

**Name of Exercise:** Local Agenda 21 programme for Mjölby, Sweden

**Location:** Mjölby, Sweden

**Participation Exercise under which Article?** Article 7

**Purpose of Participation Exercise:**

*To encourage wider public participation in the decision making process and preparation of a Local Agenda 21 strategy.*

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**Background:**

Sweden is a country with approximately nine million inhabitants. The country is divided into 289 independent local authorities which are responsible for education, health, social issues and land use plans. The local authorities tax their citizens independently according to their salary. Some 70% of these local authorities in Sweden have at least one person, full or part time, responsible for preparing a Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) document for their community and 56% of the local authorities have already introduced a LA 21 strategy. The reasons why LA 21 has made a big impact in Sweden is probably due to our history, as rural people with respect and love for nature and our big, popular movements like the Temperance movement, Labour movement and the Free church movement. Also, the administrative structure, which consists of independent local authorities, is easier to influence than a distant central power. Generally, the local agenda 21 strategy has increased public participation in local decision making. The problem is maintaining interest over time, plus getting people interested in global issues.

I work in the local authority for Mjölby as a Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator. Mjölby is situated in the Southeast part of Sweden. This rural district has a population of 25,000 people. In Mjölby, the first meeting with the public on environmental issues was in 1972 and 400 people attended. The first Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator was employed in 1995. The goal was to work for sustainable development by changing the attitude of the public.

**Why consult the people?**

Since the pretext of the LA 21 document encourages a wide involvement of the public and NGOs, and chapter four deals with involving important groups like women, youth and minorities in the decision making process, it is a clear aim to involve the people. But instead of consulting the people, we want to turn the process into a discussion.

The public should be involved in the decision making process from the beginning, by taking part in discussions with politicians and civil servants where all opinions are taken into account. This process leads to fewer complaints, stronger partnerships and, when the public are involved in decisions regarding laws and regulations, they are more likely to follow the rules implemented. All these inputs have a positive effect on public finances.

**Participation Techniques Used:**

The public was made aware of the Local Agenda 21 programme by:

- Spreading information through articles in the local press and placing an guide to the environment in the local telephone book that is sent to everyone;
- Taking part in local fairs, sporting events, lectures and debates etc.;
- Approaching people at work or where they spend their free time to inform them about LA 21 and to discuss how it will influence their daily life. Over 1? years, opinions were collected from a total of 3,500 people.
- Creating a network of Agenda 21 representatives from all parts of society:

A leaflet was sent to all the households in our community. Some 160 people replied, including local NGOs, private industries and local citizens. Anyone interested was invited to sign up to be a representative, as an individual or a company representative. A newsletter is distributed and the network is divided up into

groups depending on what they represent. The groups meet twice a year. Sometimes we let everybody meet to discuss topics common to all groups but at other times, only certain groups meet to discuss topics which are particularly relevant to them. The group consists of representatives from the community and civil servants whose work involves the topics we discuss. In this way, the civil servants can listen to the opinions of the general public which hopefully influences them in their work. Sometimes politicians from the local authority are invited to the meetings to listen and participate. Topics discussed include local traffic issues and waste management;

- Advertising in the local papers, on notice boards in the library and the city hall and in the local shopping centre. We can also send messages direct if we pay the extra postage;
- Competitions – drawing, slogans, stories about Agenda 21;
- Information screens in the library;
- Exchange of knowledge between civil servants working for the local authorities and the companies who are part of the network;
- Meetings with local NGO's, farmers and businessmen;
- Taking part in the education of children:
- We are often invited by the school to hold a lesson or to lead a half-day theme work exercise. We talk about global environmental problems and how they are connected to local problems such as traffic congestion, climate change and the inefficient use of resources. We also talk about how to save energy and what is needed in our society to encourage people to cycle more. Depending on the age of the children, they paint or discuss the topics raised or cycle through a part of the city and write letters to the local authority about the problems they meet along the way;
- Spreading good examples, introducing an annual environmental prize for the best;
- Starting campaigns for composting and recycling, usually by placing articles in the local press, sending letters to all households in the community, holding discussions with the local agenda 21 network and arranging meetings where we show the public how to compost and recycle;
- Programme for unemployed people who work either writing articles, producing questionnaires, cleaning rivers or taking responsibility for a park. It was organised by agenda 21 who employed someone specifically responsible for involving the unemployed in local activities. She was paid by the unemployment agency and people who attended had to do some kind of activity in order to get their money.

### **Who participated?**

When it comes to public participation in specific activities, as defined by Article 6 of the Aarhus Convention, 'who to consult' is regulated by the law in Sweden. All activities harmful to the environment require authorisation by the county administration board and they in turn require consultation with the public concerned.

When it comes to Article 7, which deals with public participation concerning plans and programmes, 'who to consult' is no longer a question of law. Local Agenda 21 rests upon a firm belief that the only way to bring about a change in society is to change the attitude of the public. In LA 21 work, we define 'who to involve' by 'everyone interested'. The main thing is to spread the knowledge of the question and to raise awareness and willingness to participate into as many parts of society as possible. It is not a question of who to consult, it is a starting point of a discussion where the outcome depends on the participants. Local shops, industries, sports clubs and nature organisations were all involved, as well as retired citizens, local political parties and youth organisations.

### **Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:**

The first stage was to get the network together and inform them about local agenda 21. The next step was to listen to their opinions and interests and to involve them in decision-making processes. Other people were also approached at work or where they spend their free time and the opinions from these meetings noted. Following these consultations with the public, the local agenda 21 document was produced,

presented to the district council and then made available to the public. Subsequently, the agenda 21 coordinator was invited to participate in writing the new land use, energy and recycling plans. We are now planning to extend this by letting interested groups take part in discussing and writing a local transportation plan. The groups will meet the head of the local council and the civil servants responsible for local traffic issues. All this is still at the planning stage and so we cannot say whether it will work.

To change the decision making process takes time and involves a lot of people who have to change their ways and habits. The risk is that people become defensive and want to do things the way they have always done them.

#### **What information was made available?**

As well as generally raising awareness of LA21 and the running of educational events in the local school, we also held a conference where people from different industries and well known people, such as the Bishop and Amnesty's Swedish representative, spoke about Agenda 21 from their perspective. They also spoke about why they ran their business according to ISO 14001 and why environmental questions were important them. This spring we will hold a seminar on how to save energy in the community.

#### **What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?**

Finally, after two years, a local agenda 21 strategy was written containing all the opinions that had been collected. It was written in a very open manner and with high goals. The strategy was presented to the council and was then made available to the public. It is intended for the document to be continually rewritten.

*Other important examples:*

#### **Örebo**

The city, of around 100,000 citizens, was divided into administrative areas of approximately 3,000 citizens who vote for a board that deals with issues such as education and culture and where each school has a board where the majority are parents.

#### **Åtvidaberg**

The usage of money for toys and decorating the school (around 145,000 skr a year (16,600 USD a year) was delegated to a pupil council consisting of representatives from each school in the area. Each school works out suggestions, they present the ideas to each other and then vote.

#### **Ödeshög**

Meetings have begun with the public to discuss land use issues. Their proposals are given to the town architects who draw them on a map. The map is given back to the meeting for further opinions. All the conflicting interests have to be agreed on, for example, industry versus farm land and nature reserves.

#### **Lessons**

- It is difficult to reach the youth. A special effort is needed such as music events.
- Support from the city council is a must.
- The city has to take environmental questions into account in buying policy.
- The meetings have to fulfil many different functions to attract many visitors. It has to be a social event for the family with games for the children, something to eat and questions which attract both the wife and husband. One way is to use existing networks, like local sports organisations, cultural groups and church gatherings etc.
- Local questions help attract attention to more global problems.
- In order to keep the involvement alive, one has to have regular follow up meetings and let the public come up with ideas instead of just responding to ready made suggestions.
- The formal language used in public papers has to be changed into a more popular version to attract interest. The colour and layout is also important.
- All opinions have to lead to a real result in the decision making process.
- The people already willing to participate have to put pressure on those who are less convinced.

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