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COOPERATION BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE AREA OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

PhD student, Mg. oec. Jurijs Grizāns

Riga Technical University

Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management

Meza iela 1/7, Riga, Latvia

Phone: +371 29921155

E-mail: jurijs_grizans@yahoo.com

Asoc. prof., Dr. oec. Jānis Vanags

Riga Technical University

Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management

Meza iela 1/7, Riga, Latvia

Phone: +371 67089360

E-mail: vanags.janis@gmail.com

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Abstract

The research aim is to analyze the perspectives of the modelling of the Latvian local authorities and communities partnership at the context of sustainable urban development. In order to achieve the set aim the following research objectives were defined: to analyze the perspectives of the partnership development between the local authority and community at the context of sustainable urban development; to study the opportunities of the mutual cooperation between local authority and community; to evaluate links between the modelling of the partnership between local authority and community and the concept of sustainable development; to make conclusions and give recommendations for the promotion of the partnership between local authority and community in Latvia at the context of sustainable urban development.

This paper focuses on the study of the opportunities of the modelling of the partnership between local authority and community which is an important competitive advantage of the national social, economic and spatial development at the context of sustainable development. The hypothesis of the research is local authority and community are creators of the economic, social, environmental, recreational values. The close partnership between local authority and community is vitally important for the evaluation of the distinction of the different regions of Latvia and their potential contribution to the society development as well as to the prosperity of the Republic of Latvia. Analyzing the processes of the promotion of the partnership development between local authority and community in

Latvia, it is necessary to note, that very often political decisions about support for cooperation between local authority and community are contrary to the coherent development strategies and action plans. Lack of initiative of the state and local government and lack of the support of the scientific researches in area of modelling of the partnership between local authority and community very often prevent practical possibilities to realize the best experience of cooperation between local authority and community. This means that sustainable urban development is impossible without cooperation between local authority and society. For this reason local authorities must to aware their strengths and weaknesses, to assess the current situation and to create strong but also on understanding oriented relationship and discussions with the various groups of community as well as to involve them in active cooperation. It is important to remember that sustainable urban development is not only administrative regulatory provisions and limitations but also communication with local inhabitants about the place of their residence – urban development problems, tendencies and priorities. The research is based on the three methods: 1) logically constructive method – logical interpretation of the already published by the other author's data on the modelling of the partnership between local authorities and communities; 2) monographic method – interpretation of the data based on proven knowledge about the economic, social, environmental aspects of the partnership between local authorities and communities; 3) document analysis method – study and evaluation of the normative acts and scientific researches on interaction and partnership development between local authorities and communities at the context of the aim of this research. The results of this study showed that it is crucial to develop and to promote partnership between local authorities and communities on the basis of mutual



benefit principle. It is important that urban areas become or remain attractive, both to residents and businesses. Their capacity to innovate and create new economic opportunities is a prerequisite to ensuring that these regions do not lose out in global competition.

Introduction

„We make cities but cities make us,” – wrote the foremost Greek scientist and philosopher of his age Aristotle, stressing the importance of the existing interrelations and interconnections between the development of the human settlement and its residents [1]. Analyzing an urban development from the point of view of the history, it could be concluded that these relations have a multidimensional nature – they manifested in economic, political, cultural, social etc. areas of the human and urban life. Urban development planning and management have always been in the centre of the human’s attention. In our days they do not remain the valid, but have acquired a new dimension of sustainable development. This in turn means new opportunities and challenges, new relationships and forms of accountability. The rapid rate of the development of the information technology, which is one of the main characteristics of this century, promotes the creation of the integrated, opened and international environment in which the processes don’t have such strong territorial boundaries which cover only one city, one region or one state [2]. Taking into account the ongoing political and economic changes in the world economic systems the impact of the global factors on the planning and management of the urban development increases. The major trends that determine the nature of the development and the dynamic of growth of the modern cities are the following phenomenon of the urbanization process as the concentration of the population and industry in urban areas; the growth of the urban areas and number of cities; the spread of the urban lifestyle. Cities of the 21st century reasonably could be considered as a place where the most important world’s political, economic, ecological, social and cultural processes take place. It is the basis of the public welfare and national development. Modern cities are a unique environment created as a result of the interaction between human and nature. Its main goal is to satisfy the desires and needs of the residents of the cities, as well as to provide high socially, economically and environmentally grounded the quality of life. As the living conditions and way of life for each of the urban residents is the foundation of the physical, mental, psychological and material well-being. In this point of view each city is unique and unrepeatable. Each city’s future depends on the infinite number of decisions taken by the people living and companies operating there. Any urban development based on the consistency of the economic, social and environmental interests. Economic development, harmonious society and a healthy environment are preferred external preconditions for the

development of the individual and city in both short and long term. That requires a careful balance between economic prosperity, social justice and a healthy environment. In fact, if pursued simultaneously, these three goals can mutually reinforce each other. Policies favouring the environment can be good for innovation and competitiveness. These in turn boost economic growth, which is vital to fulfilling social goals [3]. Analyzing the global nature of the above mentioned phenomena associated with the urbanization process, it is important to note that they are equally important for all EU Member States, including Latvia. In the report prepared by the Committee on Regional development of the European Parliament „*Urban dimension of cohesion policy in the new programming period*” is stressed the importance of sustainable urban development and the contribution of urban areas to regional and state development in Europe. This is evidenced by the following indicators [4]:

- Approximately 80 percent of the 492 million EU inhabitants live in cities, there are however some significant differences between Member States regarding the population distribution in urban, suburban and rural areas;
- Urban areas are responsible for generating 70 to 80 percent of EU GDP and cities are recognised as centres of innovation and motors of regional and national development.

Analyzing the above mentioned as well as other indicators of the urban socio-economic growth and the territorial spatial development, it could be concluded that on the one hand cities are crucial actors in the shaping of Europe’s economy and territory. On the other hand, many cities are confronted with severe economic, social and environmental nature problems and challenges. For this reason, urban planning and management issues are one of the priorities of the new territorial cohesion policy of the EU, as well as are at the heart of both the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategy.

Sustainable Urban Development and the Functional Positioning of the Cities in the Settling Structure

Settling structure – the network of the human settlements and interconnections between them – is one of the main components of the structure of the state space. It provides the basis of the socio-economic development of the state territory [5]. Settling structure of the state is closely related to the everyday human life and the social, economic, technological, innovative, cultural and other types of processes ongoing there. Planning and development of the administrative-territorial structure of the state is closely related to the evaluation, projection and planning of the various sectors of the state economy. That is why it needs the complex approach, inclusion in the strategic and



operational development plans of the different sectors of the state economy, as well as the harmonization of the positions and objectives of the various interest groups. Balanced placement of the human settlements, as well as the maintenance of the mutually supported and complementary relationships between the elements of

the settling structure is one of the main basic principles of the regional development. The scheme of the interests groups and factors, which influence the development and functional positioning of the human settlements in the state's administrative-territorial structure and network, is shown in Figure 1.

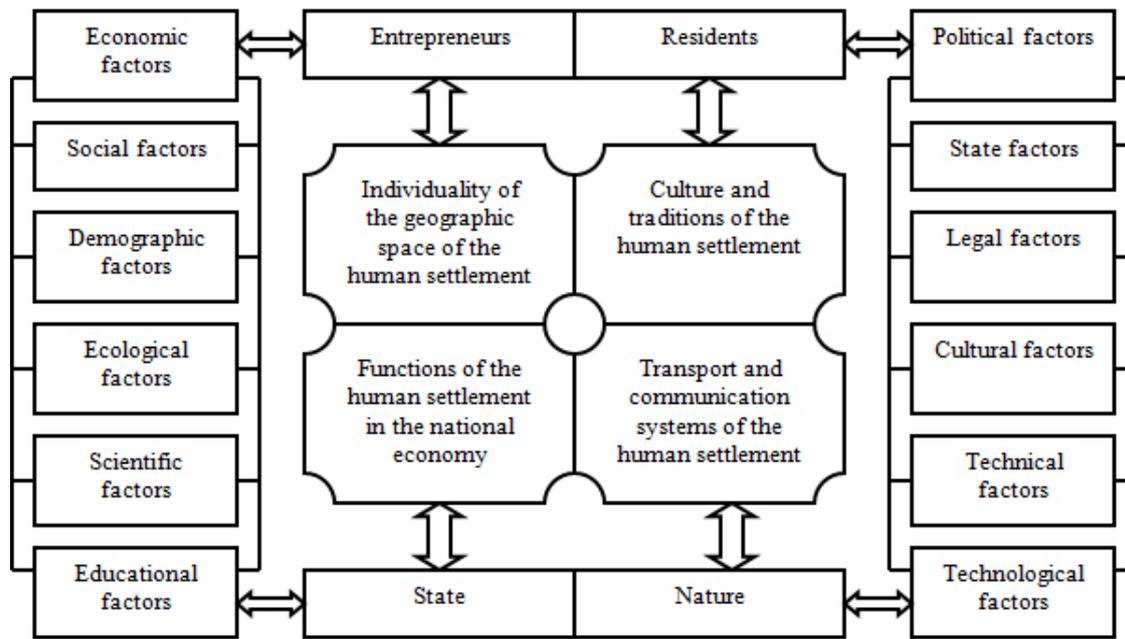


Figure 1. The model of the functional positioning of the human settlement

Source: made by the authors

As shown in Figure 1, the basic elements of the integration of the human settlement are individuality of the geographic space, functions of the human settlement in the national economy, transport and communication infrastructure of the human settlement as well as local culture and traditions. All of these internal or micro-environment's elements create prerequisites for the development of the human settlement and for its inclusion in the state's administrative-territorial structure and network. By contrast, the elements of the external or macro environment of the human settlement (local residents, entrepreneurs, state and municipal institutions, nature protection and non-governmental organizations, mass media, etc.) and factors (economic, social, demographic, ecological, scientific, educational etc.) have an effect on the development of the human settlement and provide its functional positioning in the state's administrative-territorial structure and network. The impact of the external or macro environment factors on the development of the human settlement and provide its functional positioning in the state's administrative-territorial structure and network could be characterized by the following criteria [6]:

- **The interconnectedness of the factors** – the force with which the changes of the one external factor affect others macro environment factors;

- **The complexity of the factors** – the number and diversity of the factors which substantially affect the development of the human settlement;
- **The dynamics of the factors** – the relative speed of the changes of the external environment;
- **The uncertainty of the factors** – the relative amount of the information about the external environment and the confidence in its reliability.

The diversity and the complexity of the interconnectedness of the elements and factors that affect the development of the human settlement and provide its functional positioning in the state's administrative-territorial structure and network provide that the planning of the settling structure should promote the balanced social and economic development of the territory. The planning of the settling structure of the state should promote the following prerequisites for the balanced development of the territory:

- **To provide the favourable conditions for the business development** – to promote location of the industry and other business objects within the urban areas. This will create jobs for the local residents, attract investments from the national, international and specially established funds for the development of the national economy;



- **To provide the development of the steady distributes network of the public and private services**, as well as public institutions and organizations covering all human settlements in the state. This will promote assessibility of the social protection, public health care, higher education, recreation, sport facilities for the local residents despite to the geographical placement of the human settlement. This will positively affect the attractiveness of the residential areas and will popularize it inside and also outside the country;
- **To provide renovation of the state housing fund as well as new houses building up to the modern life standards.** This will create the foundation for the physical and social well-being – adequate space, physical accessibility, adequate security, property security, structural stability and sustained sense of calm, adequate heating and ventilation systems, adequate basic infrastructure – water supply, sanitation and waste management, etc. This will have the positive effect on the increase of the level of the quality of life in urban areas.

It is important to note that one of the main objective of the planning and development of the settling structure is to promote an optimal, up to modern life standards work, service and housing placement, including the restraining of the push-pull migration of the residents. The development of the transport, particularly public transport, and communication infrastructure highly influences the development of the settling structure. That is why it is necessary to prescribe such conditions for the planning and development of the settling structure that will provide the possibly best accessibility of the centres of the human settlements as well as accessibility of the residents to the necessary services despite to their geographical placement. It is also vitally important to distribute the level of the centres of the human settlement among other areas determining a minimum choice of the public services and the mechanism of its providing. Development of the settling structure causes an anthropogenic load to the nature and changes in the cultural environment. That is why during the planning and development of the settling structure, it is important to provide preservation of the national and cultural heritage. The regulatory measures for the minimization of the anthropogenic pressure are necessary. It is necessary to avoid covering with buildings ecologically sensitive areas and to promote suitable location of the economically important objects. The development of the human settlements should be realized providing protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the territory linking it to economic and social development. The definition given by the Professor of the University of Melbourne Jerald Burke quite clearly characterizes this trend [7]: *“An appropriate presservation of the value of the territory means knitting*

together protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the territory with its socio-economic development.”

Linking planning of the human settlement with environment protection in the above mentioned definition foresees such kind of the development and resource use which creates goods that promote minimization of the negative extra impact (for example, degradation of landscape, pollution, etc.) as well as maximization of the landscape value of the territory. Therefore it is essential to predict, accordingly to the demographic, socio-economic tendencies, priorities and constraints, at the territorial planning areas which could be covered with the buildings and territories where building activities are not allowed.

Sustainable Urban Development – Point of Intersection of the Relations between Local Authority and Local Community

Analyzing the forming of the relations between local authority and local community in area of sustainable urban development, it is necessary to note that its importance has been highlighted at the beginning of the formation of the human understanding about the necessity of the improvement of the economic, social and ecological situation in urban areas, as well as about the specific actions in this sphere of human activities. On May 24 1994 at the *„Charter of European Cities & Towns towards Sustainability”* or *„Aalborg Charter”* approved by the participants of the European conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns in Aalborg, Denmark the following note about the existing situation was indicated [8]: *“We understand that our present urban lifestyle, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us essentially responsible for many environmental problems humankind is facing.”*

Evaluating the position of the representatives of the European cities and towns at the above mentioned document, it is necessary to note the importance of the cooperation between local authority and community in the given process. It is based on the fact that local municipality is one of the first that could notice environmental problems, since they are most closely related to citizens and with all levels of government are responsible for the natural and human welfare. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, being organized in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992 the following principle of the *„Local Agenda 21”* was proclaimed [9]: *„Local authorities have a vital role in public awareness and participation promotion in area of sustainable urban development because of their close relations with local communities.”*



From the above mentioned principle could be concluded that in order to achieve sustainable urban development local authorities should actively involve in urban planning and management processes indigenous people and their communities and other local communities because of their knowledge and traditional practices. Local authorities should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development. Thus tasks of the local authority will be characterized as activities that are oriented on cooperation with manufacturers and non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and trade unions, ethnic minorities and neighbouring municipalities, state institutions and other interest groups.

By contrast, an importance of the public participation in sustainable urban development planning and management could be justified by the fact that public participation not only provides a better understanding of the development of their cities and towns but also improve the quality of the planning and management processes. A non-governmental organization „TI Latvia – Delna” in the publication „*Participation in local authority’s territory planning*” issued in 2007 stressed that involvement of the society at the early stage of planning has a larger effect because of the possibility of society to make suggestions about the planning process, not only objections against the already realized projects. Namely, greater novelty and creativity become possible. In this point of view, society should be interpreted as a social system that includes both individuals and social groups, for example [10]:

- **Local residents** – involvement of the public in the process of urban planning, hearing and taking into account the interests of the public gives a sense of belonging and a willingness to support the implementation of the plans and strategies as well as to continue cooperation with local authorities;
- **Local entrepreneurs** – taking into account strategic objective of the business activities of the entrepreneurs – to get profit, it is necessary to divide this interest group between others. At the same time it is necessary to take into consideration that business activities in urban areas should be provided with an adequate infrastructure, which is different from other types of infrastructure. Assessing the business activities it is important to remember for the local authority that local entrepreneurs could be divided into two groups:
 - **Entrepreneurs with long-term interests** – are directly interested in sustainable urban planning as well as in balanced development of the city and municipality. Because it will help entrepreneurs to plan their business activities in long-term perspectives;

- **Entrepreneurs with short-term interests** – are interested in maximization of their profit in the shortest period of time. Very often such entrepreneurs build an object, for example, apartment building which very soon after it is finished or even before is sold. After that, entrepreneurs don’t have any more interest to the above mentioned object or urban area where it was built.

- **Associations and non-governmental organizations** – are an important tool for the promotion of the public participation because of their ability to union more residents than parties. Associations could make a significant contribution to the debates about the action policy and to the public involvement;
- **Research institutions** – involvement of the research institutions could help to implement principles of sustainable urban development into practice, to provide the research basis for the processes of planning and management of the urban development. Due to the research activities in area of sustainable urban development management and spatial planning realized by the EU Member States, including Latvia, now many tools for the development and implementation of the economically effective strategies of the sustainable development in specific areas. In addition, research activities of the EU contributed to the development of the integrated assessment bases for the sustainable decision making.

Possibilities of the Cooperation between Local Authority and Community and the Potential Benefits

Taking into account above identified social groups and their interests to the planning and management of sustainable urban development, an importance of the participation of society could be justified with the following arguments [9]:

- Public participation could help to promote the positive effect of the process of the sustainable development of the human settlements, including cities and towns, to the quality of life, giving an opportunity to be active and to participate;
- Public participation could help to the decision makers to identify all interested groups at the local level and to develop communication with them;
- Public participation could provide the opportunity to the active citizens to be involved and to be heard;
- Involvement of the public at the beginning of the project could prevent rising of the problems at the final phase of the project realization or strategy implementation;



- Public participation could promote saving of the financial and other resources;
- Public participation could serve as a valuable and comprehensive source of information/knowledge about the local situation, problems and possible alternative solutions.

Taking into consideration an importance of the public participation which is justified with arguments outlined above, it is important to characterize a substantive understanding and assessment of priorities of the term „public participation” at the context of sustainable development. By examining different scientific and regulatory approaches to the interpretation and application of the term „public participation” in area of planning and management of sustainable urban development could be concluded that the term could be defined as a process in which people could actively participate in the following areas [11; 12; 13]:

- To participate actively in identification of the urban issues that affect the quality of life;
- To influence actively decision-making that affect the quality of life, living conditions and lifestyle;
- To participate actively in the development of the local policy, including identification of the priorities, as well as its practical implementation;
- To participate actively in the work of the various institutions and organizations in area of sustainable urban development;
- To participate actively in the activities of the improvement of the urban development and quality of life.

Evaluating priorities of the public participation, it is important to note that for its implementation the local authority could plan and provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the planning and management of sustainable urban development. The main possibilities of the involvement of the public and the tools for its implementation are summarized in the Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, development of the open dialogue between local authority and community should be based on the public awareness raising and providing of the access to the information, regulatory and institutional support, as well as understanding of the representatives of the local authority about importance of the public participation and the promotion of their competence level in area of urban development. It is very important that the representatives of the local authority carrying out their daily duties and dealing with urban development issues provide public awareness about the proposals and decisions concerning to the urban development issues which could affect urban environment and the quality of life. It is important to note that development of the cooperation between local authority and community should be oriented to the improvement of the public trust level to local municipality as well as confidence that local residents could influence an urban development process. There

are following potential benefits from the cooperation between local authority and community: development of the democracy, development of the quality of life and work in urban areas, improvement of the quality of the urban planning and management processes, increase of the public awareness level in area of sustainable urban development, development of the human environmentally friendly behaviour, etc.

Table 1

**Possibilities of the public involvement
and the tools for its realization**

[Source: made by the authors, using [9]]

Providing of the access to the information about urban planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness activities, for example, open meeting of the local authorities, discussion forums, newsletters, posters, articles in the local newspaper, local TV, radio, etc.
Regulatory and institutional support for public participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rights of the citizens to participate in urban development planning and management should supported by laws and regulations, etc.
Interest of the representatives of the local authority in the development of the dialogue and cooperation with public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of the local authority should be open-minded and open to constructive cooperation both with individuals and social groups, for example, open door days, training campaign for the local authority staff and public, integration of the local research and academic potential, etc.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Nowadays cities play an important role in the processes of the changes of the human lifestyle, in practice of the manufacture, consumption traditions and residential space development. For this reason urban areas need a special attention in the policy of the development of sustainable urban areas. Latvian cities with the diverse cultural heritage – large number of the ancient building ensembles, almost completely retentive planning structure – are a unique value and resource for our growth. Its conservation and sustainable management is largely depends from the cooperation between local authority and community which provides the links of mutual accountability. It is important to recognize that public participation is mainly based on the energy, initiative and enthusiasm of the local residents and entrepreneurs. That is why involvement of the society in the process of sustainable urban development could not be limited only with the informative activities. At the moment vitally important is the development of the public awareness of the economic, social and environmental situation in urban areas as well as about specific actions in the history of sustainable urban development. Great importance for the



development of the cooperation between local authority and community has the human interest, commitment, consistency of actions and intense work. Dealing with urban development planning and management issues local authority should provide identification of the opinion of the local residents in order to achieve a situation when everyone could agree on common goals and objectives. It is necessary because without the harmonization of the points of view and interests long-term success of the urban development and promotion of the quality of life could not be achieved. At the end of the article it is important to note that despite of the fact that the organization of the cooperation between local authority and community is complicated process it could be seen as an innovative approach to the urban development planning and management at the context of sustainable development. Creating a relationship of mutual cooperation it is vitally important to use techniques of complete strategic planning where particular attention should be paid to the public active participation in all stages of cooperation – identification of the problems, setting of the priorities, implementation of the plans, evaluating of the results, monitoring process, etc. This in turn could help to analyze tendencies and dynamics of the urban development at the context of sustainable development.

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