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# Local Agenda 21: When is it a model for joined-up community based activity?

# Working Paper 1: Literature Review

## Karen Lucas, Andrew Ross and Sara Fuller

**Centre for Sustainable Development**
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**GLOSSARY:**

BV- Best Value

BVPI- Best Value Performance Indicator

CBO- Community Based Organisation

CCT- Compulsory Competitive Tendering

COSLA- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

DETR- Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions

EMAS- Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

ICLEI- International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives

IDeA- Improvement and Development Agency

JRF- Joseph Rowntree Foundation

LA21- Local Agenda 21

LASALA- Local Authorities Self Assessment of LA21

LETS- Local Exchange Trading Schemes

LGA- Local Government Association

LGMB- Local Government Management Board

LITMUS- Local Indicators To Measure Urban Sustainability

LSI- Local Sustainability Indicators

LSP- Local Strategic Partnership

NGO- Non-Governmental Organisation

NIEL- Northern Ireland Environment Link

NRF- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

PAT- Policy Action Team

SEU- Social Exclusion Unit

SLACN- Scottish Local Agenda 21 Co-ordinators Network

SRB- Single Regeneration Budget

SNIP- Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme

WCED- World Commission on Environment and Development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is now almost ten years since local governments around the world were given the task of implementing at the local level many of the global principles of Agenda 21, the global charter produced at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 (United Nations 1993). Some local authorities in the UK have been notably enthusiastic regarding the preparation of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategies. Nevertheless, while the number of authorities involved in LA21 based initiatives is relatively high in the UK in comparison to other 'signed-up' countries, not all authorities have caught on to its utility as a policy tool. As a result, some authorities are either still in the process of developing their LA21 strategies, whilst others are side-lining LA21 in favour of more recently introduced initiatives such as the development of community and neighbourhood strategies and the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships.

However, recent government legislation (Local Government Bill 2000) has placed a new duty on local authorities to promote the environmental, economic and social wellbeing of their communities. Commentators have observed that this represents no less than a 'mainstreaming' of much of the rationale behind LA21. The similarities between proposed Community Plans/Strategies and LA21 strategies are striking (Pinfield and Saunders 1999), and the emphasis on integration of economic, environmental and social problems and solutions reflects the conceptual underpinning of LA21 (Christie 1999). The suggestion from a variety of sources is that a number of newly introduced government initiatives could draw upon and learn from the lessons learnt from developing and implementing LA21, namely:

- the modernising local government agenda and the promotion of joined-up policy and action;
- Community planning, neighbourhood renewal and the social inclusion agenda including health, education and employment action programmes and crime reduction strategies at the neighbourhood level;
- the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships as a means of encouraging more accountable and effective local delivery mechanisms;
- promotion of Best Value.

Unfortunately, this new attention on the utility of LA21 as a potential tool for promoting joined-up and participatory local policy highlights the limitations of the information that is available in this respect from the evaluations of LA21 that have been undertaken to date. What is suggested by those monitoring the overall progress of LA21 is that, despite its attempts to integrate the social, environmental and economic aspects of the sustainable development agenda, LA21 has often been seen primarily as a delivery mechanism for environmental policy and initiatives (Morris 1999). It is also noted that, as a result of this environmental bias, LA21 initiatives have often struggled to make links with those who do not see this focus as relevant to them e.g. local businesses, socially excluded groups, officers and policy-makers based in other departments.

Furthermore, even where authorities have demonstrated joined-up community-based activity arising from the delivery of their LA21 strategies, it is difficult to assess why these outcomes have been achieved in some instances and not in others. This is because the majority of the research surrounding LA21 has tended to monitor the existence, nature and extent of LA21 projects and rarely attempts to understand the role and significance of **process** in delivery of LA21 strategies and programmes and their outcomes. Given the emerging legislative context for local government and the importance this places on community self-help activities (Home Office 1999), it is crucial that more is known about the underlying factors determining the take-up, efficiency and success in terms of outcomes of LA21. This study, commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in the second round of their *Reconciling Environmental and Social Concerns* programme, hopes in part to address this gap through paying particular attention to the experience of LA21 as a model for joined up working, and community based action.

This working paper provides background material to the study. Initially, it offers a review of literature pertaining to the sustainable development agenda and the role of LA21 as a delivery mechanism for achieving this. It then examines the mechanisms of LA21 in terms of its ability

to secure community involvement and promote environmental, social and economic policy integration. Secondly, the paper summarises the main findings of the evaluations of LA21 in the UK to date and outlines the rationale for the research methodology and case study selection for this study.

## 2. RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH TO FUTURE POLICY

Our research is initiated from an assertion that, to date, LA21 has been unique as a policy tool for the promotion of joined-up community-based activity. This is because it originated from an explicit intention to deliver simultaneously on the four objectives of:

1.  environmental protection/reversal of environmental degradation
2.  eradication of poverty
3.  local participation of all sectors and groups in society
4.  formation of global partnerships to support these principles.

Despite these explicit policy objectives, LA21 appears to have sometimes been successful and sometimes to have failed in achieving its intended goals. On the basis of this observation the research poses the question:

*What is the role of process in the successful promotion of joined-up community-based activities within the context of an LA21 framework and, in particular, in instances where LA21 strategies have succeeded in achieving this outcome in a deprived community setting?*

The research is timely in light of a number of emerging policy initiatives and it is hoped that it can be used to carry forward lessons from practice at the local level to these developing arenas. The most important of these are summarised below.

### 2.1 Community Strategies

Community strategies were made a statutory duty for all local authorities in the Local Government Act 2000 (DETR 2000a). They are intended to be a vehicle to consolidate all aspects of the modernisation agenda. The principles behind a community strategy include a duty to promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in an area now and for the future; joined-up governance at the local level with an outward focus towards addressing community priorities, and making a tangible difference to people's quality of life. The local authority should have *leadership* responsibility but will not necessarily be the leader of the *process*. The community strategy should influence the spending of mainstream public sector monies.

The community strategy has to start by engaging with communities, bringing together statutory bodies, businesses and voluntary groups and establishing a broad and inclusive vision for the council's area. It should develop a holistic approach in looking at the needs of local communities (jobs, social conditions, built and natural environment), identify the priorities for action and secure commitment of various partners to specific actions to help address these priorities. This must be done whilst taking local circumstances into consideration so there is no specific formula to be adopted (DETR 2000a). The guidance states that local authorities should however take existing schemes into account and attempt to rationalise existing partnerships to maximise skills.

There are some striking similarities between community strategies and LA21 (Table 1) - especially the core element of a vision translated into an action plan (Pinfield and Saunders 2000; Tuxworth 2001).

**Table 1: LA21 and Community Strategies**

|  |  | LA21 strategy | Community Strategy |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Impetus** | | Agenda 21/sustainable development | Democratic renewal and community leadership |
| **Process** | | Partnership | Partnership |
| | | Community Involvement | Community consultation |
| | | Outcome/issue oriented | Service/outcome oriented |
| | | Global and Local area focus | Local area focus |
| | | Concern for present and future generations | Concern for present generation |
| | | Often promoted by Environment department | Corporately driven by LA |
| **Plan Content** | | Vision | Vision |
| | | Environmental, social, economic integration | Economic, social and environmental wellbeing |
| | | Action plan | Action programmes |
| | | Implementation | Implementation via other plans and strategies |
| | | Indicators, assessment and review | Indicators, Benchmarking, Audit and Review |

**Source: Pinfield and Saunders 1999**

But there are also several major differences (Wetenhall 1999, Fisher 1999, Pinfield and Saunders 2000). Community planning is primarily about democratic renewal and resolving quality of life issues, whereas LA21 planning is predominantly about sustainable development and public participation. The philosophy behind community strategies can be seen as a weaker version of that which lies behind sustainable development (integrated economic, social and environmental wellbeing without the explicit global or futurity aspects), however politically it is closer to the mainstream of decision making (being part of the modern local government agenda) and therefore more acceptable (Pinfield and Saunders 2000).

The unique value of LA21 comes from its world-wide mandate to tackle global problems by working at a local level (Fisher 1999). In contrast, community planning is concerned with local areas. It has been noted that reconciling the need to take account of global issues in local decision making will be difficult, particularly in deprived areas (Cooper 2001). This may lead to the situation of community strategies being inward looking, focusing on local level problems (such as litter) whilst ignoring local-global problems such as energy use and climate change (Pinfield and Saunders 2000).

A further difference (Wetenhall 1999, Pinfield and Saunders 2000) is that of futurity. LA21 is more focused on precautionary planning and long term solutions to social, environmental and economic problems, whilst also looking at the present time. However community planning, with its time scale of up to 15 years, is looking only at the present. Furthermore there is no integration of the community planning process into the overall long term vision of a self sustaining future for the locality (Fisher 1999).

A final difference is that community strategy guidance promotes enhancing quality of life and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development through action to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area (DETR 2000a), whereas LA21 requires that there should **always** be a balance between reconciling social, environmental and economic concerns. Community strategies may therefore only achieve a rather weak form of sustainable development in that certain priorities may be targeted at the expense of others, instead of developing solutions which take all factors into account (Pinfield and Saunders 2000).

Local authorities have been left to decide how, if at all, their community strategies should relate to their LA21. The community strategy guidance does encourage councils to make use of LA21 where it exists, build on ongoing partnership working, and develop a vision and associated implementation mechanisms. As has been discussed in this section, this

potentially means that much of the ethos of LA21 (with its emphasis on joined-up working and community involvement in decision making) will find its way into the overarching strategy for local councils.

However, this mainstreaming may have some drawbacks:

> *"overall it is probably fair to say that LA21 was marginal, institutionally and in terms of effects … community strategies are potentially far more effective, but here lies the risk - they are more likely to be contested than LA21 strategies"*

> *(Sharp and Connelly 2000 p.6)*

With power comes influence, and involvement in the development of community strategies may become a much more attractive proposition to a range of organisations and individuals than was previously the case with LA21. LA21 has been able to encourage community involvement precisely because it has been on the fringes of local authority activity. LA21 allowed local areas to create visions of their common future and set up voluntary networks and forums, thus allowing them to work together for a self sustaining future (Fisher 1999). Attempting to locate this activity in the centre of local government may well be a turn off for those who were previously involved. It may also restrict the use of innovative forms of participation. Because LA21 wasn't central, there was the opportunity to use alternative ways and means of operating. This is unlikely to happen if it is controlled from within the chief-executive's office.

## 2.2 Local Strategic Partnerships

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) will be a significant new addition to the local strategic planning landscape in local areas (Hamer 2001). In recognition of the 'joined-up' nature of many of the most difficult to resolve problems in deprived areas, recent guidance on LSPs suggests that they should take co-ordinated action across a range of sectors, for example health, regeneration, crime, environment and education. It is hoped that the formation of partnerships at the local authority level will encourage core public services to work with each other, local residents and the community, voluntary and private sectors to improve outcomes in all areas, but particularly deprived communities.

It is intended that LSPs will:

- bring together at the local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives, programmes and services support each other and work together;
- be non-statutory, non-executive organisations;
- operate at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and
- be aligned with local authority boundaries.

> (DETR 2001 p.10)

There is no one recommended way in which partnerships should be structured, however one of the most important factors is that all sectors of the community are represented, particularly those that traditionally are under-represented (DETR 2001).

It is most likely that LSPs will be tasked with preparing community strategies as an overarching framework for a local area. However in deprived areas this could cause problems as LSPs are supposed to be set up at a smaller scale in these locations. How they will relate to initiatives across the whole of a council area is to be determined by individual authorities.

It is expected that LSPs should recognise and build on good practice from implementing LA21, including considering whether the LA21 partnership is an effective basis for an LSP, or how they otherwise link together (DETR 2001 p.39). Furthermore,

> *"where they are already operating effectively, cross cutting partnership initiatives such as Health Action Zones and Local Agenda 21, offer useful models for the development of LSPs."* *(DETR 2001 p.64)*

This means that LSPs may be based on the partnership-building work that local authorities have done for the delivery of the LA21 strategy, as it is vital that LSPs build on approaches that already work well, rather than starting from scratch.

However, as has already been pointed out, unlike most LA21 groups and fora, membership of an LSP, due to its status, could bring considerable influence on the future development of an area. The extent to which communities will be allowed to have a meaningful involvement in such a strategic process is unclear, and there is a danger that some of the more explicit although fringe 'bottom up' processes of LA21 will be replaced by a relatively 'top down' corporate local planning process.

## 2.3 Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, published by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 2001, aims to revitalise England's impoverished neighbourhoods and provide long term sustainable improvements in key areas of crime, housing, education, health and jobs (SEU 2001). This national strategy was the result of 18 Policy Action Team (PAT) reports relating to social exclusion which were published in 1999/2000.

The action plan sets out the new policies, funding and targets which will drive neighbourhood renewal in the key areas of education, health, jobs, housing and crime. In addition to a wide range of initiatives and investment across England to address these policy issues, the government is supporting renewal in the 88 most deprived local authority districts with Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) grant for better public services over the next three years (DETR 2001). The NRF is intended as a way to help local authorities and their partners to begin improving services in the most deprived neighbourhoods to narrow the gap between these areas and the rest of the country. Funds can be spent any way that will tackle deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods. The grant conditions require that authorities receiving NRF resources must be part of and working with an LSP, have agreed a neighbourhood renewal strategy with the LSP, and produce a yearly statement of use for the money which is agreed with the LSP to show that NRF resources are contributing to their wider strategy for deprivation.

One of the major ways of putting neighbourhood renewal into practice is through LSPs. The key task for LSPs in the context of neighbourhood renewal is to prepare a local neighbourhood renewal strategy. This strategy should:

- set out an agreed vision and plan for positive change in as many neighbourhoods as are in need of renewal;
- have the agreement and commitment of all the key people and institutions who have a stake in the neighbourhood, or have an impact on it;
- clearly sets out a local strategic level framework for action that responds to neighbourhood needs and puts them in the context of the area as a whole;
- include plans for action to equip those involved in neighbourhood renewal with the skills and knowledge they need.

(DETR 2001 p.25).

LA21 should, in theory, play a central role for the neighbourhood renewal strategy, given its own emphasis on providing local solutions to local problems. The focus of neighbourhood renewal is very much based on local communities being involved in scoping their problems and deciding upon visions and plans of action to tackle these problems. This study will help establish the contribution that experiences of LA21 can make to better understanding how and why local people become involved in projects and the relationship between different mechanisms for engagement and the success of projects and programmes.

**2.4 Best Value**

Local authorities have just completed the first year of operating within the Best Value regime, although legislation was first passed in 1999. Best Value has four key components (the four Cs):

- **Challenge** (why and how is a service provided)
- **Compare** (measure performance against national indicators)
- **Consult** (with local communities on how to improve delivery of services)
- **Compete** (to ensure continuous improvement).

It was intended that Best Value would help to ensure that councils take a more integrated approach to service delivery. All aspects of a council are to be subject to a Best Value review of its service, and, of particular interest to this research, 'cross-cutting' i.e. integrated reviews are also encouraged. Some councils have used this as an opportunity to conduct Best Value reviews of provision for sustainable development in their areas.

There are clearly opportunities here via the Best Value regime for the kind of 'two for one' policy outcomes which a commitment to sustainable development advocates, such as ensuring that housing and environmental service sections work together to both provide affordable housing **and** accommodation which is energy efficient. However some officers within local authorities have anecdotally expressed frustration with the continued domination of economic considerations over and above wider concerns to do with 'quality of life'. Any hard evidence of this will have to wait until reviews of the first year of Best Value are published later in the year.

This research will hopefully be able to feed examples of good joined-up practice by local authorities into ongoing guidance on integrating sustainability into Best Value.

Of direct interest to this research is the fact that the list of Best Value Performance Indicators for 2000/01 included a question on whether local authorities had an LA21 in place at the end of last year (2000). This question has been amended for this year to inquire about the development of a community strategy, a sign for many that these are intended to replace rather than simply complement LA21 strategies, although there is a further question on whether the existing LA21 strategy has been integrated into the community strategy (Rogers 2001).

**2.5 Rio+10**

Next year will see South Africa host the World Summit on Sustainable Development, ten years after the Rio Earth Summit. It is expected that it will focus on links between poverty, the environment and development (Hams 2000). This will prompt renewed interest in LA21 and it is intended that this project will contribute to assessing what contribution it has been able to make to the wider aims of sustainable development outlined in Agenda 21.

## 3. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT

### 3.1 Aims and objectives

This study will address four related research questions, namely:

- What have been the outcomes from, and shortfalls of, established LA21 strategies?
- What processes did local authorities take to develop and implement these plans?
- What influence does process have on the nature of plans and successful promotion of community based activities and, in particular those plans that include joined-up social and economic objectives?
- What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of LA21 for other programmes aiming to promote sustainable development and social inclusion?

Most importantly, the research aims to make visible the role of process in realising outcomes within the context of LA21 strategies. The main objectives of the research are to:

1. draw on the existing data monitoring progress on LA21;
2. identify case study areas which will enable investigation of LA21's role in promoting environmentally and/or socially and/or economically sustainable development;
3. explore the role of process on outcomes and in promoting the inclusion of socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged groups into LA21 projects and programmes through these case studies;
4. develop and test a model for the evaluation of projects and programmes to promote community-based activities that is capable of recognising the role of process in the successful outcomes and unrealised ambitions of such projects;
5. identify the experiences and lessons of LA21 which need to be embedded in emerging policy development for the local authority community planning duty and powers to promote economic, environmental and social wellbeing of their area;
6. promote wide dissemination through accessible outputs .

### 3.2 Methodology

The methodology for this project is proposed in four key phases, as follows:

1. **Literature review and information gathering on LA21 strategies**: this assesses three related issues:
   i) Progress – a longitudinal review of surveys carried out by LGMB/IDeA to assess patterns of change in relation to LA21 from the perspective of local authorities.
   ii) Indicators –a review of the current state of the significant work that gone on within local authorities and other agencies in the development of indicators for monitoring the progress of LA21 activity. It establishes the extent to which communities have been involved in the selection of indicators, and examines the extent to which the indicators that have been developed are adequate for monitoring the effectiveness of LA21 as model for a joined-up community based activity.
   iii) Process – this will include a literature review of published case studies of LA21 best practice and other reviews of community based activity.

   This review provides a contextual framework for the study and has helped to inform its subsequent phases.

2. **Selection and recruitment of eight case study areas:** this will be informed by the first phase of the research and from consultation with local authority officers and activists from local and central government (regional offices), NGOs, and other local fora involved in LA21. The selection of case study areas also reflects a geographical spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as different settlement types.

3. **Case study research:** This will entail face-to-face in-depth interviews with the following individuals and groups, at the local level:

- local authority officers involved in the development of strategic policies and plans;
- environmental, LA21 and Community Development officers actively engaged in the development and delivery of programmes within local communities;
- members of LA21 fora;
- local representatives from 'grassroots' organisations with a basis in environmental and/or anti-poverty activities e.g. LETS, Credit Unions, Allotment Societies, Wildlife Trusts.

The interviews will be designed to explore:

- the nature and scope of the activities currently being undertaken in the case study areas;
- methods of recruitment and/or engaging the interest and involvement of local people;
- the perceived success of ongoing projects in terms of achieving stated objects and achieving greater participation of excluded individuals, groups and communities;
- identified problems in achieving desired outcomes and/or the wider participation of local people, with particular emphasis on the socially excluded;
- awareness of the links between action and consequence in programme delivery, and how this may have influenced overall outcomes;
- ways in which strategies and delivery mechanisms could be improved upon to better realise the links between process and outcome and the additional value of joined-up environmental, social and economic objectives in the context of community-based action programmes.

A series of individual case study reports will be produced and made available to the Advisory Board at the end of the interview period in the Spring of next year.

4. **Development of an evidence-based model for monitoring and evaluating the role of process in the achievement of, and failure to achieve, desired outcomes:** the research will culminate in the development of a workable and transparent model for project evaluation, for use by both professionals and non-professionals, that makes visible the impact of different processes on outcome at the following key stages:

i) community engagement – assessing methods for defining 'communities', ensuring representativeness of participants and examining and evaluating different styles of engagement;

ii) visioning projects – examining the appropriateness of different techniques for gathering information on local need and relating these to desired outcomes;

iii) contextual appraisal – making visible the wider context into which strategies are being delivered (assessing potential barriers to, and enablers of, desired outcomes such as resources availability, community capacity, policy/legislative context)

iv) pathway setting - comparability and conflicts of the aims/objectives from the perspectives of 'the community' and 'the professionals'; developing compatible and realisable targets and milestones;

v) project delivery – identifying and assessing appropriateness of tools and mechanisms for achieving desired outcomes in the development of projects

vi) monitoring and evaluation – assessing the transparency, scope, depth, appropriateness and robustness of indicators and evaluation frameworks.

It is anticipated that, once developed, the model will be tested with professionals and non-professionals involved in LA21-related and other community-based activities and programmes in the case study areas. Following this test period a final working paper detailing the model development will be produced for consideration of the Advisory Board in the Summer of 2002.

## 4. SETTING THE SCENE - THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND LA21

### 4.1 Concepts of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development is fundamental to an understanding of LA21 as a policy mechanism. The need to promote more sustainable development was gradually introduced throughout the latter half of the twentieth century through the growing concerns of a range of organisations and individuals. They became increasingly critical of the cycle of environmental degradation and resource depletion that is characteristic of the development of (particularly) industrialised countries. At the same time, it was noted that these patterns of development are also highly inequitable, both between countries and also within nations.

In 1983, the UN responded to these concerns by establishing the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), with Gro Harlem Brundtland as its Chair. The WCED's report established that reducing environmental degradation and increasing the standard of living of all people are inextricably linked, or as Brundtland herself put it:

> "*the reduction of poverty itself is a precondition for environmentally sound development*" *(WCED 1987 p.3)*

This assertion is a contentious one, and its implications for economic development potentially profound. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Brundtland Report, as it is now commonly referred to, and in particular its definition of sustainable development, have drawn criticism from a number of sources. The overall concept of sustainable development is often referred to as vague, giving no indication of the time horizon ('future generations'), the scope or substance of human needs, nor of the role of the environment in development (Bartelmus 1994). Critics also find that its comforting principles of human wellbeing and economic society, when not bought to heel by ecological collapse or social distress, mean that it can be used to mean almost anything (Pearce 1995). Still others argue that historical evidence suggests it is essentially in the human condition to triumph over subsistence and seek to manipulate the planet for security and comfort, thus overriding the possibility of true sustainability (O'Riordan 1998).

At its heart, the concept of sustainable development implies a fundamental redistribution of resources, financial as well as environmental, which ensures that it is contested as an idea, and faces many barriers if it is to be taken seriously including:

- *Institutional/structural*
  - changing the way we do things is difficult as it probably requires challenging powerful vest interests to do things differently
  - political short term versus problem/solution long term
  - global versus local

- *Economic/financial*
  - inadequate government funding for long term change
  - fear of disadvantaging poor communities through changes to funding
  - unwillingness to fix higher taxes
  - no financial incentives for 'green' behaviour

- *Perceptual/behavioural*
  - knowledge does not automatically translate into action
  - consumption entrenched in culture
  - lifestyle aspirations in conflict with less resource use
  - alienation from decision making processes

(Moore 1997 p.169)

O'Riordan is even more cogent, finding that:

> *"the current pattern of economic gain and political power is institutionally ensnared in non-sustainable development. Arguably it is the non-sustainability that retains this institutional order, so one can hardly expect to write its epitah in the interests of a contradictory and ambiguous goal."*
>
> *(O'Riordan 2000 p.30)*

As such, there is marked disagreement between proponents of sustainable development as to the best way forward. One camp, of which the World Commission is a part, advocates continuing economic growth but in a more environmentally sensitive manner, in order to raise living standards globally and break the links between poverty and environmental degradation, through the redistribution of income. In contrast others believe that the root of the problem lies in the sustained economic growth represented by present levels of industrial activity (Carley and Christie 2000). The solution from this perspective is radical changes in economic organisation and producing much lower rates of economic growth (even zero/negative growth).

In many respects, the UK Government takes a similar position on sustainable development to the World Commission, basing its strategy on the four principles of:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the natural environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and,
- maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

(DETR 1999c)

In contrast, Levett argues that,

> *"the refusal to let go of the growth fetish is needlessly going to make the environmental objectives harder and more inconvenient to reach"*
>
> *(Levett 1999 p.6)*

From this brief summary alone, it is clear that even though the imperative of sustainable development is becoming increasingly mainstream, perhaps even unavoidable given the increase in natural disasters, it is still highly contested as a concept. Furthermore, there is no clear consensus about how sustainable development can be achieved, although there is the basic agreement that one critical aspect of any sustainable path seems to be the adaptation of our activities to the carrying capacity of the planet (Carley and Christie 2000).

**4.2 Sustainable development in practice: Agenda 21 and Local Agenda 21**

The Agenda 21 document came out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and was intended as guidance for nation states to develop policies and programmes to promote more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development processes. However, it has never been a legally binding agreement. Governments who signed up were not required to follow each of its recommendations but rather adopt those that were most relevant to their own situation. This task was then devolved to the local level of government, who were rightly or wrongly seen as best placed to develop and deliver the Agenda 21 programme. This is because those developing the Agenda 21 document saw local authorities as major players in the local economy (particularly as employers and through their purchasing policies) and as primary managers and/or regulators of the local environment (Patterson and Theobald 1999). Thus it was believed that they would be able to strongly influence the environmental behaviour of others.

As such, in the UK, local authorities were given the role of finding ways of interpreting the general objectives of Agenda 21 and turning them into practical action. They were given some guidelines to help them with this difficult task, although much of the assistance was not published until several years later. Some critics have questioned local authorities' ability to deliver, arguing that local authority officials and elected representatives tend to represent

those interests and professions that have bought us to the present state of affairs (Clark and Netherwood 1999). They argue that even though local government may be well placed to offer a strategic overview and general policy context for local sustainability initiatives, in many instances, it is severely constrained to effect substantive policy change, due to a general lack of power and/or the necessary resources. Nevertheless, in the UK the responsibility for delivering the sustainable development agenda has rested almost entirely with local authorities and NGOs, initially with very little government guidance on how this should be enacted.

More recently, the DETR have produced guidance, in collaboration with LGMB and LGA, in order to better inform the development of LA21 strategies by local authorities (DETR 1998a). 17 key themes are identified (Table 2).

### Table 2: Themes for the development of LA21 strategies

| Environment | Minimising resource use |
|---|---|
| | Minimising waste |
| | Limiting pollution |
| | Enhancing bio-diversity |
| Social needs | Meeting local needs locally |
| | Enhancing places, spaces and buildings |
| | Making settlements 'human' in scale and form |
| | Strengthening local community and culture |
| | Protecting health |
| | Emphasising prevention in health care |
| | Providing access to good food, water, housing, fuel |
| | Maximising skills, knowledge and information |
| | Empowerment and participation |
| Economic success | Creating a vibrant local economy |
| | Valuing unpaid work |
| | Access to facilities which make less use of the car |
| | Opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation |

NB. Crime and community safety added to list in 2000.

In addition, local authorities should use the following guiding principles:

- use of a 'bottom-up' approach and the involvement of local communities and NGOs in the policy process;
- open governance and access to information;
- the need for 'cross-cutting' institutions that can act across all areas of policy;
- the need for complementarity between regulatory approaches and market mechanisms for addressing development and environmental needs.

(Grubb et al 1993)

Once again it is possible to identify the 'need for cross-cutting institutions', and the 'involvement of local communities in the policy process' as key tenets of the LA21 philosophy and there is increasing recognition of this within the policy literature. As a result, many LA21 strategies in the UK have tended to place an increasing emphasis on the intrinsic links between the eradication of poverty and the protection of the environment. More recently, government policies also appear to be recognising these links, for example, the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (DETR 1999) stresses the social aspects of sustainability and recommends that LA21 programmes should, in addition to protecting the environment, aim to:

- Protect human health and amenity through safe, clean and pleasant environments;
- Maximise everyone's access to the skills and knowledge needed to play a full part in society;
- Empower all sections of the community to participate in decision-making and consider the social and community impacts of decisions;

- Make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily available;
- aim to provide fulfilling occupation for local people, particularly disadvantaged and excluded groups, with their economic strategies;
- improve housing conditions;
- aim to increase the access of local people, especially the less advantaged, to amenities and services with less need to travel.

It would appear, therefore, that at least at this superficial level of analysis, the initial research hypothesis is confirmed, in that LA21 does indeed appear to offer a unique policy commitment to the delivery of joined-up community-based activity. The next section of this paper examines the extent to which this policy rhetoric has been realised in practice, through an overview of evaluations of LA21 activity in the UK.

## 5. EVALUATION OF LA21

### 5.1 Surveys monitoring the level of take-up

From the evidence of a number of longitudinal analyses, it is possible to assert that the take-up of LA21 throughout the UK has been patchy, possibly due to its non-statutory status. The LGMB has commissioned surveys of LA21 activity using a self-assessment questionnaire at various intervals to assess take-up. The first survey for the UK was undertaken two years after its launch in 1994, since then there have been two follow-up surveys carried out in 1996 and 1998. The most recent survey for England and Wales was carried out by the IDeA in 2000 whilst separate surveys were carried out in Scotland (by SLACN, COSLA and the Scottish Executive in 1999) and Northern Ireland (by SNIP for the IDeA in 2000). The results of these surveys are summarised in the table below, however the fragmentation of the survey process means different questions were asked and the results across the whole time period are not easily comparable.

### Table 3: LA21 surveys to date

| Year | Surveyor | Area | Local authority committed to LA21 process? | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| 1994 | LGMB | UK | 71 | 23 | 5 |
| 1996a | LGMB | UK | 91 | 5 | 4 |
| 1996b | LGMB | UK | 96 | 3 | 1 |
| | | | Local authority produced LA21 strategy? | | |
| | | | YES | NO | If no, commitment by Dec 2000? |
| 1998 | IDeA | UK | 36 | 64 | 70.6 |
| 1999 | COSLA, SLACN, Scottish Executive | Scotland | 6.5 | 93.5 | 89.7 |
| 2000a | IDeA | Eng/Wales | 44.9 | 55.1 | 91.5 |
| 2000b | SNIP | N Ireland | 37.5 | 62.5 | 73.3 |

**Source: LGMB 1995, 1996 and 1997, Tuxworth 1997, Morris 1999, Christie, B 1999, IDeA 1998 and 2000, SNIP 2000**

\* In interpretation of these results it should be noted that:
[1] As of 1st April 1996 there were 478 authorities in the UK replacing the 542 prior to that date.
[2] The figures given are in percentages, calculated from the total number of respondents, not number of local authorities.
[3] There is now 100 per cent take up in Scotland with all local authorities having produced LA21 strategies and recent claims of 90 per cent take-up in England and Wales (this figure quoted by Michael Meacher, Minister for the Environment results from a basic 'head count' of local authorities claiming to have LA21 strategies in place).

Of course, the figures presented in this table do not offer an indication about the quality of the strategies produced, or how far authorities had progressed with implementing them. Furthermore, response rates differ between authorities and the earlier surveys do not distinguish geographically (for example there were very few responses from Scotland and Northern Ireland), although by 1999, the response rates were high for the geographically specific surveys that were carried out. What can be elicited from the figures is that there has been an increasing percentage of local authorities with a commitment to LA21 between 1994 and 2000. In the first instance there were approximately fifty 'early adopter' councils of LA21 (Church and Young 2000a). These early councils relied on much support from the then LGMB, although there was some interest from some NGOs. There was not much activity at first because central government took a long time to recognise the value of the initiative, most NGOs were under-resourced and there was a lack of a marketing strategy. The end result of was that LA21 was marginalised and it was difficult to persuade councils to become involved.

An increase can be seen after 1997, due to the Prime Minister's effective 're-launch' of LA21 with the statement that he wanted all local authorities to produce an LA21 strategy by the end of 2000. This statement was accompanied by the 'Sustainable local communities for the 21st century' document (DETR 1998). This caused a wave of interest in the third of councils that had previously ignored it (Church and Young 2000a). The fact that LA21 has captured the imagination of the majority of UK local authorities (and many more world wide) suggests that there was a vacuum to be filled (Buckingham-Hatfield and Percy 1999).

There are differences in the way that LA21 has been implemented in the UK. The situation in Wales is very similar to that of England, which is reinforced by the fact that there has never been a separate LA21 activity survey undertaken for Wales. There is no separate body promoting LA21 in Wales, although the National Assembly for Wales is promoting a sustainability strategy. Furthermore, there have been problems for LA21 continuity as Wales was affected badly by the local government reorganisation process in 1996 and this meant many local authorities had to start from scratch.

It should be noted that in Scotland LA21 has been implemented in a different way entirely, and hence the issues covered by LA21 strategies are distinctive because of the devolution of many financial and legal aspects of local policy delivery. There are 32 unitary authorities in Scotland and these are smaller, politically more cohesive and much less centralised than in England, each one with an LA21 adviser and LA21 strategies (Christie B 2000, Biberach). Support for LA21 in Scotland has come from the Scottish Executive and COSLA working with SLACN. The role of these agencies has involved exchanging good practice ideas, supporting councils and generally producing guidelines for LA21 strategies. A survey in 1998 indicated that LA21 strategies were not being given priority within local authorities, resulting in the publication of a 'Route Planner' by SLACN in 1999. This was launched to give councils more guidance about preparing an LA21 strategy, with a focus on the 'how' aspect of LA21 rather than the 'what', for example raising awareness and partnership working (Christie B 2000, SLACN 1999).

Conversely in Northern Ireland, there has been a dominant role for NGOs in implementing LA21. There are 26 local authorities in Northern Ireland but these councils are generally responsible for public service functions and have no responsibility for planning, housing, education, health, training or employment all of which are seen as major functions of English councils. Their limited remit means that sustainable development work is carried out as a result of individual enthusiasm rather than any statutory obligations and that governmental bodies are:

> *"unwilling or unable to accept responsibility for LA21"*
>
> *(Crilly et al 1999 p.151)*

Due to this lack of institutional support in Northern Ireland, NGOs have a significant role. The lead organisation is the Sustainable Northern Ireland Project (SNIP) set up in 1997 to tackle these institutional limitations (Crilly et al 1999). SNIP is an independent NGO funded by WWF-UK, Shell and the European Peace and Reconciliation Fund with strong links to other NGOs including the Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL). SNIP was set up as a bridge builder between local authorities and communities in the implementation of LA21. Its role is

> *"to catalyse and support local authorities, central government and its agencies, NGOs, business and communities to work together in partnership in the Local Agenda 21 process to ensure sustainable development principles and resulting good practice become ingrained in Northern Ireland culture"*
>
> *(sniponline website 2001)*

Its activities include acting as community facilitators, environmental management and encouraging community participation and they have also been involved in a major project to develop sustainability indicators.

## 5.2 Evaluations of strategy content

The available information reviewing the content of LA21 strategies is sparse and that which is available is largely anecdotal. This suggests that while many of the environmental principles of the sustainable development agenda have been incorporated into the strategic policy objectives and delivery programmes of local authorities far fewer have taken up its social and economic themes. Church and Young (2000a) note that by the end of the 1990s there was a growing number of councils with environmental management programmes and a small

number of councils promoting integrated cross-sectoral approaches, encouraged by voluntary organisations to adopt a broader agenda.

A conclusion drawn from the LA21 activity surveys is that LA21 has primarily been seen as a delivery mechanism for environmental policy and has tackled relatively few social/economic problems. Morris (1999) shows clear progress in, for example, waste, energy, bio-diversity and transport (e.g. the Don't Choke Britain campaign) as result of LA21, whereas crime and social exclusion have very rarely been addressed. Lucas (2000) points out that one particular area of growing concern among policy experts, is the tendency for the 'eradication of poverty' objective of the Agenda 21 programme to be avoided (or ignored as an issue for 'developing countries' only) within local authorities' sustainable development strategies. This is a key area of focus for our study.

The positioning of LA21 and the status of the sustainable development agenda within the local authority is often offered as one reason for this oversight (Morris 1999; Morpeth 2000). An obvious point to emerge from the LA21 surveys is that LA21 co-ordinators are based primarily in either the environmental or planning departments of the local authority meaning LA21 has the greatest impact on environmental issues within the council. Because of this positioning, LA21 officers have found it hard to get support because they are not seen as being mainstream (although there are now more in chief executives offices) (Morris 1999; Webster 1999). In many cases there are no formal links between economic development and LA21 (Harding and Newby 1999), giving the impression that economic issues are not a priority for LA21.

Another reason given for the lack of effective joining-up of LA21 objectives is the organisation of local government, which due to institutional and historical factors is often highly departmentalised and hierarchical in its structure (Church and Young 2000a). Local authorities are organised by sector and policies still tend to be developed by individual departments, whereas LA21 needs complex interdepartmental thinking. This means much LA21 work has been done on a sector by sector basis, which has made developing cross-sectoral approaches difficult.

Recent studies commissioned (DETR 1999a and 1999b) to look at cross-cutting issues affecting policy examined the successes and failures of the policy process to deliver on specific policies in a holistic or integrated manner (policies included sustainable development and social exclusion). These conclude that, while there is significant evidence of cross-departmental working in tackling these issues particularly at the local level, a number of conceptual and organisational barriers still exist including:

- inter-departmental rivalry in central government, resulting in mixed messages reaching local areas and lack of clarity over the desired outcomes;
- differences in the values and goals of different departments;
- failure to share information between departments and thereby to subject research to integrated conceptual and empirical analysis and to distil this into generally understood or accepted definitions across departments;
- weak mechanisms for allowing localities to engage with the centre about the nature of problems or the design of solutions;
- lack of commitment to an integrated delivery approach because of competition between departments for scarce resources;
- despite enthusiasm for the partnership approach, particularly at the local level, the relative infancy of working in this way means that people are still feeling their way and progress can be slow;
- differences in culture and assumptions between partners can make it difficult to understand each other;
- some local authorities find it difficult to accept others as equal partners and try to mould them into their way of working;
- a feeling that much of the good work that is undertaken by a department is ignored by others or lost in the explosion of policy information and best practice guidance that has emerged in recent years.

The skills of individuals involved in joined-up working are also critical. Williams (1999) poses the question about what it takes to be a 'joined-up' worker. He emphasises the importance of individual actors in the collaborative process and their ability to apply collaborative skills to common challenges. The results of a survey show that the majority of workers feel that working in partnership is essential to their success in their particular councils, but that there are barriers especially those relating to the boundaries of organisations and issues of receiving support from colleagues.

### 5.3 Assessments of community involvement and participation

It has been argued by a number of authors that one of the more successful aspects of the LA21 programme is that in many places it has allowed experimentation with newer approaches to participation and empowerment (see for example Church and Young 2000a). Some of the most obvious examples of community involvement in LA21 are in specific projects run by NGOs (issue focused groups operating at a national level with local branches) or CBOs (location focused operating at the local level), which are mostly environmental. These NGOs, who are free of formal links to the government and make up much of the voluntary sector in the UK, have always had an influential role in LA21 activities.

During the mid 1990s, some of the best LA21 participation experiences were where it was managed to establish different stakeholder groups as equal partners with the local councils. However, there were problems. LA21 programmes struggle to recruit individuals unused or unwilling to engage in formal political processes (Buckingham-Hatfield and Percy 1999). On closer examination it can been seen that many local networks have failed to build an alliance representing a genuine cross section of the community (Church and Young 2000a) with under involvement of black and ethnic minorities, poorer communities, youth and the aged (Morris 1999).

For example, results from the 1998 survey show 130 local authorities involved young people but no local authority in the UK has a fully developed children's LA21 programme and that developments are fragmented and thin on the ground (Freeman 1999). Indeed most local authorities seem to doubt the contributions of young people, despite the fact that the Agenda 21 document recognises the critical importance of youth and in instances where young people have been involved they have added value (Knightsbridge-Randall 1999). Further to this, only 75 of the respondents to the 1998 survey encourage participation of women (Morris 1999). Buckingham-Hatfield and Matthews (1999) suggest that women realise and demonstrate their environmental concerns in different ways to men and also prioritise them in different ways and that attention needs to be paid to the means by which women can be incorporated into the mainstream of LA21. It can also be noted that only 56 local authorities have actively involved ethnic minority communities in the preparation of their strategies.

### 5.4 Monitoring the progress and outcomes of activities - the development of indicator frameworks

It has long been recognised by local authorities and other delivery bodies that one of the best ways for monitoring their performance is through the development and application of a set of policy relevant indicator frameworks. These use quantified and/or descriptive information to demonstrate change over time in a given activity or geographical location. This information is then generally used to assist in economic decision-making, target setting and in the formulation of policies and action strategies to achieve these targets.

In the early days of LA21, a number of local authorities used the development of indicator frameworks as a tool for developing their strategies and also for encouraging greater levels of community participation. As a result there was a proliferation of literature on best practice in the development and use of indicators, which it is not the intention of this research to go into. (For an example of indicator development and use, see Crilly et al 1999).

To consolidate this work, the UK Government in its 1999 sustainability strategy set out 13 headline indicators of sustainable development, together with a cascading level of nested indicators relating to activities and practices within each sector of the economy. The

Government states that these indicators should be used to help in the formulation of policies, to inform economic policy decisions and to help the public to understand what sustainable development means. They should also be used to help business and individuals to understand how their actions how their actions might contribute to, or detract from, a more sustainable future.

The 1997 UK Round Table sub-group report on indicators of sustainable development identifies a number of potential uses for such indicators, including:

- the monitoring of consumption trends;
- the effect of these trends on the environment;
- economy and social welfare of the population;
- the effect of mitigation policies;
- setting targets for the future;
- influencing policy development, and;
- raising awareness of issues or validate public concern.

(UK Round Table on Sustainable Development 1997)

It has already been established that the Government's strategy comprises four key tenets namely: effective protection of the environment; prudent use of natural resources; maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment; and social progress which recognises the needs of everyone. These principles offer implicit guidance on the direction of the indicators needed to monitor progress on sustainable development within the different sectors. This monitoring process will in turn identify areas of concern or 'alert zones', which will trigger target setting and policy action at the national and local level and for particular sectors of the economy.

It is now recognised that indicators need to be resonant at the sectoral level and should also be flexible enough to allow for application at the local level of activity. In order to achieve this, it is essential that the indicators chosen address the particular concerns of the different sectors involved and will need to procure the widespread support of all the agents that represent these sectors, both in a professional capacity and/or from a more personal interest. It is therefore preferable that their participation is sought from the outset and their interests and concerns represented in monitoring and performance criteria that are set within these more specific indicators frameworks.

In deciding which indicators should be used to represent the activities of a sector or community, there is a general recognition that process should be informed by a number of over arching considerations. The 1997 Round Table Report recommended 9 considerations for the development and use of indicators by national Government. These are summarised as follows:

- indicators should be arrived at by a logical and transparent process and have targets attached to them, with those responsible for achieving these targets identified wherever possible;
- indicators set at the level of the State should have 'alert zones' highlighting where current trends should cause concern;
- the Government should publish a regular report highlighting progress against targets;
- all those developing indicators should regard them as a tool and recognise that their value and appropriateness depend on consideration of intended use;
- the Government should raise public awareness by developing the 1996 package of indicators;
- the Government should develop 1996 indicators to reflect the international impacts of domestic practices;
- the Government should develop methodologies within the Public Attitudes Survey to allow reflection of public concerns;
- the Government should develop 1996 indicators to fully incorporate economic and social as well as environmental indicators and these should include qualitative measures of

social issues such as health, poverty, unemployment and crime, as well as issues of 'quality of life';
- a restricted set of indicators should be identified covering the following areas of crucial importance:
  - consumption of renewable resources
  - pollution of air, water and land
  - social issues
  - bio-diversity
  - landscape and cultural resources.

More generally indicators should be:

- easy to understand
- measurable using appropriate units or scales of measurement
- clearly directional i.e. improved sustainability is equated with either a reduction, stabilising or increase in the output of that indicator
- appropriate to the issues at hand
- meaningful and relevant to all those involved in the decision-making process
- comprehensive, in that the framework addresses all relevant aspects of sustainable development
- robust, in that outcomes can be validated.

In many instances it is also vital that indicator outcomes can be appropriately disaggregated to allow investigation at different geographical levels (e.g. local, regional, national, global) and for different sectors of the community (e.g. gender, age cohorts, ethnic minorities). Finally, it is usually important to ensure some consistency in the selection of indicators to enable comparison between different projects and their effect in different areas. For this reason, it is preferable and often helpful to refer to the work of others who may already have encountered many of the issues being explored.

A number of concerns have been raised in connection with the development and use of indicators to measure the progress of sustainable development and/or LA21. These are identified as:

- the subjective nature of indicator selection;
- the difficulty of finding objective measures for some environmental qualities e.g. natural beauty, townscape;
- the difficulty and/or cost of obtaining robust data for many indicators;
- the size and complexity of some indicator frameworks, making them difficult to interpret;
- considerable variability in the scope, aims and objectives of different frameworks making comparability between different projects and initiatives difficult;
- compartmentalisation of information with no real linkages between data and a lack of integration between the environmental, social and economic objectives of the sustainability agenda;
- prioritisation of performance criteria i.e. trade-offs between different aspects of the sustainability agenda;
- reconciling conflicting performance indicators e.g. improved home energy efficiency versus low cost housing;
- failure to incorporate the concerns of all stakeholders;
- the limitations of indicators that are not linked to targets and action programmes.

However, one of the key criticisms in relation to the indicators that have been developed through the LA21 mechanism is that they have rarely been used to measure performance over time and indeed in many instances never got further than the development stage. An early pilot evaluation of LA21 indicators carried out in 1993 was undertaken with ten cities, using a list of 95 indicators from which local authorities could select those they wished to use to evaluate their LA21 strategy; a balanced selection was recommended. The final result was that seven out of ten authorities chose the same seven indicators and it was found that many

of the pilots lacked clear objectives and their choice was made because of ease of access to information (Church and Young 2000a).

Other major work that has been done on indicators is the LITMUS (Local Indicators to Measure Urban Sustainability) scheme which developed indicators on the basis of community participation. The aim of the LITMUS project, through a case study of the London Borough of Southwark, was to test how far Local Sustainability Indicators (LSIs) which are developed and used by local people are a useful tool in the context of the regeneration and management of urban neighbourhoods. A conclusion from this was that the perception of the cost and benefits of participation by members of the community were such as to inhibit effective engagement on a larger scale (Rydin and Sommer 1999).

**5.5 Ongoing evaluations of LA21**

The LASALA project (Local Authorities Self-Assessment of Local Agenda 21) is a Europe-wide local authority self-assessment exercise to evaluate. Its intention is to enable local authorities and their stakeholders to reflect on the extent to which LA21 activities have contributed to urban sustainable management and new models of governance in the municipality by providing a standardised self-assessment method that can be re-used. Preliminary results are expected in May, with the final report and conclusions available in September.

Other potentially relevant and ongoing projects include:

- WWF-UK/IDeA- LA21 strategy review
- IDeA- case studies project to be published spring 2001
- JRF/CDF – 'Local Initiatives - lessons for policy from practice' - looking at LA21 strategies
- IDeA/DETR - research into Best Value and sustainable development links
- UNED-UK – Rio+10 – support work for Rio+10
- WWF - Rio+10 – planning similar work to UNED for Rio+10
- University of Nottingham – ongoing research into LA21/local sustainable development
- Forum for the Future – local and regional programme
- Audit Commission – local Quality of Life indicators.

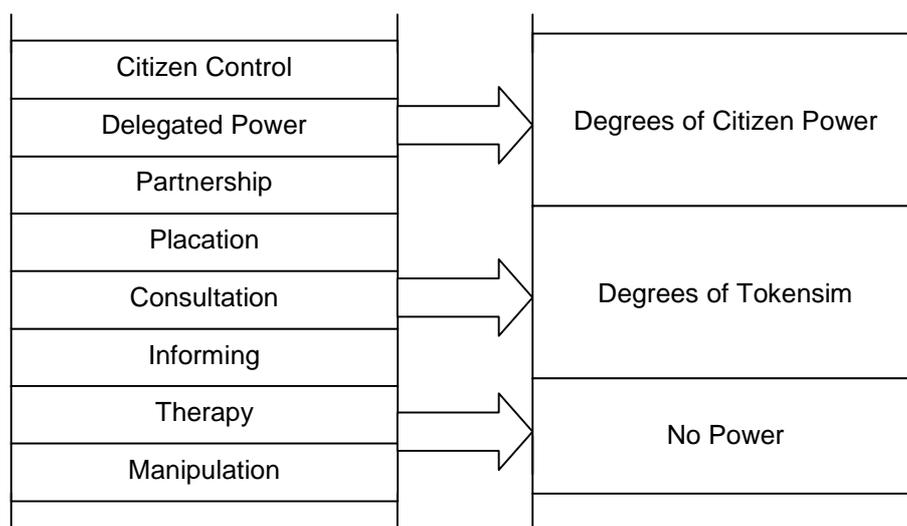**5.6 Evaluation of the processes involved in the delivery of LA21**

From this brief overview of research and evaluation activities surrounding LA21 to date, it can be seen that the role of process has largely escaped investigation. However, some preliminary work has been undertaken. In early 1997 some NGO agencies began to look at alternative methods of evaluation and one such method, the '3 Ps' model of evaluation was developed which divided the LA21 strategy into three parts, all of which could be examined individually (Church and Young 2000a):

- **Process**- has the process of consultation been designed so as to ensure all stakeholders had a genuine opportunity to take part and have an input?
- **Product**- are things actually happening in the locality as a result of the LA21 process?
- **Policies**- are the policies of local authorities and other affected bodies changing as a result of the LA21 process in ways that support moves towards sustainable development?

Further to this, there have been seminars and other discussions about the best way to evaluate LA21 as the difficulties have been recognised. The DETR, LGA and IDeA held a seminar in 1999 to examine the issue of evaluating LA21, and looked at the characteristics of an effective LA21 process and possible evaluation. Several main points were identified from this. The first of these is that it is important to look at an authority's internal structure and how this reflects commitment to sustainability. Second, it is important to assess community involvement and engagement, both who was involved and how, and also who was excluded by the types of participation on offer. Furthermore it may be possible to measure the relative power of stakeholders in the policy making process (based on Arnstein's ladder of

participation - see Figure 1) and very importantly local authorities must be prepared to act and not simply listen.

**Figure 1- Arnstein's Ladder of Participation**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Citizen Control | | |
| Delegated Power | → | Degrees of Citizen Power |
| Partnership | | |
| Placation | | |
| Consultation | → | Degrees of Tokensim |
| Informing | | |
| Therapy | → | No Power |
| Manipulation | | |

**Source: Arnstein 1969 in Rydin 2000 p.7**

A third point to come out of the seminar was how to assess strategic links and an authority's preparedness for implementation. This links with the first point in that it is important for the local authority to understand why sustainable development is important and why it should be integrated into policies. With this is mind, local authorities should be able to develop a statement of commitment to sustainable development as an umbrella to all strategies. LA21 therefore should be recognised within the local authority as a mechanism for delivering sustainable development eg. is sustainable development being built into other council strategies/processes and where in the budget is it?

It is intended that as a final output of this research, the study will develop an evidence-based model that can be used for the evaluation of projects and programmes to promote community based activities. The model will be capable of recognising the role of process in the successful outcomes and unrealised ambitions of such projects. The model will make visible the impact of different processes on outcome:

- community engagement- assessing methods for defining communities, ensuring representativeness of participants and examining and evaluating different styles of engagement;
- visioning projects- examining the appropriateness of different techniques for gathering information on local need and relating these to desired outcomes
- contextual appraisal- making visible the wider context into which strategies are being delivered (assessing potential barriers to, and enablers of, desired outcomes such as resource availability, community capacity, policy/legislative context)
- pathway setting- comparability and conflicts of the aims and objectives from the perspectives of the community and the professionals; developing compatible and realisable targets and milestones
- project delivery- identifying and assessing appropriateness of tools and mechanisms for achieving desired outcomes in the development of projects
- monitoring and evaluation- assessing the transparency, scope, depth, appropriateness and robustness of indicators and evaluation frameworks.

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