

Name of Exercise: Local Agenda 21 – Kaunas

Location: Kaunas, Lithuania

**Participation Exercise
under which Article?** Article 7

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To inspire discussion on sustainable development for administration and politicians in Kaunas City Municipality and raise public participation in decision-making.

Background:

Sustainable development has become an important factor to guide development of countries in the 1990's. Local Agenda 21 has already been developed for a large number of cities in the Baltic Sea Region, but Lithuania had limited experience with its implementation. Despite various documents, resolutions and action plans for implementation of Agenda 21 in Lithuania, almost nothing concrete has been done at the national level and there was no national policy on Agenda 21 in Lithuania. Besides, Kaunas as well as the other towns in Lithuania had a traditional nature protection, which was not able to solve environmental problems any more. Those problems caused the necessity to take urgent innovative actions towards environmental protection.

International co-operation and partnership of local authorities was extremely valuable for the efficient progress of LA21 in Lithuania as well as for implementation process of Baltic 21. With the help of ECAT-Lithuania, a practical partnership between Kaunas and Tampere (Finland) cities was established.

In June 1998 Kaunas Municipality together with their partner Tampere Municipality started a new project Local Agenda 21- Kaunas financed by PHARE. That was the first attempt in Lithuania to start the local sustainable development process. The aim of the project was the development of Environmental policy (strategy and action plan) for Kaunas city as part of Baltic 21.

The project "Local Agenda 21 – Kaunas" involved a big number of participants, i. e. local and external experts, Environmental Protection Department, universities etc.

Though the project period was 12 months (25 June, 1998 – 25 July, 1999) it was considered to be a process which will continue in future. The project was accomplished in three stages. The basis of its achievement was assessment of current situation, analysis of partners experience and training of municipal policy makers and officials on sustainability issues. Raising public awareness and participation in decision-making was an integral part of all project activities.

Process and procedural context

Project Working Group for the development of the environmental policy was established involving representatives of Kaunas Municipality as well as different Lithuanian organisations. The Working Group set up the priorities according to the most urgent activities for the existing situation in Kaunas. It was agreed to work in these trends: City Development Management, Environmental Quality, Community Development, Environmental Education and Public Awareness, Municipal Training.

The main objectives and strategies of the project were established by close co-operation of the project Working Group, project partner and external experts. The main objectives were: assessment of the correspondence of current municipal environmental policy with the national and EU legislation; evaluation of present situation of social planning and public health state; investigation on community development promotion and public relations improvement; preparation of training program on sustainability issues of policy- and decision-makers as well as of municipal officials; development of Environmental Policy (strategy and action plan); preparation of recommendations on the development of Environmental Policy for other Lithuanian municipalities.

The main achieved results by all sub-groups during the project stages:

- Kaunas Environmental Policy was elaborated and approved by the City Council;
- Monitoring data acquisition, storage and interpretation were reviewed and Report on Municipal Environmental Monitoring System Assessment and Development was prepared;
- The social survey on Environmental Consciousness was accomplished;
- Municipal Environmental Education Program was elaborated;
- Fifteen workshops for municipal staff and politicians were organised during the project. Seven material packages were prepared for distribution in these workshops. Mini-reports were prepared and disseminated every two months, home page in Kaunas Municipality Internet Web-site was elaborated.

Publicity of the project activities was one of the biggest strengths of the project Local Agenda 21 – Kaunas.

Participation Techniques Used:

Workshops for municipal staff and politicians were organised during the project.

The community participation in the project was ensured by spreading information about process and results of Local Agenda 21. The community has been informed via media, Internet, workshops and conferences. The publication of special issue of city newspaper on LA 21 raised public interest and comments.

The social survey on Environmental Consciousness was accomplished during the project. The detailed report presented public awareness of environmental issues and recommendations for the Municipality how to involve public, how to raise its awareness.

Who participated?

The project Local Agenda 21 – Kaunas involved a big number of participants, i. e. local and external experts, administration of municipalities, universities, secondary schools, media, NGO's etc. Municipal Top Management's positive standpoint towards sustainable development enabled to start a successful Agenda 21 process. The project was first presented during the meeting with Municipal Top Management (Mayor, Vice-mayors, Advisers) and project initiative group on May 11, 1998 before signing Project Grant Agreement.

The working group for the development of the project was established involving representatives of Kaunas Municipality as well as Lithuanian organisations (ECAT-Lithuania, Healthy City Office/Healthy City Institute, Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas University of Technology, Vilnius University, Consulting Company Rian T., Inc., city newspaper Kauno Diena, Lithuanian Green Movement etc.). Experts from Tampere were invited by the Working group for consultancy.

The Environmental Protection Department took an active role in the project as well. 9 out of 18 of its employees were involved in the project activities. The head of the Department was the co-ordinator of the project.

LA 21 project was launched in Kaunas secondary schools. Seminars on Local Agenda adaptation to schools activities were held for the directors and teachers of different subjects.

What information was made available?

Information about process and results of Local Agenda 21 was spread during the whole project. The community has been informed via media, Internet, workshops and conferences.

Mini-reports (6 issues, 8 A4 pages, 150 copies each) were prepared and disseminated every two months. They contained information of project activities and ongoing events.

The Local Agenda 21 home page in Kaunas Municipality Internet Web-site was elaborated in December 1998 and Mini-reports and current information are available on Internet for public.

10 articles about Local Agenda 21 in Kaunas were published in different newspapers.

Four special issues of the city newspaper on Agenda 21 have been published and disseminated. These issues especially inspired visits and phone calls to the Environmental Protection Department of students from the schools and Universities as well as representatives from other institutions and Kaunas citizens.

Fifteen workshops for municipal staff and politicians were organised during the project. Seven material packages were prepared for distribution at these events. 262 participants from Kaunas municipality, 60 from Kaunas municipal organisations, and 42 from other Lithuanian municipalities took part in these workshops. Municipal training workshops raised competence of politicians and municipal employees as well as their capacity for implementation of Local Agenda 21. The prepared training sessions will be easily distributed and implemented in other Lithuanian municipalities.

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