



FIVE APPROACHES TO LONG-TERM PLANNING

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Nola-Kate Seymoar presented an early formulation of her reflections on overall approaches to Long-term Planning within the Network and her observations of trends in those approaches. In the spirit of participatory action research, she observed that five approaches to long-term planning seem to be emerging and invited feedback from member cities on the utility of this analysis.

At the beginning, two primary approaches emerged – one centered on community demonstration projects (largely in the developing country cities) and the other on visioning for long-term planning (largely in Canadian cities). At the Biennial Conference in 2006, many of the members were struggling to determine where to start their planning process – whether to simply put a long-term lens on their existing plans and align them so as to move toward sustainability, or to begin a larger and more challenging integrated process.

Two years later within the Network, five approaches to engagement around urban sustainability are distinguishable by their primary focus:

1. On community sustainability action projects;
2. On public participation in long-term visioning;
3. On multi-stakeholder teams building integrated plans;
4. On realigning corporate functions and decision-making for sustainability; and
5. On integrating of all of these concurrently.

This development is a consequence of the responsive nature of the PLUS Network program and has grown organically from the cities' different focal points when they joined the Network. Each of these emerging approaches has particular strengths and seems appropriate for different times and locations. It also appears that, as time progresses the cities move to incorporate more of the different approaches, and there is a trend to the overall – concurrent approach

The results being achieved vary according to the approach adopted. Each of the five approaches is briefly described below.

1) Community Action Approach

This approach is achieving results in improving local living conditions and moving toward sustainability. The projects typically focus on the empowerment of disadvantaged groups (the poor, women, youth, disabled) and involve micro enterprises, livelihood improvement, community gardens, asset mapping, lanes and drains, savings and credit facilities. (e.g. Matale and Dar es Salaam). In cities such as Dar es Salaam, planning has had a difficult history. Plans exist but are not sanctioned, often developed by outside consultants and couched in terms of high level aspirations. For credibility there is a strong desire and need to see something implemented. As a result the Mayor and Council have focused on two areas: using the Community Funds as a way of organizing youth, women and the disabled to improve their livelihoods; and experimenting with multi-stakeholder governance to advance a Sustainable Tourism agenda. In Dar es Salaam and several cities in Sri Lanka, the results to date are concrete improvement in the lives and living conditions of current residents. The achievements also include the social component of sustainability – whereby the residents are more empowered and the municipal councils are more responsive to their needs. Likewise, in Canadian cities and communities in the Network such as Halifax and Iqaluit the focus has been on implementation of projects that move their sustainability agenda forward.

2) Public Participation Approach

Some cities in the Network have driven their long-term planning process with a wide scale participatory visioning process. Using the "Imagine" methodology¹ or through broad public inquiries, residents are asked to respond to a

¹ See for example imagineCalgary (www.imaginecalgary.ca) or Imagine Durban (www.imagedurban.com)

short series of questions about their city – What do they like and not like? What kind of city do they want for their children or grandchildren? Rather than seek public input through passive means, such as open houses, sending out information, advertising or the internet, these processes involve actively seeking new audiences by taking the questions to places where people live or congregate, such as at shopping malls, schools or events. Intended to change attitudes, the results of this approach are increased public awareness, support and political backing for sustainability goals. Calgary and Saint John, Vision PDX in Portland, and Durban have used similar approaches.

3) Operations and Infrastructure Approach

Before challenging citizens and others to become more sustainable, some cities like Olympia have focused inwardly to make their own operations more sustainable. Building a “Sustainability Super Team” across all local government departments and agencies, and realigning activities and mandates under clear sustainability principles has been accompanied by decision making frameworks that guide procurement processes, budgeting, performance contracts and even labour negotiations. These cities typically give reports on their progress against the indicators they have established for their operations. With regard to other operations over which they have control such as district energy or waste to energy facilities, these cities are typically upgrading their own infrastructure and setting green standards for their operations. In addition to improved credibility on the part of the local government, the results are improved institutional capacity, changes to policies and procedures and in the use and allocation of resources and decisions under the control of local governments. Within the PLUS Network, Olympia, Edmonton, Saint John, Adelaide are working on this aspect.

4) Multi-Stakeholder Approach

Rather than use a broad public participation approach, many cities are building their vision and plans with multi-stakeholder teams. In Regina, for example, the Mayor is using a roundtable of leaders from different sectors of the community who have a strong interest in sustainability issues. Typically, these stakeholders lead teams of people who address particular issues (such as land-use and transportation, economic, social etc) in the long-term plan. This is one aspect of the long-term planning process in almost all cities. The outcome of the multi-stakeholder team approach is an integrated plan with measures and indicators, and transparent monitoring processes. Regina, Saint John, Metro Vancouver and Colima are strong examples of this approach.

5) Concurrent Comprehensive Approach

The combined and concurrent approach is the most ambitious and results in achievements on all levels. Whistler, Durban, Calgary, Montpelier and Portland are examples of cities that have tackled all of these issues at once. They are also quite far along in their process, so it is perhaps to be expected that they have incorporated more of the four above mentioned approaches.