

Capacity of Local Development Planning in Slovenia: Strengths and Weaknesses of Local Sustainable Development Strategies

TOMAŽ DEŽELAN, ALEM MAKSUTI & MATJAZ URŠIČ

ABSTRACT Despite being coined by international forums and promoted chiefly by international/supranational organisations and clubs, sustainable development is a concept that in essence rests on and is largely determined by the local level. The local level's primacy in terms of introducing the principles of sustainability is openly stipulated by Agenda 21, thus providing the impetus for local sustainable development strategies – Local Agenda 21. These community-specific, long-term visions of sustainable co-existence serve as an important strategic tool for overcoming challenges communities may face while maintaining the general idea of the future. As prime standardised artifacts, local sustainable development strategies represent an excellent insight into the capacity of an individual community to achieve a sustainable future and deal with potential challenges. In this paper, we analysed four such visions of a sustainable future for two city and two minor Slovenian municipalities in order to examine their capacity to develop into sustainable communities. By employing George and Kirkpatrick's (2006) framework for assessing sustainable development strategies, we identified useful and problematic aspects of the documents prepared by the city and town municipalities. The analysis showed that the transition period in Slovenia has left a significant impact on development planning and its consequences have yet to be fully resolved.

KEYWORDS: • local sustainable development strategy • sustainability assessment • sustainable development • Local Agenda 21 • Slovenia

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS: Tomaž Deželan, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, email: tomaz.dezelan@fdv.uni-lj.si. Alem Maksuti, Ph.D. candidate, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, email: alem.maksuti@gmail.com. Matjaž Uršič, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, email: matjaz.ursic2@guest.arnes.si.

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1 Introduction

Development planning is supposed to represent the basic platform that determines how societies, places and spaces should change and what they could be like in the future. However, local development planning as traditionally applied to local decision-making rests on traditional tools and planning methods most often employed as expert procedures to evaluate and control individual projects (Brugmann, 1996: 365). Usually taking the form of various strategic and local development documents, the 'traditional' development plan predicts what type of intervention should take place when, where and why (Hall, 2002). From this perspective, developmental planning is too often understood as a 'clean', i.e. value-free, or even 'technical' exercise based on precise instruments, skills and mechanisms that support decisions concerning interventions in society and space (Albrechts, 1999, 2004), and thus portrayed as a form of precise governance of urban transformations intended to regulate the interests of different groups present in the locality.

Offe (1987: 18-19) emphasises stiffness and inflexibility as huge obstacles for modern societies. Highly formalised and institutionalised development planning may allow complex structural interventions to be carried out but actual, i.e. on the ground, realised changes could have collateral effects reflected in much wider societal processes. Many of the developmental changes influencing the quality of life in a community are in fact the product of soft, i.e. social and cultural, elements found within categories and sub-systems separate from the formal and institutionalised planning system. Measures falling solely within the framework of a formalised and institutionalised social planning system have a 'limited scope' and may, for example, solve physical problems but simultaneously create other socio-cultural problems. Only in rare cases can local community issues be resolved with simple, formalised, top-down measures. Much more often, local communities require less formal planning practices that include a range of grassroots' inputs, i.e. bottom-up social analyses of development planning policies and planning practices (see Healey, 1997; Albrechts, 2006; Salet & Faludi, 2000; Soja, 2000).

To steer multiple partners with their differing and conflicting values towards the achievement of shared long-term objectives or targets, which simultaneously address social economic and environmental issues and link local actions with global issues, a planning approach for sustainable development must be devised. This kind of planning – sustainable development planning – is nowadays considered to integrate both macro (strategic) and micro (local) requirements of various stakeholder groups that deal with national governments, city municipalities through to local inhabitants. In this sense, inclusive development planning on the local level is regarded as an inseparable part of a wider planning process whilst local stakeholders are seen as important partners whose role is not

diminished by formalised procedures and the pressure of politically and economically supported interest groups. While many traditional local planning methods may be drawn into planning approaches for sustainable development, adapting these methods usually entails participatory approaches, a common picture about current developmental conditions, an assessment of systemic problems and requirements, the measurement of global impacts of local actions, and strategic control over local development processes in the face of external pressures (Brugmann, 1996: 366).

Local planning's importance for sustainable development is well characterised by a statement by former UNCED Secretary General that "If sustainable development does not start in the cities, it simply will not go" (see Brugmann, 1996). To be precise, it is Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992) that advocates the local level's relevance for achieving sustainable development and stresses local government's vital role in educating and mobilising citizens and responding to their needs regarding sustainable development. Thus, global sustainable development relies on local authorities and their ability to construct, operate and maintain the economic, social and environmental infrastructure that will oversee planning processes, establish policies and regulations and assist in implementing national and subnational policies; in other words, to devise Local Agendas 21 (see Agenda 21, Article 28). Since these kinds of agendas (local sustainable development strategies) present community-specific, long-term and realistic visions of the future community (Čiegis & Gineitiene, 2008: 113), our aim is to examine local planning processes' capacity to achieve a future community on the grounds of sustainability. By comparing selected local strategies with George and Kirkpatrick's (2006) framework of sustainable development principles, we seek to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of local sustainable development planning.

2 Framing sustainable development

Sustainable development has become a buzzword in political and bureaucratic discourse in the past two decades and still dominates developmental discourse despite being coined approximately 25 years ago (Seema, 2010). As a result, its conceptual clarity and restrictive use have become an exception to the rule due to its many varied uses in different (sub-)national, global and regional strategic documents and policy platforms (Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002). With growing recognition of the sustainable development paradigm's importance for *our common future*, strategic documents based on sustainable development principles are gradually shaping our regulatory regimes, although some countries have experienced a less organic introduction of sustainable development due to various parallel processes (e.g. transition to a market economy, a democratic system of government, integration into international organisations and clubs) (see Čiegis & Gineitiene, 2008; Milutinovic & Jolovic, 2010; Deželan, 2010). Sustainable development principles may thus be mechanically put into development

frameworks on the basis of external pressures from donors, credit-givers, trade partners or admission gatekeepers (Brugmann, 1996; Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002; Goldin & Winters, 1995; Mebratu, 1998; Baker et al., 2005).

In essence, the idea of reconciling development needs with environmental protection is not new; however, the concept of sustainable development in its current understanding certainly is (Voigt, 2009: 12). To be precise, sustainable development is no longer about integrating environmental considerations into the economic development process, but about a development process of a qualitatively different nature that represents an epistemic shift to a new paradigm since not only economic and ecological systems need to be addressed (Jensen, 2007: 511). This paradigm shift is a consequence of greater awareness of environmental degradation, poverty, social disruptions and humanitarian crises through the Club of Rome and the Stockholm Declaration that no longer regarded development solely in terms of gross national product but as a policy aimed at better living conditions for all (Voigt, 2009: 13). The World Conservation Strategy from 1980 is one of the first international documents to explicitly deal with development and environmental limits (ibid.: 14); however, via the Brundtland Report sustainable development became a broad policy objective and gave the impetus to install the sustainable development concept in all documents of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Blewitt, 2008: 15). The Rio Declaration (Agenda 21) introduced a new approach with a central focus on the Brundtland Report and the mainstreaming of environmental protection into developmental progress.

Seen broadly, many international organisations have adopted the sustainable development concept and are actively exploring new and better indicators to measure progress and drafting new guidelines to foster sustainable development (Voigt, 2009: 19). However, the pivotal document on the global level remains Agenda 21. The latter represents a basis for various supranational, supranational-regional, national and local sustainable development strategies (see Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002; Haughton & Counsell, 2004; Baker et al., 2005).

Implementation of Agenda 21 rests on several levels with the Rio Conference clearly designating the local as the best starting point. With most of Agenda 21's actions being concentrated on the local level (see Brugmann, 1996), the Local Agenda 21 concept was formulated and launched by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives in 1991 as part of a wider framework for local governments to implement the outcomes of the Rio Conference (Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002: 64). Local Agendas 21 address many traditional local development planning weaknesses and represent a major innovation in terms of: a) nurturing a broad, inclusive process of consultation coordinated by a local authority and drawing in all key stakeholders; b) ensuring that environmental concerns enter the mainstream of urban planning; and c) providing an efficient and equitable way of

identifying common goals, reconciling conflicting interests and creating working partnerships between government agencies, private enterprises and civil society groups (ibid.). As has been proven many times, the experience with local agendas indicates their success is very context-dependent. Their effectiveness depends on the accountability, transparency and capacity of local authorities as well as parallel processes focused on the same goal (e.g. the Aalborg Charter) (ibid.). As a result, successful and influential Local Agendas 21 are linked to environments embedded in processes seeking to: a) improve the quality of local government; and b) integrate global concerns in local plans that also heavily rely on supportive national and (inter/supra)national frameworks and networks. The relevance of these networks and efforts to the Slovenian context is presented in section 3.

3 Contextual background

3.1 Evolution of the Slovenian sustainable development regime and its international embedment

Slovenia's problems and tasks regarding sustainable development seem similar to those countries that have experienced the transition to a democracy and a market economy as sustainability was put on a side-track during the 1990s (see United Nations, 2002). Initially, reformulating an enormous amount of legislation posed a serious constraint, although the basic principles for integrated decision-making were established by the Environmental Protection Act in 1993 (United Nations, 2011). In terms of strategic planning, the government also adopted the starting-points for regulating development planning on the level of the Republic of Slovenia in 1992 and a proposal adopted in 1993 for regulating annual and development planning in the country (Radej, 2000: 48).

Before the National Sustainable Development Strategy was adopted, several other key documents had integrated the sustainable development concept. The first was the Strategy for Economic Development of Slovenia (SEDS) that emerged in 1995 and was renewed in early 2002 for the period 2001–2006 (Radej, 2000; European Commission, 2004) and positioned sustainable development as a key element in the New Development Paradigm, treating the economic, social and environmental aspects of welfare equally. Although the strategy incorporated non-material components, it still clearly prioritised reducing the economic development gap within the EU over narrower social and environmental gaps. The SEDS laid down the foundations for Slovenia's National Development Programme for 2002–2006, a framework programme for EU structural and cohesion funds aimed at realising some of the SEDS' provisions and representing the second important document in the sustainable development context. The third was the National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP) adopted in September 1999. It contained objectives, guidelines and strategic measures for environmental protection and the use of natural resources, and sought to integrate environmental considerations into

sectoral strategies and set goals for the environmental and industry sectors. The NEAP clearly presented the environmental dimension of sustainable development and took account of the objectives and tasks included in Agenda 21, the EU's Fifth Environmental Action Programme and Slovenia's Environmental Protection Act.

In June 2005, the government finally adopted the national sustainable development strategy (Slovenia's Development Strategy), which sets out the vision and objectives of the country's development. The strategy primarily focuses on economic issues (Steurer et al., 2008; European Commission, 2007), although it also involves social, environmental, political, legal and cultural issues. The strategy serves as a national sustainable development strategy, albeit with an economic imperative. With regard to the institutionalisation of sustainable development, several other documents have been produced, although their primary intentions differed, chiefly by way of attempts to implement the Lisbon Strategy (e.g. Resolution on the National Development Projects 2007-2023, Programme of reforms for implementation of the Lisbon Strategy in Slovenia 2008 etc.).

Internationally, Slovenia cooperates most intensively within the frameworks of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD), the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In line with the UNCSD's operations, Slovenia cooperated by drafting and delivering reports on the state of sustainable development in the country (United Nations, 2011). In terms of the EU, Slovenia reported on the state of sustainable development already as a candidate country and later regularly participated in the 2007 and 2009 reporting exercises (European Commission, 2010). Regarding cooperation with the OECD, Slovenia's adoption of the Accession Roadmap in 2007 introduced several instances of sustainable development that were eventually scrutinised by numerous OECD committees, allowing the country to eventually participate in the annual meeting of sustainable development experts (OECD, 2010). In addition, Slovenia cooperates in various settings dealing with sustainable development principles on the global, regional or bilateral level (see Deželan, 2010).

3.2 The local mode of development planning in Slovenia

Slovenia has not yet formally established administrative intermediary levels between the state and the local communities – regions. Local authorities have the original right to control development planning processes in their area (see ZPNačrt, Official Journal of the RS, no. 33/07). As the main units of local self-government in Slovenia, municipalities are responsible for economic development and many other tasks concerning sustainable development that are detailed in Article 15 of the Law on Local Self-Government (see ZLS, Official Journal of the RS, no. 72/93). Except for special developmental arrangements, which are the direct responsibility of the state, most of the power concerning the 'where, when

and why' to make specific developmental interventions lies in the hands of local authorities (Simoneti & Zavodnik Lamovšek, 2009). The chief task of local authorities is to provide, i.e. lead, appropriate planning processes associated with a particular concern for the rational and sustainable use of resources in line with the principles of quality living, working, recreation and a healthy environment. In the decision-making process local communities, i.e. local authorities, are supposed to ensure the direct involvement of all affected and interested stakeholders and the entire community's well-being with respect to the protection of natural and built features in the area. These efforts are reflected in different development strategies which constitute the basic guiding documents for further development at the local level. These documents are supposed to constitute the framework for coordinating sectorial development policies, strategies and programmes in different fields and to also guide or limit private initiatives and interests. Finally, these development strategies are also the basis for preparing other formal instruments at the national, regional and local level.

The preparation of strategic documents at the local level has become a widespread process in Slovenia in the last decade. For example, in the Gorenjska statistical region 10 out of 18 municipalities prepared strategic documents including sustainable development principles. However, the figures are much lower for the Podravska region (10 out of 41 municipalities) and, in addition, some urban municipalities either opted to not draft a strategy and rely on sectorial ones or discarded their strategy. The latter is well illustrated in the case of Ljubljana that prepared its sustainable development strategy in 2002 (see Hanžek et al., 2002), but opted to ignore it due to problems with implementation. Instead, the strategic plans of municipal departments and sectorial strategies of the city act as general guidance,¹ which is also typical of the Municipality of Celje² where sustainability is mentioned in its "Environmental Action Programme" and for Murska Sobota³ where sustainability is only mentioned in the "Plan for sustainable mobility". The case of Koper also reveals problems of implementing the strategy from 2002⁴ (see Kavaš, 2002) and currently only addresses sustainability in the local "Environmental Action Programme" that expired in 2010. In the municipalities of Novo mesto and Ptuj, the development strategies expired a few years ago (see Municipality of Novo Mesto 2003; Municipality of Ptuj 2005), with some municipalities currently in the process of renewing core development documents (e.g. Novo mesto,⁵ Slovenj Gradec).⁶ Some Local Agenda 21 processes started a long time ago but never materialised in a proper sustainable development strategy.⁷

Although the development strategies represent an important conceptual base for starting the planning process, numerous practical aspects, i.e. locally specific barriers, obstruct full implementation of strategy goals in practice. Due to its relative 'immaturity', Slovenia's formal development planning system is very sensitive to changes in social functions and dynamics. This sensibility often results

in frequent small (micro) conflicts on the level of individuals' daily lives. Following the change of political system and transition to a market economy in the 1990s, the system of planning underwent huge transformations. The abandonment of former planning procedures and rapid empowerment of a new planning system together with an unconsolidated legal structure led to situations in which each side constructed its own interpretations regarding what was permitted in localities. This process of interpreting laws at the local level has led to the disregard of public interests at the national level and, thus, to the dissolution of the principles of cultural heterogeneity and culturally sustainable communities. In an analysis of public and private interests in spatial policies, Kos (1998: 28–30) states that Slovenian spatial planning is characterised by a “non-consolidated institutional structure” and “cross-level ambiguities and deficiencies”. Consequently, Slovenia’s development is hampered by “an informal political and legal culture” reflected in incremental and often illegal interventions in communities. Particularly at the local level, development is still based on “instinctive opposition toward the state, i.e. formal interventions in localities, which are based on long and demanding legalization procedures” (ibid.).

When trying to ease the barriers to sustainability the planning system should rely more on strategies of inclusion and try to cooperate with local communities before and during the development process. However, the range of participatory strategies in Slovenia has not changed much in recent years. If we consider Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of public participation in spatial planning (Illustration 1), participatory strategies in Slovenia mainly rely on conventional methods (e.g. exhibitions, public tribunals, various media reports etc.), which principally involve disseminating information to the public rather than the direct involvement of users (bottom-up) in the spatial planning process.

Illustration 1: Arnstein's ladder of user participation in spatial planning

8	Citizen control	} Degrees of citizen power
7	Delegated power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	} Degrees of tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	} Non-participation
1	Manipulation	

Source: Arnstein (1969: 217)

Due to the low level of inclusive, participatory planning, the sustainable development strategies in Slovenia only have apparent power, but little practical power, which frequently opens up the legality-legitimacy trap (see Kos, 2002: 21) and issues regarding trust that deeply affect the capabilities of the development planning system to produce good, i.e. holistic and integrative, solutions to specific problems appearing in local communities (see Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997). The extent to which local sustainable development strategies can contribute to overcoming these barriers and the underlying rationale this is based on are presented in the next two sections.

4 Data and method

Our assessment of normative sustainability in Slovenian municipalities rests on a purposive sample of four local sustainable development strategies. Two urban municipalities' (Kranj and Maribor) and two municipalities' (Jesence and Slovenska Bistrica) local sustainable development strategies from two statistical regions (Gorenjska and Podravska) were selected based on two criteria: a) the date of drafting; and b) the period of validity. Both criteria aimed to include challenges faced by local government units in Slovenia after 2008 (see Setnikar-Cankar et al., 2013). All selected documents were prepared in the period between 2009 and 2013 while their duration spans from 14 to 24 years.

4.1 Assessment criteria

A sustainability assessment as an integrative concept (Gibson, 2006) demands a holistic approach. In this paper we employed the frequently verified assessment methodology of George and Kirkpatrick (2006) to evaluate strategic planning processes in the four selected municipalities. Our scrutiny focuses on sustainable development strategies from local levels since these strategies are a "*coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrative manner*" (Meadowcroft, 2007: 154). Sustainable development strategies serve as standardised artefacts (Wolff, 2004: 284) that can be legitimately used to make assumptions about the intentions and ideas of their creators and the sustainable development regime they represent.

The basic principles of effective sustainable development strategies concentrate on "*principles for strategic planning and sustainable development, and a coordinated set of measures to ensure their implementation*" (George & Kirkpatrick, 2006: 146). The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the OECD identified five general principles of effective sustainable development strategies at the national level: a) integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives; b) participation and consensus; c) country ownership and coordinated policy process; d) comprehensive and

coordinated policy process; and e) targeting, resourcing and monitoring. The first two principles are regarded as sustainable development principles, while the other three are more general principles of strategic planning and management (ibid.: 148). These categories also provide a useful tool for assessing long-term strategies on the subnational level. In accordance with these five general principles, four assessment criteria were devised (see Table 1).

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of local strategic planning mechanisms against sustainable development principles

A. Integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives

Criterion A1 integration

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive and integrated analysis of economic, social, and environmental issues, which clarifies links between the three spheres, resolves conflicts between them where practicable, and negotiates appropriate trade-offs where conflicts remain.

Criterion A2 social and poverty issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates poverty eradication, gender issues, and the short-term and long-term needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups into economic policy.

Criterion A3 environmental and resource issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates the maintenance of sustainable levels of resource use and the control of pollution to maintain a healthy environment in economic policy.

Criterion A4 international commitments

Measures are in place to ensure compliance with international agreements which the country has entered into, on environmental and social issues.

B. Participation and consensus

Criterion B1 involvement of stakeholders

The country's processes of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and review include the participation of stakeholders, including government, decentralized authorities, elected bodies, non-governmental and private sector institutions, and marginalized groups.

Criterion B2 transparency and accountability

The management of the country's strategic planning processes is transparent, with accountability for decisions made.

Criterion B3 communication and public awareness

Measures are taken to increase public awareness of sustainable development, to communicate relevant information, and to encourage the development of stakeholder involvement in the strategic planning process.

Criterion B4 long-term vision and consensus

The country's strategic planning processes are based on a long-term vision for the country's development, which is consistent with the country's capabilities, allows for short-term and medium-term necessities, and has wide political and

stakeholder support.

C. Country ownership and commitment

Criterion C1 high-level government commitment

The process of formulating and implementing the national strategy is led by government, with evidence of high-level commitment.

Criterion C2 broad-based political support

The country's strategic planning process has broad-based political support.

Criterion C3 responsibilities for implementation

Responsibility for implementing strategies is clearly assigned to bodies with the appropriate authority.

Criterion C4 coordination with donors

The country's strategic planning process is coordinated with donor programmes.

D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process

Criterion D1 build on existing processes

The national strategy for sustainable development is based on existing strategic planning processes in the country, with coordination between them, and mechanisms to identify and resolve potential conflicts.

Criterion D2 analysis and information

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive analysis of the present situation and of forecasted trends and risks, using reliable information on changing environmental, social, and economic conditions.

Criterion D3 realistic goals

The national strategy is based on a realistic analysis of national resources and capacities in the economic, social, and environmental spheres, taking account of external pressures in the three spheres.

Criterion D4 decentralization

The country's strategic planning processes embrace both national and decentralized levels, with two-way iteration between these levels.

E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring

Criterion E1 budgetary provision

The sustainable development strategy is integrated into the budget process, such that plans have the financial resources to achieve their objectives.

Criterion E2 capacity for implementation

The sustainable development strategy includes realistic mechanisms to develop the capacity required to implement it.

Criterion E3 targets and indicators

Targets have been defined for key strategic economic, social, and environmental objectives, with indicators through which they can be monitored.

Criterion E4 monitoring and feedback

Systems are in place for monitoring the implementation of strategies and the achievement of their defined objectives, for recording the results, and for reviewing their effectiveness as strategies for sustainable development, with effective mechanisms for feedback and revision within the planning process.

Indicators showing the extent to which each criterion has been met are defined as a qualitative coding scheme offering scores for each criterion. The methodology allows for four descriptive assessment scores for analysed sustainable development strategies: A) all requirements of the criterion are fully met; B) all requirements of the criterion are satisfactorily met, although some more improvements are desirable; C) some requirements of the criterion have been satisfactory or fully met, but others have not yet been satisfactory met; and D) few requirements of the criterion have, as yet, been satisfactory met (see George & Kirkpatrick, 2006: 150). In addition to scoring schemes, the acquired results are accompanied by a short supporting text containing the main arguments for each individual score.

5 Results

5.1 The Urban Municipality of Maribor and the “Development Strategy of Maribor 2030”

The Municipality of Maribor has a long tradition in preparing development strategies, spanning from the 1970s since the municipality was then a major industrial centre in Slovenia that monitored environmental protection (Smaka Kincl et al., 2004: 67). After the country’s independence, this pattern to a limited extent continued through various projects with the first strategic document being prepared in 1996 (see Čuš, 1994). The result was an economic strategy that primarily emphasised the importance of strengthening economic infrastructure and without any special attention to sustainability. Another strategic document from 1997 was the foundation for a series of strategies prepared by the Maribor Development Agency. Unlike their predecessor, these documents included considerations about sustainable development principles on the subnational level (see Lorber, 2005).

With Maribor signing the Aalborg Charter in 2001 as the first municipality in Slovenia to do so (Smaka Kincl et al., 2004: 68), a local environmental action programme was drafted thus making Maribor’s efforts part of a joined EU partnership (“Towards a Local Sustainability Profile”) that strived for implementation of the Local Agenda 21. Since Slovenia’s accession to the EU, new ideas on the integration of sustainable development have emerged (see Blatnik, 2004). In the context of the established EU sustainable development regime, the main European Commission documents (chiefly Europe 2020) and Slovenia’s Development Strategy, the municipality prepared a proper sustainable development strategy entitled “The Development Strategy of Maribor 2030” which presents a compendium of strategic and operational mechanisms, and refers to three main pillars of sustainable development. The strategy was prepared by a working group from the Municipality of Maribor and supported by the

participation of local public companies, the University of Maribor and some other civil society organisations (Municipality of Maribor, 2012: 8).

Table 2: Assessment of the Development Strategy of Maribor 2030

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
A. Integration and sustainability	C	D	B	C	Weak integration divided into three-development axes (smart, inclusive and sustainable growth). Highlights the three main pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) without an adequate institutional structure and plan for implementation. Barely mentioned principles of solidarity and inclusiveness of marginalised groups (disabled, homeless), and delegated responsibility to stakeholders included in other municipal projects. Environmental requirements are satisfactorily met but more or less summarised from national sectorial documents on climate change, tourism, agriculture and forestry. In conjunction with the latter, additional integration at the local level is necessary. Connectedness and substantive consistency with documents from the regional, national and supranational level is obvious, while the proposed measures are too general and need additional improvement.
B. Participation and consensus	C	D	D	D	A multi-stakeholder approach in the preparation process. Implementation depends on a Strategic Council with a five-year mandate composed of representatives of the economic sector, regional development agency and nongovernmental organisations. The Strategic Council is appointed by the mayor, and has an advisory function. Civil society groups and other interested publics are in principle prompted for participation. Transparency is solely the responsibility of the competent authority that is majority-owned by the Municipality of Maribor, which alludes to limited accountability. The monitoring of implementation does not provide informing mechanisms for broader public awareness, and inadequately emphasises the importance of wider political and stakeholder support for the strategy's success. In that context, the long-term vision could be understood as the wishful thinking of those responsible.
C. Ownership and commitment	B	D	C	C	There is significant local authority involvement in the preparation process and implementation of the strategy. Implementation depends on existing institutions, while accountability is related to the municipality as the supreme authority. Political support depends on the balance of political power in the local community without the mentioned broader political consensus.

					Implementation of the programme is dependent on public resources. Due to the lack of integration of the sustainability pillars deviations from the existing financial perspective are possible.
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	C	B	C	D	Goals of the strategy are coordinated with the strategy from the supranational level (Europe 2020) but do not target all segments of sustainable development. The document also suffers from equivocal and universal formulations. The assessment of the current situation ignores the acute and long-term consequences of the global economic crisis, only some changes in tertiary education and new forms of employment are mentioned in line with improvements needed in national legislation. The municipality is the final decentralised unit of local self-government, and the strategy does not mention further decentralisation (e.g. in urban communities).
E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring	D	D	D	C	Lacking budgetary provisions. Selective funding of particular activities from the municipal budget with the possibility of creating special funds to finance projects prepared by public agencies and public-private initiatives in the local community in the future. No institutional bodies have been established to implement the strategy, the coordinator of the process will be selected via a public tender from bodies majority-owned by the municipality. The latter also applies to the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's implementation, which is divided into pre-, mid-term and final evaluations within each five-year implementation plan. Potential problems with evaluation may occur due to ambiguous indicators and vague criteria.

Positive features of the assessed strategy comprise the inclusive approach taken during the preparation process, the fairly accurate assessment of the current situation, and its consistency with strategic documents from the national and supranational level. A key disadvantage is that the latter is provided just on paper and is devoid of a realistic plan for its achievement. Other features that may prove challenging are the weak integration of the three sustainability pillars, the vague criteria for an effective and “down-to-earth” evaluation, the weak supporting infrastructure for implementing the strategy, and a lack of funding.

5.2 The Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica and its “Long-term development plan”

The long-term development plan was prepared in 2013 and represents a fundamental guiding and implemental document for sustainable development in Slovenska Bistrica up until 2020 (Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica, 2013: 6). It includes the idea of sustainability and it is the first such document since previous

attempts by the Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica were bound only to municipal budget investment expenditure (see Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica 2007, 2008). The development plan has seven chapters reserved for the vision and aims of the plan about the screening of the status quo, determining the strategic priorities and key development goals, and implementation and financing in a long-term perspective. The plan does not refer to sustainability in all chapters but stresses the idea of sustainability (Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica, 2013: 7–8) with a particular emphasis on the sustainable energy development of the municipality.

Table 3: Assessment of the “Long-term development plan” of the Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
A. Integration and sustainability	D	C	C	B	In addition to the explicit references to achieving sustainability, there is an integrated reference to economic, social and environmental issues. Connectedness with strategic documents from the national and supranational level is evident but there are no indicators to ensure the harmonised (copied) objectives are realised. Special care for marginalised groups is mentioned as a strategic priority but planned activities are exclusively related to competent programmes and services from the national level. Another exception is the scope of the supply and use of energy (as an element of sustainability) where precise projects are identified along with the responsible actors, deadlines and estimated costs. All chapters in the document are insignificantly interconnected.
B. Participation and consensus	D	D	D	D	No information is available on the preparation process. The municipal administration is authorised to implement projects. Monitoring will be conducted annually by a competent project frontrunner from the municipality. The possibility of changing the document is provided in advance on an annual basis and in accordance with the economic situation. The criteria for selecting projects to be funded are also determined. In conjunction with the latter, there are several inconsistencies with the idea of sustainability. Priority is given to the revenue side of the municipal budget, financing from EU structural funds, and taking the general economic situation into account that also includes austerity measures and the non-selection of “economically less important projects” (possibility of abuse). Stakeholder involvement and

					increasing public awareness are not provided at any stage of any planned projects.
C. Ownership and commitment	B	D	C	C	As a local authority, the municipality is in charge of preparing and implementing all planned projects. Shared responsibility is conditioned by the actual global economic situation, and the situation in the national economy. Political support is not signalled as important due to the primary role of municipalities in decision-making and implementation of the plan. Selection and implementation of a planned project depend exclusively on local public resources, funds from the national budget and potential EU grants. Consistency at this point is partial.
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	D	D	C	B	The plan is coordinated with national and supranational sustainable development strategies. A comprehensive analysis of the current economic situation is offered in the document in a few chapters but it is too broad and not directly related to the sustainability pillars. Mentioned objectives have deadlines and anticipated costs which are not fixed. The document is full of clauses that allow changes to the long-term plan depending on the "objective" economic situation in the country. Decentralisation is envisaged in the planning process (coordination with representatives of district communities in the municipality).
E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring	D	D	D	C	Funding is conditional and allows annual changes. Implementation relies on the municipal administration and public institutions, without the intended integration of stakeholders and actors from civil society. In that way the implementation capacity is fairly limited in advance. The plan suffers from vague indicators for all pillars of sustainable development. A project group directly responsible to the mayor provides annual monitoring. Mechanisms for the detailed monitoring and evaluation of individual projects are not provided (also there is a problem with vague criteria and/or no measurable indicators).

The long-term development plan of Slovenska Bistrica reveals several shortcomings. The biggest is the fragmentation of goals and feeble integration of policy sectors in the document. In some parts, the idea of sustainability is completely excluded and its essential elements are neglected. Alternative scores for some criteria of the qualitative scoring scheme are the lowest especially due to the weak and inadequate stakeholder involvement, unclear long-term vision, arbitrary role of local authorities in the selection of particular projects, and serious funding problems. A positive attribute of the plan is the local authorities'

commitment to implement the plan, although no exact goals and measures are specified.

5.3 The Urban Municipality of Kranj and the “Sustainable development strategy of the urban Municipality of Kranj 2009-2023”

Kranj’s strategy was developed in a bottom-up process grounded in extensive public debate encompassing 20 meetings of municipal authorities, political parties and various target groups from the economy and civil society (Municipality of Kranj, 2009: 6). The preparation process lasted two years, an organisational structure was set up strategically and assigned specific tasks to all participating actors. The document is not based on any official national or relevant EU development documents and is designed for a period of 15 years. Kranj’s strategy is the first overall strategic document to be prepared by the municipality (ibid.: 5) and is used to provide the main guidance for the community.

Table 4: Assessment of the “Sustainable development strategy of the Municipality of Kranj 2009-2023”

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
A. Integration and sustainability	A	B	A	A	Sectionalised planning is prescribed through strategic projects and priority guidelines with strong links to the three main sustainability pillars. A somewhat neglected area is combating poverty and solving the social problems of marginalised groups (more in the broader field of promoting entrepreneurship and innovation as mechanisms for achieving social equality). All requirements concerning the environmental and energy dimensions are met and operationalised. Measures are selected systematically. Compliance with national and supranational documents is explicitly exposed and evident.
B. Participation and consensus	A	C	D	B	A multi-stakeholder approach employed in the preparation process. Stakeholders are included in the process of preparing and implementing the strategy. Transparency of the preparation process was guaranteed, while responsibility for implementation is directly given to the mayor, the Strategic Council, and the head of relevant project groups and projects. Communication and increasing public awareness are somewhat neglected. The communication chapter is reserved for branding the Municipality of Kranj and does not mention informing the public about realisation of the strategy. A long-term vision and consensus are the main guiding principles with

					different stakeholders being involved from the outset.
C. Ownership and commitment	A	B	B	C	Local authorities along with the Mayor of Kranj, the Strategic Council, and the head of project teams are normatively fully committed to implementation of the strategy. Political support for implementing the strategy is in principle provided, while responsibilities and obligations for the implementation are particularly defined. The allocated municipal funds are not sufficient for carrying out the planned projects. Additional resources from cohesion funds and public-private partnerships are anticipated.
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	A	A	B	B	The strategy is coordinated with previous developmental documents. A separate chapter introduces assessment in all areas and provides for comparisons with other urban municipalities in Slovenia, which also provides the basis for drafting realistic objectives. The strategy also exposes potential barriers to successful implementation. It emphasises some latent threats concerning unforeseen legal changes, the creation of landscapes in Slovenia in the future, and the global recession. Decentralisation is mentioned as the integration of municipality districts in implementation of the strategy.
E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring	B	B	A	B	A lack of provided funds to implement the entire strategy. Strong dependence on other resources. Anticipated activities of the strategy's implementation are primarily based on the possibility of obtaining co-financing from external resources. Control mechanisms also relate to continuous monitoring of the strategy's implementation by the Strategic Council and periodical reporting to the Mayor and City Council. Revision of the strategy is provided at least every 5 years on the basis of an expert evaluation. The implementation plan provides clear obligations of responsible actors and clear criteria for effective evaluation, albeit without any precise evaluation methodology.

The positive features of Kranj's development plan significantly outweigh its drawbacks since it meets all basic and advanced criteria of appropriate local sustainability as defined in the professional literature (see Brugmann, 1996; Gibson, 2006; Čiegis & Gineitiene, 2008; Moser, 2001). The strategy is comprehensive as it stresses all three sustainability pillars as an integrated plan with feasible goals and predicted measures for successful implementation. The principle of inclusiveness was respected in the preparation process. The active involvement of stakeholders is also foreseen in the implementation process.

Continuity with prior strategic documents from the local level is evident as well as coherence with sustainable development regimes from the national and supranational level. The strategy is consistent with national and supranational (EU) sustainable development strategies and acknowledges current economic challenges, which are also accurately catalogued. Some limitations appear in terms of the provision of sufficient funds (major dependence on external financing) and the process of informing the public about the entire process.

5.4 The Municipality of Jesenice and its “Municipal development plan 2011-2025”

Challenging global and local circumstances induced the Municipality of Jesenice to upgrade its development programme in 2011. The municipal development plan for the next 14 years brought several sectoral operational programmes and policies together into an integrated policy document (Municipality of Jesenice, 2011: 4). Drafting of the plan lasted two years based on a partnership approach and the participation of the community and external experts as well as other interested stakeholders from the public (ibid.). The plan draws on an internal evaluation and analysis of economic conditions as well as the revision of a previous development plan from 2005. Drafting of the plan involved more than 100 experts dispersed across 17 working groups (ibid.: 5). The plan’s general vision is for Jesenice to become a modern and open town with a developed economy and high quality of life (ibid.: 18), although the plan also reveals certain challenges that originate from the vision itself (see Table 5).

Table 5: Assessment of the Municipality of Jesenice’s “Municipal development plan 2011-2025”

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
A. Integration and sustainability	D	C	D	D	Weak integration of the three sustainability pillars, substantive deficiencies especially in the social and environmental field. Poorly defined measures regarding care for marginalised groups. Concern for the environment is marginally included. No international commitment or connectedness with national sustainable development documents and initiatives.
B. Participation and consensus	A	C	C	D	A ‘bottom-up’ drafting process with the cooperation of numerous experts and other stakeholders. Informing includes the use of electronic media, and preparation of the annual report discussed at the Municipal Council’s meeting in order to provide for transparency and accountability of the implementation process. No clear long-term vision of

					the plan. The sustainability idea is neglected; strategic planning is weak and inconsistent with municipal capabilities and short- and medium-term necessities.
C. Ownership and commitment	A	D	C	C	The mayor is responsible for overall implementation while individual executors perform on-the-ground implementation in all stages of particular projects. The document does not provide mechanisms to ensure wider political support. The active involvement of citizens in implementation of the document is not provided for. De facto implementation of planned projects depends on public resources, funds from the national budget and potential EU grants.
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	C	D	D	D	Despite being a continuation of its predecessor, the development plan reveals a discrepancy between the goals and planned measures. A separate chapter assessing the current situation. A modest SWOT analysis is used without convincing indicators. Concerns arise because the proposed measures are devised on the basis of a deficient SWOT analysis. Stakeholder engagement is not provided for, and decentralisation is not mentioned.
E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring	D	D	D	C	Funding only from the municipal budget would prolong implementation to 28.24 years. Insufficient municipal funds are complemented by other sources (EU funds), private sector involvement, optimisation of municipal property and of current spending. The development plan demonstrates deficiency in the implemental infrastructure. Objectives are very general and the indicators intangible. The Strategic Council is nominated by the mayor and is responsible for monitoring implementation. Indicators of successful implementation are taken from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia without any explanation of their purpose and content.

In its current state, the municipal development plan seems a failed attempt to develop holistic long-term sustainable development as it proves defective in virtually all segments of set goals and activities planned. The plan demonstrates a virtually complete absence of the three sustainability pillars, unrealistic goals that fail to be integrally connected, and ambiguous measures based on inadequate screening of the status quo in the municipality. For some criteria from the qualitative scoring scheme all the requirements are fully met. This is particularly evident with the involvement of stakeholders (participation of experts and stakeholders during preparation of the plan), and the responsibility of local authorities for the implementation.

5.5 The assessed strategies from a comparative perspective

A comparative overview reveals Kranj's strategy to be the most elaborated and complete local sustainable development strategy among the examined ones because it shows the highest scores and reveals the highest level of consistency of the three pillars of sustainable development. It also highlights the long-term vision of the community through realistic goals based on precise and reliable assessment mechanisms. The development plan of the Municipality of Jesenice is structurally very similar to Kranj's strategy, but appears unfinished and poorly executed. Similarly, Slovenska Bistrica's development plan proved to be deficient and seriously flawed since the assessment revealed low ratings for most evaluation criteria. The plan was marked by insufficient consensus and participation in the document preparation process, unclear criteria for assessing implementation, and limited budgetary provisions. The latter proved to be the uniform and probably the biggest obstacle to successful implementation of the document and in some cases also the process of drafting these documents. Apart from the problem with finances, Maribor's development strategy shows signs of limited accountability regarding its implementation, and defective integration of the main sustainability pillars into the overall strategy. Slovenska Bistrica's development plan reiterates the listed challenges with inadequate planning, weak integration of the designed initiatives, and ambiguous criteria for monitoring the implementation process. Overall, all of the development strategies and long-term plans proved to be insufficiently oriented to the long-term vision of communities. Instead, they are too broad and imprecise documents with serious flaws in the prescribed implemental infrastructure and minor capacity to lead to sustainable future communities.

6 Conclusion

The examples of developmental strategies from Slovenian cities point to various useful and problematic aspects of the documents prepared by the city municipalities. On the conceptual level, the documents have a relatively well-prepared theoretical base and, from this perspective, represent a potentially useful collection of planning mechanisms that should be adopted during the development process. On the other side, the documents lack important elements on the practical level, which diminishes their importance on the level of implementation:

- Inconsistencies between the strategic and operational level of development planning. The conceptual structure of all assessed documents is relatively weak due to the long (most documents are on average more than 100 pages long) and imprecise elaboration of the primary developmental goals, the contradictory developmental orientations, unattainable targets for sustainability and vague measures for their fulfilment, inadequate indicators of the current situation, and inaccurate implementation plans without clear responsibility of high-level authority.

- The importance of active citizens' participation, i.e. inclusivity strategy, during the planning process and later during implementation of the sustainable development strategy is largely neglected. The analysed documents reveal too little attention to the importance of communication with stakeholders and public awareness of sustainable development. The municipalities (in the documents) also underestimate the need for a broader consensus and political support for implementation of the agreed goals.
- All of the assessed development documents suffer from a lack of guaranteed financial sources needed for successful implementation and therefore often remain just politically designed unfulfilled wishes of local politics. Some of the assessed documents show the set goals are unrealistic or are too particularistic to expect their implantation in due time.
- Except for the sustainable development strategy of the Municipality of Kranj, all of the other long-term (sustainable) development documents only represent an attempt to provide some solutions for problems at the local level. To really achieve this goal, they need to be revised and prepared in accordance with objective goals and measurable indicators necessary for effective monitoring.
- All of the documents were prepared after the official start of the global financial and economic crisis (after 2009). However, the dimension of the effects of global, i.e. external, factors on localities is not taken into account in the objectives (e.g. the economic crisis is mentioned only formally without any ideas for how to overcome related problems).

One main aspect needing to be reconsidered in the documents concerns the temporal structure of developmental planning. The temporal dimension, i.e. the elaboration of strategy goals according to specific points in time, dates or periods is in most of the documents non-binding and does not anticipate a redefinition of potential goals or alterations of plans if the implementation is not completed by a specific time. The distinction between developmental planning and time planning is in this sense crucially important. Kos (2002: 30) explains that "planners often present themselves as field experts, even though in line with the above definition of good spatial planning they should be both experts in a specific field AND time". The 'hard', i.e. scientific, aspects of planning are all too often pushed to the forefront, while the 'soft' and locally specific aspects related to time and social behaviour are relegated to the background; their importance only emerges when unexpected events occur, upsetting the initially conceived plan of developmental interventions. In this sense, the presented strategies may prove to be insufficiently elaborated and mainly have a political role but do not carry high implantation potential. The developmental planning process should thus include a component of long-term planning and "identify the externalities" (Tietenberg, 1994: 36), i.e. attempt to establish where problems and obstacles are likely to arise after a certain period.

According to various public opinion polls (Toš, 1999; Hočevar, 2004; Kos 2010, Uršič 2009, 2012), the Slovenian population generally supports sustainable development strategies. This inclination towards sustainable development planning is often combined with people's distrust in state, regional and city authorities due to the absence of adequate information or poor communication between the inhabitants and the institutions that deal with planning on the local level. The presented analysis shows that the planning mechanisms in Slovenia are relatively 'immature' and therefore all the more sensitive to changes in social behaviour, as indicated by the frequent conflicts that accompany attempts to change the spatial order in specific localities. The biggest problem deriving from the pseudo-developmental planning in Slovenia is the narrow orientation of formal interventions in local communities as they merely consider physical and temporary solutions and do not seek connections with the wider environment and society.

At this point, it is clear that developmental planning which tries to respond to problems by using only direct, one-dimensional, physical solutions does not suffice and cannot eliminate the undesirable social influences which appear from time to time. In fact, a certain level of conflict in sustainable planning is inevitable and must be considered an important force for changing and adapting the planning system in line with (post)modern trends. The solution to this puzzle does not stem from the direct inclusion of the unexpected or as yet unknown needs of individuals in the planning system, but concerns the improvement of a mechanism that would reduce the gap in communication between planners and users, if and when such needs emerge. As such, planners will have to adapt their communication strategies to various stakeholders regardless of their insistence on the 'higher' objectives of formal planning policies if they wish to avoid the potentially excessive costs of each change they plan in the local environment.

Notes

¹ Jazbinšek Sršen, Nataša (Head of the Department for Environmental Protection at the Municipality of Ljubljana), personal communication with one of the authors, 8 January 2014.

² Črepinšek, Natalija (Head of the Department for Construction and Maintenance of Communal Infrastructure, Transport, and Environmental Protection at the Municipality of Celje), personal communication with one of the authors, 10 January 2014.

³ Cvetko Török, Nada (Head of the Department for Infrastructure, Environment and Spatial Planning, and Commercial Public Services at the Municipality of Murska Sobota), personal communication with one of the authors, 9 January 2014.

⁴ Deranja, Davor (Department for the Environment and Space at the Municipality of Koper), personal communication with one of the authors, 10 January 2014.

⁵ Muhič, Alenka (Head of the Department for Development and Investments at the Municipality of Novo mesto), personal communication with one of the authors, 9 January 2014.

⁶ Lužnik, Rozalija (Head of the Department of Planning and Environmental Protection at the Municipality of Slovenj Gradec), personal communication with one of the authors, 9 January 2014.

⁷ Jurca, Niko (Head of the Department of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Infrastructure at the Municipality of Nova Gorica), personal communication with one of the authors, 9 January 2014.

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