

Comments to the “Local Agenda 21 Guide “Proposal – A Challenge for All, Manual to Implement the Local Agenda 21”

Abstract

The Institute for the Environment decided to elaborate a "Guide" with the title "*Local Agenda 21 A Challenge for All, Manual to Implement the Local Agenda 21*", aiming to support the Municipalities and Local Communities in elaborating and implementing the Local Agenda 21. That would only help to diminish the national *deficit*, as this Council has mentioned countless times, and as it is widely recognised by the Portuguese public opinion.

The Institute for the Environment initiative having in mind to "*contribute with a guiding methodology in the conception and implementation of the Local Agenda 21*" to which the Council had access to analyse, intends to be a "*reference in the standard to implement Local Sustainability Systems (LSS)*".

Before all else, the process to transmit and encourage the adoption of Local Agendas 21 is an activity that increase the citizenship and disclosures sustainability principles. For such, one should demand the Public Administration an essentially motivational and educational attitude, at all levels. However, it is considered that this posture does not derive from the present initiative, and that it embodies an understanding that distances itself from the spirit that characterised the Rio'92 and that the *ICLEI -International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives* has been promoting for the past sixteen years.

CNADS also considers that

- The Guide is organised and written to be a standard similar to a publication inspired in the certification processes. This generates bureaucratic practices, serving as an obstacle for the ever-needed incentives for participation and for a better articulation between the citizens of the municipalities and their leaders.
- The main reason behind the Local Agenda 21, public participation, is relegated to a secondary role, for its importance and the full commitment of the social partners in the several stages of the process are not properly underlined. The follow-up formula in itself, wrongly designated as "monitoring", should be open and fully participated, with its results widely discussed by the social partners . Therefore, it is recommended a reorganisation of priorities and to emphasise the Agenda 21's processes paradigm – the participation.

- The focus should be to mobilise and help the civil society to find local sustainable solutions for itself and not to lead, through any plan, a transition process leading to sustainability. This should be clearly stated in the Guide's foreword.
- All the stages of the conception and execution process for the Local Agenda 21 should be thought of and explained. The diagnosis stage would deserve a special emphasis, for the Guide considers it as "short-term" and, oppositely, it should last as long as needed, for it is a stage intended to survey and hear citizens. It is in this stage that the creation of the Forum arises, something that is an incomprehensible flaw in this Guide/Manual.
- In a document of this nature, one should stress the principle of the diversity of experiences and routes for local sustainability, being desirable to perceive the Guide/Manual as a methodology chart to prepare, execute and revise Local Agendas 21, respecting the multiple concrete situations and the diverse routes that lead to a local sustainable development. Therefore, it is of the highest interest to present a small set of sustainable development indicators (the "ecological footprint" would be one of them), for it is important to have data that allow to do time and space comparisons.
- It would be convenient to give the proper emphasis to the importance of defining, applying and regularly accompany a public system of sustainability indicators, transmitting the message of the importance of a set of indicators that make sense to the region, on one hand, and to the local social partners, on the other. This will make the local sustainable development understandable and serve as motivation for a joint-responsibilities process.
- As it now is, the Manual is a technical document on the matter, when one would expect an obviously rigorous document, but also educational, illustrating as much as possible the procedures, action possibilities, and agents to include.
- One should stress the importance of including all the social and political forces from the first moment. A Local Agenda 21 process is a continuous and dynamic process requiring the inclusion of all in defining central goals. Without a clear involvement of the several social and political agents from the very beginning, there is a risk of mining the process by lack of commitment and identification with the agreed goals. The success of this process depends on determining, at the Central Administration level, a service of focal point, aiming to motivate and not to coordinate.