

LOCAL AGENDA 21 AND THE SYSTEMIC VALENCES IN VIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Agenda 21, UN initiative was adopted for the first time in Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992, promoting the concept of sustainable development at local level. After ten years, in Johannesburg in 2002, the second World Summit stated that Agenda 21 "represented the main instrument in view to reach the welfare status of the population at world level". Local Agenda 21 is implemented by local authorities and it promotes public participation, a genuine balance between the economic growth, social equity and environment protection. The concept of sustainable development involves a constant re-evaluation of the relationship human being - nature, solidarity between generations, as the only viable option for ensuring a development model on long term. In this respect, economic policies should be drawn up, in view to try to organise the adequate management of human being and natural resources instead of placing the biosphere under the constraints provided by the logic of immediate profit. The current paper aims to approach theoretically and pragmatically the topic of Local Agenda 21, as a model of systemic analysis. The paper will approach the core concepts which are shaping the general framework for accomplishing sustainable development and at the same time the paper will present the implementation of Local Agenda 21 in Romania.

Key words: sustainable development, Local Agenda 21, systemic analysis.

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1. Introduction

The systemic approach constitutes a methodological step of human knowledge, which includes theoretical and practical activities. Its evolution bears the stamp of scientific development overall was forced, in time, to adapt the theoretical basis, constantly perfecting and becoming a scientific theory. The systemic approach became truly operational for the organizational and socioeconomic environment about five to six decades ago. The moment coincides with the acceptance by the international scientific group of the GTS (General System Theory) and to enrich it with new academic concepts and applications (Niculescu, Lavalette, 1999: 307-308).

The origins systemic approach can be finding in the ancient Greek philosophy, when the concept of the system appeared in an embryonic form. Aristotle gave the first definition of the system, saying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and he stressed the need for specific research to the social domain, stating the principle of unity of the individual - society.

Even if the precepts of Cartesian knowledge have become today sophistry, they need to be highlighted in terms of scientific rigor, and depth of knowledge, being needed for the systemic approach (Niculescu, Lavalette, 1999: 307-308).

In his numerous thoughts about knowledge, Descartes said that "knowledge is the first precept of not ever admit that something is true if you know the obvious way, as such; that is, carefully to avoid rush and prejudice and not get in your judgments than what would show your spirit, so clear and distinct that you have no opportunity of questioning (Purcaru, Bască, 1996; Matei, 2000).

2. Research Methodology

From a methodological standpoint, the paper relies on comprehensive and systematic search of the literature and document analysis (among others Annual Reports, authorities' data, resume, obtained by using free accession to information) and strategic documents. In this context, the research methodology is based on a case study as research strategy. Regarding the qualitative research, the author use theoretical framework, legal analyses, systematic and analytical collecting data from official written sources.

3. The concept of sustainable development and fundamental principles

The concept of sustainable development had as its starting point the global ecological crisis from 1929-1933 and later it developed by incorporating all spheres of economic, social and human, being considered today a new way of humanity. Sustainable development has been designed as a solution to the environmental crisis caused by intense industrial exploitation of resources and the continued degradation of the environment and seeks primarily to preserve environmental quality¹.

After the Brundtland Commission Report (1987), there was an obvious need to combine development with environmental protection, premise of the concept of sustainable development and of the new principle of "sustainable development". This principle was proclaimed in the "Rio Declaration" statement signed by most countries, including Romania, the UN Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992. According to Principle 3 of the Declaration on Environment and Development, "the right to development must be such as to meet equitably the needs of development and the environment of present and future generations."

After the Rio Conference from 1992, there have been set seven fundamental principles of harmonization of environmental protection and sustainable development (Uliescu, 2001).

Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration resume in other forms the human rights to environment, proclaimed in Stockholm (16 June 1972): "The human being is at the center regarding sustainable development, with the right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Therefore, the first principle is the general obligation to protect the environment and natural resources, which is manifested also by the human right to the environment, the obligation to protect the

environment for future generations to preserve natural resources policy (UNESCO Convention, 1972).

A second principle is the need for development and environmental protection (Principle 4 of the Rio Declaration and Article 130 of the Treaty on European Union – Maastricht, 1992).

From here it could notice at least four consequences: (a) elimination of poverty - a prerequisite for sustainable development (Principle 5 of the Rio Declaration); (b) the need to eliminate or reduce production and consumption of non -viable modes (Principle 7 and 8 of the Rio Declaration); (c) the need to involve in future policies, the new factors of sustainable development: social groups, women, youth, local, etc. (Principles 20, 22 of the Rio Declaration).

A third great principle "polluter - pays" - national and international legal obligation related employment mechanisms polluter responsibility (Rio Principle 13, Council of Europe Convention, Lugano, 1993, article 3 d and article 81 of Law no. 137/1995);

The fourth principle is that of environmental conduct. It applies to cross-border and international trade issues. Special legal mechanisms need to make the implantation of polluting activities (impact assessment, consultation procedures, information, equal access to justice, etc.) (Espoo Convention of 1991 on the assessment of transboundary impacts, Article 14 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Rio 1992 (principles 12 and 14 of the Rio Declaration).

A fifth principle takes the idea that the environment and sustainable development are inextricably linked to solidarity and participatory democracy (principles 18, 19 of the Rio Declaration).

The principle of prevention was one of the first principles declared since the '70s. Avoidance of touching and damage to the environment, taking into account their irreversible character (Espoo Convention 1991, Article 14, Convention on Biodiversity, Principles 11, 17 - Rio Declaration).

The seventh principle discussed the science and technique and acknowledged the scientific uncertainty or ignorance (the man does not possess yet all the scientific data). So it must act with caution to risk behavior because it stills unknown or incompletely known. The new prudent behavior becomes the precautionary principle (stated in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration) and consists in making decisions with caution as the shares that are not fully mastered (nuclear moratorium) or taking precautionary legal measures to limit damaging effects.

4. The Local Agenda 21

Since the faze of document elaboration from Rio, it was recognized the importance of local communities in the implementation of sustainable development principles. The Summit from Rio (June 5 to 14, 1992), which voted Agenda 21 - monumental document of the twenty-first century government policies to achieve the overall goal of "sustainable development" – it is considered by Decleris "a triumph of science systems, a real proof that human survival and progress depend by the systematization of public policy. "(Decleris, 1992). A special chapter of the

Agenda (Chapter 28) dealt with the problem of sustainable development strategies for local communities. This chapter contains a call to all the local communities that they create their own Agenda 21, a Local Agenda 21 to take the overall goals of Agenda 21 and to translate them into specific plans and actions for a local community.

Local Agenda 21 – Local Plan for Sustainable Development, is structured as follows²: I. Sustainable Development Strategy with the following sections: (a) Evaluation of the Natural Capital; (b) Atmosphere; (c) Water Resources; (d) Mineral Resources; (e) Soil; (f) Biodiversity and protected areas; (g) Forests; I.2. Evaluation of anthropic capital (Economy): (a) Description; (b) Industry; (c) Agriculture; (d) Trade; (e) Transports; (f) Basic infrastructure; (g) Communications; (h) Innovation and information technology; (i) Tourism; (j) Waste Management; (k) Financial Services (l) Physical Planning; I.3. Evaluation of social capital: (a) Population and human development; (b) Poverty and social inclusion; (c) Health; (d) Education; (e) Society and social categories; (f) Sustainable Consumption; 1.4. Objectives. II. Local Action Plan: Specific objectives and identified projects. III. Portfolio of priority projects.

The Local Agenda focuses on social, economic and environmental issues and propose solutions to existing problems by encouraging more efficient practices. Sustainable development can be achieved without compromising the quality of life by learning creative thinking and practicing sustainable behavior.

In Europe it pays special attention to developing the Local Agenda 21 as it is known that 80% of Europe's population lives in urban areas, so the future of Europe depends largely on the development of cities. On May 27, 1994 in the city of Aalborg in Denmark was held the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Conference. At this conference was prepared a document that later became known as the Charter of Aalborg.

After the Earth Summit in Rio, Agenda 21 successful campaigns took place in Bolivia, China, Sweden, United Kingdom, Turkey, Bulgaria, to name just a few countries engaged in the process. Romania is also regarded as a success in the implementation of the Local Agenda 21.

4.1. Local Agenda 21 in Romania

In 2000 the National Centre for Sustainable Development (NCSDD), the implementing agency of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with Capacity 21 and with the support of the Governments of United Kingdom and Canada, began the implementation of Local Agenda 21.

In fig. 1 shows the map of Local Agenda 21 in Romania.

4.2. Phases of the Local Agenda 21 in Romania

4.2.1. The pilot phase 2000-2003

The Agenda 21 project started with a pilot phase conducted in nine locations (Baia Mare, Oradea, Iasi, Targu Mures, Galati, Ploiesti, Giurgiu, Ramnicu Valcea and Miercurea Ciuc) and came to complete the local plans for sustainable development.

The main goal achieved in the pilot phase was to establish the methodology, under which were written in all cities participating the Local agendas. Through experience, Local Agenda increased the process efficiency, helping to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to adopt sustainable development principles into local strategies.

Fig. nr. 1 – Phases of the Local Agenda 21 in Romania



The Five phase 2006-2008

Third phase 2004-2005

The pilot phase 2000-2003

Fourth phase 2005-2006

Second phase 2003-2004

Source: National Center for Sustainable Development

http://www.ncsd.ro/la_21_in_romania_ro.html

The main stages of the project included: (a) Creating local structures LA21: Local Steering Committee, Bureau of Local Agenda 21 Working Groups; (b) Develop a strategy for sustainable development and a local action plan, followed by an extensive consultation process to ensure additional contributions prior to their completion; (c) Identification of priority projects; (d) Providing support to implement priority projects selected, with the safety of achieving synergies with other UNDP projects in the same locations.

The drafts of local plans were completed by incorporating critical observations, comments and ideas gathered through the consultation process. These documents have three major components: Local Strategy, Local Action Plan and Priority Projects. In the late of February 2003, the nine pilot cities finalized the Local Plan for Sustainable Development, which was then formally adopted by the City Council in each pilot city.

4.2.2. Stage Two 2003-2004

After the successful implementation of the pilot phase of Local Agenda 21, the project was expanded in other 13 locations: Falticeni, Worcester, Arad, Sighisoara, Medias, Sibiu, Campina, Targu Jiu, Targoviste, Pitesti, Slatina, Bolintin Vale and Zimnicea. The second phase of the project has brought several innovative elements in the process, such as diversification of the area of project implementation by including smaller towns like Zimnicea and Bolintin Vale.

4.2.3. Third Step 2004-2005

Local Agenda 21 has continued in three cities and one county, including the Borsec Town, Brasov, Bistrita and Mures City who have made their own local plans for sustainable development. The main innovation brought in the third stage of the project was the extension to the level of the county through the cooperation with Mures County Prefecture. Moreover, in 2005, CNDD added a new dimension LA21 through partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency in order to introduce in Romania the practice of integrated environmental assessment.

4.2.4. Fourth Stage 2005-2006

The purpose of the fourth stage of the Local Agenda 21 was to further strengthen the institutional capacity and produce an awareness in the public and authorities regarding the adoption and introduction to the principle of sustainable development in developing strategies to localities and counties and action plans in other three cities and one county Constanta, Medgidia, Gura Humor and Brasov.

In each location were established Agenda 21 offices established in order to develop the institutional capacity of local authorities. Establishing participatory mechanisms at the local level was achieved by informing civil society and organizing public debates that contributed to the completion documents: local strategy for sustainable development, local action plan and priority projects portfolio.

A new element of this stage was the support of UNDP and CNDD local authorities in preparing the documents for the concession of water supply system and wastewater treatment Medgidia.

In conclusion, the fourth stage of the project confirmed the need to continue the implementation of Local Agenda 21 in Romania, based on examples of best practices gathered by then in local development agendas and the positive results of projects started in this framework.

4.2.5. Fifth Stage 2006-2008

At this stage, the Local Agenda 21 has spread to other two commons, four cities, three counties, District 2 of Bucharest. The areas of implementation of the new phase were selected based on several criteria such as promoting balanced participation of all regions of Romania and encouraging the participation of territorial entities with low development indicators, especially in the north-east, south and south east, ie in Alba, Neamt and Tulcea and cities of Alba Iulia, Tulcea,

Ovidiu and Babadag. The most important new element in the fifth stage of the project was the implementation in rural areas, in villages Falciu (Vaslui county) and Kogalniceanu (Constanta county). Also, the area in which the project was conducted extended its cooperation with the authorities from 2nd district of Bucharest in order to adopt the principles of sustainable development.

Following the standard procedures for implementing the three essential documents for the implementation of Local Agenda 21 have been completed in all the above locations: Local Strategy for Sustainable, Local Action Plan priority projects and portfolios. After accession to the European Union, Local Agenda 21 projects became eligible for financing from the EU Structural Funds. The LA21 managed also to attract additional funding from the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing.

In 2009-2010, the National Centre for Sustainable Development has advised local public administrations that have implemented Local Agenda 21. Goal was to support start-priority projects have been identified as eligible for public-private partnerships.

Cities and projects: County Council Mures - construction of the airport; City Ovidiu - rehabilitation of water supply and sewerage; Falciu - construction of sewerage networks; rehabilitation of educational infrastructure; Babadag City - rehabilitation city park; wind energy system.

We must mention that the Romanian Government in session on 12 November 2008, discussed and approved the National Strategy for Sustainable Development at the horizon of 2013-2020-2030. The document follows the methodological requirements of the European Commission and is a joint project of the Romanian Government, through the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the United Nations Development Program, National Center for Sustainable Development. The strategy sets goals for transition in a reasonable and realistic time frame, a new development model of the European Union and widely shared - that of sustainable development oriented continuous improvement of people's lives and their relationships in harmony with the natural environment. Development Strategy is the result of the obligations assumed by Romania as EU member state according to the objectives agreed at Community level, particularly those stipulated in the Accession Treaty, the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs in the renewed EU Sustainable Development 2006³.

Conclusions

Local Agenda 21 is a complex systemic analysis, representing the model of sustainable development in terms of social, economic and environmental. It provides a framework for addressing social and environmental issues such as air pollution, water and soil pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, health, demographic trends, poverty, consumption, production and transportation problems related to waste.

National Center for Sustainable Development (NCSD) had an important role, being the only non-governmental organization, accredited by the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, with ECOSOC status who achieved and implemented in Romania local plans for socio-economic development in the Local Agenda 21.

The implementation of Agenda 21 in Romania brought many benefits, such as: (a) Implementation of a new public management model based on an integrated and adaptive ecosystem approach; (b) The foundation of creating an institutional infrastructure for flexible, adaptable and performance that guarantees the participation of all members of society or stakeholders involved in the decision making, equitable access to the benefits of development activities, negotiations of potential conflicts; (c) Facilitating the access of local public authorities to the EU Structural Funds through are founded the community development projects; (d) The provision of an adequate framework for financing local infrastructure projects; (e) The application to the local / regional scale of the principles of EU Sustainable Development Strategy (revised in 2006) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania (revised in 2008); (f) The promotion of decentralization and subsidiarity; (g) The establishment of operational structures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of Local Plans for Sustainable Development with a set of indicators as a tool standards .

Notes

¹ National Environmental Protection Agency, http://www.anpm.ro/Mediu/dezvoltare_durabila-18;

² [National Center for Sustainable Development, http://www.ncsd.ro/documents/implementation/local_plan_content.pdf](http://www.ncsd.ro/documents/implementation/local_plan_content.pdf).

³National Center for Sustainable Development, http://www.ncsd.ro/national_sustainable_development_strategy_ro.html.

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