

514

INTERNATIONAL Sustainable Development Research Conference
Manchester, April 7th and 8th, 1997

Experiences with local green planning in the Netherlands

Frans Coenen, Centre for Clean Technology and Environmental Policy, University of Twente, The Netherlands

1. Introduction

For each nation Agenda 21 recommends that:

'The experience gained through existing planning exercises such as national reports for the Conference, national conservation strategies and environmental actions plans should be fully used and incorporated into a country-driven sustainable development strategy' (Chapter 8, Agenda 21, UNCED, 1992).

Before UNCED on a local level there were also existing planning exercises with regard to a wide range of environmental issues (EU, 1994, Blowers, 1993). These planning exercises are often referred to as local green planning or local environmental planning. They range from environmental charters to environmental action plans.

The first Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), published on May 25, 1989, is world-wide seen as successful forerunner for similar documents published in other countries. Dutch municipalities were also early involved in green planning exercises. Therefore the Netherlands are an interesting case to look into the experiences and the possible lessons of local green planning for a local Agenda 21 (LA21).

In section two we will first discuss the relation between LA 21 and local green planning in general. In section three we will sketch the system of local green planning in the Netherlands and the progress of LA21. Section four deals with the experiences in local green planning in the Netherlands and their meaning for LA 21. The last section draws some general conclusions. The conclusions are based on an evaluation of the first generation of Dutch environmental policy plans using a survey and plandocument analysis concerning all Dutch 110 municipalities with more than 30,000 inhabitants. In addition a multiple case study was performed using interviews and decision document analyses in seven case-municipalities.

2. Local Agenda 21 and local green planning

Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) states as an objective that:

by 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on a local Agenda 21 for the community.

Chapter 28 doesn't state where an LA21 should consist of. It gives a mandate to the local authorities to take responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating the dialogue among 'citizens, local organisations and private enterprises' which is necessary to determine *the form and content of their specific LA21 initiative*. The task should not be misconstrued as having to adapt to and apply a pre-set program or plan (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1997).

The misconceived idea that a LA21 is specific action plan is stimulated by some international initiatives after RIO. For instance the ICLEI (1993) defined a LA21 campaign in the context of their LA21 initiative as:

any participatory, local effort to establish a comprehensive action plan for the sustainable development of that local jurisdiction or area.

The Charter of European Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability (the Aalborg Charter, 27 May 1994) expects from signatories of this Charter to prepare local action plans. This action plans should contribute to the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme.

Although the mandate of Chapter 28 does not explicitly ask for an action plan or programme as an output of a LA21 process is it clear that 'the best strategies ...' should be written down in some kind of document. A LA21 needs a framework for local sustainable policies. The first of the eight steps in the preparation of a local action plan in the Aalborg Charter is

'the recognition of the existing planning and financial frameworks as well as other plans and programmes' (The Aalborg Charter, part III, 27 May 1994)

Between existing green planning processes and the process and content of a LA21 there will be some similarities. Both will contain some form of a future vision, will strive towards a cross sectoral integration and integral approach and will have some form of community involvement. We would also expect some obvious differences. A local green plan will be an initiative by the local authority, addressing environmental issues. An LA21 is never the sole initiative of a local authority, and asks for a global dimension concerning global solidarity and justice.

In section 4 we will see what we can learn from of the experiences with local green planning which are of particularly interest for LA21 like the integral approach and the participation in planning.

3. Local green planning and LA21 in the Netherlands

Already in the seventies the first Dutch municipalities made green plans or as they are often called in the Netherlands environmental policy plans (EPP). The early plans had the character of environmental charters. During the eighties nearly all municipalities made operational management plans for environmental policy. These operational plans were one of the solutions to solve the problems with environmental regulation on the local level. Evaluation. The national government subsidised the preparation of two types of operational management plans. First the Nuisance implementation plan (NIP) restricted to the implementation of the so-called Public Nuisance Act for nearly every municipality and later the broader Environmental Implementation plan (EIA), for a small group of municipalities.

Table 1 Type of plans in municipalities above 30,000 inhabitants (Touw infraconsultants, 1989, Coenen, 1996)

	mid 1988	January 1993
No plan at all	25%	0%
Only a NIP	15%	0%
An NIP and an EIP	16%	32%
Also a EPP	34%	68%
Municipalities with an EIP working on an EPP	-	12%

Policy planning was not a new phenomenon in the environment. Various environmental laws contained planning obligations for both the national government and the provinces. The planning systems as it was developed in the seventies has the nature of a response to urgent problems and focused mainly on the individual sectors, where these problems showed most clearly. The sector planning system consisted of various sector plan for solid waste, water quality, soil conservation, etc. In the Memorandum 'More than the Sum of its Parts' from 1984 by the Minister of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment, Winsemius, the foundations for a new system of environmental policy planning are sketched. The ideas from this Memorandum were converted into legislation in the chapter 'Plans' of the General Environmental Conservation's Act. The new system integrates all sector plans in single strategic environmental policy plan in relation to a single operational implementation plan.

Although in their the basic concept the ideas about the organisation of the planning system and the course of the policy processes which have to take place within the planning system, dates back to 1984; it was given its final form after the publication of the bill for the Planning chapter (1989) and after this bill was discussed in parliament (June 1991). All the researched municipalities had approved plans from 1989 onwards¹. As such the new planning system influenced the municipal plans.

¹With the exception of two plans, the plans we studied of the larger group of municipalities were from 1989 or later.

The sector plans were mainly internally oriented and prepared exclusively within their own environmental sectors. The new planning system proposed the concept of 'open planning'. 'Open' means involving others such as citizens, enterprises, environmental organisations and other authorities in planning at an early stage. This is supposed to increase the scope and recruiting power of planning which in turn is related to the interiorization of environmental responsibility by the plan's target groups. Such interiorization also depends on the way in which the plan is accomplished. The *external function* is the consequence of publicising the plan. By doing so actors in the environment such as citizens, firms, social organisations and other authorities gain an insight into the type of behaviour which is to be expected from the municipalities, so that they can adjust their own decision-making. 'Open planning' is in line with a well-known aspect of the Dutch environmental policy; the so called target-group approach. This policy focus means that, after the national environmental objectives have been formulated in the National Environmental Policy Plans, target groups and their representatives have a strong say in all further stages of the policy process. In creating a consultative structure between the government and the industry organisations acting on behalf of the polluters (i.e. the target groups) and attempt is being made to internalise environmental responsibility in individual companies. One of the main aims of this consultations is to define the tasks for a specific sector of industry within the framework of the overall national environmental objectives. Usually these arrangements are laid down in covenants and other forms of guidelines, incorporating targets to be realised by the various sectors of industry within a certain time limit.

LA21 had a slow start in the Netherlands but was picked up very quickly after the beginning of 1995 because of earmarked funds (Coenen, 1997). In 1992 the idea of LA21 was not received with much enthusiasm by Dutch municipalities. In the first place because Dutch municipalities claimed that they were already doing a lot in the field of sustainable development. International publications showing 'good examples of sustainable development' strengthened this idea. Many good examples, like for instance separated garbage-collection, energy-saving, sustainable building, were already common practice in Dutch municipalities. They are probably among the forerunners in the world, so they didn't see the surplus value of LA21 in this respect.

Secondly, because the intensification of tasks in the context of implementation of the first National environment Plan meant that on the one hand the municipal administrative capacity was enlarged. The targets which had to be accomplished to receive the new funding on the other hand were quite strict and concentrated on 'basic environmental tasks' such as permit giving, control and the implementation of national law. Fulfilling these targets, and retaining the funding, proved a great burden for the municipalities. Little time, capacity and energy was left to develop new initiatives. A lot of municipalities felt that LA21 would just be an extra burden they could not face at the time.

Thirdly, the environmental hype was not longer at its peak in the Netherlands. This point was reached in 1989 and 1990. Media-attention, public interest and political attention were on the decline. UNCED probably had a greater impact in other countries in this respect. However there were still pioneers within the Dutch municipalities. One could easily fill a book with dozens of Dutch examples of sustainable development initiatives that would look good in any country. The first two years after RIO most municipalities failed to start a more or less formalised LA21 process, they only took a few aspects in hand. The VOGM -regulation was a new form of earmarked environmental funding for a three-year period (1995-1998), which included an action point on LA21. Municipalities could receive extra funding for four policy priorities out of a list of nine points of action. LA21 was the only really new action point. The funding is based on the number of inhabitants. The goal of the LA21 action point is to point programmatic to sustainable development on a local level. No blueprint has been supplied as how to reach an LA21. Eventually, 143 out of over 600 municipalities choose LA21 as one of their four action points.

Some municipalities tried to combine LA21 preparing their second local green plan. In other municipalities an LA21 is a separate process, partly because of the plan period of the existing green plan.

4. Lessons from local green planning

On the basis of the evaluation (Coenen, 1996) of the experiences with local green planning we can draw the following lessons. The first category of lessons result from experiences with the organisation and processes of local green planning:

- The operational management plans (NIP and EIP) showed that making means available for drawing up plans without assuring capacity for the execution of these plans, the plans are doomed to fail in advance. For LA21 this means that besides capacity to organise the dialogue there should also be means to implement the strategies for sustainable development which come out of this process.
- The plandocument analysis showed that 75 of the 76 studied plans made use of a consultant firms in some way. A correlation was found between the consultant involved and the type and form of plan and planningprocess. In LA21 one should be cautious that not the consultant is the dominating factor in defining the form of the dialogue process.

The second category of lessons result from experiences with inter policy integration in local green planning:

- The plandocument analysis showed that local environmental policy plans can be considered comprehensively in the sense that they involve whole range of environmental sectors (waste, air, noise) and related policy sectors (traffic, housing, physical planning). Most plans, even the most recent ones, had a environmental compartment approach (70.5 %). Only a third (29.5 %) had a thematic or combined thematic and sectoral approach. The well-known themes from the Dutch national environmental policy plan (e.g. acidification, the manure problem and desiccation) are not very common in Dutch municipalities plan. For LA21 it is good to realise that a real comprehensive approach still give difficulties within municipalities. The municipal organisation, the compartmental organisation of the environmental department and the specialisme of the civil servants can obstruct a comprehensive approach.
- A second lesson is the translation of environmental policy in green plans into environmental relevant decision making in other policy areas. The case-studies in the evaluation (Coenen, 1996) lead to two conclusions on the use of the plans by other policy sectors in the municipality. Firstly the actual use of a green plan in decision making in environmental relevant areas like physical planning, traffic policy, housing, etc. depends on the knowledge and relevance of the plan for these other sectors. In the case municipalities the relevant environmental policy in the green plan often was first translated into a specific sectoral plan (like a traffic our physical plan) before it had influence. Secondly the resistance from other policy sectors to the infringement of environmental policy into these sectors depends on in how far the green plan is considered an 'environmental initiative'. The use depended on commitment established during the planningprocess. The best used plans were the plans that were considered as plans of the whole organisation. The output of LA21 will have to be translated in a wide variety of municipal plans. Therefore it is important that an LA21 is not pushed back to the environmental sector. Although it is a much broader concept, the risk is that it is handled as if it was just another initiative from the environmental department.
- A third lesson is the relation with national policy. Inter policy integration could particularly be given form at a local level, because this is where a policy areas really touch. But in a lot of areas the inter policy integration is given shape on a national level and then implemented on a local level. For instance on a national level in physical and traffic planning, sustainability principles are taken into account and then implemented on a local level.
- The fourth lesson is the tension between environmental goals and goals form other policy areas. The evaluation research on municipal environmental planning (Coenen, 1996) showed that the overall growth target of municipalities is of major importance for the way these municipalities handle environment and sustainable development. Municipalities with a large growth target, where several thousands of new jobs have to be created and thousands of houses have to be built with the necessary infrastructure, showed a more reserved environmental policy. There are even examples of municipalities trying to set the national environmental policy aside. Like the Dutch ABC-location policy, on behalf of economic growth. On the other hand, there are municipalities with a low growth rate, and fewer employment problems who advertise themselves as 'green cities'. They are able to make choices in attracting new businesses and refuse environmentally unfriendly businesses. These are often municipalities which are very popular as central locations for offices..

The third category of lessons result from experiences with participation in local green planning. Participation in local green planning processes could be either reaction on the basis of a concept plan drawn up by the administration without the involvement of target-groups or real participation in the preparatory stage of the plan. A telephone survey in June 1992 (Buil, 1992) showed that only 1/3 out of 60 municipalities (over 25000 inhabitants) actually involved the target groups in the preparatory stage of the planning process. Usually the approach would be to interview the target groups or have face-to-face consultation talks. A written survey held in the beginning of 1993 (Coenen and Lulofs, 1993) showed that 29.8% only had participation in the preparatory stage, 35.1% merely as a reaction on the concept and 21,1% in both stages. Of the local planning processes 14% didn't involve any form of participation.

Two problems with participation in local green planning are of special importance for LA21:

- If we place municipalities that had real participation on a participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969) 9.8% had a citizen consultation group as the highest form of participation and 43 % had at least hearings and information meetings, apart from other forms of participation. Direct interviewing of target groups occurred in 33.3% as the highest step on the ladder, apart from other forms of participation. These numbers show that it was not unusual to involve target groups when drawing up of environmental strategies, but it happened in a minority of the municipalities and the methods were quite limited. But the majority of the municipalities relied on consultation after drawing a concept-plan. Problem in participation processes was often to get business involved. Especially during hearings all kinds of groups would show up, except business.
- Agenda 21 stresses of the importance of the major groups for the implementation of Agenda 21. In Dutch environmental policy 'target groups' play an important role. There is a resemblance between these target groups and major groups. According to the national planning framework, local authorities should also involve target groups in their planning. At local level there are some specific advantages and disadvantages to a target group approach. The main guidelines of environmental policy are largely determined by the state. The policy is executed mainly by the provinces and municipalities. At municipal level there will be less need to arrive at a common policy formulation. Usually there will be a consensus by the time the municipality is confronted with the problem. At municipal level, the tension between what has already been decided between the central government and a particular branch of industry, always plays a part. For instance both the municipality and the local garage dealer may be confronted with agreements made between the central government and the Association of garages (BOVAG). In practise, a local target group policy can be shaped by including representatives from the target group in a guidance or feedback group, organising an informative meeting with the target group or explicitly consulting target groups through interviews with representatives or requesting a (written) response to planning drafts. But only a small minority of the municipalities set up more permanent consultation forums, especially with local environmental movement groups.

5. Concluding remarks

Although there are obvious differences between local green planning processes and LA21, we can draw some lessons from the experiences in local green planning. An important lesson lies in a major difference between LA21 and local green planning. An LA21 is more than an environmental initiative. Local green planning deals with environmental issues and their relations with other policy areas. An LA21 addresses sustainable development including global equity issues.

An LA21 asks for new role of municipalities and other stakeholders in the local community. In local green planning processes municipalities play a dominating role. In LA21 processes the municipality has to play a role as facilitator of a process and as a partner in an open dialogue. Municipalities as well as the environmental policy target groups have problems getting used to the new role municipalities have to play in LA21 processes. A bottom-up LA21 process depends very much upon the quality and power of the other actors involved. NGO's and other actors need to be well organised to play an role in Local Agenda 21. Municipalities find it difficult to find equal and relevant partners for the dialogue.

References

- Agyeman, J. and Evans, B. (ed.), Local environmental policies and strategies, Harlow, 1994
- Arnstein, S., A ladder of citizen participation, in: Journal of the American Institute of Planners, p. 216-224, 1969
- Ashworth, G., The role of local government in environmental protection: first line defence, Harlow, 1992.
- Blowers, A. (ed.), Planning for a sustainable environment, a report by the Town and Country Planning Association, London, 1993
- Buil, V., Een open planning van het gemeentelijk milieubeleid? MSc.-thesis, Enschede, 1992
- Brugmann, J, Call for a Local Agenda 21, ICLEI, 1992
- Coenen, F.H.J.M., The role of municipal environmental policy plans in environmental management, paper IIAS-conference, Vienna, 13-17 July 1992
- Coenen, F.H.J.M. en Lulofs, K.R.D., Resultaten enquête naar gemeentelijke milieubeleidsplanning en gemeentelijk milieuzorg-beleid, Enschede, 1993
- Coenen, F.H.J.M. , The effectiveness of municipal environmental policy planning, Enschede, 1996
- Coenen, F.H.J.M. , Local Agenda 21 in the Netherlands. Slowly maturing in fertile soil?, in: Lafferty, W.M. and Eckerberg, K (ed.), Moving towards sustainable communities in Europe. A cross-national perspective on the implementation of Agenda 21 at the local level of governance, forthcoming June 1997
- EU Expert group on the urban environment, European sustainable cities project, First report October 1994
- Lafferty, W.M. and Eckerberg, K (ed.), Moving towards sustainable communities in Europe. A cross-national perspective on the implementation of Agenda 21 at the local level of governance, forthcoming June 1997
- Matthews, N, Everything you ever wanted to know about Local Agenda 21 but were afraid to ask, Town and country planning, July/August 1994 Vol. 63
- Morphet and Hams, Responding to Rio: a local authority approach, Journal of environmental planning and management, 1994-4