

"Agenda 21" – old hat in new outfit

Ist part

In 1992, 178 member states of the United Nations signed the "Agenda 21" on the Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro as an action plan to be implemented. The background of this plan was the concern, that reduced global resources could not be further submitted to an extensive use and that eventually an environmentally sound economic development should be put in place.

As an action plan for the 21st century, the "Agenda 21" requests a change in people's behavior and this in particular in the industrialized countries. The guiding image of a socially equitable and ecologically bearable world, which would be in a position to also improve the economic living conditions of human beings and to guarantee the availability of natural existential resources on the long-term, should from now on serve as the basis for a sustainable development, which would be ecologic and social oriented and extend its impact to cities and communes.

By way of this approach, "local Agendas" are given a major importance as they are viewed as an instrument with which daily politics can be shaped together with the expectation, that corresponding decision processes for instance on the administration and in politics level, in initiatives and associations, in the economy and in schools can be put into practice and promoted.

Implementation on the local level: Example Germany

Under these premises a number of cooperations and associations have formed over the last years in about 420 cities, communes and regions in Germany in order to develop and plan action programs, which would provide for the future development. The relation between politics and administration on the one side and initiatives, associations and private persons on the other side already start to show success, which is expressed in many aspects, by a multitude of activities of theoretic and practical type:

- In Gemering close to Munchen a red line on the pavement should act as a kind of "red line" and link 20 art works made out of different materials. The public's reactions to the first art works that where exhibited are generally controversial, by which the local art circle, as the initiator of this project, claims to have achieved its most important aim, i.e. to make the "local Agenda 21" become a subject of discussion and by so doing drawing the attention of the citizens to this action plan.

- With the pilot project "Health and Fitness region Arweiler", the city of Arweiler is striving to achieve an overall regional development taking into account ecologic, social and economic requirements. Measures and initiatives are developed in creativity circles, which should specifically focus on the commercialization of regional products on a larger scale as for instance the " Village of open Farms" or the "Consumption in direct ways".

- The city of Munchen has set itself the objective to become a multicultural city with

its rate of foreign inhabitants of 22%. A requirement expressed by the special forum comprising 150 institutions, associations and politicians is to no longer consider foreign persons or groups of foreigners as a source of concern but rather to integrate them without making them lose their identity. The overall effort should lead to an obligation for each and everyone to accept and promote multicultural events, ways of living and opinions.

- As the first "Agenda" school in Nordrhein-Westfalen the Duisburger Gesamtschule Globus am Dellplatz decided to align the entire educational program on the "Agenda 21". Following the motto "think global, act local" the school set up a cafe for students, which functions without producing waste. Furthermore, other projects for instance include the partial cover of the roof of the school building with grass and courses like social education, environment and media education should be developed to become pedagogic key elements.

- For some years now, Hamm is promoting community initiatives, which focus on the long-term with the design of an environmentally sound future. Following the motto "acting, not talking", contacts with citizens, associations and groups are used to financially promote specific measures for the ecologic improvement of urban structures. A natural design of free space, the decoration of facades with plants as well as the restructuring and planting of building plots should help citizens, who are not organized in clubs or associations to come together in order to together regain possession of a part of nature.

- Cities as Bremen, Kaiserslautern, Leverkusen and Trier are working to set up a "city marketing concept" with the intention to integrate the requirements of the "local Agendas 21" in a future oriented urban development. As a communication process, which is leading actors together and is coordinating administrative actions, the "Agenda" process should formulate objectives to be integrated in specific fields of action, which for example will deal with energy supply, building and ecology, guiding images for sustainable tourism, mobility and traffic, future of employment, renewable energies and protection of resources, etc.

With its pilot project "sustainable development of the Neustadt area", the city of Bremen is trying to replace theory with praxis and will regularly report on key projects as for instance the implementation of a fetch and delivery service for elderly people and the project "resident road to the Weser", which tries to improve the quality of living by reducing the amount of road traffic. The key element of the effort, as stated by the organizers, is to set common objectives and generate an identity, which would bring and hold all this together.

A closer look at reality

However, as interesting, locally oriented and close to praxis some initiatives and projects in the Bundesrepublik may seem, the randomly retained examples at least partially show that mainly theoretical approaches are formulated rather than an implementation on site, relating to specific projects with the participation of independent supports and associations through organizations and citizens.

Even though the true motivation of seemingly committed public organisms should not be denied, it is difficult to get rid of the impressions, that to a certain extent, it is also the implementation of economic projects and the realization own interests, which is targeted and for which the "Agenda 21" merely serves as a cover. This is not only evidenced by the rather generally formulated and hardly differentiated objectives but also by the mostly institutional supports and a very theoretical and difficult language used for the presentation.

In a first overview for instance the initiatives and associations grouped in the Forum for the Environment of Bremen, acknowledge that the "overall situation appears to be clearly negative". Even though some things have changed according to Peter Muller, Member of the Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (Association for the Environment and the Protection of Nature in Germany (BUND)), the governments of the Länder stick to their restrictive course of action, in priority promoting larger urban project, which are harmful to the city and consume not only money but also space.

This evaluation can only find our support as on the background of exaggerated increases in population and employment, the current concept for urban development of Bremen justifies interventions in urban structures, which have made their proofs, foresees additional space for living, businesses and roads and thus does not stop from including the delimited and optimally integrated allotment garden areas! With the objective of the desired growth rate, the aim of a sustainable development of the city Bremen seems hardly possible and the "local Agenda 21" may only fulfill an alibi function despite all sincerely meant intentions.

The example of Bremen is particularly telling for this, also due to the city's difficult budgetary situation. It is exemplary and thus also transposable to other cities and communes. Between the nice "Agenda" appearance and the bare reality of an increased competition between communes, the gap is clearly visible, not always corresponding to the requirement of a socially balanced and ecologic bearable world. Furthermore, activists from political and administrative levels as well as from economic and other interest groups, among those also associations for the protection of nature, seem to focus too much on the new formulated postulates on the background of the "Agenda 21" and their direction, that they are either not recognizing or not willing to recognize the sustainable development in the allotment garden movement, which has taken place already a long time ago and which is truly implementing the contents of the "Agenda 21" in a pragmatic way on the local level.

2nd part

Sustainable development in the allotment garden movement

Yet, the references of the "Agenda 21" to the allotment garden movement seem evident. Diplom-Ingenieur Reinhart Herzog of the Bayrische Akademie für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege in Laufen has, with regard to this, recently and within the frame of a series of events by the Bundesverband Deutscher Gartenfreunde (BDG) illustrated this and highlighted the possible connection points in the fields "sustainable development, health, education and social competence".

The potential and the possibilities are favored by the high level of organization of the allotment gardeners' association counting more than 3 million members in Europe as well as by the legal structure, which supposed an ideal associative support, formulating and integrating social and ecologic aims in the articles of association as a personal obligation.

In a more specific way the following examples should show that the allotment gardeners, even without the pretext of the "Agenda" have already gone from "talking" to "acting" since a long time.

Above all, the allotment gardens are no isolated islands but connected to the public green spaces and the surrounding living areas by walking and cycling paths. The community facilities as for instance playgrounds and benches can be used by gardeners and any other inhabitants alike, and together with free and planted spaces they play a very important role as an area providing leisure and relaxing possibilities for the city.

The care of these gardens and areas is environment friendly oriented, almost forbidding the use of herbicides and promoting the use of compost, the careful treatment of the soil, the use of natural means of pest prevention, the recycling of bio mass from the garden, the production of healthy vegetables and fruit while taking into account the specificities of the site and the climate for the selection of types – these all have since long been the elements of the standard repertoire of garden friends.

Projects which are relevant for the environment and close to nature as for instance the creation of humid biotopes, the rebuilding of closed down and sealed paths, the planting of hedges for birds and the creation of new paths with water permeable materials, the promotion of fruit growing, dry biotopes, green roofs and useful insects, etc. are also the expression of a collective awareness showing responsibility in practice.

The following examples show that there are no limits to multitude and that allotment gardeners are not a closed group but an open solidarity community:

- Special allotment gardens for elderly people or for children in prep school age in partnership with homes for elderly people and Kindergartens;
- Initiatives with self-aid groups for unemployed people, which, within the frame of projects preparing for professional integration, provide young adults with the possibility to gain experience in nature by working in their own garden,
- The cooperation with a psychiatric day care center, which in the therapeutically use of an allotment garden and the contact with neighbor allotment gardeners sees a very promising possibility for the treatment of patients;
- Connections with schools, which in collaboration with the local associations can provide practical courses following the motto "learning by doing",
- Various and diversified educational paths with specially designed biotope structures and model gardens.

The terms of integration of foreigners are not just an empty formula in the world of allotment gardens but the expression of a permanent tolerance and acceptance of different nationalities. Thus, it is not a rarity to find associations that count more than

10% of foreign members without nevertheless experiencing problems of neighborhood. Above all the community and the common interests play their part in improving the mutual acceptance. Even Turkish associations as for instance in Bremen, which also count German allotment gardeners among their members, are – to the same extent as the participation of foreign allotment gardeners in the committees of "German" associations – no longer the exception.

Without continuing the randomly chosen examples, it clearly appears that the guiding image of the "Agenda 21", the "sustainable development" in relation with economy, ecology and social requirements, is very well taken care of in the allotment garden movement where it is actually implemented on site. This is due for one part because of the education and the training of allotment gardeners on all levels but also to the fact that frequently the own needs and difficult situation due to social developments or changes in the past and present have forced the allotment garden movement to react in a flexible way forcing the allotment gardeners to face economic, environmental and social changes earlier and more intensively.

Over the last years, this led to a cooperation with numerous organisms and institutions, among those the associations for the protection of nature, educational organisms, schools and Kindergartens leading up to contacts, in particular in the environmental sector with private enterprises, which can still be extended and intensified.

The performance allotment gardeners can achieve has been evidenced by the 2nd European Year for the Protection of Nature, with the participation of allotment garden movements from Bremen and Bayern, not only through important transregional monthly projects but also, upon the proposal by the German National Committee for the European Year for the Protection of Nature 1995 by receiving an award from Bundespräsident Dr. Roman Herzog.

Thus, conditions are optimal for all people who are open to a successful cooperation with the allotment gardeners and local allotment garden movements in the process of the "local Agenda" in trying to implement practical projects, by working on site, by taking into account the achievements and efforts of the allotment gardeners and by promoting the well-being of the community in the best sense of the "Agenda 21".

Deka

End.