

# TG38 - Urban Sustainability

## The Inaugural Meeting

In Issue 3/99 of INFORMATION advance information was given concerning the [inaugural meeting of TG38](#) which had intentionally been scheduled to take place as part of the Triennial Symposium of W055, W065 and W092 in Cape Town in September 1999.

The meeting featured three events: a Task Group Meeting, a Technical Tour and a Workshop.

Joint Coordinator Chrisna du Plessis reviews the Workshop below.

The morning of 9th September 1999 was taken up by the Workshop on decision-making for urban sustainability at which some seventeen people drawn from local authorities, academia, and environmental NGO's, as well as some post-graduate students took part.

Chrisna herself provided a general background to sustainable development and the tools that can be used to ensure that decision-making leads to more sustainable solutions. These include supporting tools such as indicators and guiding principles, as well as process tools such as scenario planning, systems dynamics, integrated development planning and consensus-based participatory processes.

Three South African local authorities were invited to present the processes they used to improve the sustainability of their cities.

In a very entertaining and thought-provoking presentation, Councillor Alan Dawson presented the Midrand EcoCity vision. Midrand is a very new city, situated between Pretoria and Johannesburg. Its economic base is light industry and wholesale retailing. The decision to turn Midrand into an exemplary sustainable city was taken after a toxic spill from one of the factories in the area caused severe environmental damage and threatened the health of the community. The townships and informal settlements around Midrand also suffered some of the worst air-pollution levels in the country. Thus while the decision to go for a "greener", more sustainable approach was taken at a strategic level, there was very strong support from the community and the community is involved in the decisions leading to actual implementation of more environmentally friendly development strategies.

The next presentation was from Dr. Debra Roberts, Environmental Manager for the Durban Metro Council. Durban is the second largest industrial hub in the country with a population of 2.3 million, but 46% of its economically active inhabitants are not formally employed and the city has the largest informal settlements in the country. At a time when the majority of South Africa's local and metropolitan authorities are bordering on bankruptcy, Durban has the enviable position of being comfortably in the black, with the country's richest treasury. This enabled the city to be the first city in South Africa to accept Local Agenda 21 as a corporate responsibility and to develop and implement an effective Local Agenda 21 programme. The process was driven at a strategic level, but in partnership with stakeholder groups. The first phase of assessment and prioritisation led to the completion of a State of the Environment and Development Report, a study of people's perceptions and needs, and the building of partnerships with stakeholder groups. The second phase led to the development of an environmental management policy for the Durban Metropolitan area, a Strategic Environmental Assessment and a Metropolitan Open Space Framework Plan. An intensive media campaign, using printed material, mass media and street theatre was used to inform the community of the various processes and raise their awareness. Local Agenda 21 was also used to guide the Durban Integrated Development Planning Process. This is the first example in South Africa of a city actively using sustainability principles to drive

its strategic decision-making.

Osman Asmal, Local Agenda 21 representative of the Tygerberg Local Council presented the experiences of the Cape Metro Council. He pointed out that although Cape Town officially supports Local Agenda 21, it uses pilot projects to illustrate principles, instead of including it in the strategic visioning process for the CMC. This lack of strategic focus and integrated planning resulted in many loose-standing projects that cannot attain their full potential because there are areas of conflict with other planning processes. Where the first two presentations emphasised the successful pathways to follow, this presentation concentrated on the many obstacles that cities face on the road to sustainability.

After a very interesting discussion session, where the importance of individual commitment to sustainability in those that drive the decision-making process was highlighted, Alan Gilham of WSP presented the point of view of the construction industry. He pointed to the key drivers of the industry and how these should be exploited to encourage decision-making that will lead to sustainable development.

The morning's session closed with a brief presentation to those present on TG38 and its aims, whereupon the three local authorities committed themselves to make their experiences available and to act as a reference group for the development of the decision-making framework for urban sustainability.

## **Meeting of TG38**

After lunch the TG38 members came together in a business meeting to decide on the way forward. From this the following project outline was developed.

### **Aim**

The project aims at establishing a better understanding of the urban decision-making process and how the principles of sustainable development can be incorporated at each level of decision-making, especially at the interfaces with the built environment and the construction industry.

### **Objective**

To produce a decision-making framework to guide local authorities, the built environment professions and the construction industry towards urban sustainability.

### **Scope**

Although urban sustainability should be approached in an integrated manner, this project will focus on the process of creating the built environment and will only include socio-economic issues of sustainability where these directly influence and are influenced by the built environment and the activities of its creation, maintenance and demolition.

It is recognised that urban sustainability requires decisions by all stakeholders. However, these decisions are guided, encouraged and approved by the local authority. The project will therefore focus on decision-making by the local authority regarding the built environment.

To avoid duplication of work already being done in the EU countries and elsewhere in the developed world, as well as to provide a greater depth of understanding of the field of decision-making for urban sustainability, the project will have a strong developing world focus. Special attention will be paid to the issues of transforming the poorer urban core and urban fringe settlement types and integrating these with the city. This focus does not, however, exclude the issues and practices of the developed world.

# Work Programme

## Phase 1: Developing the methodology

- Timeframe: September 1999 - February 2000

To understand the urban decision-making process and to identify how and where the principles of sustainable development should be incorporated in the process, the following information is required.

- The current protocols for decision-making. These would include factors such as national policies, priorities, legislation and regulation; the local development vision as identified by the community (such as LA21) and local regulations such as bylaws. It would also include an understanding of the process by which these protocols are developed at local level.
- The tools used for decision-making. Tools used would include indicators, scenario planning, systems thinking, strategic environmental assessment, public participation, etc.
- The interfaces with the built environment and the construction industry. These can be found in the structural, operational and social patterns of the city and can be either external or internal. External interfaces include planning approval, tenders, monitoring (inspections) and impact assessment. Internal interfaces include planning, infrastructure provision and commissioning of projects.
- The process and flow of decision-making. This includes the hierarchy of decisions, the 'hard gates' (or those points in the process where it cannot continue unless there is agreed consensus or permission to continue)<sup>1</sup>, and the mechanisms for feedback.
- The stakeholders and their positions. Each of the above processes involves different and overlapping sets of stakeholders. It is necessary to know who they are, what their values, drivers and priorities are and where these differ.
- The barriers towards making more sustainable decisions. These include a lack of knowledge, weak political will, conflicting priorities, short-term planning horizons, no or unsatisfactory mechanisms for integration and communication between line departments, opposition from landowners and lack of public buy-in.

Phase 1 will concentrate on developing tools for extracting this knowledge from local authorities and for testing their understanding of and commitment to sustainable development.

These tools will be developed by the CSIR, WSP Group, De Montfort University and Peninsula Technikon, with the assistance of three South African local authorities, Durban Metro Council, Cape Town Metro Council and Midrand Local Council. All three of these authorities are experienced in the issues and problems of incorporating sustainable development principles into the decision-making process at urban level.

The toolkit will be presented at the Sri Lanka Conference on Cities and Sustainability, February 2000. The larger TG38 membership will then be invited to use the toolkit to produce country reports on the current practices and thinking on decision-making for urban sustainability.

## Phase 2: Preparing the country reports

- Timeframe: March 2000 - August 2000

During this phase the participating members will complete their country reports using the tools provided, adapting these tools to suit local circumstances.

The country reports will then be presented and discussed at the next TG38 meeting coinciding with the Conference on Strategies for a Sustainable Built Environment in Johannesburg, 21-25 August 2000.

## Phase 3: Preparing the draft framework

- Timeframe: September 2000 - April 2001

Using the country reports as a basis, a draft decision-making framework for urban sustainability will be designed, using an iterative process. This draft will then be presented at the CIB Triennial Conference in Wellington, New Zealand, April 2001.

#### **Phase 4: Testing the framework**

- Timeframe: May 2001 -

This phase returns to the original local authorities involved in the project and asks them to test the framework where possible, and comment on it. These comments and others gained from discussions at the CIB and other conferences will then be used to refine the framework further to allow a final version to be produced.

#### **Contact Addresses**

More information is available from the Coordinators.

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