



Entrepreneurship key to successful Local Agenda 21 strategy

There has been a mixed response to Local Agenda 21 (LA21) across Europe, but a new study from the Basque Country in Spain has identified factors that contribute to a successful LA21 strategy. These are a local entrepreneurial presence, joint problem-solving and joint decision-making by local government members.

The UN's Local Agenda 21 (LA21) recognises the need to promote long-term strategic planning to address local sustainability. This is a participatory effort, led by local government, to establish a strategic plan for tackling environmental, social, economic and cultural issues. However, in the 20 years since its introduction, the response from local authorities has varied. Previous research indicates that LA21 is viewed as complex, generating a sense of uncertainty, but little research has investigated what encourages its uptake.

The study identifies important factors in adopting, developing and implementing a successful LA21 strategy, by focusing on the Basque Country in Spain where the programme has been positively received.

The study focused on three concepts to understand why the Basque Country embraces LA21:

- *Co-creation*. The continuous dialogue and joint problem-solving between members of local governments.
- *Co-decision*. This represents the level of participation in decision-making.
- *Local entrepreneurship*. This indicates the presence of inspirational and innovative leaders or organisations.

With these concepts in mind, the researchers conducted interviews with individuals from the Basque Government, the provincial councils, local governments, environment centres and IHOBE, an agency of the Basque Government that promotes sustainable development and has been a leader on LA21.

The interviews indicated that stakeholders share the running of the LA21 network and only actions that everyone agrees with tend to be implemented, which highlights the importance of co-decision.

Co-creation was also essential. The network encouraged co-creation in the shape of collaboration/meetings between local governments in voluntary ad-hoc teams to design and implement LA21. Meetings between local governments and the creation of a number of task forces successfully dealt with sustainability issues, such as waste management and sustainable mobility. Participation in co-creation was motivated by initiatives, such as the hiring of consultants and training courses. Membership of voluntary teams and task forces brought recognition and prestige.

Entrepreneurs were important in several ways. For example, mayors from pioneering local governments were asked to share and popularise their experiences, whilst IHOBE acted as a prominent organisational entrepreneur or 'missionary'. The study also analysed the results of 134 surveys conducted with municipal staff in the Basque Country that investigated co-decision, co-creation and entrepreneurship in LA21. The results indicated that regional and local government entrepreneurs are the most important factor in achieving a successful embrace of LA21. The role of IHOBE was essential in the success in the Basque Country, alongside the involvement of pioneering local mayors. The second most important building block was co-decision, which has a direct positive effect on LA21, and, finally, the third important factor was co-creation, through which local governments can enjoy the benefits of working together, reducing costs and sharing knowledge.

The results suggest that to embrace LA21, regional governments should support networks and collaborative platforms between local stakeholders that encourage the sharing of knowledge and engagement in joint learning. Although specifically located in the Basque Country, the researchers believe the results could be extended to similar contexts.

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