clear that it is in cities that this collective future will be shaped.[2]

# RETURNING TO RIO

The name "Rio+20" refers to the 20th anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, better known as the Earth Summit. The Conference ended, among others, with the adoption of Agenda 21, the voluntary UN programme of action for implementing sustainable development. This document contained a chapter entitled "Local Authorities' initiatives in support of Agenda 21" (Chapter 28) which gave birth to the global Local Agenda 21 movement. In the words of Maurice Strong, the Secretary-General of the 1992 Earth Summit, *"of the many programmes that have resulted from the Earth Summit, none is more promising or important than this one, which has hundreds of local authorities around the world now setting out and implementing their Local Agenda 21s".*[3]

Returning to Rio in 2012, the global community should take note of the unprecedented success of this movement, one of the most extensive follow-up programmes to Agenda 21, and discuss how to further support and scale up local action for sustainability.

*"As the level of governance closest to the people, [local authorities] play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development."*

Chapter 28, Agenda 21 (1992)

Local sustainability initiatives take many forms and reflect the self-defined goals of local communities, who often define sustainability in different ways according to their values and priorities. While Local Agenda 21 helped inspire a movement, the concept of sustainability is now embraced widely by municipalities, businesses, and organizations that may have never even heard of Agenda 21.

The aim of this study is to document the variety of local processes for sustainability – whether they are related to Local Agenda 21 or not – that have emerged across political and economic cultures globally. It is beyond the scope of this report to calculate how far these processes contributed to improving the condition of our planet and living conditions of its citizens, if such calculations are at all possible. However, it is important to acknowledge that local initiatives, many of them inspired by Local Agenda 21, have made a lasting mark not only on local but also on national and international governance systems, changing profoundly the way we think about sustainable development and pushing the boundaries of what is achievable. ICLEI, the original proponent of Local Agenda 21, has long argued that "local action moves the world" and the purpose of this study is to show how this has been done.

# ICLEI - LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Founded in 1990, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability [4] is today the largest international association of local governments for sustainable development. Membership is constantly growing and today numbers about 1200 local governments, coming from over 70 different countries and representing almost 570 million people. With its network of offices around the globe and daily contact with local government officials, ICLEI is uniquely positioned to act as a repository of knowledge and experience related to local sustainability processes. Over the last 20 years ICLEI experts have assisted countless local, regional and national governments in planning and implementing local sustainability initiatives, authored numerous manuals, guidebooks and reports on the theme and participated in thousands of events, with and on behalf of local governments.

In the run up to the Rio+20 Conference ICLEI is heavily involved in the official UN preparatory process, acting as Local Authority Major Group Co-organizing Partner and, together with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), coordinating the input of local governments into the international discussions. At the conference itself ICLEI will facilitate the presence and participation of local governments. This study is therefore not merely a theoretical exercise but will also lay the ground for the local government contribution to the Rio+20 Conference, drawing from the experience and lessons learned from the last 20 years to propose new ways forward for local governments and the wider global community.



# RIO+5: LOCAL AGENDA 21 TAKES OFF

Twice in the past ICLEI has analyzed Local Agenda 21 progress on a global scale. In 1997 the first assessment [5] was conducted to inform the UN General Assembly Special Session, which was tasked with a five-year review of Agenda 21. According to Agenda 21 chapter 28 quoted above, *"by 1996 most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on a 'local Agenda 21' for the community"*. For the purpose of this first assessment, ICLEI had adopted the following, working definition of the Local Agenda 21 process:

*"Local Agenda 21 is a participatory, multi-sectoral process to achieve the goals of Agenda 21 at the local level through the preparation and implementation of a long-term, strategic action plan that addresses priority local sustainable development concerns."*

This definition excluded, among others, activities that were stemming from the simple delegation of national or state-level responsibilities to the local level, ones that included only a one-off consultation process or did not engage a diversity of stakeholders. The assessment was based on the results of two separate questionnaires, developed to capture the distribution and progress of Local Agenda 21 initiatives. The first one was addressed to national governments, National Sustainable Development Councils and national and regional local government organizations, while the second one directly targeted ICLEI local government members.

According to the survey, in 1997 Local Agenda 21 activities were underway in more than 1800 local governments in 64 countries. Over 80% of the reported activities were taking place in 20 countries with established or nascent national Local Agenda 21 campaigns.

A staggering 90% of initiatives were taking place in high-income countries. Those underway in middle- and low-income countries were less focused on environmental issues but aimed at a better integration of environmental, social and economic issues, even if they included a shorter time perspective than those in high-income countries.

The analysis highlighted the key role of national municipal associations who, thanks to their established legitimacy with local government leaders and capacity to provide country-specific training and technical support, proved very effective in mobilizing and supporting local action. In particular, local government organizations were instrumental in using the experience of early pilots and model cities to generate a truly national movement, engaging the majority of local governments.

ICLEI predicted a rapid increase in Local Agenda 21 processes in middle- and low-income countries following the establishment of national campaigns and the growing interest of international donors in supporting these kinds of processes.

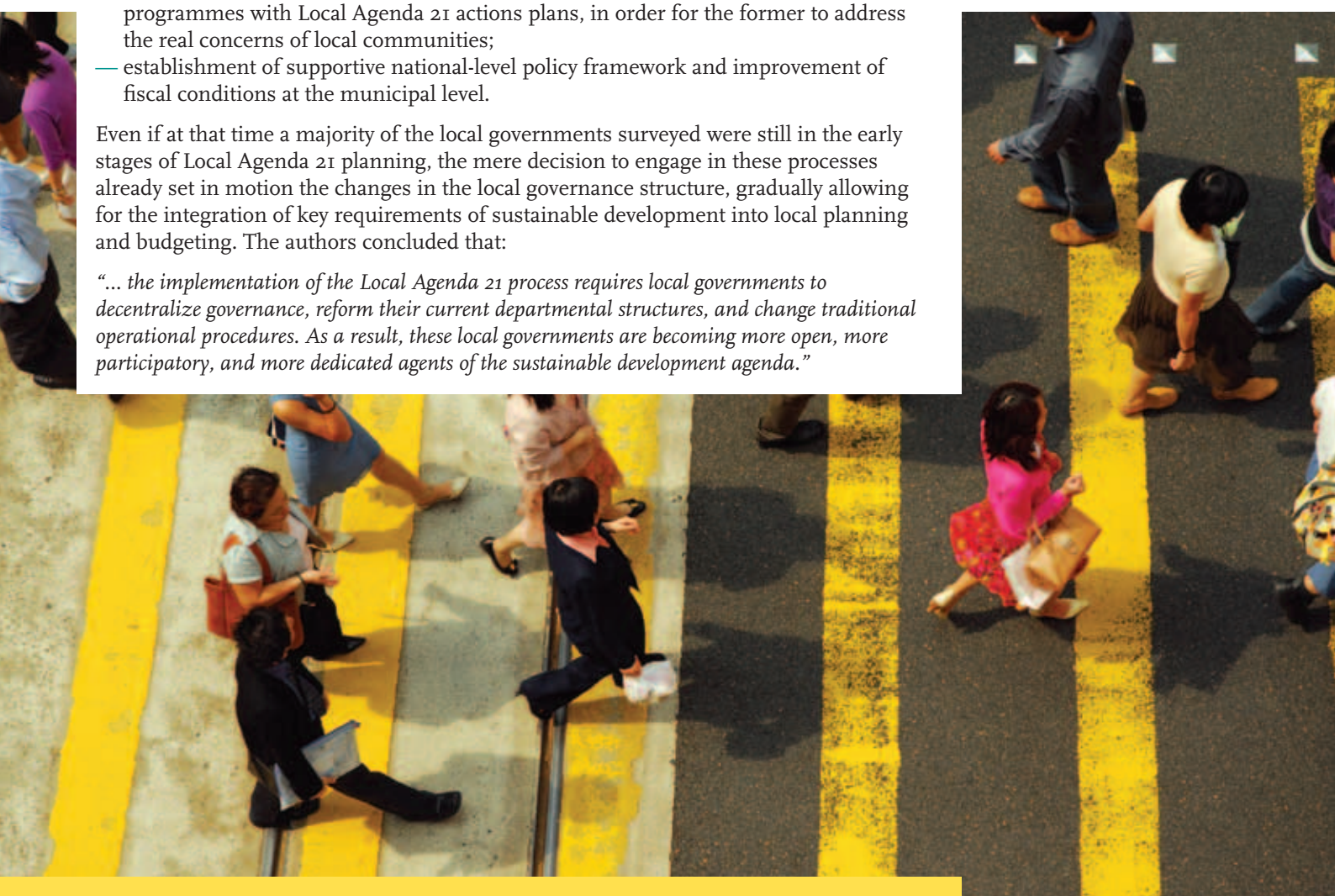
Asked about major obstacles in implementing local sustainability, local governments listed lack of financial support, lack of community consensus to set priorities, lack of support from national governments and, finally, lack of information. The national governments and institutions complained about similar obstacles, such as the lack of funding, lack of information and lack of expertise. To remedy those, ICLEI recommended:

— further support for national Local Agenda 21 campaigns, with a focus on multi-stakeholder approach and close cooperation with local government organizations;
— alignment of national and international investment and development assistance programmes with Local Agenda 21 actions plans, in order for the former to address the real concerns of local communities;
— establishment of supportive national-level policy framework and improvement of fiscal conditions at the municipal level.

Even if at that time a majority of the local governments surveyed were still in the early stages of Local Agenda 21 planning, the mere decision to engage in these processes already set in motion the changes in the local governance structure, gradually allowing for the integration of key requirements of sustainable development into local planning and budgeting. The authors concluded that:

*"... the implementation of the Local Agenda 21 process requires local governments to decentralize governance, reform their current departmental structures, and change traditional operational procedures. As a result, these local governments are becoming more open, more participatory, and more dedicated agents of the sustainable development agenda."*





# RIO+10: FROM AGENDA TO ACTION

Five years after the Rio+5 assessment, ICLEI conducted a second survey [6], in collaboration with the Secretariat of the 2002 UN World Summit for Sustainable Development and the UNDP Capacity 21 Programme. Again, two surveys were developed, one addressed to the national, regional and international institutions and the second one addressed directly to local governments.

The report identified over 6400 local governments in 113 countries worldwide that were engaged in Local Agenda 21 (LA21) activities, a more than three-fold increase over less than five years. Even though over 80% of these local governments were located in Europe, a significant increase has been noted in the number of countries in which one or more LA21 processes were underway.

Over 60% of local governments surveyed had developed Local Action Plans, even if the environmental focus still dominated over the wider, sustainable development approach, with the following issues commonly identified as main priorities on the local level:

— natural resources management,
— air quality,
— water resources management,
— energy management,
— transportation.



It is interesting to note that water was the common priority issue for all municipalities, regardless of their economic situation. Asked about the actual improvements achieved in the course of LA21 processes, local governments pointed to:

— waste reduction,
— public awareness,
— water quality,
— city beautification.

All municipalities observed progress in terms of public awareness and water quality. Answers from high- and middle-income countries noted the greatest progress on waste reduction, while low-income countries highlighted the success of community empowerment. There was also considerable progress observed in terms of integrating LA21 processes into the municipal systems, with 60% of surveyed municipalities claiming at least partial integration. The changes included improved interdepartmental cooperation, public/private partnerships and LA21 activities included in official documents.

The higher number of processes identified allowed for better regional comparisons, painting a picture of what a "typical" LA21 process might look like in different world regions. **African** municipalities prioritized poverty alleviation, economic development and health issues, responding to the most pressing needs of the communities. African local sustainability processes were characterized by strong stakeholder involvement, sometimes even contributing to a further strengthening of the role of certain groups, e.g. women. In addition to the lack of financial and political support, the lack of expertise was perceived as one of the key challenges.

The **Asia-Pacific** local sustainability process was typically driven by a national campaign, had a strong environmental focus and was well-integrated into the municipal governance system (e.g. through official documents, such as local environmental strategies). Stakeholder participation was also important but the relationship with the national government was perceived as key, with repeated calls from the local level for a more favourable policy framework and tax reform.

The **European** case was particularly interesting since this is where most of LA21 activities were taking place. Here again one could observe a strong involvement of national governments but also an important role played by national municipal associations and the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, acting on a regional level. Some European countries were greatly advanced in their uptake at an early stage. Sweden, for example, reported that 100% of the municipalities had adopted LA21 by 2002. The priority issues named by European municipalities included energy management, transportation, land use and biodiversity. Interestingly, it is the only region that cited climate change as one of the top priorities. European municipalities complained about a perceived lack of commitment from the national government and a lack of community interest, calling for greater alignment with national sustainability strategies and further embedding local sustainability processes into municipal operations.

The **Latin American** priorities included community development, economic development, poverty alleviation, security and water resources management. It was the only region to identify tourism as one of top priorities and indicate heritage and culture preservation as one of the key achievements of local sustainability processes. Latin American municipalities boasted the highest rate of stakeholder involvement, even if some groups continued to be excluded from LA21 processes (e.g. ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples). Amongst challenges, local governments pointed to the slow decentralization process and called for more power to be delegated to the local level.



Similar concerns were shared by **North American** municipalities who called also for a revised tax structure and the removal of subsidies placed on unsustainable products and policies. Local governments in North America highlighted community empowerment as one of the main achievements of local sustainability processes, with the activities focused mostly on land use, transportation, water resources management, economic development and air quality.

Despite the progress, the main challenges remained similar to the ones identified five years earlier. Based on the results of these assessments, prior to the 2002 UN World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg local governments called for:

— better design of national and international investment and development assistance programmes to reflect local priorities,
— support for the creation of national LA21 campaigns, particularly in low- and middle-income countries,
— creation of a supportive national policy framework,
— development of locally relevant mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress.

The last point reflects the move from agenda to action and the need for better tools to evaluate local sustainability performance.

How many of these conclusions and recommendations still hold true today? What progress have we made and in which areas are further effort needed? Ten years after the last assessment it is time to consider these questions.

# EVALUATING LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY PROCESSES TODAY

One of the most pressing questions to answer before embarking on this study was how best to analyze local sustainability processes on a global scale. The two previous reports, as described above, were based mostly on multiple choice questionnaires, targeted at national and local level separately. These tools were well suited to the main purpose of the reports, which was to identify the number, geographical distribution and thematic variety of LA21 activities worldwide. However, today, 20 years after the adoption of Agenda 21, we wanted to know more about the dynamics and impact of these processes, institutions and mechanisms that emerged and political and social changes to which they contributed.

Local sustainability is now established within the mainstream, becoming a part of everyday activities for thousands of local governments worldwide. More and more cities, asked about their commitment to sustainable development, answer that it has become a cross-cutting issue, a guiding principle applied to all their activities. A growing variety and complexity of local sustainability processes, as well as their progressive integration into the municipal systems, means that it is now increasingly difficult to study them from an international perspective using quantitative instruments.



Moreover, the reports of 1997 and 2002 were very much focused on the Local Agenda 21 approach, even if there were a few countries that did not use the actual term (e.g. United States). However, as we have observed in the last years, some countries have moved on and replaced the previously used Local Agenda 21 with another term such as e.g. "local sustainability strategy" or "integrated development programme", reflecting local conditions but also a changed thematic focus or different process structure. There are also a number of cities, particularly in Asia, that perform very well in terms of environmental, economic, and to a lesser extent, social indicators but their activities are far from the original LA21 approach, as defined by ICLEI in the previous reports and quoted above. Should these "eco-cities", as they are sometimes referred to, perhaps particularly relevant for global discussions on green economy, be included in a debate on local sustainability?

This leads us to the most important question, namely, how can we evaluate local sustainability processes today? Should we look at outcomes, actors or rather the process, closer to the original LA21 approach? For the purpose of this study, we have decided to keep it as open as possible and have adopted a very broad definition of a local sustainability process, highlighting simply the multi-sectoral character of a process, its long-term perspective and local focus:

**A multi-sectoral purposeful activity over a longer period of time with the aim to influence the development of a locality and local policies towards sustainability.**

This definition is also open in the sense that it doesn't define what we mean by "sustainability". This was a purposeful choice, since one of the aims was to find out how local leaders and communities understand sustainability, what kind of issues or activities are associated with this concept and how it evolves over time.

As much as it would be interesting to find out how many local sustainability processes are currently underway, what proportion of local governments have developed an action plan or started its evaluation and how many of them were involving stakeholders in these processes, we believe that this type of analysis is not only very difficult but perhaps even no longer useful, considering divergent paths that cities worldwide are taking.

# COLLECTING THE INFORMATION FOR THIS STUDY

The study aims to present the "story" of local sustainability, as told by the people who were personally involved in implementing and supporting cities in their sustainability efforts throughout the last 20 years. Taking into account current discussions on the international governance framework for sustainable development, one of the key themes of the Rio+20 Conference, the main focus is on placing local sustainability initiatives within a broader national and international context, in order to identify opportunities and barriers to scaling up local action. With this in mind, the following questions will be addressed:

— What are the **main driving forces** behind local sustainability processes? How do different driving forces influence the development of local sustainability processes?
— What are the **key reference frameworks** that influence the scope and ambition of local action? How are these frameworks developed and what is their impact on the local level?
— Looking at two decades of local sustainability processes, what changes have they brought about? How has the **role of local governments** changed, on the local, national and international level?

The study is based on in-depth, qualitative interviews [7] with local sustainability experts and draws upon knowledge accumulated by ICLEI, UN-Habitat and other partners throughout twenty years of supporting the local sustainability movement worldwide. The experts were asked to focus on key trends and developments over time within their country or region, as well as on recommendations that could later be fed into the international preparatory process for the Rio+20 Conference. The interviews consisted of the following ten sections:



1. **Basic information** (involvement in supporting and/or analyzing local sustainability processes in a certain country or region).

2. **Take-up of local sustainability process** (proportion of local governments engaged in local sustainability processes, according to available data, changes over time).

3. **Local Agenda 21 and other initiatives** (main local sustainability schemes and processes on the national/regional level).

4. **Main drivers of local sustainability processes** (actors and milestones that played a crucial role in the development of local sustainability processes).

5. **Main issues addressed at the local level** (overview of key issues addressed within local sustainability processes).

6. **Maturity of local sustainability processes** (progress made by local governments involved in local sustainability processes in the country or region, e.g. the level of integration of sustainability concerns within the local administration, development of strategies and target-based action plans, monitoring efforts, etc.).

7. **Participation at the local level** (scope of public participation in local sustainability processes and involvement of different groups of stakeholders).

8. **Impact of local sustainability processes**

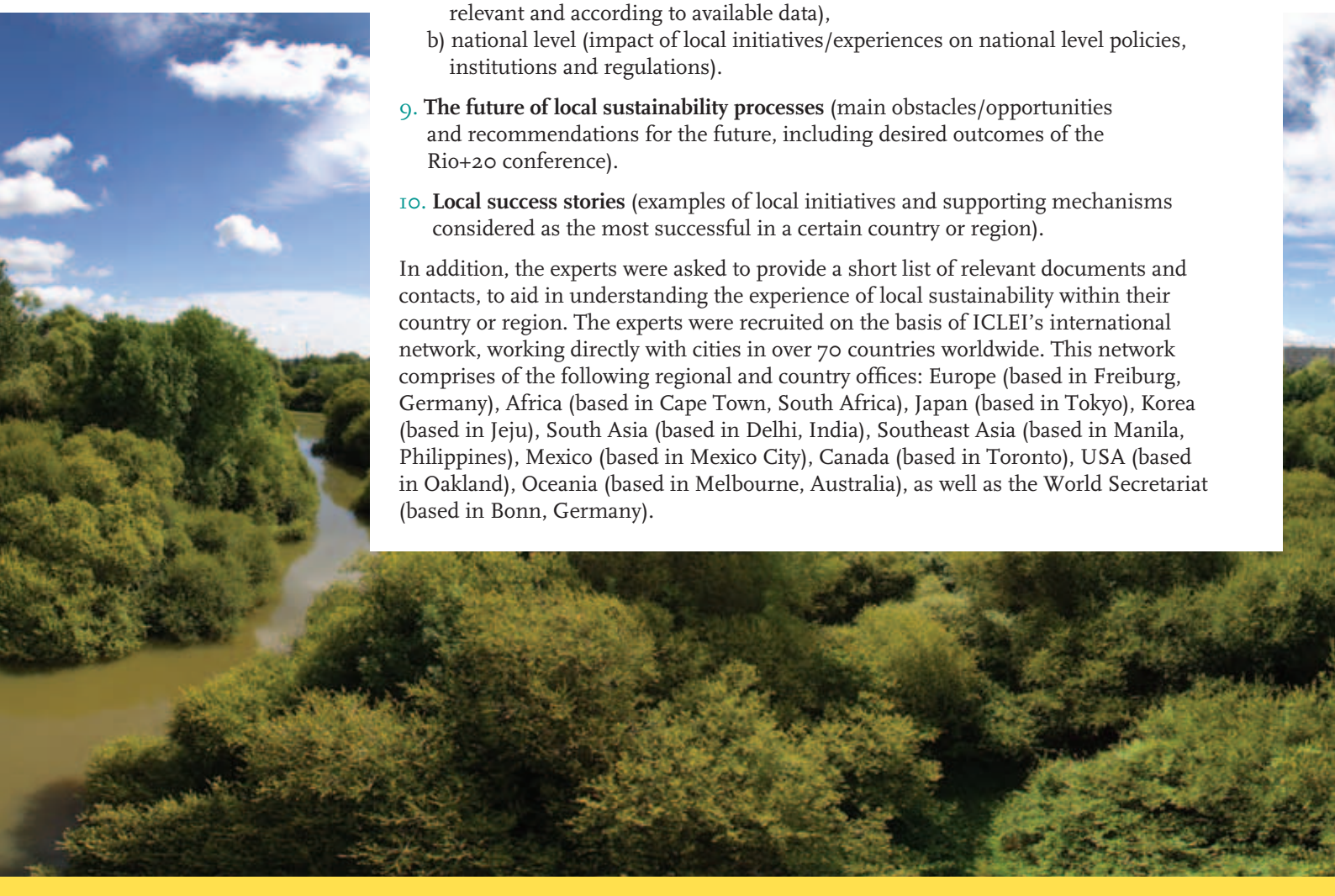
   a) local level (focus on new policies, regulations or practices that emerged at the local level as a direct or indirect result of local sustainability processes undertaken, improvements in terms of environmental, economic and social conditions, if relevant and according to available data),
   b) national level (impact of local initiatives/experiences on national level policies, institutions and regulations).

9. **The future of local sustainability processes** (main obstacles/opportunities and recommendations for the future, including desired outcomes of the Rio+20 conference).

10. **Local success stories** (examples of local initiatives and supporting mechanisms considered as the most successful in a certain country or region).

In addition, the experts were asked to provide a short list of relevant documents and contacts, to aid in understanding the experience of local sustainability within their country or region. The experts were recruited on the basis of ICLEI's international network, working directly with cities in over 70 countries worldwide. This network comprises of the following regional and country offices: Europe (based in Freiburg, Germany), Africa (based in Cape Town, South Africa), Japan (based in Tokyo), Korea (based in Jeju), South Asia (based in Delhi, India), Southeast Asia (based in Manila, Philippines), Mexico (based in Mexico City), Canada (based in Toronto), USA (based in Oakland), Oceania (based in Melbourne, Australia), as well as the World Secretariat (based in Bonn, Germany).





In order to improve the geographical coverage of the study and strengthen its conclusions, the results coming from the ICLEI network were coupled with the contributions provided by selected UN-Habitat offices. UN-Habitat, with its pivotal role in supporting local sustainability through programmes such as "Localizing Agenda 21" and "Sustainable Cities" (implemented together with UNEP), brings in the development perspective on local sustainability and offers first-hand knowledge of the situation in countries that only recently gained recognition for their actions on sustainability.

The contributions from UN-Habitat focus mainly on the following regions and countries: Arab Region, Burkina Faso, Central America, China, Indonesia and Pacific Island countries, Latin America and Caribbean Region, Sri Lanka, Western Balkans.
To complement the practitioners' perspective, ICLEI had invited a number of research and civil society organizations to provide an overview of the state of local sustainability in their respective regions. This additional input, as well as desk research conducted by the authors, ensured that the study, albeit not strictly academic, is linked to ongoing work in this field. The process of collecting information for the study has been a challenging experience for a number of reasons. Some of them will be elaborated on further in this study but, put shortly, the main obstacles were the following:

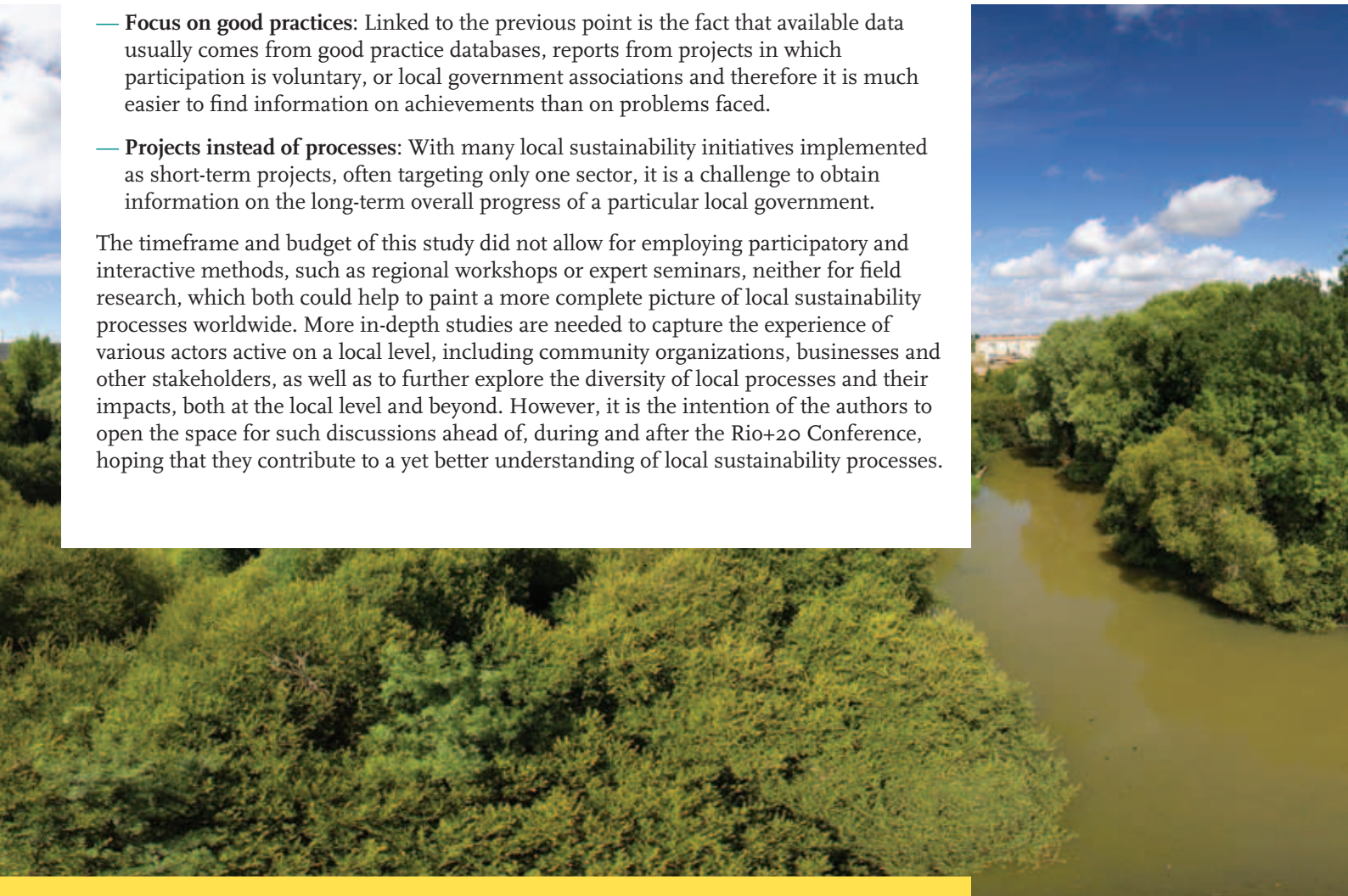
— **Lack of reliable data on local processes**: A majority of countries still do not collect information on local sustainability processes, mainly due to their voluntary nature and lack of agreed standards, and even if national data exists, it is not comparable on a supranational level. On the other hand, local governments and national local government organizations often lack capacity to regularly produce and collect standardized data on local processes.

— **Focus on good practices**: Linked to the previous point is the fact that available data usually comes from good practice databases, reports from projects in which participation is voluntary, or local government associations and therefore it is much easier to find information on achievements than on problems faced.

— **Projects instead of processes**: With many local sustainability initiatives implemented as short-term projects, often targeting only one sector, it is a challenge to obtain information on the long-term overall progress of a particular local government.

The timeframe and budget of this study did not allow for employing participatory and interactive methods, such as regional workshops or expert seminars, neither for field research, which both could help to paint a more complete picture of local sustainability processes worldwide. More in-depth studies are needed to capture the experience of various actors active on a local level, including community organizations, businesses and other stakeholders, as well as to further explore the diversity of local processes and their impacts, both at the local level and beyond. However, it is the intention of the authors to open the space for such discussions ahead of, during and after the Rio+20 Conference, hoping that they contribute to a yet better understanding of local sustainability processes.

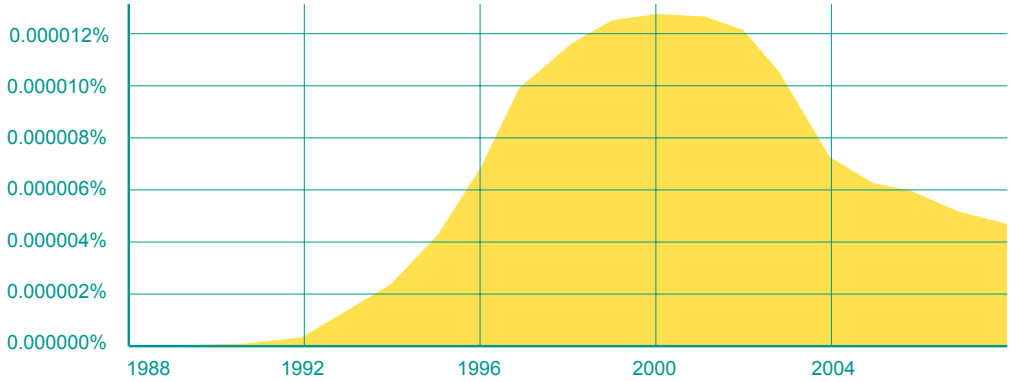





# LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY ENTERS THE MAINSTREAM

This section presents a short history of the term "Local Agenda 21", from its sharp rise in usage in the 1990s to its gradual decline in recent years, in which it has been increasingly replaced with other, often local, terms. Fortunately, in stark contrast to the term that symbolized its beginnings, the local sustainability movement is growing fast, spanning thousands of cities across all continents.

# LOCAL AGENDA 21 AND OTHER TERMS




The image above illustrates the frequency of the term "Local Agenda 21", as it appeared in English language literature between 1987 and 2008.[8] Even this simple exercise can show us an enormous rise in popularity that this term encountered in the 1990s, pointing also to a decrease in usage following the Johannesburg Summit. Coupled with observations of increased engagement of local governments in sustainable development issues, it reinforces the earlier point made about Local Agenda 21 being just one of the labels used to describe local sustainability processes. While still remaining an important reference point in certain countries, it can be also regarded as slightly dated and somewhat out of fashion in others.

From the very beginning the term "Local Agenda 21" was met with mixed reactions. Some countries, particularly those that established strong national campaigns, embraced it from the start and it remains the main reference point for their local sustainability processes today (e.g. France or South Korea). Others have never used it. Three key factors can be identified that determine the use of the LA21 term:

— **technical** (e.g. Finland where "sustainable development" simply sounded better than "Local Agenda 21", when translated to Finnish),

— **political** (e.g. Quebec was the only Canadian region to refer to local sustainability processes as LA21, due to its historical ties with France),

— **funding-related** (e.g. in the case of Latin America where the term has been "localized" following the completion of donor-funded projects).

## Who is afraid of local sustainability?

In the United States the term "Local Agenda 21" never really took off. Even the term "sustainable development" was initially met with scepticism. Some local governments considered it part of "unintelligible non-profit jargon" and the word "development" struck them as going in the opposite direction to sustainability. Since the early 2000s most local governments refer to their activities in this field using the term "sustainability". However, for a small but vocal minority of Americans terms like "climate change" or "sustainable development" have become synonyms for the attempt to introduce central control over natural resources, limiting the freedom of the individual in an unacceptable way. Therefore, these terms and campaigns associated with them are often viewed with hostility and fear.

One of the first countries worldwide to take up Local Agenda 21 broadly and develop a national programme was the United Kingdom. However, the UK also serves as an example of a country where the label under which local governments were instructed to pursue local sustainability initiatives changed frequently. Defined by a strong central government, repeatedly new programmes, strategies, plans and policies have been introduced, focusing on different aspects of sustainability in line with changing national priorities.

Twenty years after adoption of Agenda 21 local initiatives for sustainability are taking place all over the planet under many titles and labels. This gradual move away from the original "Local Agenda 21" label in many places is an indication that local sustainability has become an established policy area, and thus more and more local governments use local political language in place of the original UN jargon.



# THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Even though, for reasons mentioned above, we are not able to estimate a number of local sustainability processes underway, there are strong indications that the last decade has witnessed a sustained growth in the local sustainability movement.

One way of estimating the popularity of local sustainability initiatives is to look at the multitude of international and regional associations and schemes that have further developed or appeared in recent years. ICLEI, which is the largest international association of local governments dedicated to sustainable development, has today about 1200 members in over 70 countries. There are a number of strong regional associations dedicated to sustainable urban development, such as Energy Cities that represents over 1000 European cities and towns working on sustainable energy management. In 2005, soon after the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, the Mayor of the City of Kyoto founded the World Mayors Council on Climate Change, an alliance of committed local government leaders that now counts over 60 members. Newcomers, such as C40, founded by 18 big world cities to work on climate issues, seek to cater to the needs of specific segments of cities. The African Local Agenda 21 Cities Network is to be launched in December 2012, during the 6th Africities Summit in Dakar, Senegal. Sub-national governments also organize for sustainable development, with the global Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD) launched in 2002, following the Johannesburg Summit, and R20 Regions for Climate Action founded in 2011.

New campaigns, often backed by international organizations, are being launched, as the examples below outline. With over 3000 local government signatories to date and covering almost a quarter of the EU-27 population, the EU-backed Covenant of Mayors can play a key

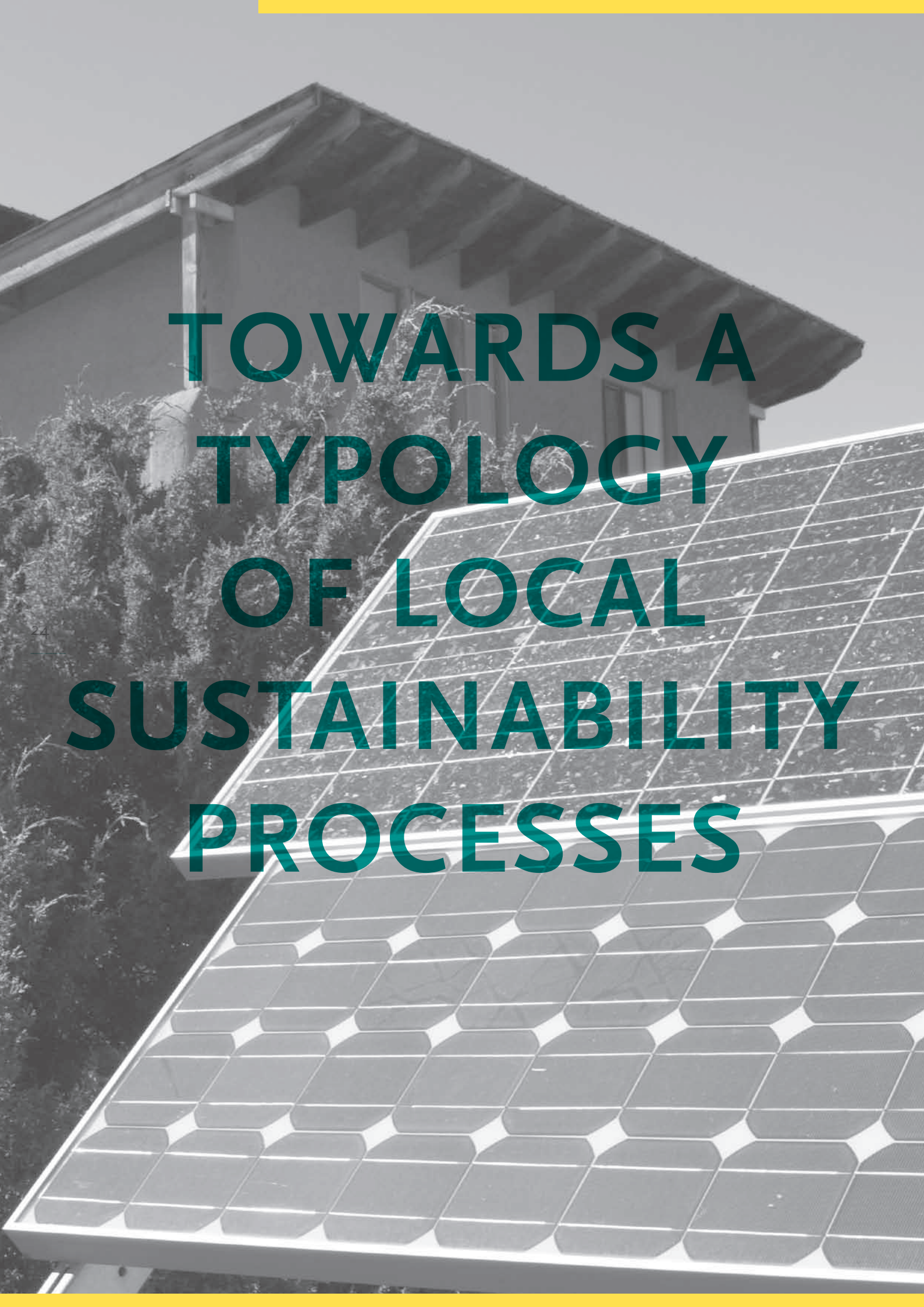
role in achieving its emission reduction targets. In the US more than 1000 mayors have signed the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement since 2005, vowing to reduce carbon emissions in their cities below 1990 levels, in line with the Kyoto Protocol.

Local sustainability has been integrated into the mandates of virtually all organizations and associations that work with cities, such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Citynet, Metropolis, Eurocities or national municipal associations. Same could be said for international donors, both multilateral and bilateral, that increasingly support sustainable development on the local level, often through twinning programmes.

These impressive numbers represent the widespread commitment of local governments to sustainable development. However, moving from commitment to action still remains a challenge for many local governments, for a number of reasons that will be further explored in this study.

## Counting local sustainability processes

A surprisingly low number of countries collect reliable data on local sustainability processes. The examples presented below prove that, if well taken care of, the seeds of local sustainability can bear fruit quickly. In Korea, where the first Local Agenda 21 process was started in 1995 in Pusan, today 86% of local governments have established Local Agenda 21 Councils. In the US, 600 ICLEI members represent nearly 30% of the US population and sustainability is high on the local agenda, with 80% of the biggest cities in the US citing it as one of their top five priorities.[9] Spain, thanks to the strong involvement of the regional administration, has 3763 active Local Agenda 21 processes, involving almost half of the Spanish municipalities.[10] In France, where the Local Agenda 21 movement started only towards the end of the nineties, there are today almost 850 Local Agenda 21 processes, covering 70% of the *"communautés urbaines"* and more than half of the regions and departments.



# TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY PROCESSES

Twenty years after the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, local sustainability processes can be characterized neither by a common name nor a common methodology. One may argue that it is precisely this flexibility that makes them flourish in so many different political, legal and economic settings, but it certainly does not make them easy to describe. How to make sense of the diversity of local sustainability processes and learn from their experience so far?

The traditional approach to describing complex, global phenomena is to adopt a regional perspective, grouping countries with somewhat similar framework conditions. In the case of local sustainability processes, it could mean looking for a "typical" European or South Asian process, an approach followed by the previous 2001 assessment. The initial concept for this study was to repeat a similar exercise a decade later. However it was quickly discovered that a purely "European" or "South Asian" local sustainability process did not exist in any meaningful sense, whereas similarities occur between countries located in very different parts of the globe: France and Malaysia, Finland and Ecuador, Poland and India, among others. What worked ten years ago, it seems, no longer fits the reality.

To paint a clearer picture of the phenomenon in question, this study proposes a different, governance-oriented and qualitative approach that focuses on initial driving forces behind local processes. It has been widely acknowledged that in order to advance sustainable development on a global scale a multi-level effort is needed. However, the real question is how the different levels of governance can work together, to make the most of their individual strengths while mutually supporting each other. The approach adopted by this study aims to shed some light on this particular question, drawing on the experience of thousands of local sustainability processes worldwide.

The following chapter presents five main types of local sustainability processes, characterized by the political level and the type of organization that initiated them:

— Local Government Strategy
— Civil Society Initiative
— Concerted Action
— National Policy
— International Cooperation

For each of the types, two typical manifestations (or subtypes) are identified, illustrated with one or more examples. Following initial drafting the typology turned out to be a good framework for analyzing the information collected for the study, even if certain categories needed to be extended to accommodate the diversity of the processes observed (e.g. city-to-city cooperation or the development of eco-cities). Although most local processes include elements of more than one of the types listed above, singling out the key driving force can offer a more in-depth understanding of characteristics, strengths and weaknesses inherent in a certain type of process. In addition, tracking the development of each type over time gives a valuable insight into typical problems faced by different processes, depending on how were they initiated.

As is the case in every typology, the one offered below is – admittedly and purposefully – a simplification, focused on black and white rather than on shades of grey. The aim is not to collect and describe every initiative undertaken locally but to contribute to better understanding the development of local sustainability processes and distil critical issues for further progress, with a focus on the potential and limits of different framework conditions.

# TYPE 1:
# LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

Local sustainability is often portrayed as a moral choice, a matter of the heart rather than of reason. To a certain extent it is of course a moral choice, but for the majority of local governments worldwide local sustainability is about rational decisions, driven by cost-effectiveness calculations and a risk management approach. It should come as no surprise then that many local sustainability processes are initiated by local government leaders or employees who see the potential benefits such processes can bring to their own city or town.

Locally initiated processes are often oriented towards local rather than global objectives, but, in the case of sustainable development, local actions cumulate into global changes. Even though the improvement of local sustainability performance can be achieved by partly shifting the burden elsewhere (e.g. importing energy-intensive products from other countries), this is only possible in a short-term perspective. Experience of local sustainability pioneers shows that opening a discussion on sustainable development on the local level eventually leads to addressing issues that go beyond the local scale, emphasizing global interdependence and interconnectedness.



Facing structural economic changes, being affected by crisis or losing competitiveness on the global market, cities are no strangers to the idea of global interdependence. A radical redefinition of local policies and targets is seen as a solution in the face of the crisis, be it natural, economic or political. By re-orienting their development alongside sustainability criteria, the pioneers often set new, more sustainable standards for all local governments in their country. As shown by the examples cited below, the impact of local initiatives may go even further, influencing policies in other cities and countries.

Out of all the five types presented here this one is the most dependent on individual leadership. Such a person, often a charismatic local leader, might be committed to sustainable development but not necessarily: what matters is the courage to innovate and an ability to engage others. To minimize the risk of local sustainability processes being abandoned when the political situation in the city changes, community buy-in and focus on the institutionalization of the process are decisive.

However, there is a price to pay for being the first one. Some of the most ambitious cities complain that it can be lonely at the top, particularly on the national scale. Honoured with awards and invited to share best practices, frontrunners have few opportunities to support their further growth. Those that are eager to continue blazing new trails enter the international scene looking for partners with similar challenges. Others choose to rest on their laurels, capitalizing on the image earned with earlier successes.

## UP FROM THE ASHES – CRISIS AS THE CATALYST FOR CHANGE

A local crisis or conflict, related for example to waste management or water pollution can trigger a radical re-orientation of local policies, with the impacts often reaching regional, national or even higher levels. As the recent UN Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean report concludes:

*"Environmental conflicts, especially those where there has been very active public participation in terms of providing ideas, information and possible solutions, tend to create opportunities for positive change by tabling issues and options that have never been considered before."* [11]

A good example comes from the city of Surat in Gujarat, India, where the 1994 plague outbreak lead to legal action being taken by citizens against the state, demanding solid waste management to be appropriately regulated. Following this case, in 2000 the government of India adopted the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, applying to all Indian municipalities. As for the city of Surat, in 1997 it was awarded as the second cleanest city in India.

In Central America, with its history of natural disasters, local governments have unfortunately learned the hard way that implementing sustainable development on the local level is the best way of preventing or limiting damage. A lot of those new policies were born in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, which devastated the region in 1998. A similar phenomenon can already be noticed in Japan, severely damaged by the earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima in 2011. Even though Japanese municipalities have long embraced local sustainability policies following a requirement from the national government, a crisis of this magnitude naturally results in a change of direction. What's more, living in a globalized world means that the lessons from natural and man-made disasters can greatly impact on policies at the other end of the planet, as illustrated by the recent decision of the German government to phase out nuclear power following the Fukushima accident.



# Kitakyushu, Japan: From the Sea of Death to local sustainability champion

A well-known "grey to green" story comes from the Japanese city of Kitakyushu, a heavy industry centre until the 1970s that struggled with air and water pollution. The city's Dokai Bay was contaminated with industrial and domestic wastewater and referred to by the locals as "the Sea of Death". In 1997 Kitakyushu was the first Japanese city to participate in the Eco-Town project, funded by the national government. Working closely with the industry, research organizations and citizens, Kitakyushu managed to turn the tide and emerged as one of the global leaders in terms of environmental management and performance, collecting numerous awards and honours.

In 2000, the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia adopted the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment [12], inspired by the city's achievements and designed as a mechanism to achieve tangible progress in environmental quality and human health in urban areas in the region. Recognized in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Initiative helped over 100 cities from 18 countries of the region to improve their capacity in urban environmental management. In 2010 the Kitakyushu Initiative has been officially closed and is now being reorganized into the Asian City Network for Environment Improvement, with Kitakyushu to host the Asian Centre for Low-Carbon Society.



The experience of many European sustainability champions shows that an economic crisis can also trigger new, more sustainable development trajectories. With European industrial landscape undergoing a seismic shift in the 1980s, many local governments were facing a double challenge of finding a new, non-industrial identity while dealing with the damages stemming from their industrial past. Be it Malmö in Sweden or Newcastle in the UK, those and other cities successfully overcame structural economic change, joining forces with local businesses and civil society. The industrial past is preserved as a cultural heritage and the new focus is on environmentally friendly business development.

## URBAN VISIONARIES - SETTING THE STANDARDS INTERNALLY AND FOR OTHERS

The examples above are a testimony to the transformative power of the crisis, but local sustainability does not need to start from the destruction of old ways. This is easier in a sense because, in the absence of an acute crisis, the communities are in a position to choose their own priorities. However, when the pressure caused by urgent problems is missing, the motivation to act may be hard to find and sustain. The solution, as applied by a growing number of cities, is to agree together on an ambitious goal, a shared vision that can mobilize the entire community, e.g. to achieve 100% renewable energy provision, commit to sustainable sourcing or to develop new green spaces. Benefiting from clear political commitment, the implementation process is usually well-organized and includes strong participation of relevant stakeholders, with the private sector playing an active role.
Cities that streamline their sustainability processes to reach a common goal are often found among international "good practice" cases. Their ambitions and forward-looking approach, usually supported by good marketing, earn them recognition both regionally and internationally. The image of the "sustainable city" is also an increasingly important asset in the economic development of cities, attracting clean, innovative businesses and research institutions.

# Växjö, Sweden: A fossil fuel free city

In the 1980s, few people outside Sweden knew the name Växjö. Today this medium-sized city in southern Sweden is one of the local sustainability capitals, often referred to as "the greenest city in Europe" and praised worldwide for its ambitious and holistic approach. Back in 1996, ahead of the Kyoto Climate Conference and building up on environmental activities undertaken since the 1970s, local politicians have decided that Växjö should become fossil fuel free. The first time-bound commitment was to reduce $CO_2$ emissions by 50% per capita by 2010 from 1993 levels. The 2030 deadline for a 100% reduction was agreed later. Thinking back to these times, people from the city council observed:

*"One important thing to mention is that when the decision was taken, nobody really knew if it is possible to achieve the goal for 2010, nor what kind of actions needed to be carried out."* [13]

In the following years a number of climate and energy saving measures have been implemented, including conversion to largely biomass-based heating, introduction of smart metering systems and construction of the first wooden high-rise blocks to passive energy standard. Even more importantly, Växjö demonstrated to the community of cities worldwide the viability of a concept debated for years, having managed to decouple local economic growth from $CO_2$ emissions.

# Curitiba, Brazil: Planning for people

One of the pioneers in bringing sustainable development to the local level, Curitiba has been long recognized internationally as a "sustainable city". The key to its success lays in the integrated urban planning approach, focused on maximizing the quality of life for the inhabitants and linking land use with transportation planning, adopted as early as the 1960s. However, moving from plans to implementation is not always easy. In the case of Curitiba it's difficult to overstate the importance of the leadership of Jaime Lerner, an architect, experienced urban planner and a three-time Mayor of Curitiba involved in developing Curitiba's seminal Master Plan. The integrated planning approach, together with the existence of the independent urban planning agency (IPPUC), ensured the continuity in implementing the city's strategy, particularly following the departure of Lerner who went on to become the governor of the State of Parana.

Curitiba remains most famous for its rapid and cheap all-bus transit network, well integrated with the urban form and producing considerable environmental and social benefits. The idea has been replicated by many South American cities, including Bogota, Quito, Guatemala City and Mexico City, but it's only one of Curitiba's many brilliant ideas. Despite rapid population growth, the city has managed not only to keep but to dramatically increase the ratio of green spaces per person, from 1m² in 1970 to 52 m² in 2002. Other fields in which this Brazilian city has achieved remarkable results include flood prevention, a waste recycling programme that generates funds for social inclusion and job creation programmes. The example of Curitiba is inspiring in the way it links environmental, social and economic aspects but it also shows that a good urban development strategy can be worth much more than a series of expensive one-off projects.[14]

# TYPE 2:
# CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVE

The civil society actors, such as community groups, non-governmental and religious organizations or science and research institutions, were among the first to pursue sustainable development activities, also at the local level. The education sector, both formal and informal, played a key role in supporting those activities. Civil society, thanks to its commitment and expertise, plays an important and necessary role in inspiring, complimenting and controlling sustainable development processes initiated by the public and private sector.

Civil society-based sustainability processes have at their core civil society networks, either from the local or the national level, which initiate actions to promote sustainability and raise public awareness. Compared to processes initiated by the public sector or international organizations, they are usually characterized by a higher degree of creativity and willingness to explore new solutions.

The key question when discussing civil society initiatives for local sustainability is are they linked to official policy processes and the activities run by the local government? If the answer is yes, the question becomes how. If run in parallel, they risk becoming "playgrounds", with no tangible, lasting effect on the community. On the other hand, trying to fit into and influence existing policy processes may be a lengthy and frustrating exercise, especially if there is lack of trust on both sides.



## COMMUNITY-DRIVEN LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY PROCESSES

Local networks for sustainable development emerge in communities where the local civil society has a strong commitment to and awareness of sustainable development issues. This represents a great potential to anchor the principles of sustainability in different aspects of local life and in different groups within the local community. The fact that the initiative comes from "within" the community can also make it easier to prevent and resolve potential conflicts, thanks to already existing ties between different actors and groups.

The key relationship here is the one between the emerging network and the local government and it can range from trust and cooperation to competition and even hostility. Without the involvement of local government, community initiatives will usually remain limited in scope and impact, regardless of their innovative potential. Successful cooperation is only possible with mutual trust and shared goals, conditions difficult to achieve if both sides perceive it as more of a power struggle. This is closely related to the question of public participation in local sustainability processes, discussed further in chapter on local sustainability and changes in political culture.

Some remarkable examples of community-led sustainability initiatives come from the Transition Towns movement that has emerged in 2006, starting from the town of Totnes in the UK, and now spanning well over a thousand communities in 35 countries. The movement focuses on supporting community-led responses to climate change and aims to build resilience and happiness. It should come as no surprise that "building a bridge to local government" features in the list of twelve key ingredients to the Transition Model:

*"Whatever the degree of groundswell your Transition Initiative manages to generate, however many practical projects you've initiated and however wonderful your Energy Descent Plan is, you will not progress too far unless you have cultivated a positive and productive relationship with your local authority."* [15]

# Germany: Grassroots Agenda 21

In Germany the UN mandate for local governments to enter into a process to develop a Local Agenda 21 coincided with the reunification of the two German states FRG and GDR, a process driven by the peaceful protests organized by East German civil society. This unique experience, coupled with a complete lack of Local Agenda 21 guidance from the national level during the 1990s, resulted in the emergence of a local sustainability movement which brought together environmental NGOs, church groups and initiatives active in decentralized development cooperation into a common engagement for Local Agenda 21. Local governments at that time mainly had the role of passive supporters rather than active coordinators of these initiatives. The main focus was on integrating the numerous aspects of sustainable development and on the improvement of public participation processes, formally established in the West and non-existent in the East. Attempts of local governments to professionalize Local Agenda 21 processes often met with scepticism and even resistance among earlier initiatives, which on the one hand demanded the implementation of their strategies and project proposals by the elected councils, and on the other insisted on the driving role of civil society. As a consequence, local governments started organizing parallel processes to engage citizens in the development of strategies such as climate mitigation plans, social integration strategies, model neighbourhoods and others, in which they increasingly included sustainable development principles and criteria.



# Freiburg, Germany: A multitude of local sustainability initiatives

The ‘Black Forest metropolis’ Freiburg enjoys a reputation of being a ‘Green City’ far beyond the borders of Germany. The city is characterized by an impressive mixture of multiple activities that taken together justify its image as a forerunner in sustainable development. In the model district ‘Vauban’ a derelict military area was converted into a socio-ecologic car-free pilot neighbourhood. Associations of private households have replaced corporate developers as builders of multi-storey apartment houses, the light rail system runs on renewable energy, so called ‘Plus Energy’ houses produce more energy over the year than they consume, the world-wide first 1960’s high-rise apartment block was refurbished into a passive house, and newly built municipal buildings have to be passive houses, among many other innovative measures. However to assume that all this follows a well-designed plan managed by the local government would be a mistake. Instead an enormous number of activities and projects carried out by a multitude of civil society initiatives and organizations interact with each other in a fruitful way. The fact that many earlier participants of such initiatives have moved on and became local councillors, officials or decision-makers in local companies has gradually turned the local government, municipal utilities and the economy into further crucial contributors in this patchwork of actors for sustainable development. It was only in 2011 that a new unit for sustainability management was established at the mayor’s office, which should link the various actors and activities together and evaluate and document their collective achievements.

## CIVIL SOCIETY-DRIVEN PROCESSES ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

In some countries local sustainability processes have been initiated by multi-stakeholder networks established on the national level and driven largely by the civil society representatives. These networks are usually created in response to a lack of activity from the central government or the national municipal association, filling the gap left by the national institutions. If successful, they might act as catalysts, preparing the ground for national government initiative.

The success of such a network depends on whether the partners manage to sustain the initiative in a long-term perspective, particularly in terms of funding, and really root its activities in the local context. For this to happen the involvement of local governments is crucial and therefore networks including local government members have a clear advantage over those that only gather civil society initiatives.

# Peru: Cities for Life Forum

The Cities for Life Forum was established in 1996 by representatives of NGOs, grassroots organizations, local governments and universities to promote the development and implementation of Local Agenda 21 in Peruvian cities. Today it brings together 57 partners from 20 cities and is active in promoting and implementing community-based environmental urban development processes. The organization focuses on education and empowerment of the local leaders. The Cities for Life Forum played a particularly important role during Alberto Fujimori's administration (1990-2000) when local governments interested in pursuing sustainable development had to face obstacles related to the contradictory national framework and absence of political will within the (now former) central government. Following the change of government and the push towards decentralization, the achievements of local governments supported by the organization were taken up on the national level. One of the most prominent examples of this mechanism has been a 2003 Framework Law on Participatory Budgeting that obliges all local and regional governments to implement participatory budgeting on an annual basis.

# TYPE 3: CONCERTED ACTION

Local government associations and networks, both on national and international level, have long been avid advocates of local sustainability processes. As membership organizations, they fly the flag for local governments' interests, understand their concerns and enjoy their trust. They support local governments by offering information services, trainings and guidance, as well as by organizing networking and exchange of experiences through regular events. The result of their activities is "concerted action" or, in other words, a voluntary movement of hundreds or thousands of local processes, which support and inspire each other. By participating in this voluntary movement, cities gain an opportunity to learn from others but also to showcase their successes, promoting themselves as frontrunners in the field of sustainable development and stimulating healthy competition among local governments.

## NATIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS AND NETWORKS



Previous reports on Local Agenda 21 implementation have praised national LA21 campaigns, particularly those led by national municipal associations, for their effectiveness in mainstreaming local sustainability processes. Thanks to their good understanding of local governments' needs and capacities, national associations continue to be key actors in mobilizing and coordinating local action. In some countries, e.g. Italy or Sweden, new municipal associations or networks have been created that focus specifically on sustainable development issues.

National municipal associations have been instrumental in promoting local sustainable development in Latin American countries, including Ecuador, Chile and Costa Rica. In Ecuador, the Consorcio de Muncipios Amazónicos y Galápagos (COMAGA, the Municipal Association of the Amazonian Region and Galapagos) offered guidance and training to its members, achieving collective political commitment and involvement of all Amazonian local governments. High political profile of local sustainability in Ecuador was reflected in the 2008 Constitution, one of the few worldwide to include the reference to local sustainability and make it mandatory for all local governments.

The Chilean Municipal Association established a national Local Agenda 21 campaign in 2000, providing not only training and guidance but also small grants to fund demonstration projects, thanks to financial support from international donors. The campaign focused on small cities in rural areas and offered a set of public participation tools to support their strategic planning and local economic development. In 2002 Costa Rica held its first mayoral elections which gave a major impetus to the development of local democracy. The national LA21 campaign, led by the national municipal association, had a strong environmental focus, addressing issues like environmental education or waste and water management, and benefited greatly from close cooperation with the education sector. The support from the national association has continued until now, despite international funding ending. Even though local sustainability is not nationally mandated, like in Ecuador, Costa Rican municipalities continue to strive for sustainable development and have managed to incorporate sustainability in their daily practices. In all three countries LA21 influenced local decision making incorporating public participation as a routine.

# Chile: Nunoa Charter

The Chilean Municipal Association was not only active on the national level but has also made efforts to build a regional local sustainability initiative, with the support from ICLEI. One of the milestones in this process was the organization of the first Latin American conference on local sustainability in 2002, following the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The conference attracted almost 200 participants and ended with the adoption of the Nunoa Charter, the Charter of Latin American Municipalities for Sustainable Development. This would not have been possible without the leadership of the Mayor of Nunoa, then vice-president of the Chilean Municipal Association, who saw that successful local sustainability initiatives can create political momentum to further push much needed decentralization processes. However, political divisions within the association and the end of international funding for the support structures meant that by 2007 the Nunoa Charter lost its relevance. Despite the failure of the regional initiative, sustainable development and participatory approaches have been by now largely integrated into standard practices of Chilean local governments. The national government continues to support local sustainability through dedicated funding programmes and legislation (e.g. encouraging participatory budgeting).

# Italy: The Italian Local Agenda 21 Association

Established in 1999, the Italian Local Agenda 21 Association (Coordinamento Agende 21 Locali Italiane) brings together over 500 municipalities, regions, provinces and other local authorities that work with Local Agenda 21 processes. In its founding document, the Ferrara Charter, Coordinamento positioned itself as part of the global Local Agenda 21 movement, embodied on the European level by the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign and the Aalborg Charter. From the early days, the association took on an active role within the Campaign, including being one of its financial supporters. The endorsement of the Aalborg Charter remains obligatory for its members, which partly explains the very high number of Italian signatories to both the Aalborg Charter and Commitments. The primary objective of the association is to link Italian municipalities to ongoing policy processes at the national, European and international level, while providing relevant support and training. Funded mainly by membership fees, Coordinamento offers its members 19 working groups, on, for example, decentralized cooperation, health, culture, mountain communities, sustainable tourism, mobility and biodiversity. In recent years activities of the organization focused on climate and energy issues, often within European-funded projects.



Municipal associations, as opposed to national governments, often have the luxury to engage in long-term activities, as their leadership and mandate are less prone to political changes. “Concerted” local sustainability processes create a community spirit among participants, a social capital that helps to overcome everyday difficulties. This community and continuity aspect results not only in greater resilience but also in flexibility of local sustainability processes that can benefit from existing structures at the national and local level, for example, when introducing new topics.

## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS AND NETWORKS

The growing number of international networks of local and regional governments that have emerged in the last 20 years – many of them with a focus on sustainable development issues – is a new phenomenon in the history of local policy-making. The traditional structure of national municipal associations, themselves forming regional and international associations, is today complemented with organizations that create direct links between the local and the international level. The existence of these networks has made local governments, their activities and interests much more visible on the international scene.

This has been particularly important in countries with little or no national support for local sustainability processes, allowing local governments to find an alternative framework for cooperation and exchange. For instance, participation of US cities in ICLEI grew in an unprecedented way during the Bush era. Another example can be found in Spain and Italy, where local governments, in the absence of national support, turned to the international level and joined the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign in large numbers. A similar dynamic could be observed in Latin America. Local governments, challenged with an incomplete decentralization process, filled that gap through visionary municipal associations supported by international donors. For the first time a systematic exchange of experiences and South-South decentralized cooperation took place giving a new, wider perspective to local development.

Participation in international networks can be more demanding for local governments than engagement on the national level. First of all, most materials and events are offered in a foreign language, usually English (which is certainly a privilege for English-speaking communities). It requires also more travel, often meaning higher expenses and longer time away from the office. However, as the growing membership of international networks suggests, the benefits justify these potential inconveniences.

By engaging on the international scene, local governments gain direct access to international institutions, such as the European Commission in Europe or various UN processes. Local government representatives appreciate the advocacy role that networks can play, together with the inspiration and constructive criticism coming from those working on similar issues, perhaps in completely different ways and often under very different conditions. This opportunity for exchange can be particularly valuable for those who receive little recognition in their own municipality and rely on an international community of like-minded people for support and renewed motivation. On the other hand, participating in and hosting international events may contribute to raising the profile of sustainable development issues within the local administration. International networks also play an important role as platforms to share new solutions to local challenges and to find partners for collaborative projects on sustainable development.



# USA: Cities for Climate Protection Campaign

The Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Campaign was initiated by ICLEI in 1993, and was one of the first initiatives recognizing the importance of local action in reducing GHG emissions. Today it counts around 1000 member cities in 50 different countries, with over 200 in the US alone. The Campaign offers participating municipalities a comprehensive methodological framework, organized in five performance milestones, allowing them to plan, implement and monitor a cost-effective CO2 reduction policy, while improving the quality of life for inhabitants. The decision to join the Campaign is also a political statement, in the sense that every member needs to adopt a formal resolution, confirming their political commitment to CO2 reduction efforts.

The CCP Campaign has been particularly successful in the US not only in terms of its growing membership and the ambitious initiatives undertaken by the CCP cities but also as one of the key drivers behind a broader political movement represented by the US Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. The Agreement has been launched on 16 February, 2005 – the day when the Kyoto Protocol entered into force and became law for 141 countries that have ratified it. Disappointed with the US government decision to not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, 141 American cities came together under the leadership of Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels and pledged to meet or exceed the 7% GHG reduction target by 2012 from 1990 levels foreseen for the US under the Kyoto Protocol. The mayors called also for the establishment of bipartisan national GHG emissions reduction legislation, including a national emissions trading system. Since 2005 the agreement has been signed by over a thousand mayors, including Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, Portland, New York and many more major US cities. The CCP Campaign has been instrumental in providing tools needed to implement these commitments, such as a national protocol on local GHG emissions, as well as in mobilizing its member cities to strive for even more ambitious reduction targets.

## European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign

Launched in 1994 in Aalborg, the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign remains the biggest bottom-up movement that has emerged following the Local Agenda 21 call. The mission of the Campaign is to support the exchange of experience between cities and reach out to other local governments, collect information on the activities undertaken at the local level and serve as interface between the European Union and the local sustainability movement. The Campaign has played a key role in defining what a sustainable European city should look like and in setting out a process for making this vision a reality, by producing the Aalborg Charter and the Aalborg Commitments respectively.

The steering committee of the Campaign consisted initially of five local government networks (ICLEI, CEMR, Eurocities, UTO and WHO-Healthy Cities) plus the cities of Aalborg and Hannover, with the Directorate General Environment of the European Commission and the EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment participating with an observer status. Over the years the organization structure changed, including additional networks and cities. The European Union who initially co-funded the Campaign has withdrawn from the Campaign and the funding has been provided by the partners themselves, which meant scaling down the Campaign activities.

Today the Campaign is active mainly through regular European Sustainable Cities and Towns Conferences. The most recent one has taken place in Dunkerque, France in May 2010 and attracted over 1800 participants, the next one is scheduled for 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland. In the past its activities included the Sustainable Cities Awards (1996-2003), development of the Sustainability Kit offering practical support to local governments, as well as a number of training and advocacy initiatives.

# TYPE 4: NATIONAL POLICY

In its essence Local Agenda 21 has been a call for action, spurring voluntary engagement beyond the legal duties of local governments. However, with further development of national sustainability policies and growing recognition of the importance of local action comes also a certain level of institutionalization of local sustainability on the national level. To a varying extent depending on the country, supporting local governments in initiating and conducting local sustainability processes has become an important point on the national policy agenda. Indeed, national governments have a whole variety of instruments to initiate and support local sustainability processes and strategies, as well as to create favourable conditions for local action. These range from a clear legal obligation for local governments through provisions such as the adoption of sustainability criteria in sectoral legislations or funding programmes, to the establishment of national campaigns for local sustainability.

A special case of top-down local sustainability processes, steered by national governments, are the recent plans (particularly in Asia) to create new model cities or “eco-cities”. Although at first sight these projects have only little in common with traditional Local Agenda 21 processes, they incorporate sustainability criteria – especially environmental ones – in urban planning in a radical way.

## NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS, MECHANISMS AND LEGISLATION

Campaigns to raise awareness and the profile of sustainability issues on the local level initiated by national governments, and support programmes with guidance, training and exchange of experiences can be found across continents. Less frequent are financial incentives through subsidies linked with criteria such as process management quality, public participation, or the obligation to include sustainable development in strategic documents.

Regarding mandatory documents or references to sustainable development, three approaches can be distinguished:

— Local governments are obliged to adopt a Local Agenda 21 or local sustainable development strategy, e.g. in Ecuador, where sustainable local development was included as one of the objectives of the 2008 Constitution, or in the UK where local governments are required to develop a participatory Sustainable Community Strategy;

— Local governments are obliged to develop one or more sectoral documents related to sustainable development, e.g. every French local government of more than 50,000 inhabitants has to adopt and implement a Climate Plan, every Kosovo municipality needs to adopt a Local Environmental Action Plan, as well as to present a Strategic Environmental Assessment of its Municipal Development Plan;

— Local governments are obliged to incorporate sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue into its strategic documents, as in the case of South Africa, in which every municipality needs to adopt the Integrated Development Plans, a five-year development planning tool.

However, the problem with this "stick and carrot" methods is often the quality of the documents developed and the extent to which they are rooted in the practices of local government. In order to be successful, incentive-based systems need to be complemented with strong awareness raising and capacity building components. Otherwise, they risk delivering generic, "copy and paste" documents that are quickly filed away and never really implemented. Including sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue, particularly in countries where there is no established sustainable development policy, may result in a little more than a rhetorical exercise, with no real action taking place.



# Canada: Gas Tax Fund

An interesting mechanism has been developed in Canada where municipalities are allocated a percentage of the tax that is collected by the federal government on gasoline and later distributed via the provincial governments. For the period 2005-2010 the gas tax funds amounted to $5 billion, allocated on a per capita basis to the provinces. In order to access this funding, the municipalities are obliged to complete an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) that serves as an umbrella for all sustainable development activities. The funding is to be spent on environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure that will contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, cleaner air and cleaner water. Eligible projects fall under six categories: water and wastewater systems, solid waste management, public transit, roads and bridges, community energy systems, and community capacity building for sustainable planning. The key component of the ICSP is the need for public engagement and stakeholder participation. Thanks to this, ICSPs have played an important role in mobilizing community awareness of sustainable development issues.

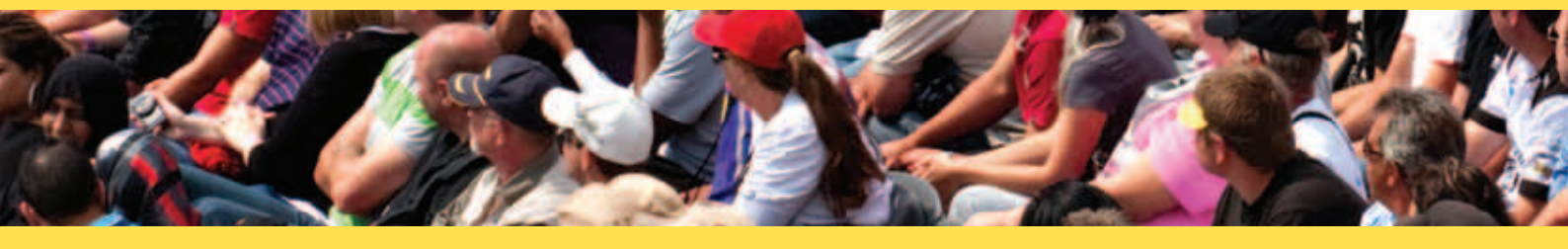
# Korea: From Local Agenda 21 to green growth?

A rare example of a national Local Agenda 21 campaign based on a localized organizational structure, Korea is internationally recognized for its commitment to green growth. However, the case of Korea shows also how shifting national priorities are reflected at the local level, and displays the tension between effectiveness and local ownership of sustainable development processes.

The national Local Agenda 21 movement started in 1995 in the city of Pusan. The movement experienced tremendous growth with the establishment of the Presidential Commission on Sustainable Development in 2000 and the enactment of a Framework Act on Sustainable Development in 2007. In accordance with this act, metropolitan cities and provinces were required to establish a Local Sustainable Development Council and develop a Local Sustainable Development Strategy. The newly created Councils were usually closely linked to ongoing Local Agenda 21 processes, steered by Local Agenda 21 councils or civil secretariats and supported financially by the local governments. As of December 2010, almost 90% of Korean local governments had an active Local Agenda 21 process.

In 2008, at the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea, President Lee Myung-bak proclaimed "Low Carbon, Green Growth" as Korea's new national vision, with three major objectives: promoting eco-friendly growth engines for the national economy, enhancing quality of life for Koreans and contributing to international efforts to combat climate change. To bring the vision to the local level the National Assembly of Korea mandated the establishment of Local Green Growth Committees and the appointment of Chief Green Officers in metropolitan cities and provinces, as well as within ministries and governmental agencies.

In 2010, Korea established the internationally praised Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth, translating the vision into binding national regulations. In accordance with the new Framework Act, seven Korean provinces and nine metropolitan cities have developed Five-Year Implementation Plans for Local Green Growth, a strategic document that steers development within the province or metropolitan area. According to representatives of the Korean Local Agenda 21 movement, the new vision meant a shift towards climate response and economic growth, with less attention being given to stakeholder participation and local sustainability in the broader sense. Newly established Local Green Growth Committees do not have strong relations with existing Local Agenda 21 secretariats and the citizens are seen more as the target of sustainable lifestyle campaigns than a partner in policy discussions.



# France: National reference framework for Local Agenda 21

Compared to other European countries, France was a late bloomer in terms of local sustainability, with a major mobilization coming at the end of the nineties. However, thanks to the strong leadership of the Ministry of Environment (renamed in 2009 the Ministry of Sustainable Development) and other national level actors, it now boasts one of the most active local sustainability campaigns, or rather Local Agenda 21 campaigns, as this term has remained a synonym for local action for sustainable development in France. The success can be attributed to a healthy combination of three crucial elements: national legislation encouraging Local Agendas 21, a reference framework and call for recognition rewarding best performers, as well as broad stakeholder participation in the set-up and development of the campaign. Local Agenda 21 is understood as a voluntary overarching process, integrating sustainable development into local strategies.

In terms of legislation, there are a number of requirements related to the integration of sustainable development concerns into local strategic documents. New environmental laws mandate every region and every local government with more than 50,000 inhabitants to produce a report about sustainable development of their territories, as well as to adopt and implement a climate plan (for those who do not have a Local Agenda 21).



Launched in 2006, by the Ministry of Sustainable Development in partnership with local governments, the national reference framework for Local Agenda 21 defines five objectives and five process requirements that characterize a Local Agenda 21 process. This reference framework is a tool for coherence and sustainable development is now defined by those five objectives in French environmental laws. In order to support local governments in applying this approach in practice, the Ministry has co-developed with local governments an online sustainability management and evaluation tool that provides an overview of relevant national commitments, highlights actions needed at the local level and proposes a set of accompanying indicators.[16] Local authorities that fulfil the criteria of the reference framework can apply to the Ministry for official recognition. This official recognition is valid for three years and encourages territories to advance towards local sustainability.

Most importantly perhaps, the local sustainability movement in France benefits from well-established institutions that offer constant support to interested local governments, and work in partnership with the Ministry and other institutions to advance the regulatory framework and raise the profile of local sustainability. One of the key actors is the National Local Agenda 21 Observatory, which has collected and analysed local sustainability experience since 2006. The Observatory was founded by the Ministry for Sustainable Development, Association 4D, the Association des Maires de France and Comite 21. There are also many actors active at the regional and local level.

## MODEL SUSTAINABLE CITIES

In the Northern Hemisphere, with its demographic trends of shrinking and ageing populations, the sustainable cities of the future will be the cities that exist today, only with their structures, functions and fabric adapted to minimal resource use and a changed climate.

The situation in the Global South is very different. According to UN projections, by 2050 almost 70% of world population will live in cities which means that, coupled with expected population growth, the world urban population will grow from 3.5 bln in 2010 to 6.3 bln in 2050, with 95% of this increase occurring in developing countries.[17] That means that in the next 40 years existing urban capacity needs to be almost doubled. Whether this new urban capacity will adhere to sustainability criteria or not is a decision of fundamental importance for sustainable development worldwide and a choice that will hugely impact our future.

Designing cities from scratch, as is often the case with current so-called eco-cities projects, certainly has its advantages. Planners and engineers are free to design and implement many radical solutions, for example in terms of resource efficiency standards or transport infrastructure, without having to worry about adapting existing systems or going through cumbersome public consultation processes. On the other hand, even the most advanced technologies cannot produce a sustainable city without the involvement of its future inhabitants. It remains to be seen what the impact will be of various technological solutions on quality of life and to what extent people will be willing to follow sustainable consumption patterns.

Existing eco-cities projects, as the name shows, focus on high environmental performance, downplaying other aspects of sustainable urban development. They are often designed to act as a showcase of emerging technologies and promoted as exciting business opportunities rather than exciting places to live in. It will be interesting to watch how these new developments turn from investment projects to cities and what will be the experience of their inhabitants, since it is only when the first inhabitants settle there that the real local sustainability process can begin in earnest. Coming back to the challenge of doubling existing urban capacity within the next 40 years, one has to keep in mind that in order for this challenge to be met profound changes in existing urban development patterns are needed. Eco-cities alone, as long as they remain isolated islands of innovation, will not produce a tangible impact.

# Tianjin Eco-City, China: A model for sustainable development?

Launched officially in 2008, Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city is a collaborative project between the Government of China and the Government of Singapore. The main objective is to build an eco-city that could serve as an easily replicable model for sustainable development for other cities in China and around the world. The first of the planned 350,000 inhabitants are expected to move there in 2012 and the whole project is to be completed by 2020.

The development of the 31 $km^2$ area is guided by a master plan, with 26 key performance indicators, covering environmental, social and economic aspects, e.g. 90% green trips (public and non-motorized transport), 20% of subsidized public housing or 50 R&D scientists and engineers per 10,000 people working.[18] Some targets, such as the 20% share of renewable energy, have been criticized as not ambitious enough. On the other hand, many agreed that the Tianjin project, contrary to other similar initiatives in China, has both realistic targets and a realistic timeframe, and therefore a good chance of actually being implemented. The project is a Chinese-Singaporean joint venture, involving both private and state-owned companies. Like most eco-cities, Tianjin Eco-city is expected to become a showcase of green technologies and has already attracted major investors from all over the world, including companies like Philips or Hitachi. Thanks to its high political profile, the development benefits from a number of policy concessions, including tax incentives, housing rebates and special funds to support R&D activities.

# Masdar City, Abu Dhabi, UAE: A capital of clean technology

Initiated in 2006 by the Government of Abu Dhabi, Masdar City is part of Abu Dhabi's effort to become a global centre of excellence in renewable energy and clean technology solutions. It is a very ambitious initiative, considering that in 2008 United Arab Emirates ranked amongst the top five per capita CO2 emitters worldwide [19] and its economy is in large part based on oil. Administered by Masdar, a dedicated subsidiary of the government-owned investment company, the development was scheduled to be completed by 2016 and house 40,000 residents. Masdar City is one of five units of Masdar, a *"commercially driven enterprise that operates to reach the broad boundaries of the renewable energy and sustainable technologies industry"* [20], and has a very strong R&D focus.

Originally announced as zero carbon, zero waste and car-free, the project has been forced to accept more modest targets and an extended timeline, due to the financial crisis. However, it still includes a number of large-scale innovative solutions, such as the largest solar photovoltaic plant in the Middle East (10 MW), a pilot of a Personal Rapid Transit system (automated, single-cabin electric vehicles) or smart water metering. Despite still being in early stages of its development, Masdar City has gained international recognition and managed to attract a number of multinational companies, including Siemens, GE, Schneider and BASF.

# TYPE 5: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

For many local governments and communities, local sustainability processes came with the participation in international development cooperation activities. Amongst these, the participation in programmes of national and international organizations for technical cooperation and development has to be distinguished from individual partnerships between cities and municipal associations in the North and South, East and West.[21] Even though both forms of support for economically weaker regions had existed for much longer than the vision of sustainable development, it was in the last twenty years that the support for local sustainability has been so explicitly incorporated into the portfolio of development cooperation activities.

Local sustainability processes initiated by international cooperation programmes tend to follow a pre-defined common methodology with agreed process criteria, and failure in fulfilling them may endanger the further flow of financial support. This often results in well-prepared and well-managed local processes that deliver remarkable results in a comparatively short time. On the other hand, as soon as (project) funding ends, these processes have to prove that they themselves have been established in a "sustainable" way – which of the structures and procedures introduced can be maintained beyond the lifetime of the donor intervention?



In contrast, processes initiated by partnerships between individual local governments (e.g. in the framework of city twinning) are focused to a much greater extent on mutual learning. Although such processes may be characterized by a high process management quality as well, the focus of the cooperation is more on a long-term partnership, shared experience and mutual exchange, and less on professional management and measurable results. In addition, with both partners being local governments (or local government associations), there is greater understanding of challenges faced, as well as a more equal working relationship, going beyond the usual donor-recipient relation.

In both cases channelling new initiatives through existing, well-established cooperation structures makes it easier to get them off the ground. However, development cooperation activities in the field of sustainable development face similar risks and difficulties as any other development projects. On the recipient side, those are mostly related to weak legal and governance systems and can entail, for example, a lack of institutional and personal capacities, corruption or political pressures. On the donor side, the risks include insufficient knowledge of and respect for local needs, lack of coordination between different donors and short-term engagement.

## UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

In 1997 ICLEI predicted a rapid increase in Local Agenda 21 processes in middle- and low-income countries, pointing to the growing interest of international donors in supporting these processes. Today local sustainability initiatives can be found in the portfolio of almost every international development organization, even if only a few of them still use the name "Local Agenda 21". This wouldn't be possible without the involvement of few pioneers, such as UNDP, UN-Habitat, UNEP but also bilateral donors like Germany, Canada, Belgium, Denmark or the Netherlands, who through their long-term engagement and focus on capacity building managed to plant the seeds of local sustainability in thousands of municipalities worldwide.

However, the funding available for sustainable development at the local level is often channelled through a number of institutions before it reaches local administration. This leads not only to increased costs but also to suboptimal results, as the activities may not be sufficiently rooted in the local context. The 2011 UN-Habitat report on cities and climate change calls for easing bureaucratic burdens on local access to international support and argues that local actors need direct communication and accountability channels linking them to international donors.[22] The 2011 ICLEI White Paper "Financing the Resilient City" reiterates this call, proposing a bottom-up, demand-driven approach to investment planning, design and financial sourcing, the three "inversions" of the conventional development assistance approach.[23]



# UNDP: Promoting good governance and public participation

UNDP has been working on sustainable urban development through many of its programmes, including LIFE (Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment) that focused on promoting participatory urban governance and Capacity 21, a dedicated funding instrument for Agenda 21 implementation, both launched at the Earth Summit in 1992. Capacity 21 in particular played a pivotal role in getting Local Agenda 21 processes off the ground in many countries around the world. Today local sustainable development issues are integrated in many UNDP projects and initiatives, including those focusing on local governance, access to services and environment protection. In its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, UNDP promotes public participation and gender empowerment, public-private partnerships and local capacity building. One of the recent initiatives, Territorial Approach to Climate Change (TACC) Facility, established by UN agencies and networks of sub-national governments, focuses on the role of regions in climate mitigation and adaptation. The Facility will contribute to the preparation of up to 50 Integrated Territorial Climate Plans, including assessments of carbon emissions, present and future vulnerability, and mitigation and adaptation strategies.



# UN-Habitat: Improving urban environmental planning and management

The Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) has been established in the early 1990s, as the joint UN-Habitat/ UNEP facility, with the goal of building capacities in urban environmental planning and management. It targeted urban local authorities and their partners, promoting broad-based participatory approaches and pro-poor governance. The SCP programme ran from 1991 to 2007 and, together with its sister programme Localizing Agenda 21 (focusing on the sustainable development of secondary towns), operated in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Today UN-Habitat continues to work with cities in developing countries through its Cities and Climate Change and Habitat Partner Universities initiatives. The former, launched in 2009, is currently active in 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It focuses on medium-sized cities that are to experience the largest population growth and greatest increase in vulnerability to climate change impacts in the coming decades.

## INTERNATIONAL DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

The last years have brought a growing popularity of decentralized development cooperation programmes and, at the same time, the unique contribution that local governments bring to the development process has been recognized on the international level. In its 2008 communication "Local Communities: Actors for Development", the European Commission has stated:

*"While the involvement of local authorities in external cooperation and development policy, especially through town twinning, has a long history, the last decade has witnessed a radical change in its nature. Decentralised Cooperation has emerged as a new and important dimension of development cooperation. (...) Local authorities are bringing unique added value to development processes".*[24]

European local governments have access to a number of funding instruments, both on the European and national levels, to finance their cooperation activities. However, decentralized cooperation still represents a very small percentage of national aid. In Spain, one of the European leaders in this regard, it amounts to 15% of the national aid budget.[25] In France the 2005 Oudin-Santini law allows the municipalities, regions and public authorities responsible for water and sanitation services to spend 1% of their budgets on these services for financing international development projects in these fields.[26] There are also countries, however, in which local governments may not spend their public money for development cooperation projects.

Decentralized cooperation is not limited to North-South relations. A growing number of South-South partnerships, such asbetween Johannesburg in South Africa and Lilongwe in Malawi or between eThekwini Municipality (Durban) in South Africa and ALAN in Namibia, highlights the importance of this form of cooperation.

With growing awareness of carbon footprints of products and services, the role of decentralized cooperation, as a way to reduce emissions at the source, is set to increase.



# Do we really reduce CO2 emissions in industrialized countries?

With industrial manufacturing happening mostly in developing countries, it is there where most carbon emissions are produced, regardless of the final destination of the product. To put it simply, importing products from developing countries equals "outsourcing" carbon emissions. The international trade alters national carbon footprints, making it difficult to estimate real reductions achieved. A recent study from the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research found that the cuts in carbon emissions that developed countries have made since 1990 have been cancelled out by increases in imported goods from developing countries.[27] This means that any efforts to reduce carbon emissions, be it on national or local level, need to assume a global perspective.

## Barcelona: Pioneering a local approach to international solidarity

In addition to external funding, a growing number of municipalities choose to finance (or co-finance) development projects from their own budgets. Among the cities that have pioneered this approach was Barcelona, with its Barcelona Solidaria programme.[28] Established in 1994, Barcelona Solidaria supports development projects implemented by Barcelona-based NGOs, as well as those implemented directly by the city administration. It is funded by a fixed percentage of the municipal budget (0.7%). In the framework of this initiative, the City of Barcelona funds annually approx. 70-80 projects, focusing on humanitarian assistance, health and safety issues, social integration and gender equality programmes, local economic development (e.g. fair trade) and promotion of public participation. There are also some projects with clear environmental focus, e.g. the Local Sustainable Development Strategy for the urban area of Al-Fayhaa in Lebanon which resulted in, among other achievements, an establishment of the first air pollution monitoring station in that area.

## Germany: Partnerships for climate mitigation and adaptation

An interesting example of a recent initiative that focuses strongly on climate activities comes from Germany. In the framework of Municipal Climate Partnerships 50 German municipalities and their partner municipalities will develop joint programmes for action on climate change mitigation and adaptation by 2015. This initiative builds on a long-term involvement of German local authorities in international development cooperation, with many projects that addressed sustainable development or even explicitly Local Agenda 21 promotion.[29] Key countries with which German cities work are Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Nicaragua and China.

# Canada: Strengthening national local government associations

Canadian municipalities have been long involved in city-to-city cooperation, through the Municipal Partnership Programme, led by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). The basic feature of this Canadian cooperation is a strong focus on partnership between FCM and other national local government associations and local capacity building, as well as alignment with national development priorities. As a result of this cooperation, the Federation of Municipal Associations in Bolivia (FAM-Bolivia) has implemented a local equivalent of FCM's Municipal Green Fund that supports and mobilizes municipal resources for investments in sustainable development projects. Other examples include the municipality of Dedougou in Burkina Faso that, together with its Canadian partner, established a functioning solid waste management system. The experiences of Dedougou have been further replicated in other Burkinian municipalities, thanks to the manual developed together with the Association of Municipalities of Burkina Faso.[30] Other notable projects include the support to public participation of vulnerable groups in China, sustainable tourism development in Vietnam and environmental education in Nicaragua. The Canadian example shows the importance of national municipal associations as local sustainability actors, both on the national and international level.



Many of the existing international instruments have the potential to support local sustainability, even if it may require certain adjustments to their current operating mechanisms or simply capacity building for cities. One such instrument is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol. Under CDM, the developed countries (so called Annex B countries) can meet their emission reduction targets by purchasing certified emissions reductions from developing countries. Despite bureaucratic obstacles related to CDM projects, a number of cities (e.g. in China or India) have used this instrument to finance their sustainability initiatives, particularly in the field of waste. UN-Habitat has also recently produced a guide for cities from developing countries on how to make use of CDM.[31] Lessons learnt from CDM experience can be very valuable in designing future financial instruments based on the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle, e.g. in the field of climate adaptation.[32]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# INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE FRAMEWORKS

With Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 offering only a very general direction for actions to be undertaken at the local level, there was a widely recognized need to agree on a more concrete guidance that would steer local sustainability processes. With the local sustainability movement gaining momentum, local governments are increasingly looking for a reference point, a standard their own performance can be compared against.

Many referred to international commitments, such as the Rio Conventions, Millennium Development Goals and the Kyoto Protocol, for example through comparing local $CO_2$ reduction targets with those allocated to countries under the Kyoto Protocol. Others have decided to go a step further and join or create a bottom-up local government movement, actively entering the international arena and taking on the responsibility of implementing sustainable development in their cities or towns. Organized through bottom-up processes, local governments call upon national and supranational structures to support them in their efforts and to recognize the potential of local action. In some regions, most notably in Europe, their calls have been heard and the supranational institutions saw in local governments valuable allies in implementing their sustainable development policies. This resulted in a wave of new, top-down local sustainability initiatives addressed to local governments.



# BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES

Looking at the wide spectrum of bottom-up initiatives coming from the local level, one can distinguish between comprehensive local sustainability frameworks, like the Aalborg Charter, the founding document of the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, or the STAR Community Index, and more theme-oriented campaigns, such as the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign.

The main objective of these comprehensive frameworks is to agree on a common vision for local sustainability, set out issues to be addressed and propose a process to support the achievement of this vision. The holistic approach, integrating social, environmental and economic aspects, is certainly a key strength of these initiatives but may also turn out to be a weakness, if the concepts used are too general and difficult to translate into practice. The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign remains the most prominent example of a comprehensive, bottom-up framework to date. It has inspired efforts to establish comparable structures in other parts of the world, such as the Nunoa Charter in Latin America, but none have managed to achieve a similarly high profile.

The more narrow focus of the theme-oriented campaigns makes it easier for them to define clear goals, offer practical, targeted support and ultimately produce tangible results on the ground. Initiated in 1993 and still going strong, ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Campaign has united over 1000 local governments worldwide in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CCP has evolved into a broader movement, inspiring other initiatives, including the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement and the Partners for Climate Protection Programme, the Canadian component of the broader CCP. Building on CCP experience, local governments are today at the forefront of global action for climate mitigation and adaptation, with the Local Government Climate Roadmap. Launched in 2007 at the COP13 in Bali, it mirrored the UN Climate Roadmap and, since there is still no binding international climate agreement, continues today with initiatives like the Copenhagen Cities Climate Catalogue, Mexico City Pact and Cities Climate Registry, and – most recently – the Durban Adaptation Charter.

The strengths of the bottom-up initiatives lie in their flexibility and respect for local priorities, as well as in their democratic nature that creates a sense of ownership amongst local governments. On the other hand, the bottom-up nature often means problems with keeping the process alive, e.g. due to a lack of reliable funding sources or the waning commitment of key actors. To avoid the danger of operating in parallel to ongoing political processes, bottom-up initiatives increasingly strive to link up with existing processes, both to maintain their relevance and to raise the bar on such processes (such as the Local Government Climate Roadmap does for the UNFCCC negotiations process, for example).

## Aalborg Charter and Aalborg Commitments: Foundation of local sustainability in Europe

Adopted by local government representatives gathered in Aalborg, Denmark in 1994, the Aalborg Charter has been signed by more than 2700 local authorities, most of them Spanish and Italian. Read today it is still one of the most visionary and forward-looking documents on local sustainability, and yet is has managed to win the support of hundreds of cities in Europe. Ten years after the adoption of the Aalborg Charter, the cities active within the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign decided that a new, more practice and process oriented document is needed, in order to accelerate the implementation of local sustainability processes.

As a result, the 2004 European Conference adopted the Aalborg Commitments - a list of 50 qualitative objectives organized into 10 themes, including governance and management, environmental, social and economic issues, as well as containing a global solidarity dimension. The move from charter to commitments signified a new, more structured and ambitious approach. To be signed by the political representative, the document required the signatory to comply with time-bound milestones. Each local government was asked to produce a baseline review within a year of signature, conduct a participatory target-setting process and arrive at a set of individual local targets addressing all 10 themes within two years, as well as committing to regular monitoring review.

As of 2011, the Aalborg Commitments have been signed by over 650 local authorities, a majority of them Spanish and Italian once again. However, when it came to complying with the requirements, the numbers were significantly lower: 67 baseline reports and 11 target-setting documents were uploaded to the Commitments website. One of the main reasons for this was the lack of enforcement procedures, meaning that failure to deliver did not result in being removed from the list of signatories. On the other hand, most European cities who consider themselves dedicated to sustainable development in one way or another refer to the Aalborg Commitments, even if they decide to structure their own processes differently.

## STAR Community Index: How to create a working national standard?

The STAR Community Index [33], launched in 2012 as a Northern American local sustainability framework, is a strategic planning and performance management system that offers US local governments a road map for improving community sustainability. In its effort to support local governments and communities, STAR combines four key elements: a vision of healthy, prosperous and inclusive communities, clear goals and performance measures, a rating system that drives continuous improvement and fosters healthy competition, and an online performance management tool. The framework is organized around 10 guiding principles and includes 81 sustainability goals. In 2010, 10 beta communities were selected, including New York, Washington, Austin and Atlanta. Each contributed to building the online platform and to road-testing the system itself. Developed in a broad participatory process, STAR is a partnership between ICLEI USA, the US Green Building Council and the Center for American Progress.

# LOCALIZING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY GOALS



As the successes of local action become apparent, regional and international organizations, such as the European Union, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), increasingly realize the need to "localize" their strategies. Coordinated involvement of local governments is seen as a crucial factor in meeting international targets related to issues such as climate and energy, biodiversity and resilience.

The EU initiatives created in the last few years, such as the Covenant of Mayors, linked to the EU Climate and Energy Package, or the European Green Capital Award [34], have been very effective in further raising the profile of sustainability issues and have inspired calls for similar instruments to be established in other areas of European policy. The EU Committee of the Regions recommended the extension of the Covenant of Mayors format to the entire EU resource efficiency agenda, while the roll-out of the EU Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, linked to the objectives of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the Leipzig Charter, is expected in 2012.

Existing local sustainability awards and rankings are usually top-down, with criteria being defined externally, with only a few exceptions (e.g. the Sustainable Cities Award of the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign). The most popular ones, such as the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award, the EU Green Capital Award, the ITDP Sustainable Transport Award or the Green Cities Index (coming from the business sector), attract a lot of media attention and are highly valued by local politicians.

The main advantage of top-down initiatives, particularly those endorsed by the EU, is high political visibility that attracts local leaders, as well as a strong support network on the national level, e.g. through line ministries. They are usually accompanied with well-funded dissemination and capacity building activities, making it easier for cities not only to join but also to comply with the requirements. On the other hand, such initiatives are more vulnerable to political pressures and may settle for easily achievable or non specific targets, particularly if the goals agreed at the international level are not ambitious enough. The monitoring of implementation at the local level also remains a challenge, with most processes still based on self-reporting and declarations.

Top-down does not necessarily mean a lack of stakeholder participation. It is certainly reassuring that many top-down campaigns seek to involve local governments in various stages of the process. However, in most cases local governments and their organizations are invited to support the implementation of the international and regional goals, while their voice in discussions on defining those goals is seldom heard. Even though it is encouraging to see many top-down processes include a stronger involvement of local governments, the question whether it is possible to combine ambition and ownership of bottom-up process with the political visibility and resources of the top-down ones remains open.

## UNISDR Making Cities Resilient Campaign: Localizing climate adaptation

The UNISDR Making Cities Resilient Campaign addresses issues of local governance and urban risk, based on the understanding that local government officials are faced with the threat of disasters on a day-to-day basis and need better access to policies and tools to effectively deal with them. Established in 2010 for a five-year period, the Campaign aims to raise political commitment to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation among local governments and mayors. As of December 2011, almost 1000 cities from 80 countries have answered this call. The Campaign encourages cities to act, having developed a checklist of ten essentials for making cities resilient. The Campaign introduces no binding commitments, focusing instead on awareness raising and training support and involves a wide range of partners, including local government organizations.

## EU Covenant of Mayors: New energy for Europe?

Launched in 2008 to involve local governments in the achievement of EU climate and energy goals, the Covenant of Mayors has quickly become an important political instrument for showcasing the potential of local action. Hailed as an exceptional model of multi-level governance, the Covenant has been created by the Directorate-General Energy of the EU Commission to support the implementation of the EU Climate and Energy Package, in particular the 20% reduction of $CO_2$ emissions by 2020. The signatories adopt a resolution in which they commit to meeting or exceeding the EU target and accept the obligation to present a Sustainable Energy Action Plan, including emissions inventory, within a year of signature, and then an Implementation Report every second year.

To date the Covenant has been signed by over 3200 local authorities. One third of them have already submitted their action plans, with targets often far exceeding the required 20%. However, so far only approx. 10% of the plans submitted have been accepted by the Covenant Secretariat which may suggest that their quality is not always as high as expected. With the obligations clearly defined, also the enforcement mechanisms are stronger than those applied, for instance, by the Aalborg Commitments Secretariat – while delays seem to be acceptable, those not complying are eventually suspended. Similar to the Aalborg process, here again it's the Italian and Spanish municipalities that make up over 75% of the signatories but the Covenant has been more successful in reaching out to cities in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

# LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CHANGES IN POLITICAL CULTURE

Thinking about the legacy of local sustainability processes, there is one question that inevitably springs to mind: has the local sustainability movement succeeded in making the world a more sustainable place? Looking at statistics and projections available, both in terms of environmental and social performance, it is clear that we are still a long way from global sustainability. As to cities, one can't help but notice that the prevailing urban development patterns are not sustainable, leading to sprawl, congestion and segregation. Rapid urban growth and wasteful consumption patterns remain a challenge to communities worldwide. However, even though a lot remains to be done, local sustainability processes have made a lasting impact on the way we understand and implement sustainable development today.

The following chapter will highlight key changes in terms of how local sustainability has been understood and governed, including shifting thematic foci and evolving approaches to public participation. Finally, it will reflect upon the changing role of local governments, both in terms of decentralization progress and increased activity on the international scene.

# CONCEPTUALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - TOWARDS A GREEN URBAN ECONOMY

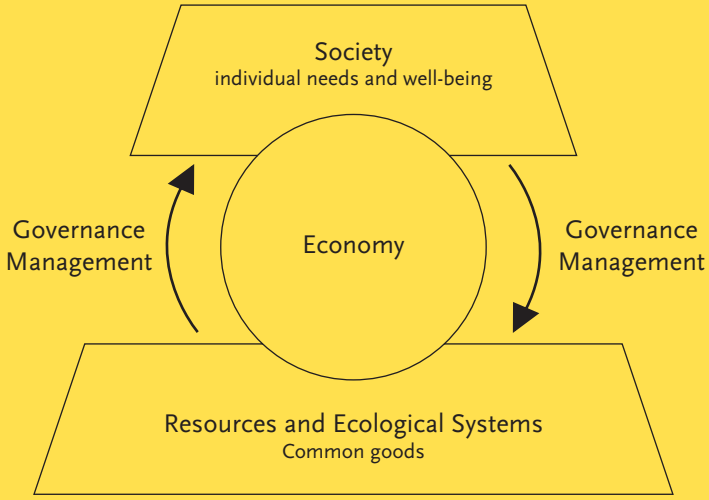


Local processes described in this study deal with sustainability – but what exactly does that mean? As already mentioned, in collecting information for the study the authors have decided to leave the task of defining sustainability to the respondents, trying instead to find out how this term is understood at the local level. Put simply, the question is what do local governments do when they say they work towards sustainability, and as a follow up, how has it changed over the past two decades?

It came as no surprise that a lot of respondents still refer to the 1987 Brundtland definition, according to which *"sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.[35] Others quoted the formulation included in the preamble to Agenda 21, which defines sustainable development as *"the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future"*.[36]

A popular view of sustainable development sees it as composed of three pillars, environmental, social and economic, even if not all of them are treated equally. However, these general definitions can translate into very different activities on the ground, depending on local concerns and priorities. In light of the preparations for the UN Rio+20 Conference, and in particular the discussion about a 'Green Economy', the question of interconnectedness of the sustainable development pillars keeps coming back. Can we treat environmental, social and economic goals as equally important? Are they compatible or contradictory?

Willing to contribute to this critical debate, ICLEI proposes to consider an alternative model of conceptualizing sustainable development, inspired by Herman Daly's 1973 Sustainability Triangle.[37] This re-conceptualization underpins the proposals formulated by ICLEI in its contribution to the zero draft of the Rio+20 outcome.[38]




# Sustainability beyond the 3 pillars

As the figure above illustrates, human economic activity is the key mechanism that extracts natural resources (common goods) and transforms them into goods and services intended to improve quality of life and human well-being (individual needs). This process is flanked by policies, procedures and technologies available (governance/management). Sustainable development in this model would mean establishing an economy that uses natural resources only to the extent they can replenish themselves and absorb emissions. At the same time, economic activity would have to provide a societally agreed minimum level of quality of life to everyone. Policies at the local, national and international level would have to safeguard the physical carrying capacity of ecosystems and agreed human social standards.

Selected as one of the key themes of the upcoming Rio+20 Conference, the concept of green economy has received a great deal of attention in the last two or three years. In its much-discussed report "Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication", UNEP argues that investing 2% of global GDP into ten key sectors can kick-start a transition towards a low-carbon and resource-efficient global economy. Due to the concentration of people, knowledge, infrastructures, resources and economic activities cities are the natural environment in which the transition to the green economy will happen.

With its regulatory powers, market position and communication channels, local governments are uniquely positioned to take an active role in this transition. With instruments such as strategic planning (e.g. building codes or land use planning), financial incentives (e.g. environmental taxes) or advisory services for local citizens and businesses, local governments have an opportunity to shape the local economy, minimizing its impact on the environment and maximizing its innovation potential. One of the examples of local governments' contribution to greening the economy is the progress in integrating social and environmental criteria in local purchasing policies.[39] According to ICLEI's Procura+ Campaign, sustainable procurement means:

*"thinking carefully about what you buy: buying only what you really need, purchasing products and services with high environmental performance, and considering the social and economic impacts of your procurement".*[40]

Sustainable procurement policies are well established in most OECD countries but there are also a growing number of initiatives underway in others, most notably in China, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa. The 2007 IISD report on the state of play in sustainable public procurement (SPP) found that local SPP initiatives are far more widespread than national ones, particularly in developing countries, noting that:

*"While the baseline incentives for these could well be national policies on sustainable development and (to a lesser extent sustainable procurement), it is noteworthy that most of these programmes do not appear to be specifically linked to them. Rather, they are the result of dynamic international procurement networks and proactive leadership at the local level."* [41]

The choice of green economy as one of the key themes for the upcoming conference has created a lot of controversy, particularly in the absence of a universally agreed definition. For instance, many developing countries feared that adopting green economy principles would lead to a sort of "green protectionism", adding yet another obstacle to developing country exports. Others, mainly non-governmental organizations and other major groups, criticized the focus on technological innovation and economic growth whilst social innovation and justice received little attention.

It remains to be seen what the outcome will be of these discussions but there is at least one positive aspect of choosing this theme over others. Turning the debate towards economics finally brings into the picture the primary reason behind the exploitative, unsustainable use of natural and human resources – the current model of human economic activity. Raising the level of social and environmental standards for economic activities in local, national and international legislation, ranging from the local bakery to multinational corporations, seems to be the 'remedy of choice' if the global community wants to stop the downward spiral of increased exploitation of natural and human resources.



# FROM ENTRY POINT ISSUES TO FULL-FLEDGED PROCESSES

The story of local sustainability processes can be seen as a story of (local) administrations adapting their management and governance processes to sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue, going beyond established policy silos. Most successful local governments started small and later scaled up their activities, broadening the thematic focus, including long-term perspectives and, most importantly perhaps, integrating various activities around a set of strategic objectives. However, in order for this tactic to succeed, it is essential that local governments establish a sustainability management system to steer local processes. Simply adding more activities, without an overarching management framework, results in fragmentation of efforts, waste of human and financial resources and poor performance.

Starting small means focusing on one issue first and then including more, as the process develops. When looking at topics tackled by different municipalities, one can often see certain regularities or typical trajectories that local sustainability processes follow. However, it is important to recognize that those changing topics act more as entry points for local sustainability, relevant for a particular time and place. The choice of priority issues may respond to local concerns, but is also influenced by the availability of funding, political pressures from the central level, and other external conditions.



## SHIFTING PRIORITIES IN LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY PROCESSES

Japan, similar to many European countries, has seen a shift from air, water and soil pollution as key local sustainability issues in the 1980s to climate mitigation, resource efficiency and biodiversity conservation in the 1990s. The most successful local sustainability campaign to date has dealt with the issues of waste reduction and recycling. Tackling the rapidly increasing waste stream that resulted from growing consumption, local economic growth and a lack of landfill sites became a priority for Japanese local governments, who were concerned about the burden it played on local budgets. Another example of a typical trajectory comes from the US, where the interest of leading local actors has shifted from environment protection and public participation, through climate mitigation and a broad sustainability approach, to climate adaptation issues.

The biggest change apparent in the recent years is the growing importance of climate issues, which are now firmly at the top of the international sustainability agenda. This growth in prominence may be at least partly attributed to discussions incited by the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change [42], published in 2006. In fact, a lot of communities, when talking about local sustainability, refer mainly to their activities targeted at climate change mitigation and – to a lesser extent – adaptation. In the 2002 Rio+10 survey, climate issues were named as one of the top priorities only by European municipalities - today, however, it is truly a global concern. Apart from climate, two other themes have been very successful in mobilizing local action, particularly in the last decade: climate adaptation and biodiversity.

## New entry point: resilience and climate adaptation

With growing awareness of the inevitability of climate change, the issues related to climate change vulnerability and adaptation have sharply risen in the global agenda. Whereas the local dimension of mitigation activities can be more difficult to grasp, there is hardly a more local concern than climate adaptation, particularly as many cities struggle already with the impacts of the changing climate. It comes therefore as no surprise that cities are very active in the global adaptation debate, also in terms of advocacy. During the Durban Local Government Convention, held in parallel with UNFCCC COP-17, 114 mayors and other elected local leaders representing almost a thousand local governments from around the world came together in the signing of the Durban Adaptation Charter. The Charter calls upon local and sub-national governments to scale up and accelerate their adaptation efforts and to mainstream adaptation in all local development planning. This would not have been possible without the Resilient Cities conference series, organized by ICLEI since 2010, that offers a multi-stakeholder platform for discussing adaptation strategies and funding mechanisms.[43] According to the ICLEI White Paper on Financing the Resilient City, urban resilience is defined as *"the ability of an urban area or system to provide predictable performance, i.e. benefits, utility, to residents and users, and predictable returns to investors, under a wide range of often unpredictable circumstances"*, and is seen as a positive development strategy, as opposed to narrowly understood adaptation that focuses simply on risk reduction.[44]

## New entry point: biodiversity

Another fast growing theme is biodiversity, which is gaining political importance on the local, national and international levels. With recent calculations of the value of ecosystem services done in the framework of the TEEB study [45], the global community has regained a sense of urgency to deal with the accelerated loss of biological diversity. Similar to climate adaptation, biodiversity preservation is related to reducing local vulnerability and therefore is a topic of great importance to local leaders. ICLEI's Local Action for Biodiversity, a global urban biodiversity programme, has been active since 2006 and currently works with a number of pioneer cities from around the globe to manage and conserve biodiversity at the local level. Local governments have been also very successful in forging international partnerships, with the establishment of the Cities and Biodiversity Global Partnership, described further in this chapter.

While both climate adaptation and biodiversity have lately become very visible on the international arena, it is necessary to recognize that they are neither replacing nor running in parallel to earlier local sustainability processes. On the contrary, in most cases they build upon ongoing processes, often breathing new life (and funding) into them. After all, whether one reads a climate adaptation strategy or a biodiversity strategy, it still needs to deal with building regulations, health issues, water management or green spaces and it still needs to involve local stakeholders. It's like putting a new lens on your camera – the shape you are photographing remains the same, just the light changes.

## SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS

The developing countries have started their Local Agenda 21 processes with a focus on poverty alleviation and access to services, both of which remain important in African, Asian and Latin American municipalities. It would be over-simplifying to say that poorer countries deal mostly with social issues and, as they grow richer, the environmental issues take over. On the other hand, it is clear that many municipalities in developing countries still struggle to deliver basic services to their communities and hence issues like slum upgrading, access to sanitation or solid waste management are absolute priority. However, in all of these regions the cities are now also working on resource efficiency, as well as on climate mitigation and adaptation, as a way to maximize cost-effectiveness of their investments.

Despite the dominant position of environmental issues in the global sustainability discourse, issues like health, safety and social integration have been commonly included in Local Agendas worldwide. For instance, in 2000 the German development cooperation, in partnership with ICLEI, introduced the concept of Local Security Agendas in a number of Latin American municipalities. Australia has long implemented the Cities for Healthy and Safe Communities Campaign, dealing with alcohol abuse and violence in urban areas, as part of its sustainable communities approach. In a lot of European countries, including the UK, Italy and France, environmental, social and economic issues are integrated under the umbrella of social entrepreneurship or social economy, often with strong support from local governments.

However, it is worth noting that social and environmental interests are often perceived as competing. One of the examples might be when a certain territory is declared as a national park, with a ban on human settlements, hunting, timber production, etc. Although it ostensibly means preserving the area for future generations, it can also have a more negative effect, destroying the livelihoods of its current inhabitants. Another example is the case of renewable energy which is still often more expensive than conventional energy, partly due to smaller market share and perverse subsidies. There are many similar dilemmas and, even though some solutions do exist, there is a limit to reconciling social and environmental interests in the short term. To ensure that the decisions taken are as sustainable as possible, greater focus needs to be put on education, transparency and public participation.

# FROM PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TO SOCIAL INNOVATION

The enhanced culture of public participation is often quoted as one of the most remarkable achievements of local sustainability processes worldwide. For many decision makers and citizens alike, this shift in governance is itself regarded as a major step towards more sustainable cities and towns. Considering that the success of local sustainability depends also on the radical change of individual lifestyles, a trust-based dialogue between various groups that make up the local community may well be one of the critical resources needed to make that change happen.

A well-organized and inclusive participation process can be considered among the best measures in terms of conflict prevention. This is especially true with regards to local sustainability policies, as the scarcity of natural resources will exacerbate social tensions - according to the 2010 report by the Peruvian human rights Ombudsman, 50% of the 255 conflicts identified were socio-environmental and most of these were between mining companies and local communities living within their sphere of operation.[46]

In many countries it was the local governments, as *"the level of governance closest to the people"* to quote chapter 28 of Agenda 21, who voluntarily initiated and developed the practice of public participation, often investing considerable staff and financial resources in preparing and facilitating these processes. By doing that local governments have contributed greatly to the education and empowerment of citizens, not only in the field of sustainable development.

Even though the right to public participation in sustainable development may be taken for granted today, it is only in 1998 that the UNECE Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters [47] was signed, entering into force three years later. As of November 2011, it has been signed by 45 parties and has played such an instrumental role in encouraging greater transparency in environmental matters that its extension to the global level is one of the hoped for outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference.

## PARTICIPATION AND FUNDING MECHANISMS

Community participation is now a common requirement in national or international investment and development assistance programmes, at least on paper. In terms of national programmes, a good example is the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission [48], a 20 billion USD city modernization scheme, launched in 2005 by the Government of India. For cities to access this attractive financial opportunity, a number of reforms need to be enacted on regional and local level, including decentralization measures and laws on community participation and public disclosure.

A similar requirement came with the US federal community development block grant funding, which created a precedent for public participation for many of the cities which used this funding stream.

Interestingly, in some cases public participation is not limited to participating in decision-making but can extend to participating in the actual implementation of activities, with citizens acting as investors in municipal infrastructure projects [49] or even developing community-owned investments, e.g. in the field of energy.



## WEB 2.0 - NEW METHODS OR NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATION?

The development of new technologies has had a great impact on participation processes, making it easier for people to express their opinions. Growing access to internet has made it possible to reach out to new social groups, decreased costs of participation processes (e.g. by using online communities instead of face-to-face meetings) and enabled more individual interaction between citizens and city officials (e.g. via social media).

However, while removing old barriers, new technologies may have also contributed to building new ones. One of the terms used when discussing new media is the "digital divide" - the inequality in access to information and communication technologies, related, among others, to differences in infrastructure or IT skills. According to "A Digital Agenda for Europe", 30% of Europeans have never used the internet.[50] Digital divide is often brought up to question the representativeness of public participation processes conducted using online tools. There is no doubt that traditional "offline" participation methods also privileged certain groups, e.g. those with more free time or those better educated, but perhaps the awareness of potential misrepresentation was greater, whilst the internet creates the illusion of universal accessibility that can be very misleading.

With new applications appearing almost every day and the spread of mobile phones, also in developing countries, the potential of using these technologies to accelerate local sustainability is immense. More importantly, online technologies create new ways of engagement that redefine local public participation, pushing it towards collective co-production of knowledge and services.[51]



# India: Mandating community participation

India's law on community participation, the Model Nagara Raj Bill, approved in 2008, creates a new tier of decision-making in each municipality, called "Area Sabha". Area Sabha includes all persons registered in the electoral rolls in that area and has its representative (elected or nominated, depending on the state) whose responsibilities, as defined by the bill, include mostly consultative and community mobilization functions (e.g. to suggest the location of public amenities in the area or identify people eligible for welfare services). Between Area Sabhas and municipalities, there are also ward committees that, according to the Nagara Raj Bill, should be composed of the elected ward councillor, Area Sabha representatives resident in the ward and civil society representatives. However, despite a strong financial incentive, the implementation of this bill is still incomplete.

# Kampala, Uganda: Mapping local knowledge

A recent example comes from Kampala, Uganda, where participatory community resource mapping has been employed in support of land use planning.[52] Turning to the community generated much-needed, reliable information in a relatively short period of time with limited resources, whilst simultaneously building local capacities and promoting mutual learning. According to Joseph Ssemambo of Kampala Capital City Authority, the process of generating practical solutions to commonly perceived problems increased the sense of ownership and empowered the community to lobby for better service delivery. However, a number of problems were also observed, including problems with sustaining the community's interest and motivation in the face of a lengthy process, a lack of immediate results, and low levels of participation, especially among men, who are still considered to be the final decision-makers. The process has been made even more difficult due to limited experience in the use of measuring instruments and constant mobility of the population. Despite the challenges, involving local residents in the planning of local development activities makes the actual implementation much easier, ensures it is in line with local priorities and builds trust between the people and the administration.

## FROM SHARED KNOWLEDGE TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Another practice that has changed public participation processes, particularly in the urban planning field in developing countries, is the so-called Participatory GIS (Geographic Information System) that combines a participatory approach to community development with a set of geospatial technologies. In simple terms, PGIS generates maps that represent people's spatial knowledge and uses them as tools for community empowerment, analysis and advocacy.

As evidenced by the Kampala example, participation empowers local communities to lobby for better service delivery. But there's also another positive side effect to the community acquiring a sense of ownership and it can be calculated in monetary terms. The history of public participation in Latin American and African municipalities shows us that such a dialogue is not only trust building, but also contributes to an awareness of shared responsibility for development. In consequence, people are more likely to pay fees for municipal services, which translates into increased revenue for the local government and, through further investments, into improved quality of life for the inhabitants. Kaladougou in Mali, a city that has worked on improving its communication with citizens in partnership with the Canadian City of Moncton, has managed to increase its revenue stream by 25% in less than six months.[53]



## LIMITS TO PARTICIPATION

In a lot of countries, particularly in the developing world, engaging relevant stakeholders still remains a challenge and participation processes are prone to manipulation or even corruption. Locally elected officials or consultative bodies often do not represent the voice of local citizens but instead focus on personal gain or simply support the ruling regime. This was the case with Egypt's Local Popular Councils that have been seen by the citizens as a "corrupt relic of the Mubarak era".[54] These Councils dissolved following the events of the Arab Spring, which called for more social dialogue and citizen participation in addressing key developmental issues.

The mechanisms of misrepresentation differ slightly in developed countries, where the main obstacle seems to be the lack of interest on the part of citizens or, to put it differently, a failure in enticing such an interest on the part of local governments. This may lead to participation processes being strongly influenced or even hijacked by groups with special interests, often economic.

The question of gender representation and women's role in achieving sustainable development has been addressed in many local sustainability processes, also on the national campaign level. For instance, the Korean LA21 Network established in 2008 a nationwide Gender Network, dedicated to promoting the role of women in building gender-sensitive local sustainable development. The network calls for women to be included as LA21 council members (at least 30%), gender training programmes to be organized for members and secretariat, new agendas to be set in related themes, and for all LA21 processes to be evaluated from the gender perspective. In March 2011, the African Local Elected Women's Network has been established in Tangier, Morocco, with support from the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA), with the mandate to strengthen the role of women in local development.

Even though recent years have seen progress, there are still groups that remain excluded, e.g. urban poor, people with disabilities and immigrants. To reach people more effectively, local governments resort to already established communication channels and communities, e.g. local media, schools or faith groups.

# FROM TOP-DOWN TO MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

In the last two decades local governments have not only been given more powers, often with reduced budgets, but have also stepped up to take more responsibility, entering the international scene. Both of these processes are far from over but the experiences presented in this chapter show that we are headed in the right direction, bringing governance closer to people whilst also integrating it into a new multi-level governance system, able to deal with complex challenges that the global society is facing.

## DECENTRALIZATION

In 2000 when the first law on local autonomy was enacted, Indonesia experienced "the euphoria of decentralization". This is a sentiment that many other countries across the globe can certainly recognize. Political decentralization that entails, for example, the introduction of direct elections for mayors and local councillors can awaken local communities, leading them to question the status quo and raising the temperature of public debates. On the other hand, few things can mobilize local community more effectively than a fight for their future and that of their children, such as when natural resources become scarce or are at risk of being polluted. Can local sustainability initiatives prepare the ground for decentralization? Or is it the other way round and it is the decentralization that makes local action for sustainability possible?



It's interesting to note that the decentralization agenda greatly moved forward in the nineties, the decade that also saw the birth of the Local Agenda 21 movement. In 1996 the Habitat Agenda officially endorsed the principle of subsidiarity, recognizing that:

*"(Sustainable human settlements development can be achieved) through the effective decentralization of responsibilities, policy management, decision-making authority and sufficient resources, including revenue collection authority, to local authorities, closest to and most representative of their constituencies."*

Habitat Agenda, paragraph 177

A year later, Jeb Brugmann, founding Secretary-General of ICLEI, noted that the primary success of the Local Agenda 21 movement has been to build local institutional capacity for sustainable development in hundreds of communities worldwide, with surprisingly little support from donor agencies and central governments, and added:

*"(Local Agenda 21) progress has probably been fuelled in many countries by the recent introduction of decentralization policies. But it could be argued that Local Agenda 21 is doing more to facilitate the successful implementation of these policies than the policies are supporting the Local Agenda 21 effort."* [55]

In 2007 the international community adopted International Guidelines on Decentralization and Strengthening of Local Authorities [56], building upon a decade-long debate led by UN-Habitat. The Guidelines reaffirmed the principle of subsidiarity, underlining that the devolution of tasks to the local level should be accompanied with devolution of resources. The document highlighted that local authorities should be able to participate in taking decisions that will affect them, reiterating also the need for public participation mechanisms at the local level.

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

World leaders have always liked declarations and recent years have seen them commit to numerous goals, agendas and roadmaps. However, it is increasingly understood that global commitments, particularly in the field of sustainable development, are to be implemented locally and therefore mechanisms need to be put in place for the local, national and international levels to work together.

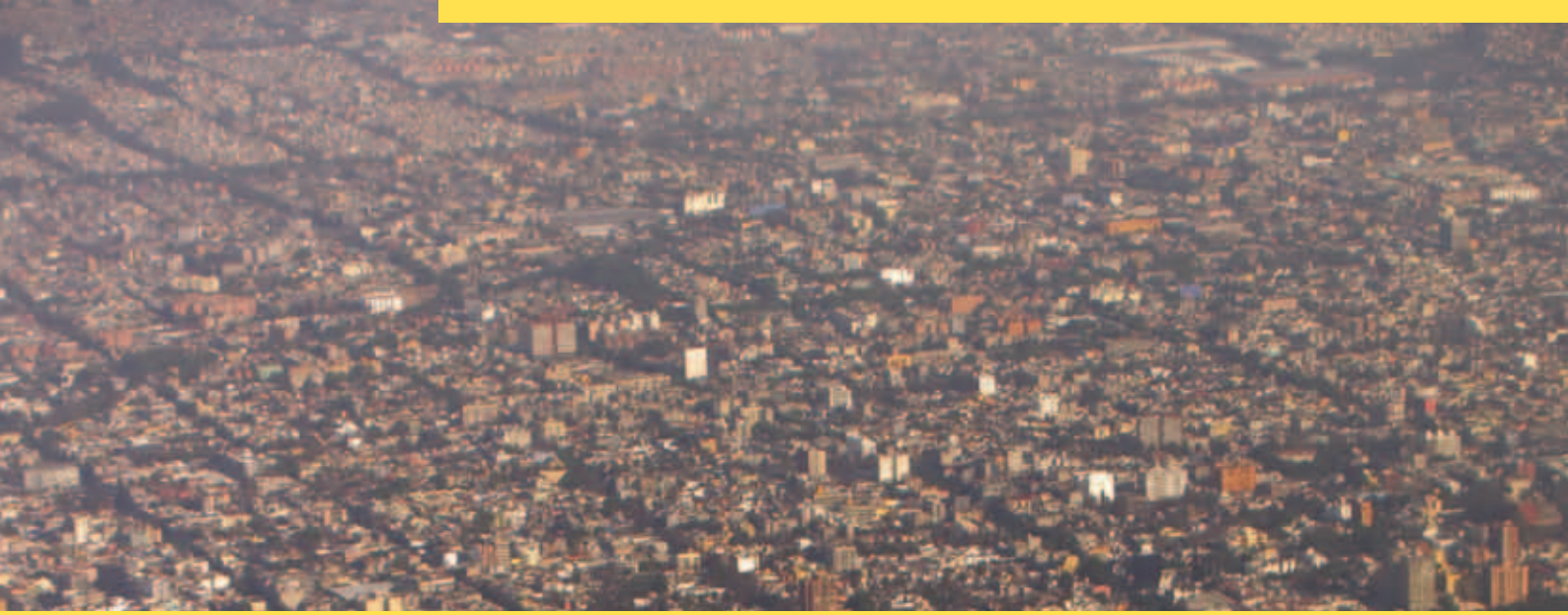
Looking at current international commitments, from the Rio conventions on climate change and biodiversity to the Millennium Development Goals, one can see not only a growing understanding of the importance of local governments as implementing partners but also a growing interest on their side to have a say on the commitments themselves, often pushing for more ambitious goals or binding agreements.

# Global Partnership for Cities and Biodiversity

One of the fields in which multi-level governance mechanisms are the most advanced is certainly biodiversity. In 2006 more than 300 local authorities, gathered at the ICLEI World Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, called for the establishment of a pilot project on Local Action for Biodiversity. The Declaration on Cities and Biodiversity, adopted in Curitiba, Brazil, a year later, reaffirmed cities' commitment to the achievement of biodiversity targets, as spelled out in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Building upon this process, in 2008 a multi-stakeholder Global Partnership for Cities and Biodiversity [57] was launched to support cities in the sustainable management of their biodiversity resources, facilitate the exchange of experience, and coordinate the implementation of biodiversity strategies on the local, national and international level. The Global Partnership, facilitated by the CBD Secretariat, brings together local and national governments, multilateral organizations and NGOs, private sector donors and academia.

One of the concrete outcomes of this cooperation is the adoption of the 2011-2020 CBD Plan of Action on Cities, Local Authorities and Biodiversity [58] by the CBD COP-10 in Nagoya in 2010. The plan recognizes that biodiversity is first and foremost a local issue and aims at providing national governments with opportunities to work together with sub-national governments, cities, and other local authorities on biodiversity strategies and action plans. As part of its coordination efforts, the plan endorses a newly developed City Biodiversity Index (or Singapore Index), a tool enabling the evaluation of biodiversity at city level, currently being tested by a number of cities worldwide. Even if not binding in its formulations, the Plan of Action represents a clear shift towards multi-level governance arrangements and the recognition of the key role of local governments in implementing global biodiversity strategies.



# Mexico City Pact and Cities Climate Registry

Disappointed with the failure of global climate negotiations after the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in 2009 in Copenhagen, cities have decided to show their leadership by adopting the Global Cities Covenant on Climate, known as the Mexico City Pact. Adopted in November 2010, ahead of UNFCCC COP-16 in Cancun, Mexico, the agreement built upon the Copenhagen World Catalogue of Local Climate Commitments, which identified more than 3,500 voluntary GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions reduction commitments of local governments. Commenting on its adoption, Christina Figueres, the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, said:

*"The Mexico City Pact sends a key signal to the negotiations that it can indeed be done, and that millions, if not billions, of people around the world are ready to begin implementing climate change action".*[59]

The Mexico City Pact sets out a number of voluntary climate mitigation and adaptation commitments and establishes a Cities Climate Registry, a global mechanism for reporting local climate information. The registry is designed to take stock of local activities undertaken (such as the development of a Climate Action Plan or the adoption of local legislation that favours GHG reductions) and to record their outcomes, in accordance with international MRV standards (measurable, reportable and verifiable). The first annual report of the Cities Climate Registry has been published during UNFCCC COP-17 in Durban, South Africa and includes data from 51 cities, coming from 19 different countries. Out of those, 40 have reported community GHG emissions (as opposed to government-only emissions), reaching a total of 447 million tonnes $CO_2$ per year, a figure exceeding the individual annual GHG emissions of 167 countries that are Party to the UNFCCC. Even more importantly, 75% of community GHG commitments aim for GHG reductions of more than 1 % per year, which exceeds the reduction commitments of most national governments under the Kyoto Protocol. Finally, 92% of actions already implemented or those in progress have been financed from local resources.[60]

# Localizing the Millennium Development Goals

The question of bringing the commitments down to the local level is particularly interesting in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDGs are time-bound and quantified targets addressing extreme poverty, adopted by the international community in 2000 and to be achieved globally by 2015. Even though environmental sustainability is only one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, the achievement of many of the other goals depends on good natural resource management (e.g. increasing access to water and sanitation services). As stated by Anna Tibaijuka, former Executive Director of UN-Habitat:

*"It is important to realize this: even though the MDGs are global, they can most effectively be achieved through action at the local level. (...) In each city and town, there will be a local reality to be taken into consideration, and indeed the MDGs should be adapted to meet this reality. (...) Of course, national level plans and actions are critical. But experience has shown that national plans must be linked with both local realities and the people they serve to be successful."* [61]

Despite the fact that the importance of rooting development in the local context is well-understood, a question remains how this can be achieved in practice. In his analysis of localizing MDGs, David Satterthwaite from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) points to difficulties related to the top-down approach often adopted by the donor agencies and to their reliance on national systems. The local reality, that Anna Tibaijuka was referring to, can only rarely be reflected in the programmes and decisions of the international agencies that, by their nature, offer a standardized approach to solving local problems. Satterthwaite claims that:

*"'Better local governance', which implies more competent, transparent and accountable local governments with more resources, may be the single most important underpinning for the achievement of many of the MDGs."* [62]

Should the global community decide to adopt Sustainable Development Goals following the Rio+20 Conference, it is hoped that their local dimension will be more explicitly acknowledged, contributing to greater coordination of efforts undertaken to achieve them.

The growing importance of local governments on the international arena is also reflected in the change of their official status. During the preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit, local governments were still considered non-governmental (sic!) organizations. After that, and in the run-up to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg they were given the status of one of nine "Major Groups", the one they still hold during the Rio+20 preparations. However, thanks to advocacy efforts of all local government networks, led by ICLEI, this situation is beginning to change. In 2010 during the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP16 in Cancun, Mexico, local and sub-national governments were for the first time recognized as "governmental stakeholders". In the same year the role of local governments has been acknowledged by another of the Rio Conventions, during the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, COP10 in Nagoya, Japan, that adopted a Plan of Action on Subnational governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity. Rio+20 provides the opportunity to build on these changes and to design an Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development which allows for full participation of Governmental Stakeholders in policy-shaping and implementation.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the last two decades local governments have shown that they are able to drive the implementation of sustainable development and to initiate respective local processes - sometimes more effectively than national governments or international organizations. Sustainable development has been successfully localized and is no longer a distant, theoretical concept but one filled with meaning and evoked in everyday activities.


There is NO
Planet B

## 1. Local consciousness about global and future impacts of today's action has never been as high.

20 years after the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro local sustainability processes are not following any common methodology, but a common logic: The local contribution to global sustainability is a conscious and intended side-effect of actually pursued improvements of local living conditions. Local sustainability first and foremost means a healthy, diverse and resilient local economy; jobs; an attractive natural and built environment; good quality housing; access to healthy food, air and water; functioning social and political systems and public services; and increasingly also the (financial) independence from increasingly expensive fossil resources. The uniqueness of this global movement of local sustainability processes, unprecedented in history, is that all of this takes place under the paradigm and the acceptance of both the limits of global ecosystems and the global and future effects of local activities.

***Information on global trends and the impacts of any local activity on future generations and other places must be made available as a standard basis for political and economic decision-making.***



## 2. A good local sustainability process combines various driving forces.

Local sustainability processes are characterized by their initial driving forces. The types described in this study show that these forces originate in different systems: Local government, civil society, networks, national governments and international partners each give local processes their unique energy and quality. It is important to understand that each of these qualities taken alone are invaluable, however not sufficient for a powerful sustainability process. Taken together they constitute a simple yet helpful set of mutually supportive forces – an ideal local sustainability process will thus combine as many as possible of the properties of each of the five types identified, and be

– laid down in a local strategy,
– rooted in a civil society initiative,
– linked with others as part of a concerted action,
– embedded in a national policy, and
– enriched by international partnership at the same time.

***The effectiveness of local sustainability processes as well as of programmes designed to support them should be enhanced by combining the strengths of as many as possible of the five process types identified in this study.***

## 3. The multi-local movement has prepared the ground for advancing national and international sustainability policies.

The fact that tens of thousands of local governments all across the globe dedicate local activities to the common value 'sustainability' and thereby influence national and international policies and standards represents a remarkable political innovation. Still, the outcomes of this political innovation cannot primarily be measured by any drastic changes in the physical conditions or energy and resource flows it has brought about, as many may have expected originally. Instead they can be found in many social innovations, which however are crucial for the physical changes doubtlessly necessary in the near future to be anchored in and owned by the civil society.

***The potential of local sustainability processes to prepare radical policy shifts on all levels through political and social innovation must be recognized and further developed.***



## 4. Local sustainability processes are hubs of social innovation.

The development of the local sustainability movement coincided with the massive expansion in the use of the Internet, personal computers and mobile phones world-wide. This opened completely new possibilities for civil society to organize itself, get and share information, and participate in political processes. Local sustainability processes employed the benefits of new media in disseminating information at extremely low costs to formerly unimaginable mailing lists, in further developing methods for public and stakeholder participation, and in linking local activities up with those in other places. It is however more important to see and better exploit the potential for social innovations coming with new communication technologies: new forms of self-organization such as carrot mobs, crowd sourcing, crowd funding, participatory GIS, guerilla gardening, pledges, etc. empower people to act instead of just participating in talks. In contrast, classic consultation methods usually employed in local sustainability processes rather aim at developing common ideas and positions.

***By combining classic methods of consultation and participatory policy development with new forms of spontaneous and collective action, local sustainability processes can strengthen their role as test beds of sustainable innovation.***

## 5. Local sustainability was one of the first open source development processes - and this is one of its biggest strengths.

The local sustainability movement was not steered by any one particular organization that could have structured, standardized, documented or evaluated the local processes implemented world-wide. Still, at the same time a number of international organizations and networks have emerged, which bring together local governments and represent them in the international policy arena. Numerous international instruments for local governments to find orientation, recognition and ways to evaluate progress have been developed by many different parties and with varying intentions. In addition, more and more individual local governments started to engage and present themselves on an international level - mayors have indeed become global actors to an extent not known before. While the implementation of sustainable development became largely localized, local governments have at the same time globalized themselves.

***Global programmes for sustainable development have to combine the variety, creativity and adaptability of local strategies with universal national and international support structures.***



## 6. Local governments have to deal with the effects of a deregulated globalized economy.

The development of the multi-local sustainability movement coincided with the globalization of the economy, granting large international corporations practically unlimited access to natural and human resources globally. The political response to this phenomenon, however, is environmental and social standards defined by national governments, and in competition with each other which effectively regulates these standards downwards. The negative effects of this vicious circle are visible on the local level world-wide: wherever people have no access to clean water, where products for the affluent parts of the world are produced under degrading conditions, where intact medium-sized companies are taken over and liquidated, where forests are chopped down and arable land is contaminated, where prices for corn, electricity, fuel or steel multiply, and so on.

For the people affected, as well as for international organizations that try to help them, the primary contact is with local governments. Local sustainability processes thus operate in a vacuum between globalized economic activity and an insufficient protection of natural and human resources through national and international policy-making.

***The global community needs to agree internationally on environmental and social standards enforced through national legislation in order to provide a reliable framework for both the global economy and local sustainability processes.***

## 7. Greening the economy is a chance to address the crisis.

The focus on economy emerging during the preparatory process towards Rio+20 bears an invaluable potential for correcting the up to now unsustainable development on Earth at the source: by changing the conditions for human economic activities. For many internationally operating companies and some national governments 'Green Economy' may merely be understood as 'Green Growth' and booming technological innovations supported with public money: operating systems for urban infrastructure, large scale power plants based on renewable energy sources, genetically modified super-seeds or electric cars are only a few examples. This focus on technological solutions however is too narrow and leads to new risks: social innovations such as new forms of organization, new business models, basic income models, common welfare work, crowd thinking and others could make the Green Economy a true contribution to sustainable development.

Furthermore, the Green Economy will only have positive effects for the people if it is designed as a 'Green Urban Economy' - with components such as decentralized regional energy, waste and water management, and concrete improvements of local living conditions. By purchasing goods and services, setting quality standards, building institutional frameworks and bringing actors from all sectors together, local governments will have to play an important role. Among others, they have to be empowered to engage with globally operating providers of services and infrastructures such as water and energy supply, public transport, security services or waste management, and to define and control the social and environmental quality standards they demand for any solutions to be provided.

***For the Green Economy to become a serious contribution to sustainable development, it has to be linked with social - not only technological - innovation. Decentralized solutions and public control over common goods will be key.***

## 8. 'The future we want' requires a new definition of growth.

Many local governments around the globe have been experimenting with various indicators to measure their success or failure in moving towards sustainable development. As a result, many comprehensive sets of sustainability indicators are available but are difficult to communicate to the public. Others are experimenting with single aggregated indexes such as the Human Development Index [63], the Ecological Footprint [64] or the Gross National Happiness [65] index. At the same time, the single most popular indicator for measuring development world-wide still remains the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which however has turned out not to be suitable for measuring human well-being. With unsustainable and undesirable incidents like disasters, diseases and pollution potentially contributing to a growth in GDP, it becomes obvious that this indicator is strongly misleading our perception of the world as it does not measure the true progress of human development.

***GDP has to be replaced by a development index which is based on social wellbeing and environmental quality, and at the same time is simple enough to be calculated and communicated on the local, national and international level.***

## 9. Sustainable development needs a multilevel governance system with a multi-sectoral approach.

As this study shows, local governments are willing and able to achieve a great deal in moving towards sustainable development. However, where national taxation and subsidies incentivize, and legislation fails to sanction unsustainable behaviour, the best local sustainability process reaches the limits of its effectiveness. Therefore it is not enough for local governments to demand better recognition and support for their sustainability processes on the local level from national governments at the Rio+20 conference. Clearly it is the time to promote legal and fiscal framework conditions in all countries that (re-)direct investment and thinking towards sustainable solutions.

On the international level, world leaders are facing the task to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development, in order to formally involve all levels of government as well as further, non-governmental actors, each with their individual strengths. To create a multilevel governance system with a multi-sectoral approach in which each player needs to play his part according to their respective competences and powers.

***The future institutional framework for sustainable development of the UN should include local governments as governmental stakeholders and at the same time initiate national and international legislation that supports their efforts.***



## 10. It's time to move from national interests to global environmental justice.

In addition to what has been said above, it may be helpful for the international community to move away from the practice of negotiating individual national reduction targets as a percentage of current emission levels. Instead, acceptance should be sought for globally applicable average per-capita limits for the extraction of natural resources and for the emissions resulting from their use. These limits could be calculated from the carrying capacity of global ecosystems and be universal for all countries. Provided that compensation for the very unbalanced use of resources in the past can be included, they could provide the basis for reduction targets and development corridors for any country, both in the North and the South, and could furthermore be broken down into targets for sub-national and local governments. Finally, this approach would facilitate the establishment of access and emission trading schemes between territories.

***International negotiations about emission reductions and access to natural resources should be based on the principle of global environmental justice, thus allowing every world citizen on average to use the same share of global resources.***

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