

GLOCAL 2009

National Conference on Local Agenda 21 and Sustainability

THE CASCAIS CHARTER

Sustainability on the move, network for co-operative Sustainability

Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, which was approved by all nations at the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), highlighted the importance of local authorities as the level of government closest to citizens and emphasised their “vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public with a view to promoting sustainable development” (CNUAD:1993:333). Almost two decades later, about 40% of Portuguese municipalities are sharing the idea of Local Agenda 21 (LA21), and have developed a number of initiatives aimed at achieving local sustainability and contributing to global sustainability. As a result, a National Conference on Local Agenda 21 and Sustainability - GLOCAL 2009 held in Cascais on September 23-24, 2009 - reflected on the possibilities and restraints relating to political, economic and social processes for implementing LA21 in Portugal, drawing attention to those successful elements that have proved vital to guaranteeing the success, viability and continuity of such initiatives on the ground. These include:

- a) the commitment and involvement of political authorities with necessary legitimacy to share decision-making power—with the public; to provide clear information and ensure clear and transparent procedures to make certain that decision-making processes take into account the results of public debate, community hearings and the aspirations of all citizens
- b) ensuring the viability of LA21 processes beyond the mandates of elected administrations by seeking the comprehensive and long term involvement of local political and civic forces.
- c) acting in a proactive way that goes beyond merely complying with legal or official commitments made by different local administrations. An LA21 should be seen, above all, as a continuous process that extends well beyond the contractual undertakings made to guarantee funding. It is especially necessary to ensure lasting results that would give rise to real changes in government practices and community based initiatives that are too often closed off to public participation.
- d) supporting local values and culture in an increasingly globalised world. Focusing on local questions and involving the public in decision-making processes concerning issues directly related with their daily lives and their immediate living conditions provides an effective means for valuing difference and authenticity without ignoring the global processes to which we are all subject.
- e) Developing an inclusive agenda which encompasses all citizens, builds on social justice and created lasting employment and enterprise for prolonged prosperity across the whole municipality, all based on sustainability practices.

However, a more informed and diachronic approach, with the capacity to adopt strategies and create synergies to improve LA21 processes already underway as well as to encourage the emergence of new initiatives in municipalities and regions where they do not yet exist, requires a much greater coordination of efforts.

To this end – and as recommended in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 – setting up a **National Network of Local Agendas 21** will provide for increased cooperation between local authorities, enhance the sharing of information and experiences; increase levels of regional and national coordination and contribute to the promotion of a more active and committed citizenship in defence of the common good. The National LA21 Network being proposed here will have the following specific objectives:

1. to prepare the municipalities of Portugal for a genuine commitment to establishing an effective network and implementation process for nation- wide LA 21 in time for the **20th Anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development** to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.
2. to encourage the **training of local technicians and facilitators** to enhance endogenous monitoring and development of LA21 processes;
3. to promote and strengthen **partnerships and the sharing of knowledge and experiences** between the different institutions and agents (local, regional, national and international) involved in implementing these initiatives;
4. to encourage **Portuguese participation in the international movement promoting sustainability** through the involvement of municipalities, associations of municipalities (national and regional) and LA21 initiatives in international networks for sustainable development;
5. to promote **the coordinated evaluation of implementation processes** (local, regional and national) by independent bodies, as well as the production of studies and data and the monitoring of the most successful LA21 initiatives, which can be used as models for emerging initiatives;
6. to hold a regular **disclosure conference**, backed by an effective web based exchange of practice and learning held in rotation in the different regions of Portugal, with a view to passing on the latest knowledge, sharing experiences and publishing the results of evaluations;
7. to contribute, through the coordination of public, private and civil groupings, and through the tangible and effective results produced by the network, to create the necessary pressure to establish an **effective national policy supporting the implementation of LA21 initiatives**.

In spite of the persistent lack of a concerted national framework and/or reliable funding policies for implementing LA21, incontrovertible advance has taken place in Portugal in recent years, with the average annual growth rate since 1996 reaching 44.3% and almost 230% since 2005. However, the results of this dynamic is still irregular, remaining in the field some misconceptions and unsustainable practices - which reinforces the role of the network and coordinated evaluation. Furthermore, within municipalities were we can find the most successful LA21 initiatives, both the local authorities and residents recognise that such processes:

- i)* increase the level of **confidence** between government and the governed;
- ii)* facilitate the **implementation and public acceptance of local government policies** and instruments, strengthening the position of local authorities in relation to the central government;
- iii)* improve the **quality of local life**, both at the level of the (re)appropriation of public spaces (place-making) and as an exercise in promoting a more proactive and effective citizenship based on a sense of local belonging and identity;
- iv)* contribute to **local development** through the synergetic encouragement of interactions between the different stakeholders that make up local communities.

Cascais, September 23-24, 2009

Text by Luísa Schmidt and João Guerra