



GEMEENTE DEN HAAG



Strategies for Sustainable Cities

Adopted on 24 June 1999 by the participants of
the Regional Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns in Den Haag, Netherlands

The conference in The Hague of local authorities and other actors from North-West Europe is the **final** meeting in a series of four regional events within the framework of the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign. The Campaign serves as a key facility for the exchange of experiences and good practice on sustainable development processes at the local level. The four events will lead to the Third Pan European conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns to be held in Hannover in February 2000.

The conference has been attended by 226 delegates from twenty countries, the majority were representatives from local authorities, others came from European Institutions, national governments, NGO's, academia and the private sector.

The Hague conference focused on 'how to develop new strategies for local sustainability'. Based on key principles of dialogue and partnership and the development of new concepts, a number of key themes were discussed:

- How can the integration of ecological, economic and social aspects of sustainability be better achieved at the local level?
- How can innovative forms of local management and governance help deliver the sustainability agenda and what is the role of partnership and dialogue?
- How can the benefits that new means of communication offer for the enhancement of monitoring, evaluating and understanding of sustainability be maximised?

THE CONFERENCE MESSAGE

First and foremost the meaning of sustainable development needs to be re-enforced:

Sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Report is: 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Based upon the presentations and debate during the conference, sustainability continues to be the over-riding principle, which must be incorporated into all policies of all levels of government. The following key messages are put forward:

- Local authorities are primarily responsible for the delivery of local sustainable development (What can be done locally should be done locally). However, this cannot be achieved without the support and co-operation of all actors and all levels of government through the provision of the necessary tools, instruments, legal frameworks and necessary finance.
- To develop suitable policies to reach sustainable development objectives, there is a strong need for dialogue and partnership between all government levels. The close working relationship between the European Commission, EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment, the Campaign and local authority networks needs to be maintained and reinforced. Similarly, there is also a need for dialogue and partnership between all actors

at the local level (citizens, business sector, NGOs and the local administration).

- Dialogue and partnership are essential for complementary and mutually reinforcing policies for sustainability to be developed.
- Quality of life, public health, environmental concerns, social cohesion, principles and values should become integrated elements of all European and national policies that have an impact on cities and towns. At the appropriate scale, whether the local, national or European level, these should be developed through urban visions that consider and integrate economic, social and environmental forces.
- Local capacities must allow for the development of integrated strategies, rather than single sector short-term solutions. The legislative frameworks must support rather than hinder the development of integrative approaches.
- European local authorities call upon the European Institutions to recognise the important role that the Local Agenda 21 process has in promoting good governance and local empowerment. They call upon the European Commission to provide financial support to promote and encourage the process throughout Europe as a means to help deliver 'Sustainable Development in Europe'.
- If progress towards sustainability is to be made, it is important to have up-to-date data to assess whether cities and towns are moving in the right direction or not. The production and availability of reliable and accessible data is essential.
- To measure the progress towards sustainability the development of a standard set of local sustainability indicators, which can be discussed at the Hannover Conference (Feb. 2000) is welcomed. The indicators should be comparable, quickly available and up to date.
- New methods for benchmarking best practices, such as a system of peer reviews, should be developed. The possibilities of a system of peer reviews at the local level, based on the OECD-system, should be further investigated and discussed at the Hannover conference.
- Communication of the need for sustainable development is crucial, advantage needs to be taken of new innovative mechanisms in order to reach the widest possible audience.
- The Campaign and local authority networks provide a vital mechanism for communication with the local level throughout Europe.

KEY CHALLENGES

Based upon the above messages, the following key challenges are recognised for different levels:

EUROPEAN LEVEL:

- A high profile publicity campaign on the main aspects of sustainable development should be developed with the support of the European Union.
- The need to ensure that new and innovative forms of management and governance can be transferred to other local authorities through the exchange of good practice and through the existing networks which support the Campaign.
- The need to ensure the continued concerted support / action provided by the partnership of European local authority networks as a vital tool in the sustainability process.

EUROPEAN, NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

- Innovative forms of governance and management, addressing diversity, peoples' participation and process management are required to mainstream the sustainability agenda at all levels.
- To develop integrated indicators and use them as an important tool to adjust local policies and as a mechanism to communicate the sustainability agenda to all sectors (business, public, community etc.).

LOCAL LEVEL

- The limited involvement of private sector in particular needs to be resolved, as does the involvement of minority groups.
- Education and training of local administration and private sector staff to enable them to understand the sustainability agenda, the need for integration and the development of new scenarios.
- The European Commission initiative to develop a single database on urban issues is welcomed. We recognise the need to supply good practice case studies to the database to disseminate good practice across Europe.