

GREATER PORTO REGION, PORTUGAL

MARCH 2006

Planning for a sustainable future – municipal cooperation and public participation in the Porto Region

Partnerships between several municipalities and civil society not only result in the improved coordination of regional sustainable development strategies, but facilitate increased environmental awareness and good practice amongst the public. Sustainable development goals are thus more effectively met through these partnerships.

PROGRAM NAME

FUTURO SUSTENTÁVEL – PLANO ESTRATÉGICO DE AMBIENTE DO GRANDE PORTO (SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN FOR THE PORTO REGION)

To develop, disseminate, implement, evaluate, monitor and revise an action plan for sustainable development in the Porto Region, that considers sustainability principles from environmental, political and social perspectives. The participation of all municipalities in the region and the general public is integral to the definition, identification and implementation of this sustainable development strategy, increasing responsibility and involvement from all actors.

ABSTRACT

Futuro Sustentável is coordinated by LIPOR – Serviço Intermunicipalizado de Gestão de Resíduos do Grande Porto, in partnership with the Biotechnology School of the Catholic University of Porto. Futuro Sustentável aims to set up and establish a regional strategic environmental plan (SEP). Developed through a partnership between the nine municipalities of the Porto Region, the SEP is unique in Portugal and involves extensive participation from citizens, politicians, scientists, specialists and entrepreneurs.



Europe

MUNICIPAL PROFILE

Porto Region, Portugal, comprising nine municipalities: Espinho, Gondomar, Maia, Matosinhos, Porto, Póvoa do Varzim, Vila do Conde and Vila Nova de Gaia.

Population total for region

1,262,582 (figure from 2004)

Land Area

814.7 km²

Municipal Budget

Total expenditures for the region (2002): US\$ 1,040,649,440.

Full financial information can be found at: www.amp.pt/ampnumeros2004.asp?t=14



Porto municipality

The project began in 2003. In the first phase, awareness-raising activities took place and the project structure was developed. The second phase began the process of diagnostic-related initiatives, leading to assessment of the status quo and priority-setting. The project is currently in its third phase, in which the SEP will be published and elements of the SEP will be implemented.

CASE

Context of region and municipalities

The nine municipalities involved in this project are mainly urban, although there are important rural areas in the region's hinterland. In these areas, agriculture and farming are important, and subsequently create different environmental challenges.

In recent years the Porto Metropolitan Area has come under enormous pressure due to rapid population growth and the lack of a common strategic plan for the region. Polluted water courses, lack of gardens and green areas and heavy traffic are some problems that require joint intervention to overcome.

Working independently, the municipalities of the region had difficulty in implementing measures that could prevent some of these problems. It was realized that the Porto Region required integrated solutions and effective partnership-working in order to face its strategic economic, environmental and social challenges, and to create a sustainable, prosperous region.

Approach

Futuro Sustentável develops ways through which municipalities can overcome such problems. By integrating the environmental policies of nine municipalities into one shared agenda, sustainable development and its impact upon daily life becomes more coherent. Working together also increases the effectiveness of municipal actions for sustainable development, ensuring these occur in tandem with and complementary to the policies and needs of their neighbouring municipalities. Through this approach, Futuro Sustentável aims to overcome the gap between urban and rural areas.

The approach used also means that other challenges, such as regional economic development, are more likely to be tackled effectively as regional knowledge resources are shared and strengthened.

By placing emphasis on public awareness and participation – at regional and local levels - in the planning process, Futuro Sustentável promotes bottom-up, inclusive decision-making processes and demonstrates that cooperation between institutions and civil society in a complex region can result in coordinated action for sustainable development.

Case description

Futuro Sustentável is a three-phase process. The first phase saw the initial awareness-raising and information activities, as well as the development of project structures. It was followed by a second phase in which an environmental diagnosis of the region and its needs was completed, culminating in the creation of the SEP. The final stage, beginning in 2006, is the implementation and evaluation of the SEP.

In the first phase, which began in 2003, a 'Coordination Group' was established for the project. This group, financed by the project, is an advisory body on the strategies of the project. The Coordination Group authorize project decisions, which are then implemented by the municipalities, financed from within their

own budgets. LIPOR and the project's Technical Group convene this group and drive Futuro Sustentável, yet do not have the right to vote at Coordination Group meetings.

Coordination Group decisions are made by members with equal voting rights – the members include local and regional governments, stakeholders such as NGOs and the business community, and related agencies from the national government. The SEP is used to help define action guidelines and strategies for the Group, with municipalities free to choose which recommendations are implemented and to what extent and scope. To date, the municipalities have been very committed to the project and are active participants in the Coordination Group.

In addition, every municipality created 'Environmental Councils' that included members from community organizations such as schools, local police or cultural organizations. These Environmental Councils developed environmental awareness-raising initiatives, defined community priorities and in phase 2, through participation in the Green Auditing process and the preparation of a municipal action plans, helped implement specific steps. The Environmental Councils are mainly reflexive consulting groups and do not have decision-making powers, yet municipalities have been responsive to these Environmental Councils and considered their outcomes in planning processes.

Awareness-raising campaigns were undertaken throughout the region, with travelling exhibitions and workshops, leaflet and poster cam-

paigns, thematic newsletters, the web portal www.futurosustentavel.org, and a range of agreements with media organisations responsible for dissemination across the region.

The second phase was diagnosis, with the introduction of Green Auditing aimed at identifying local problems and promising opportunities. Several tools were used for diagnosis, including bibliographic research, field work, questionnaires and, critically, extensive public consultations. The consultation and participation of citizens enabled the municipalities to identify priority actions and to begin to define a coherent strategy.

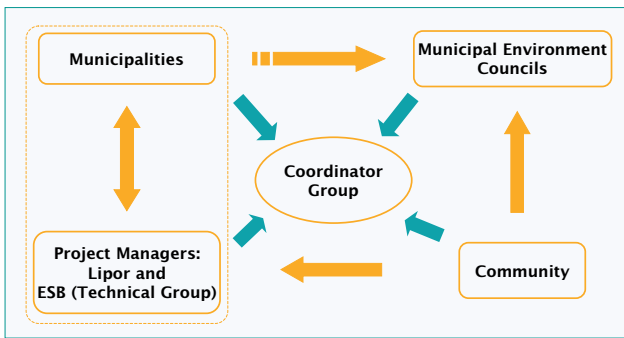
The European Union's Urban Green Days 2005 were a launch-pad for Thematic Steering Groups, which worked on four identified priority themes targeted by the Region's '2005 Global Report on Public Participation'. These four strategic themes were: Water and River Restoration, Education and Training for Sustainability, Transport and Air Quality, and Natural Protection (incorporating urban planning and prevention of fires in natural areas). These Groups convened in professionally facilitated meetings, resulting in the refinement of the measures to be set up in the SEP. The Technical Group of Futuro Sustentável coordinated these meetings, which aimed at maximum involvement from all sectors and stakeholders.

In addition, a regional conference on environmental issues was held in June 2005. At this event, the Aalborg Charter was signed by all the municipalities participating in Futuro Sustentável, demonstrating the commitment of



Participative workshops
Left: Maia
Right: Gondomar





Main Structures of the Project

all the municipalities to sustainable development. In addition, the conference presented Sustainability Awards, commending excellent work by communities.

In the third phase of the project, action plans are being prepared for each municipality, emphasizing the critical priorities and initiatives for the region and municipality, as identified by the public consultation and thematic studies undertaken in phases one and two. These plans attempt to ensure the financing of the implementation in municipalities for the duration of Futuro Sustentável. Furthermore, the SEP will be adopted and implemented with a continuous process of monitoring and review to assess its impacts, and to propose improvements and modifications.

Results

An initial result of the project is environmental awareness amongst citizens, policy makers and other regional actors. Increasing the quality of information available for citizens, as well as the range and scope of opportunities for participation, helps to transfer sustainable development from a political concept into the real world of citizens, hopefully laying the foundations for their ongoing commitment to sustainability.

By facilitating access to environmental information, there has also been greater acceptance of the need for shared decision-making and cooperation between stakeholders. In particular, the development of a bottom-up approach and advancement of citizens' consultations was a bold step in Portugal.

By promoting higher levels of participation from citizens, the project emphasizes not only the economic, environmental and political

dimensions of sustainable development, but also the oft-neglected social aspects.

Furthermore, coordinating the activities of municipalities is more effective and efficient than single measures; duplication is avoided and resources are shared.

As the third phase develops, municipalities will work in increasingly frequent and dynamic strategic partnerships, increasing synergies and solving structural problems. The change to a strategic planning process will hopefully allow the region to grow whilst preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

LESSONS LEARNED

Promotional work helped the project to gain credibility and was fundamental in encouraging people to participate in meetings and other initiatives. Futuro Sustentável showed the value of high-visibility projects and campaigning.

However, it is still very difficult and time-consuming to motivate citizens to participate in public hearings. This is mainly a result of many years in which little or no citizens' consultations were undertaken by governments and municipalities. In order to gain a representative and numerous audience, a lot of thought and consideration has to be given to the day, time and place of a meeting, and to issues such as transportation.

Second, by attracting the involvement of all stakeholders and in particular local governments, Futuro Sustentável secured the support and gathered the necessary momentum to establish itself in the consciousness of communities in the region. Systematic and structured public participation in planning processes changed public perceptions about the relevance of planning processes, challenging preconceived ideas and encouraging increasing numbers of citizens into the consultation processes, creating a positive spiral. Another positive effect is higher community cohesion across the region.

Stakeholder dialogue can still present problems, as sectors and stakeholders who are not familiar with partnerships are brought together. In addition, sometimes there is a gap between the daily management of these relationships and the planning processes.

Finally, the SEP will focus on delivery and effective implementation. Each measure will have its agenda with responsible entities, actions, funding and duration clearly identified. This will ease management of the initiatives and make the implementation process more transparent.

KEY REPLICATION ASPECTS

Futuro Sustentável has demonstrated that the involvement and commitment of local authorities in regional planning processes is an essential precondition for success – municipal cooperation can address issues across a functional urban area effectively. This may serve as a good example for participatory planning processes in other urban areas. Committed local authorities add credibility to the project and act as managers instituting and driving change. Moreover, the efforts of one or two outstanding municipalities can act as an impetus for other local governments in the region to follow the example – with active and engaged municipalities the process should be ceaselessly dynamic and resource efficient.

Public participation in functional urban areas is a critical but complex challenge – transparency and total commitment to involving the public in all stages of the planning process is required each and every day. The times and dates of meetings must be coordinated to maximize the levels of potential public participation; meetings must be planned carefully and be very interactive to facilitate discussion - e.g. using resume cards and vote systems to create more focused discussion that delivers effective and efficient outcomes. Furthermore, the integration of a range of civil society stakeholders such as businesses, non-governmental organizations and government agencies acts as a forceful driver of transformation.

The success of the entire process is dependent upon a well-prepared, structured and resilient supporting group who must maintain excellent relations with the local media, civil servants and government technicians in the local authorities. This guarantees the project's institutional support from within the authorities and guarantees the means to promote the project externally. Including opinion makers and strong entities from the outset will make it easier to increase credibility of the project.



Publications and website of the project

Staff

The project team consists of eight persons in the Technical Support Group and two persons working at LIPOR. LIPOR is responsible for promoting the project and bringing together the local authorities, while the Technical Support Group works as a consultant, managing all the technical issues of the project, as well as organizing the meetings.

Budget

The total cost for Technical Support Group during the three-year project was US\$ 531,195.17 plus VAT. Some additional costs are excluded from this figure and were covered on an ad hoc basis.

Financing

The project financing, guaranteed for the three years of the project, is provided by LIPOR, with the understanding that a supra-regional authority will take over the project thereafter, as coordinator and funder.

KEY CONTACTS

Dr. Nuno Barros

Coordinator

LIPOR – Serviço Intermunicipalizado de Gestão de Resíduos do Grande Porto
Apartado 1510
4435-996 Baguim Monte
Portugal

Telephone: +351 22 977 0100

Fax: +351 22 975 6038

Email: nuno.barros@lipor.pt

Eng. Pedro Macedo

Technical Support Group Coordinator
Escola Superior de Biotecnologia –
Universidade Católica do Porto
Rua Dr. António B. Almeida, s/n
4200-072 Porto
Portugal

Telephone : +351 22 558 0032

Fax : +351 22 509 0351

Email : pamacedo@esb.ucp.pt



References

- > www.futurosustentavel.org
- > www.lipor.pt

Acknowledgements

Futuro Sustentável was inspired by Dr. Fernando Leite, who mentored and supported the project. The project has also been helped by the active participation of communities and actors across the Greater Porto region, in particular the Technical Support Group guiding the project. The project has depended upon and received outstanding levels of commitment and interest from all participating municipalities.

Date Written

March 2006, ICLEI European Secretariat.

ICLEI–Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local governments implementing sustainable development.

ICLEI's mission is to build and serve a worldwide movement of local governments to achieve tangible improvements in global sustainability with special focus on environmental conditions through cumulative local actions.

16th Floor, West Tower, City Hall, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5H 2N2 Tel: +1-416/392-1462 Fax: +1-416/392-1478 Email: iclei@iclei.org

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