Vadyba
Journal of Management
2011, No. 2 (19)
ISSN 1648-7974

PARTICIPATORY LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS, COMMUNICATION INSTRUMENTS AND EMPOWERING MEDIUM

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Abstract
During last 20 years Latvia has undergone numerous reforms in the public sector including: setting up of environmental sector, administrative territorial reforms, becoming EU member and others. Decentralization of environmental responsibilities towards local level in early 1990s was replaced by centralized planning during EU accession period, now we experience return to the controlled decentralization in environmental sector. Many municipal administrations who were facing persistent shortage of resources and knowledge had chosen minimalist approach – limited their activities to formal legal compliance and did not invested in development of local environmental capacity. However there are few forerunners bringing in various innovations to support local development through new governance solutions based on collaboration between stake-holders and community involvement. The article aims out at characterising external driving forces and finding internal (municipal) factors what influence environmentl management at local level turing it towards more participatory and collaborative way of local governance. Environmental communication, what is comprised of information, education, participation and environmentally friendly behaviour as four key components, uncontested is a policy instrument remarkably needed for developing public environmental awareness – a key precondition for sustainable development. But this is also an instrument to ensure better environmental considerations integration into decision–making in municipal administration and in its relations with local society. This is recognized by public administrations, which are extending use of communication tools beyond the scope of planning process and limitations set by the formal public participation methods defined in the laws. Building on 30 case studies explored with a set of qualitative research methods, this article reveals diversity of communication practices present in the Latvian municipalities, covering internal and external dimensions of organizational communication. Institutional mechanisms for collaborative decision making used complementary with communication instruments in the empowering local circumstances or medium are providing opportunities for wide stake–holders dialogue and prove to be significant factors for supporting participatory local environmental management.

KEYWORDS: collaboration, environmental communication instruments, empowerement medium, institutional mechanisms, local government, participatory environmental management, stake–holders.

Introduction

It might be expected that external driving forces desribed further in the introductory part of the article have the same impact on environmental management practices at the local level, however praxis shows quite different picture. The goal of the article is to find out what are the main factors what make some municipalities more active and participatory governance orientated in the environmental management area, and what is the specific role of environmental communication for facilitating those processes.

To understand Latvian context, reflection of processes in 1990s is crucial. Those are related to the various type of changes in the society: democratization, emerging of new management paradigms, expansion of environmental sector. After historical decision taken in 1990, Latvia regained its independence and immediately started various reforms (Vanags and Vilka 2002, 2007; Pukis 2010). The former Soviet administration and legal system in a considerably short period of time was replaced by new institutions and laws. Environmental and local self government sectors were born genuinely a new. One of the first legal acts in 1991 – Environmental protection law (EPL) – implied changes in environmental management approach. Instead of formerly dominant normative attitude regulating use of natural resources, it was offering a management system to address solutions to the environmental problems. EPL defined state, municipalities and environmental institutions as key responsible parties for environmental protection. EPL outlined environmental information and environmental education as two important policy instruments. It also stipulated local (municipal) level obligations to ensure environmental quality, namely, to perform local environmental control and prepare environmental protection programmes. The changes in early 1990s might be evaluated as environmental responsibilities decentralization towards a local level. Unfortunately, they were not accompanied by sufficient resources and capacity. As a result in late 1990s the non–compliance found in almost all municipal environmental management sectors (water, waste, air etc.) became serious obstacle for the smooth country's joining to the European Union.

This period concurred with fresh winds blowing from the Rio conference on sustainable development (1992) what was emphasizing the role of local level in addressing environmental problems, and a need for participatory planning processes and involvement of main stake–holder groups, as well as building up public awareness through better provision of environmental information and environmental education (UNCED

1992). Built on Rio declaration, Local Agenda 21 process initiated new participatory governance culture on local level all over Europe and to some extent in Latvia as well (Kern and Loffelsend 2004; Ernsteins 2006).

Another driving force in form of the *Environment for Europe* process endorsed traditions of environmental policy planning at national level, what was transferred to the local level by a number of prominent international organizations (ICLEI, UBC, REC) and cross–European initiatives. This helped to build up local environmental capacity through self–experience and learning processes (Kudrenickis and Lagzdina, 2006).

A specific of 1990s is emerging of environmental NGOs at local level and the burst of non–formal environmental education activities (Lagzdina, 2009). This created a communicative and empowering medium for vertical and horizontal collaboration across the local and regional governance levels and sectors, as well as between local stake–holder groups. Inter–municipal and municipal–NGOs collaboration positively affected environmental awareness in the society and strengthened capacity of the local administrations. The mentioned factors and driving forces complemented by the idealism and motivation of the municipal staff (environmentally educated specialists) created preconditions for development of environmental management traditions at a local level and frequently put municipality in the centre as a process facilitator (Lagzdina and Ernsteins 2009).

Another important factor, worth mentioning, was the administrative territorial reform, what started in early 1990s and was completed in 2009. The amalgamation of small municipalities into larger ones is a typical pattern of public reforms all over Europe (Kersting and Vetters 2003). The main goal of such reforms was to improve the performance efficiency of a local level. Until 2009 Latvia had 548 units of two level local governments. Majority of them (424) were rural municipalities with disperse, low density population. In ~ 1/3 of the municipalities population was below 1000, in 38 % 1000–1999, only in 10 % it exceeded 5000. Lack of administrative capacity, obsolete management approaches, insufficient, low quality basic services to the citizens, inability to take part in large scale infrastructure projects were just some reasons why efficiency of local authorities was evaluated as inadequate, and amalgamation was proposed by the central government as the only solution. After difficult reform period totally 119 administrative units were set up in Latvia: 109 local municipalities called *novads* and 9 large urban municipalities. In terms of population the size discrepancies among them are enormous, ranging from 2000 to over 30 000 people in a *novads*.

The practice shows that reform did not levelled environmental management capacities of municipalities. The size and scope of municipal environmental sector (problems, institutions, stake–holders, diversity of solutions) still differs, and this means that uniform approach to the environmental management in Latvian municipalities is hardly possible. Meanwile the growing complexity of environmental sector what is penetrating into almost all spheres of life requests multidisciplinary understanding of the situation, for that involvement of different sectors and stake–holders in the development related discussion is needed. It also requests to invent new public policy instruments to influence societal values, beliefs, actions and organization (Jordan et al. 2008; Mickwitz 2003). Discussion of alternatives to normative, control and economic instruments goes hand in hand with transformation of environmental governance. Literature emphasizes that new instruments shall respect local context and facilitate environmental protection through more informed participation. For that development of communicative and procedural instruments is needed at all levels (Holzinger et al. 2006). Two elements: local knowledge integration into decisions and opening up political arena for environmental interests are pre–requisites for improving quality of the decisions (Newig and Fritsch 2009). Another factor is availability of environmental information (EEA 1999).

There are plentiful references in the literature attributing to the environmental communication enormous potential for targeting essential environmental policy objectives: building environmental awareness, promoting sustainable lifestyles and stake-holders collaboration. Environmental communication is extensively discussed from various disciplinary perspectives and in the various contexts (Cox 2010; Corbet 2006; Doyle and McEachern 2008; Norton 2007; Inagani 2007). Though public sector representatives typically perceive information and participation as main and sometimes only consituents of environmental communication and its instrumentality.

In a search of holistic, comprehensive and systemic approach towards environmental communication, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) at the University of Latvia Faculty of Economics and Management had developed collaboration based environmental communication model (Ernsteins 2003). This model provides a comprehensive systemic approach towards environmental communication as it pools into a coherent system four key elements otherwise scattered around in the disciplinary texts, i.e., environmental information, environmental education, public participation and pro–environmental behaviour. These components used in a complementary, integrated and systemic manner create public environmental knowledge and shape values, foster individual and collective need for participation and support environmentally friendly actions.The overall framework of the research and further discussion is built on this environmental sciences based environmental communication instrumentality paradigm.

Methodology

The data for analysis are based on findings from 30 municipal case studies conducted by the author individually and in a team of fellow–researchers within the frame of several projects implemented by the Department of Environmental management (DEM) and The Regional Environmental Center (REC) during the course of last 4 years (2008–2011). Six of the cases (Ventspils, Liepaja, Saulkrasti, Salacgriva, Dundaga and Kolka municipalities) were collaboration projects between DEM and coastal municipalities with a goal to develop guidelines how to improve municipal environmental management with more efficient use of communication instruments (Ernsteins et al. 2010).

Research represents variety of municipal types in terms of their size and local contexts: large urban cities (9), towns (13), and rural municipalities (8).

Data collection was done using complementary set of qualitative research methods applied in a harmonized, triangulated manner within the wider concept of the case study approach (Yin 2010). Survey and interviews, municipal document studies, internet research were main methods used independently or embedded in the case study exercise. Multiple case comparative analyses served as methodological basis for data interpretation. A pilot survey about experience in local environmental policy planning and integration of policy instruments was done in 13 municipalities (Lagzdina and Ernsteins 2009). It was complemented by in–depth interviews involving polititians, environmental and planning specialists (30), state institutions (7) and small focus group discussions (3). To receive data about environmental communication beyond municipal administration–led initiatives, the structured interviews and small scale surveys were done in the main target groups (NGO sector, media, environmental educators, schools, and business), covering over 40 persons. Document studies involved content analysis of local policies, regulations, project materials, municipal websites, local and regional media sources. All materials brought together created quite a comprehensive picture of environmental management practices in Latvian municipalities and provided basis for conclusions about key understandings and main factors influencing it.

Environmental management approaches at the local level

Municipal environmental responsibilities are quite generally described in the sectoral framework laws: Environmental protection Law (1991, 2006) and Law on Self governments (1994) with amendments. Majority of responsibilities are stipulated in by–laws and regulations. The complexity of tasks envisaged there brings to the conclusion that environmental management is not possible without disciplinary (sectoral) management experience what requests qualified human resources and institutional mechanism to lead the process (Lagzdina and Ernsteins 2009). Findings reveal that disciplinary competences are built gradually during years of environmental planning exercise, transferring best practices from international partnerships, and they are essentially based on in–house environmental expertise.

Presence and interaction between mentioned factors make distinct municipal environmental management approaches. While taking a *Passive municipality model,* municipalities limit their activities just to comply with a minimum set by the legal requirements regulating environmental sector and public involvement in the local development and decision–making. It means that they do not develop local environmental plans, neither draft specific local regulations, implemented projects are concentrated on technical infrastructure development, the number of community driven activities is marginal, decision–making takes place in closed circles, dominates one–way information flow, collaboration with stake–holder groups is limited. Passive municipalities rely on state environmental bodies and central financing to solve environmental issues in their administrative territories. Availability of municipal environmental information is limited, this results in lack of communication about environment and low integration of environmental concerns in the decisions.

The *Active municipality model* is size–bound: small (usually rural) municipalities differ from the urban ones. Active small municipalities work with many community stake–holder groups, establish consultative mechanisms, integrate deliberative democracy elements in their decision–making and support non–governmental sector initiatives. Regardless simplicity of the communication tools and forms used locally, they are effective enough to support wider collaboration within society and to bring in environmental discussions in the local settings. The specific of medium and small size municipalities is the strong presence of the local mediative forces: NGOs, schools, museums, libraries – all of them are active in different contexts of environmental communication.

Urban municipalities, as they have better resources, usually take more active and formal approach, though full environmental management cycle (problem evaluation, goals and policy planning, programming and budgeting, implementation and evaluation) is characteristic of marginal number of Latvian municipalities (Lagzdina and Ernsteins, 2009). Based on compendium of best practice finding from case studies, the author proposes key characteristics of environmentally active municipality:

- clearly stated and communicated to the public political commitments,
- environmental management system,
- environmental action planning,
- binding environmental regulations,
- environmental specialists and /or units,
- use of diverse management instruments,
- active environmental communication,
- cooperation with education and academic sector,
- availability of local environmental information,
- institutional mechanisms for public participation,
- used elements of e–governance,
- innovative forms of public consultations,
- positive orientated public relations and pro–active work with local/regional media etc.

The characteristics of active municipality are in line with the principles of better governance (transparency, information, openness, integration) and tools, like organizational improvements, communication platforms, e– governance, one stop agency etc. proposed in various policy guidelines.

Findings can be summarized in two conclusions:

1) active municipality is communicative municipality, and this demonstrates shift towards more open, inclusive and participatory local governance;

2) disciplinary environmental planning experience helps to use environmental communication instruments in more systemic and integrative way.

Institutional mechanisms for environmental management and participation

Environmental policy literature lists institutional instruments as important pre–condition for successful policy implementation. According to the Latvian Law on Self governments (1994) municipality has rights to define its administrative structure. Unfortunately marginal number of municipalities in Latvia up to now have set up environmental departments, and those are only large municipalities (Riga, Ventspils, Liepaja, Jelgava, Jurmala). The permanent position of environmental specialist in 2009 was available only in 11 municipalities. The number of environmental staff fluctuates from 1 to 2 people. In larger cities, like capital city of Riga in 2011 there are 15 specialists in the environmental department, in the resort city of Jurmala – 7 (due to large forests areas to be maintained) and in the 3rd largest city Liepaja – 5. Environmental competent are also landscape architects, utility services engineers, planners, which work in various departments where they have other than environmental responsibilities. Findings prove, that presence of environmental specialists is decisive in a strategic planning of the environmental sector, it also improves integration of environmental issues into overall work of municipality. Interviews identify several important roles of the environmental specialist: managing local environmental information, cooperation with NGOs and schools, initiator of public awareness activities and environmental projects to the administration. A case of Venstpils city Environmental control unit characterizes complexity of tasks awaiting environmental specialist. The unit works in 6 key directions: environmental quality monitoring; planning and coordination of stake–holder interests; development of proposals for Council; permitting and local environmental licensing; management of protected nature areas; coordination of environmental education activities within the Blue Flag programme. This spectrum of management fields draws recommendation, that to ensure management of environmental sector municipality with limited internal resources has to build strategy for human resources management, which allows to map available in–house and external resources. Next step is to develop mechanisms to involve them, preferably on a voluntary basis, what in its turn requests to create a communicative medium or supportive local circumstances which bring public latent knowledge to surface and use.

It was obvious that administrative territorial reform (2009) would extend the scope of environmental issues to be managed at a local level. Unfortunately most of municiplities continue in *business as usual* manner: just in few cases new administrations recognized a need for opening environmental specialist position. Such solution brought immediate positive changes in the environmental management and communication practices as well.

Besides operational management discussed above, environmental decision–making process is going on at political level. The institutional mechanism for that is Municipal Council and Standing Committees elected from deputies. To bring in environmental expertise in the decision–making discussions and to make process more substantial and qualitative, municipalities establish Commissions and short–term Working groups, consisting of internal and external specialists. Professional NGOs, regional environmental and health adencies, business representatives are part of this mechanism.

The study reveals three models, how environmental issues are accommodated into the municipal decisions (Fig.1). The 1st model means that separate Environmental Committee is set up, this is the most professional and content focused solution; the 2nd model means that environmental issues are integrated into a work of joint Committees (Environment & Development; Housing & Environment), where they are not the priority. In the 3rd model Environmental Commission has advisory role, it prepares opinion for a Standing Committee. Municipal environmental specialists usually are invited to attend all those meetings and to report or provide explanations before decisions are taken.

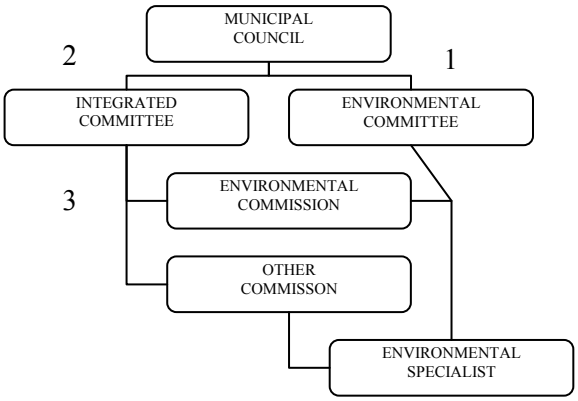

Figure 1. Environmental decision making mechanisms in municipality

In some municipalities participatory mechanism in a form of a Public Consultative Board (PCB) is established. PCB consists of civil society representatives from NGOs, interest groups, business, school boards etc. Its size varies from 5 to15 people. Typically PCB are established in non–environmental sectors (youth, social, tourism, entrepreneur). The only Public Environmental Board exists in the Cesis town. There are a few PCBs established for water resources management. They perform delegated by the municipality tasks: issue fishing licences, attract financing for lakes management, perform public volunteer control over waters, initiate public awareness campaigns etc. Apart from the consultative functions PCBs create number of other positive effects: disseminate information through social networks, are coordinators and mediators between stake–holders and municipality, through projects they empower local society for pro–environmental activities. Municipal specialists highly appreciate the role of PCBs, as they serve as useful environmental communication instrument in the hands of municipality. This insitutional mechanism extends availability of otherwise scarce resources for local environmental management and creates additional channels for communication.

Environmental communication instruments

Prevailing perception in the municipal administrations reflects belief that environmental communication is not theirs but others task, namely, of educational sector, NGOs, state environmental bodies, and media. Public discourse and surveys reveal that main expectations towards leading role in this field are put towards the Ministry of Environment. Scholars emphasize that the Ministry has to work with public policy instruments at its disposal to set up supportive medium for environmental communication allover the country, and there are enough positive achievements in this respect so far (Lagzdina 2010, Lagzdina et al. 2010). Nonetheless municipalities cannot avoid their environmental communication role reflected in the sustainable development concept. Denial would mean lack of holistic thinking and disregarding of self governments principles.

Environmental information is a key prerequisite for decision–making and informed participation. Looking for environmental information as it has been defined by the Environmental protection law (2006) and in compliance with the Aarhus Convention (1998), the situation in Latvian municipalities shall be evaluated as insufficient. Numerous surveys show that people would like to be more informed about local environmental issues. It is contrary to the dominant perception in the public sector believing that society is not interested in the environmental matters and this is the reason for passive participation.

Focusing in this article on web–based communication tools, we shall acknowledge that this is an absolutely marginal number of municipalities where we can find a link *Environment* on their website, and usually this is not a front page interface, but second or even third level link. This means that information cannot be easily found. Environmental quality data are available on websites of few larger cities (Liepaja, Riga, Ventspils, Rezekne etc.). They usually cover topics of air quality and swimming waters quality during a summer season. Data on drinking water are usually produced by the water utility companies and provided regularly for public through municipal website. Research findings allow us to reccomend to the municipality to set strong requirments for public utility companies in relation to the provisions of information. The cases when it was done, gave positive results: improved availability and scope of the local environmental information, reduced people complaints.

Cooperative relations between main environmental service providers and at the same time information keepers and municipality allows to extend traditional information dissemination forms, and brings in educational and pro-environmental behaviour elements into information efforts. In this context an example of the North Vidzeme Regional Waste management company shall be mentioned. The way how company collaborates with municipality as its client and a stake-holder shows diversity of information and education channels and tools, and reveals their complementarity potential to create synergic effects within completed environmental communication cycle. Those are leaflets on services to citizens, environmental education programme for schools and kindergardens, landfill site excursions, cooperation with school boards to integrate waste education in curricula, lectures, awareness campaigns etc.

Research finds that there are enough external factors supporting communicative mode of governance. Government communication policy (2008) and related regulations stipulate that institutional websites shall contain a link *Public participation.* Many municipalities overtook this practice. Most of the their websites contain lists of local NGOs contacts, what helps for social networks building. Some include information on events organized by NGOs, others use websites for public surveys and initiate *Answers and questions* chapter. Though from a user perspective municipal websites are still very diverse and difficult to navigate, though it is acknowledged by all target groups that e–communication develops new sphere of public communication and becomes key channel for society informing and participation. Thus municipalities continuously have to work on improvements in this field.

Large portion of environmental information and knowledge exist outside municipal administration, and instruments to obtain, share and disseminate it shall be identified by a municipal administration. Collaboration with stake–holder groups is one of the options. Good relationship and cooperation with active in the region NGOs, who perform environmental projects, is efficient way to upgrade in–house knowledge, skills and build information base. Another direction is closer vertical cooperation with the regional environmental and health inspectorates and nature protection administrations working at a local level. The channels for that already exist in format of annual multi–lateral meetings, joint environmental control activities etc. An example how to improve information flow from business sector is provided by the municipal environmental licensing system established already in 1990s in Ventspils (Zilniece et al. 2010). A licence obliges enterprise to provide regular information about its environmental performance and risks to the municipality and citizens.

As one of the best practice cases how to create environmental information in the rural areas, is a Public environmental monitoring programme designed and set up by the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve specialists some years ago. Its goal was twofold: to obtain necessary for planning and management information on biodiversity resources and to build up long–term partnership for participatory management with a local community. Now the model in the hands of national Nature protection Board serves as the instrument for involvement in the nature protection activities individuals, schools, rural tourism entrepreneurs, museums and libraries all over the country. It provides a solid basis for seting up nation wide public volunteer movement in the environmental sector.

Broad source of environmental information can be found in the educational sector at all levels, in schools and regional universities particularly. The accumulation of this information and a body of environmental knowledge is a coordinative tasks of a municipality in future.

Environmental education (EE) is a distinctive field where collaboration between different actors proved to be

a key to the success. It is a powerful way to bring in information and knowledge into various municipal environmental management fields. Few typical models, though examples are much more diverse, are characterized below. The first example is a Blue Flag programme, a part of FEE – Fund for Environmental Education in Europe activities. It has been implemented for many years in the coastal municipalities (Liepaja, Ventpils, Riga, Jurmala as most experienced in the field), and it becomes indispensible part of municipal environmental policy. Positive correlation is revealed between environmental policy planning process and EE use as a complementary instrument to reach policy goals. Another model is based on the Environmental Days concept. These are wide public environmental awareness campaigns which take place on a Day for Environment (June 5), a Water Day (March 22), a Day without a car (September 22). Usually this is a complex set of activities (demonstration projects, exhibitions, school contests, children games, seminars for specialist, art performances) involving various stake–holders and institutions. In many cases campaigns are merged with city celebrations what extends their effects towards wider community. The role of a municipality is to unify these efforts in a single system by providing attractive medium for collaboration. In this way municipality can pool together human resources otherwise scattered around in a quite isolated environments and strengthen its facilitator role in the environmental awareness building process as it is expected in the Agenda 21 statements.

The Ecoschool model active in over 130 schools and kindergardens of Latvia proved its efficiency particularly in the rural settings. In this model school is not an isoleted unit, it is a facilitator of various activities, ideas and communication processes in the local society. Besides schools have enormous demonstration potential for pro–environmental behaviour in waste sorting, water and energy saving areas. Their experience is disseminated through pupils further to their families and wider community. The original idea of Ecoschool is adapted also for the forestry and waste management sectors. Latvian State Forests company set up a national–wide education campaign about forest ecosystems to create public knowledge and influence environmental attitudes. *Mothernature classes (Mammadaba)* is a model how to combine education, entertainment and recreational elements in one service package. In most of these cases success was based on the collaboration between enterprises, schools and municipality. These cases give ground for another recommendation: municipalities shall reveal and admit new roles in the society and utilize emerging forms of environmental communication more extensively, especially in case they lack internal resources and knowledge themselves to be active in the field.

Empowering medium

The administrative culture, positive attitude, and supportive mechanisms (availability of grants, free space for activities, informative support etc.) play crucial role in the empowering of the local society representatives to be active in the environmental management processes. The most empowering factor for the municipal staff and a local community would be a real political commitment towards sustainable local development reflected in a daily management of the administration and a territory as a whole. Unfortunately, sustainability principles are just formally integrated into the development programmes and planning documents. Though there are few cases which show different approaches. One of models is related to the introduction of environmental management systems (ISO, EMAS) in municipal administrations. It serves as an instrument for integration of environmental considerations into daily activities of different departments, enhance cross – department communication and improve overall performance of a municipality. This includes green public procurement instrument what is a clear signal to the local entrepreneurs to develop and offer environmentally friendly products and services. Unfortunately experience in Latvian municipalities with green procurement is just developing, regardless sufficient legislative support to it.

Another empowering instrument is best practice demonstration effort for sustainable resource use in waste, energy and other sectors and environmental friendly life–styles (cycling etc.). Example of such practice can be observed in the Salacgriva coastal municipality with its solar panels to lit children play grounds, and heat pumps to generate energy from sea heat for the public buildings (kindergarden etc.). In 2010 Salacgriva municipality adopted its Green Declaration which gave impetus to cross–department discussions how to contribute to this vision and how to address and involve the local society. It is obvious, that such type of innovative approach won't be immediately supported from all sectors, therefore municipality shall enhance public interest, create wider discussion and provide real tools to take part. It shall activate local media coverage of a new vision, use it in the municipal marketing and image building exercises, provide small grant programmes to NGOs, use modern public involvement techniques in planning process (like *Future City game* was used in Ogre municipality in 2010). There are many other ways and ideas already existing within a local society how to create collaborative and empowering medium for activating and unifying local society towards common goals. This is what author understands as an empowering medium – a vision brought to the public discussions; following demonstrations of the municipal commitment and invitation of all community to share responsibility for implementation.

Finaly, we shall conclude that environmental issues integration into decisions and communication processes starts in the municipal administration. Therefore collaborative mode and communication experience shall be developed as organizational culture, as new way of doing things and governing. It shall be established between units and in relations with structures outside central administration (communal services, tourism agency, school board etc.). This would build necessay basis for external integration covering all municipal territory and gradually extending municipal communicative boundaries to ecosystem and region level, thus posing communication imperative on stake–holders, governance levels and sectors relationships.

Conclusions

The perfomed multi case studies research allows to identify differences between municipal environmental management practices and shows variety of tools used by administration and other stake-holders in their environmental efforts. Dispersity of these activities shall be overcome by integration of stake–holder knowledge and skills into decision making process through participatory mechanisms and collaborative practices.The role of environmental departments and environmental specialists is this context is crucial. Municipality shall acknowledge its limitations and seek for ways how to utilize communication instruments for obtaining missing environmental information and knowledge, as well as sharing them with wider community. The active role of municipality depends on its readiness to utilize modern IT technologies in building up participatory governance at a local level. Besides it shall find political courage to define clearly its environmental commitments and adjust management culture and structures for these goals.

Research allows to generalize some theoretical assumtions as regards reciprocity between participatory mechanisms, communication instruments and empowering medium serving in their entirety as the main factors affecting local environmental management.

1) Complexity of the environmental sector requests multidisciplinary understanding of a situation, what requests involvement of different sectors and stake–holders in the decision–making process, supplementing of the traditional policy instruments with new ones, with participation orientated tools, what in its turn implies communicative and procedural changes in the municipal administration.

2) Understanding the role of environmental communication and communication in general is a relatively new experience in Latvian municipalities, what might be expanded through better application of tools offered by the public government modernization concept, as well as by turning each municipality into a learning organization which can be achieved through creating internal experience and knowledge, based on revision of past practice, identifying new opportunities and attracting available human resources in the local territory.

3) Key environmental communication components (environmental information, environmental education, public participation and pro–environmental activities) provide a complementary set of tools, the use of which creates synergic effects for stake-holders awareness building and involvement into environmental decision–making process.

4) Variety of institutional mechanisms for internal and external integration of administrative units and stake–holders, as well as wider spectrum of activities performed by different local stake–holders, all together are forming inspiring and empowering municipal communication medium and extending communication content. The role of municipality is to facilitate collaboration and networking among these groups by financial, communicative and other means of support.

5) New participatory culture, collaborative local spirit supports empowering medium and facilitates bringing in innovations what are still missing in the Latvian society and in environmental management field particularly.

Acknowledgement. The research was promoted with the support of the European Social Fund project "Support to the doctoral studies at the University of Latvia".

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УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЫ НА МЕСТНОМ УРОВНЕ: ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ МЕХАНИЗМЫ, КОММУКАЦИОННЫЕ ИНСТРУМЕНТЫ И СТИМУЛИРУЮЩАЯ ОБСТАНОВКА

S u m m a r y

Реформы последних 20 лет в Латвии (создание сектора окружающей среды, административно территориальные перемены, вступление в Евросоюз итд.) повлияли и на местные самоуправления. В целом можно утверждать, что начало 1990–х характеризируется децентрализацией обязанностей. Это время совпало и с новыми идеями об устойчивом развитии, прозвучавшим в Риодежанейро (1992). Основной документ этого события Агенда 21 призывал усилить роль местного уровня в решении проблем окружающей среды, в том числе подчёркивая важность вовлечения общественности, её доступа к экологической информации и экологического образования. Эти годы были началом развития негосударственного сектора (НГО) и неформального экологического образования. Совокупность этих факторов способствовало развитию экологического сознания общественности, которое является одновременно условием, инструментом и целью управления окружающей среды.

Административно территориальная реформа, закончившийся в 2009 году, была нацелена на улучшение эффективности местной (муниципальной) власти, но пятикратное сокращение числа самоуправлений (от 548 до 119) не повысило уровень их компетенции по вопросам управления окружающей среды. Возрастающая комплексность этого сектора призывает искать новые подходы и инструменты, которые способствовали бы интегрированию разных интересов, отраслей и уровней управления.

Данная статья основана на ситуационных исследованиях 30 муниципалитетов Латвии. Основные данные собраны методами качественного исследования (интервью, анкетирование, дискуссионные группы, углублённые интервью со специалистами итд.) Предметом исследования является коммукационные процесы в муниципалитетах, институциональные механизмы и стимулирующее участие общественности обстановка на местном уровне. Экологическая коммуникация, состоящая из четырёх основных компонентов (экологическая информация, экологическое образование, участие общественности и про–экологическое поведение), создаёт влиятельную совокупность инструментов для процесса управления окружающей среды.

Анализ выявил два основных типа муниципалитетской деятельности: пассивный и активный. Пассивные местные власти прилагают минимальные усилия в рамках законодательных норм. Причиной этому является отсутсвие специалистов и должностей в области управления окружающей среды. Характерные признаки активного муниципалитета: присутствие планирования сектора окружающей среды, экологический отдел или специалист, использование многообразных управленческих инструментов, экологическая коммуникация, элементы е–управления итд. Практика приводит к выводу, что активный муниципалитуе является и коммуникативным муниципалитетом, а дисциплинарное планирование сектора окружающей среды способствует системному и интегрированному пользованию всеми четырмя инструментами экологической коммуникации.

Перед принятием решений на политическом уровне, в муниципалитетской Думе, существуют различные механизмы. В отдельных муниципалитетах созданы специальные Экологические комитеты с участием депутатов. Существуют и Экологические комиссии, в которые входят представители разных сторон на местном уровне: НГО, региональные структуры, учёные итд. Это значительно разширает базу для принятия обоснованных решений. По мимо того, во многих муниципалитетах созданы Консультативные советы. Основная цель этих советов внести в среду принятия решений ценности, интересы и соображения местного населения, хотя роль советов более широкая. Они являются посредниками в процессах вертикальной и горизонтальной коммуникации между муниципалитетом, общественностью и разными группами интересов.

Хотя доминирующее мнение склоняется к тому, что экологическая коммуникация является обязанностью Министерства по охране окружающей среды, отрицание роли местного самоуправления явилось бы признаком отсутствия понимания основных постановок устойчивого развития, включая роли местного уровня в информировании общественности о качестве окружающей среды и в экологическом образовании общественности. Информация является важной предпосылкой для участия общественности в принятии решений. Учитывая, что экологическая информация в основном создаётся вне муниципалитетской администрации, а предприятиями, научными исследованиями, в проектах НГО итд., муниципалитет должен создать управленческие инструменты и формы сотрудничества для обмена и распространения этой информации.

Экологическое образование является той сферой деятельности разных сторон (НГО, частного сектора, школ, средств массовой коммуникации), где сотрудничество имеет хорошую основу и ценный опыт.

В заключении важно подчеркнуть значение общей стимулирующей и вдохновляющей обстановки местной

территории в целом. Она создаётся примером самой местной администрацией, инструментами в её распоряжении, интерактивными методами вовлечения общественности, а так же само–активной позицией разных групп общественности, имеющих инициативу, мотивацию и готовность к сотрудничеству в области управление окружающей среды.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: группы интересов, инструменты экологической коммуникации, институциональные механизмы, муниципалитет, сотрудничество, стимулирующая обстановка, участие общественности, управление окружающей среды.

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