

4. Public awareness and participation as elements in strategies for development

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4.1 The Municipality's plan and project ideas for development

- 4.1.1 Testing public awareness
- 4.1.2 Nongovernmental organisations

4.2 Plans and prospect ideas for development

- 4.2.1 The Municipality's plans for development
- 4.2.2 People's individual plans
- 4.2.3 Summery

4.3 Key elements of a strategy for sustainable development

- 4.3.1 The role of the strategy and its advantages
- 4.3.2 Identity of the Livani area
- 4.3.3 Strengthening of Institutions
- 4.3.4 Natural Resources
- 4.3.5 Economic Development
- 4.3.6 Resource people databases

4.1 THE MUNICIPALITY'S PLAN AND PROJECT IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.1.1 Testing public awareness

Public awareness of the situation in the local community and how it is governed is a prerequisite for an active participatory democracy, or, in fact, any local democracy. Within the SUPERBS public awareness of municipal issues was estimated using a questionnaire.

The questionnaire dealt with local government issues, such as identities of chairmen and deputies, budget income and expenditure issues, and development plans. It also estimated the readiness to participate in municipal issues. The method to collect answers was to have students interview people on the streets and in public places. 243 answers were collected.

Answers from different segments of the population are shown in table 4.1.

Results from the questionnaire clearly indicate insufficient awareness in the population about municipality issues. It means that the economic and social bases of participatory democracy and the active participation of the population in municipality issues is very weak and should be actively strengthened through steps taken by the municipality and NGOs. A general conclusion is that the local government

List of NGO's in the Livani area

Amateur theatre	Folks art study "Dubna"
Chorus	Folklore group "eiruleits"
Singing band "Julijs"	Handcraft Union
Football club	Basketball club
Preili	SASF "Generosity Foundation"
Latvian Red Cross	Family Support Union,

should make an effort to more closely inform the town intelligentsia. As a result of the SUPERBS project, authorities are preparing leaflets on municipality budget issues, plans and operational information.

4.1.2 Nongovernmental organisations

Active and effectively functioning NGOs are the backbone of a democratic society and an effective control of governing institutions on the local and central level, and proper management of the taxpayers' money and common property including natural and cultural heritage. Additionally NGOs perform many other functions. A problem is that in a society with a transition economy and in particular in Livani, people have little experience of participating in NGOs under a democratic system where

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION AS ELEMENTS IN STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Table 4.1 Result of the questionnaire in numbers and percentages. 243 answers were collected (157 female and 86 males) of which six groups are presented separately according to profession.

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)	Medicine (19)	Students (18)	Pensioners (16)	Unemployed (16)	Teachers (9)	Workers (14)
1. Do you know who the Mayor of the municipality is?	192 (79.2)	51 (20.8)	18/1	17/1	16/0	15/1	8/1	13/1
2. Do you know who the deputies of the municipality are?	152 (62.6)	91 (37.4)	16/3	15/3	13/3	9/6	8/1	12/2
3. Do you know how the municipal budget is used?	85 (35.0)	158 (65.0)	5/14	11/7	8/8	1/15	7/2	7/7
4. Do you know the budget income structure?	95 (39.1)	148 (60.9)	5/14	10/8	9/7	7/9	6/3	9/5
5. Do you know which of the taxes paid by the taxpayers remain in the municipal budget?	56 (23.0)	187 (77.0)	2/17	6/12	7/9	2/14	4/5	5/9
6. Do you know the plans of the municipality?	43 (17.7)	200 (82.3)	0/19	0/18	5/11	4/12	2/7	4/10
7. Do you have the time and readiness to participate in the municipality's projects?	53 (21.8)	190 (78.2)	1/18	8/10	3/13	2/14	0/9	5/9

freedom, dignity and room for initiative are basic values. The elementary rules and traditions of self organisation of NGOs are not well known in the society in a broad sense.

At the beginning of the transition process, leaders of the "singing revolution" in Latvia did not understand the need for paying serious attention to developing the instruments of participatory democracy and as a result, step-by-step they were pushed out of the political structures by people using methods from the Soviet nomenclature. Now, 10 years later, the ruling establishment in all the political parties is not interested in developing participatory democracy. They are afraid that their social and political status is based on a refined corruptive environment. As a result it is hard to develop a strategy for local and national development that is accepted and approved by the society.

Nevertheless, there is an impressive list of NGOs in the Livani area which is indicative of serious potential for future development (See box).

4.2 PLANS AND PROSPECT IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.2.1 The Municipality's plans for development

Livani assigned a team to work out proposals for municipal development. The team produced a list of approximately 80 projects (See box) later published in "Livani town social economic development program" (Livani 1999, 109 pp. Accepted: Council decision Nr.59-5, 01.08.1999). The projects are grouped into sectors in accordance with a sector development vision included in the programme. It is clear from an analysis of the list, that the municipality has a very great need to mobilise resources in order to go ahead with the practical implementation of the projects. The main problem is human potential.

It is interesting to compare this list with the list of ideas received from the public during the SUPERBS questionnaire. There is some overlap on the lists, but the questionnaire shows that people are not aware of the municipality's plans, ideas, and strategy. It is clear that both public and private resources should be mobilised to implement the various

ideas. Many of them should be broadly discussed in the community before implementation. One very good experience came from the work on the plans to build a hydropower station on the Dubna River. Public discussions resulted in municipality rules for possible implementation of the idea.

An abbreviated list of municipality project ideas:

1. Development of political and administrative local government structure for the Livani area.
2. Public participation and democracy development.
3. Development of self-help groups for people with specific needs.
4. Development of a family support centre.
5. Apartments for socially disadvantaged persons.
6. Summer camp for children.
7. Optimisation of the social care system.
8. Environmental management system for Livani.
9. Local agenda 21 action plan.
10. Territory fiscal planning.
11. Technically economical plan for the rebuilding of the water supply and collection system and district heating system.
12. Energy and air quality management system.
13. Solid waste collection and landfill management.
14. Livani lake management project.
15. Dubna river coastline management project.
16. Reconstruction and design of the main street of the town.
17. Development of a secondary school museum as well as a city museum.
18. Reconstruction of the local stadium and development of training sites.
19. Creation of an evening secondary school and adult education centre.
20. Development of the Livani Business School.
21. Reconstruction of the Dubna river bridge.
22. Build the highway around the town.
23. Edition of monographs about folklore, traditions and handcraft skills.
24. Take care of the ancient cemetery.
25. Recreation of the Livani park area.
26. Sport hall for the Livani high school.
27. Research project on the natural resources.
28. Building of a hydropower station.
29. Building of a conference hall.

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION AS ELEMENTS IN STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.2.2 People's individual plans

In addition to the work of the project team, two separately made brainstorming questionnaires were handed out in the streets and in other public places for citizens to fill in (a specially made questionnaire was distributed to business people). The questionnaire raised two issues for the respondents to deal with:

1. What were their development proposals for Livani? (see box below)
2. What were their private plans for the future?

For second question the respondents had to give two answers per question, one answer for the *near future*, and a second answer for the *distant future*.

87 inhabitants of Livani were questioned, age 15 to 78. 62 of them were women, 21 men (4 dates missing). Most of the women were 20 to 50 years old, and most of the men were between 40 and 50 years of age. 17 of the pollees were unemployed (3 people did not indicate their occupation) which included 11 pupils, 11 students and 8 pensioners.

In analysing the results of the questionnaire, one should take into consideration that they reflect mainly the women's viewpoints and plans, and that most of the women had low incomes.

9 people *have plans to leave* Livani, or at least they want their children to abandon the town because they do

not feel there are good prospects for the future. Four of the respondents pointed out that they had *no plans whatever* because they had no money or no job.

It seems that most of the problems are connected to the *economic situation*. 13 pollees' plans for the near future were tied to finding a better (or any) job, remaining at work or hoping to make a lot more money in order to cover debts.

It seems that the present social economic situation is perceived by many people as rather difficult among the pollees there were many unemployed or people with low-paid work. Evidently, work is important, and therefore future plans are closely connected with the fear of losing it.

23 pollees mentioned plans associated with *the family and children*. Emphasis was laid not only on material support for the children but also on their education, support of their studies after high school, etc. People seem to have appreciated the importance of education and the advantages it may provide in the labour market. 21 pollees plan *to acquire or improve their education* themselves, evaluate their abilities in order to raise their professional standards or continue their business.

11 people mention plans associated with *change or improvement of their homes* (to change the flat, to buy a car, to plant an orchard, etc.).

Public brainstorming - ideas for development

Result from two sessions with Livani students

First session:

1. To equip sports grounds, skating-rinks, etc. for young people.
2. To restore playgrounds for small children.
3. To put the town's parks in order.
4. To organise festivities that would consolidate the population of the town.
5. To expand the collection of books in Livani libraries.
6. To renew the crumbled facades of buildings.
7. To improve work opportunities in the town.
8. To pay more attention to sports so that youth and children would involve themselves in sports, thereby improving their physical development.
9. To co-operate with the police so that they controlled the selling of alcohol to under-age juveniles and closed the so-called "points" because the alcohol bought there is potentially fatal.
10. To think more about entertainment locales for youth, as there are so few.
11. To increase the possibility for young people who have graduated from post-secondary institutions to return to their town, rather than to other towns or cities.
12. To develop the educational curriculum so that pupils could acquire a more qualified education.
13. To study the historical heritage – if possible to inspect old buildings.
14. To create one large supermarket, for all the small shops have the same goods and they do not realise much profit.
15. To create a historical centre.
16. An organisation is needed that would coordinate co-operation between sales partners in order to enhance the sales of goods (i.e. look for partners for co-operation, sign contracts, be a contact or organisation between seller and buyer).

Second session:

1. To poll the population of the town about their requirements (every inhabitant). Then, review the results and, if possible, implement them. More people should be involved in various projects.
2. To use more intensively products made in Livani.
3. To open all possible courses to the unemployed, particularly youth. Interest should be aroused so that courses were attended voluntarily. Try to involve other countries as well.
4. To form interest clubs in schools and link them with organisations.
5. To build playgrounds for children, especially in places where they could ride bicycles and rollerskate.
6. To arrange recreational areas for both young people and adults.
7. To repair pavements.
8. To organise more activities that would involve the entire town's population.
9. To forbid littering. Consequently provide special places for collecting garbage.
10. To provide the possibility for private enterprises to purchase buildings in order to improve their condition.
11. Young people are very interested in computers. Therefore a club could be opened where all those interested could work with PCs as well as learn more about them. People with no experience working with a computer could take part in the club and acquire the necessary knowledge. This would be a purposeful step to take, since nowadays work in almost all spheres is connected to the computer.
12. Various courses which are considered necessary should be organised and made convenient for the people of Livani.

21 declared that they *do not have any plans*. Some add that this is due to the shortage of money or work. It seems that part of the Livani population is unsure about their future. There is a feeling of unpredictability in their lives associated with the problems of work.

Respondents wanted to either find work in general or find a better job. Some were still optimistic about being able to open their own enterprise or improve the existing business.

Family or children – only 18 people had plans for the distant future.

Seven people had plans devoted to *feelings of comfort or personal life* e.g., to go on a journey, to visit a rest-home etc.

Unfortunately, the results of questionnaire have clearly shown that the municipality's plans have very little or practically no reflection in people private plans. Nobody mentioned the possibility of linking municipal plans and private plans.

4.2.3 Summary

There are feelings of despair and disbelief in the future prospects for Livani, therefore several pollees plan to leave Livani. The principal reasons for hopelessness are unemployment and poor material standards.

The importance of education is appreciated. The population seem to understand the role of education in the labour market, in starting a business, etc.

Economic planning is of primary importance, and once that is taken care of are thoughts given to establishing a family, education of the children, culture and recreation. Some people have no future plans at all, particularly for the distant future.

A comparison with Questionnaire 2, devoted to recommendations for the development of the town, shows that there too, the urgent problems requiring attention are employment and development of business. Many pollees indicate a need for instruction and courses of training. (Perhaps psychological work with the unemployed would be helpful such as courses in raising self-esteem, encouragement to take risks in order to start something new, to change one's speciality, etc).

Possibly the situation can be improved using the recommendations of the people for the development of Lîvâni in the near future. Otherwise there is a risk that people may leave Livani.

Reviewing the results of the first Questionnaire, one can state that people know very little about their municipality, the officials who work there, and the activities and plans of the municipality. It is also possible that the hopelessness about the future of the town is a result of this lack of knowledge. The population need information about what is being done and they have no views about what has already been done.

It follows that the people of Livani need a closer link with the municipality. Many problems could have been more easily solved if work had been better co-ordinated. Much can be done through joint efforts. It is very important to exchange information, to instruct the population, and to arrange courses and seminars.

4.3 KEY ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.3.1 The role of the strategy and its advantages

Results of questionnaires, brainstorming, and the list of municipality project plans open the possibility to make efforts to design some strategy elements for sustainable development which could be accepted from society.

Strategic key elements for sustainable development have the role as a common platform for future action and are envisaged to support decision-makers and to stimulate the activities in the following directions:

- Propagation of information and knowledge on sustainable development, raising public understanding, education and awareness.
- Management of natural resources towards a sustainable consumption in agriculture, forestry, industry, and service.
- Democratisation and decentralisation of the municipality management process and improvement (development) of skills and professionalism in public administration.

The defined and (accepted) strategy should serve as a guideline and an element of control and self-control to both the decision-makers, NGOs and, of course, the general public. The proposed strategy is based on, a situational analysis in SUPERBS case studies, questionnaires and brainstorming sessions, and a design of an operational structure for the development strategy, tailored in municipalities of Livani area

The four basic fields of action reasonable at starting point:

- Identity of the area
- Strengthening of Institutions
- Natural resources
- Economic development

The recommendations in these notes are well-chosen activities that should be developed and implemented. It must be stressed once again: most of the proposals can be started without big investments and on the basis of local people. It takes time to build the future!

4.3.2 Identity of the Livani area

As the existing human resources are the key for the development, it is essential to raise the self-consciousness of each citizen - to believe in and build on individual capabilities and the available resources.

In the creation of new communities, and new Latvia, it is advisable that self-government (local authorities) gradually should develop openness and an information policy towards the citizens as well as new forms of models and traditions for cooperation between all the actors in the area. In the creation of democratic and new decision-making processes access to information and public participation is important.

For example, one could form initiative groups and working groups with representatives from relevant interest groups, local communities, etc.

The groups should serve as inspiration for and be supported by the local decision-makers, and therefore it is crucial for such groups to have members that are

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION AS ELEMENTS IN STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

respected in the local society (key persons) but also people with new ideas (active and creative persons).

From the action field "Identity of the Livani area" the following recommendations on the first steps can be made:

Short term:

1. Support of local cultural initiatives
2. Development of openness and public information
3. Involvement of citizens in selected processes

Long term:

1. Public participation in all important matters through clear and appropriate instruments of democracy
2. Highlights of ethical values and renewed life style

4.3.3 Strengthening of Institutions

In the area of decision-making, public management (administration), involvement/decentralisation, and improved public service. The following recommendations on the first steps can be made:

Short term:

1. Organisation of adult education
2. Training activities for unemployed citizens
3. Database on resource persons, students, natives from Livani

Long term:

1. Promotion of the return of university graduates
2. EU accession process
3. Creation of links to local authorities in other countries
4. Environmental management

4.3.4 Natural Resources

In the area of biodiversity and nature conservation, an local renewable resources (especially energy). The following recommendations on the first steps can be made:

Short term:

1. Livani students research on nature heritage
2. Promotion of biodiversity in farms/agriculture by, as a first step, to integrate in the ongoing advisory activities on the advantages of bio-diversity, fore management, etc. - must be demonstrated
3. Pilot project on energy saving in public buildings for example a school

Long term:

1. Promotion of biodiversity (in farms/agriculture by integrating the topic in the school education
2. Assessment of biomass utilisation for basic energy production

4.3.5 Economic Development

In the area of "Economic Development" the following recommendations on the first steps can be made

Short term:

1. Strengthening the organisation/network of agricultural advisors - by creating service oriented activities towards the farmers
2. Elaboration of an action plan for farming and forestry
3. Development of an association of businessmen

4. Education activities on management, etc. for farmers and business leaders and initiators/developers
5. "Clean soil" action in Livani area

Long term:

1. Product development based on local natural § resources
2. Sustainable tourism

4.3.6 Resource people databases

A list exists of natives of Livani in Latvia who have potential to assist the municipality. The design of three databases of the resource people are in progress:

- Students
- People willing to participate and high level professional specialists
- Natives from Livani in Latvia who have potential to assist the municipality.

This list and databases are very essential for the municipality. This information and assistance of those persons can be used to raise self-consciousness of the society, to search for extra expertise not available in the municipality, to organise lobbying for the municipality at the central government level, to mitigate the brain drain effects by exploiting knowledge, expertise, and skills of excitizens of the Livani area, and to promote a process of return to Livani.

"A ready to participate resource people list" contains three different groups of valuable persons to be involved in active cooperation with the municipality.

- The first group contains 65 unemployed persons with higher education diploma, sufficient professional skills, and high level of motivation to find employment and to support the municipality in its efforts to overcome unemployment.
- The second group is people who announced readiness to cooperate with the municipality in their answers to the questionnaire. Approximately 10-15% from the town active population are ready to participate.
- The third group is highly skilled multidisciplinary professionals who are very busy, but can be invited to act as experts in critical issues, overlapping with their professional activities and fields.

The students' list and databases include some 40 people who are very aware of municipality issues and are ready to cooperate with the municipality in various projects.

Students should be a focus of municipality self-government attention and strategy. The long-term prosperity of the municipality, and especially step by step movement towards sustainability in a broad sense, depends on an active policy towards students. The complexity of sustainable development implementations requires knowledge and skills which can only be obtained on a university level that updates knowledge and active contacts with advanced professionals around the world.

An active position towards students is the main method of mitigating the brain drain from the municipality towards the capital city.