

Implementation of an evaluation system – an indicator set – in the Healthy City of “Chrudim”, Czech Republic

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1. Introduction

1.1 A short introduction to the initiative

In 1988, the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated an **international Healthy Cities project** and invited major European cities to participate. Over twenty years, more than 1300 cities, towns and regions throughout Europe have joined the Project.

After the 1989 Velvet Revolution, several municipalities in the Czech Republic started to implement the ideas of the Project. In 1994, eleven active cities formed an association called the Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic (HCCZ). Since 1998, HCCZ member cities, towns and regions have followed the HCCZ methodology, co-operating with a wide range of HCCZ expert partners, particularly Charles University in Prague and the National Health Institute. The Methodology developed and used for the implementation of Healthy Cities principles was presented with an award at the Worldwide Project EXPO 2000 in Hanover.

Within a brief period of time, the New Gate 21 methodology (a gate is the graphic symbol of the two fundamental pillars of the Healthy Cities – health and the environment) has stimulated a boom in the activities in the member cities, municipalities and regions to promote the strategic development of the municipalities with citizen participation, including local Agendas 21, applications of Health 21, and Local Environmental and Health Action Plans (LEHAPs).

Currently (as of June 2013), there are 1120 Healthy cities, municipalities and regions (members of the HCCZ) in the Czech Republic, with a regional influence on 2,653 municipalities (56 per cent of the country's population).

HCCZ is presently the only association of Czech municipalities that stipulates consistent work towards the sustainable development, health and quality of life in cities, municipalities and regions of the Czech Republic in its statutes.

Unlike many other national programs, the HCCZ strongly involves citizens in strategic planning and decision making processes in municipalities. This participatory approach towards public policy making fosters a shift from government to governance. Governance implies a whole array of actors that are involved in the formulation and implementation of public policy. In other words, the engagement and involvement of citizens in policy-making processes often results in easier implementation of various policy measures at the local level. The will for change hence does not depend only on politicians and policy-makers, but also on the interest of the public.

2. Evaluation system of the Healthy Cities

Public administrations that are committed to the Healthy Cities idea, otherwise known as Local Agenda 21, are monitored in the following areas:

- ✓ implementation of sustainable development,
- ✓ public engagement,
- ✓ quality of strategic management.

Evaluation takes place according to a set of 21 criteria enumerated by the Working Group for Local Agenda 21 created by the Government Council for Sustainable Development. Each criterion has its own set indicators, including activities/operations whose implementation leads to meeting the designated criteria. According to these criteria, a given town can fall into one of four categories A-D and one preliminary category . Indicators associated with the categories are not implemented by the towns themselves, but rather they submit the required information to the Working Group (their level of detail differs pursuant to the assigned category) and the monitoring takes place in the town itself.

Categories A-D are preceded by the category 'Interested Parties'. This involves towns that start to be interested in LA 21, but they do not want or they cannot create any formal structures or initiate processes for implementing LA 21. During this phase, towns familiarise themselves with the LA 21 agenda, examples of good practice in a given field and the possibilities of application in their own case.

Category D of LA 21 is the lowest category. This requires a town to implement activities based on the principle of partnership. It is necessary to create organisational support with a town (e.g. the appointment of an official onsite LA 21 coordinator) for the implementation of LA 21. Within this category, LA 21 has to be fulfilled with specific content that include communication and managerial procedures, including active public participation in regional planning and decision-making, and the implementation of significant measures that impact upon the lives of inhabitants, or cooperation with the civil and business sectors.

Category C of LA 21 requires a more sophisticated structure, a deeper level of political support and civic participation in LA 21 activities. An integral part is the provision of an official administrative body for LA 21, and the creation and approval of an official document signing up to LA 21 in the form of a declaration. Also important are freely accessible meetings at public forums where public issues can be discussed. Cooperation and joint activities between political representatives, civic associations, the local business sector and inhabitants are very important.

The second highest category of LA 21 is **Category B**. The requirements stated above for the category C are significantly expanded. An interim plan respecting the principles of sustainable development is gradually integrated into a comprehensive sustainable development strategy for the given region and with the participation of experts, partners and the public. LA 21 has an agreed method of financial support either from a town's own resources or from external resources (national and European funds). For measuring their progress made toward sustainable development, towns make use of a set of appropriate indicators that they define themselves for this purpose or they use an existing set of indicators developed for this purpose (e.g. the European Common Indicator set), or as the case may be, they work together with various initiatives and professional institutions that apply the indicators onsite. Their procedures are made publicly available and they share their experiences with other towns at joint meetings or via an online system.

The highest **Category A** represents towns that interconnect individual areas of sustainable development to a comprehensive process of strategic management. Implementation of LA 21 is ensured through a permanent body of the council or representative government. In order to be allocated this category, a town carries out a **sustainable development audit** on the basis of a **set of indicators** designed by national experts. They also evaluate the town's audit and propose to the LA 21 Working Group of the Government Council for Sustainable Development the granting of Category A. This category can be further distinguished by assigning stars, so towns in Category A can achieve further improvements. No towns in the Czech Republic have so been classified within this category, although the town of Chrudim is seeking to be awarded this classification this year. Another three towns - Vsetín, Kopřivnice and Litoměřice – have participated in the testing of the indicator set and will probably seek to be granted Category A in 2014/15.

3. The purpose and the methodology of the case study

The presented case study illustrates the process of development and implementation of indicators at the town level. The study aims to:

- ✓ Describe the unique cooperation between experts in indicator development on the one hand and the local authorities on the other on the indicator set development (the set was tailored to the selected municipalities in terms of data availability, environmental and social conditions, low financial costs etc.)
- ✓ Describe the motivation of the town representatives to use “alternative” indicators (drivers)
- ✓ Describe the barriers to the indicator set implementation

The authors of the study are also national experts on the creation of indicators. This allows them to directly monitor the process of developing, testing and implementing the indicators. Two qualitative research methods were used for drawing up the study: participative

observation and structured interviews¹ (using open-ended questions). Both these methods are used due to the fact that both authors of the study are in close contact both with the creators of the indicator set – national experts, and with the representatives of the towns that are testing the set, and of course with the representatives of the town of Chrudim as well, which is seeking to be granted the highest status within the scope of the Healthy Cities network – Category A – in 2013, and will therefore implement the final indicator set in practice by carrying out a sustainable development audit in the town. It was therefore possible during open discussions to uncover a range of barriers and drivers in the creation and use of the indicator set. The study was conferred with the representatives of HCCZ as well as with representatives of the town of Chrudim. Their views and perceptions were incorporated in the study. The results of the study can be thus considered as the knowledge provided by study authors – based on well-established research methods, and opinion of the representatives of HCCZ and the representatives of the city of Chrudim.

4. The development of the indicator set

To develop the indicator set, the Healthy Cities' National Network formed a group of experts who have focused over the long term on the issue of sustainable development, quality of life, and the creation and use of sustainability indicators. Their role was:

- a) to help create general rules for the awarding of Category A to towns (a timetable, the role of individual stakeholders, a peer review management process, etc.),
- b) to identify relevant areas for assessing the sustainability of towns on a given SD theme,
- c) to create an indicator set for evaluating sustainability at the local level (each expert focused on the creation of indicators for one of the identified areas),
- d) to work together with towns and regions in the creation and testing of the indicator set and the implementation of indicators – finding optimal key indicators and supplementary indicators for a town
- e) to help with the implementation of the indicator set (supervising sustainable development audits carried out by cities) and assessing the audits of towns carried out on the basis of this indicator set,
- f) to carry out final modifications of the indicator set and the general conditions for the awarding of Category A,
- g) to help incorporate the results of the work into the methodology for users.

This group of experts worked together with town representatives, specifically the LA 21 coordinators, mayors and deputy mayors, and individual department officials who directly participated in the development testing of the indicator set. It was the task of these representatives to:

- a) help create rules for the awarding of LA 21 category A by means of a consultation process,
- b) co-create an indicator set for evaluating sustainability at the local level (finding the connections/compromise between the options available to towns and the requirements of the experts),

¹ Structured interview samples are listed in the annex to the study.

- c) use the proposed indicator set in practice for evaluating specific areas of sustainability (carrying out sustainable development audits) and discuss with experts the pitfalls of using the proposed indicators,
- d) help stipulate the final form of the indicator set for compiling the methodology.

The compiled methodology was also the subject of a peer review procedure and after a consultation process it was approved by the Government Council for Sustainable Development's LA 21 Working Group as the recommended methodology for evaluating LA 21 Category A. The agreed methodology establishes 10 sustainable development/quality of life categories (derived from the Aalborg Commitments²):

- 1) Governance
- 2) Environment/Natural common goods
- 3) Responsible consumption and life style choices
- 4) Transportation
- 5) Health
- 6) Local economy and business
- 7) Education
- 8) Culture and local traditions
- 9) Social environment
- 10) Global responsibility

The above categories are divided into specific areas (3-4) related to SD/QoL and about four key (obligatory) indicators and several complementary (voluntary) indicators are defined for measuring purposes for each of those areas.

5. Main findings from the indicator set development and testing

The next findings are based on the participative observations and interviews with national experts and city representatives during the indicator set development and testing.

Drivers on the promoters'/experts' side³:

- professional interest in the creation of an indicator set at the local level that would be systematically used by towns for the formation of their policies (this is one of the few original comprehensive sets for the local level in the Czech Republic)
- better understanding of the principles of the functioning of towns (for experts who have hitherto not worked at the local level)
- getting to know new people who are interested in promoting sustainability in towns – establishing contacts for further cooperation
- expanding the portfolio of expert activities (for part of the expert team)
- the opportunity to cooperate with representatives of towns who are generally motivated by the creation and testing of indicators

Recommendation (by experts, representatives of HCGZ): The above identified drivers (Drivers on the promoters'/experts' side) to be used for motivation of potential members at the phase of putting an expert panel together.

² <http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/>

³ The work was not paid, only travel costs were compensated

Barriers on the promoters' side:

- a lack of time – most team members are top professionals in their field and are therefore very busy
- forming compromises between the requirements of towns and the demands of experts (experts seek the maximum number of indicators ideally supported by data, while town representatives want to minimise the number of indicators and in particular limit those indicators which are difficult in terms of access to data). These compromises are perceived by some experts as a potential threat to their professional quality – if it is not possible to formulate indicators well in a given field, other experts in that given field will challenge the overall quality of the evaluation of sustainability.
- the need to introduce entirely new indicators where they have hitherto not been greatly used even at the national level (e.g. for assessing the quality of environmental education).
- The scepticism of some town representatives over the use of indicators as a means for the further adoption of political measures because a change at the town level is not in some cases (cities/regions) possible because of overall Czech Republic directives and associated legislation. Their willingness to work with indicators is hence reduced. It is necessary to discuss this with town representatives and rid them of their scepticism. This, however, occurs only very rarely and more at the level of individual officials who were the co-creators and subsequent users of the indicators.
- the fears of some town representatives (especially officials) of their own low erudition in the field of applying and evaluating indicators – communication during the creation and testing of indicators is then not ideal (such cases have also been quite rare)
- low knowledge of the issues of evaluating phenomena with the help of indicators on the part of some users – discussion over specific indicators and their inclusion within the set is hence limited (such cases have been quite rare)

Drivers on the users' side⁴:

- the effort to map the situation in the field of sustainable development with the aid of an indicator set that would fully correspond to the needs of towns (existing sets are not ideal for towns in the Czech Republic) – a shift from intuition to objective information
- the need for the creation of policies in the field of sustainable development that would be based on objective information
- towns want to draw attention to their strengths that could attract the interest of people in living in a given area or confirm that the town where they are living is something special
- the opportunity to increase the knowledge of town representatives regarding the issue of sustainable development indicators
- better-informed citizens
- the opportunity to consult with national experts on indicator issues

⁴ Towns voluntarily enrol in the process of creating and testing indicators. This concerns towns that would be interested in obtaining Category A on the basis of LA 21 evaluation within the foreseeable future.

- the interest of people or NGOs in obtaining objective evaluations of specific critical issues in towns

Recommendation (by experts, representatives of HCCZ): The above identified drivers (Drivers on the users' side) constitute prospective incentives for the cities that consider using the alternative indicators for measuring quality of life.

Barriers on the users' side:

- generally, there is a lack of information and/or understanding of indicators on the users side – there is generally very little understanding of indicators at the town level (this is also clear from WP2 Czech Case Study). Policy is essentially managed either through reporting, which a town is obliged to do for the state or on the basis of randomised measures or simply intuition. The basic problem of towns generally consists in the ability to obtain data and subsequently evaluate and interpret them. Even the data are available, their evaluation and interpretation are often difficult because the town lacks trained personnel/officers. Thanks to HCCZ and the DataPlan operational database, towns have some basic data available to them relating to issues of health and the environment. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of important information such as that relating to the social environment in towns, education, town management, etc, that is not usually available, or is available but has not hitherto been used.
- a lack of capacity on the users' side (money, time, people abilities) – this must be seen as a complex problem. The first described barrier, i.e. the lack of information and experience with using indicators is enhanced by the fact that towns often do not have sufficient staff capacity in the form of officials who would be able to use indicators more than has been the case so far. They are also limited by the ability of officials who have been trained for wider data analysis. If indicator users are therefore able to overcome the first barrier and decide to make use of the indicators on the basis of information obtained from the creators and the promoters, then they are generally handicapped by a lack of staff capacity. This problem can be resolved either by hiring further staff or outsourcing the required work. This will naturally increase administration costs, which is always seen as a great problem. In general, there is a tendency in the Czech Republic, as well as in other European countries to gradually reduce administration costs. It is therefore necessary to develop a high degree of commitment by users to implementing the indicators.
- lack of will for change on the users' side because of the necessity to learn new things – many politicians are motivated for making a change through voters' interests/pressures/etc. This is especially so if there is no interest on the part of voters in the application of indicators, and there is little interest shown by politicians in their application. This, however, was not been the case of towns in which indicator sets have been tested. In several cases, however, we became acquainted with the concerns of some officials based on the fact that they will have to include new work obligations within their work programmes. Their concerns stemmed from a lack of time to undertake quality processing of audit documents, and some officials were concerned about where they will obtain data and how they will evaluate them. However, this concerns quite rare cases rather than a general problem, and towns working over the long term with HCCZ are used to responding to new challenges.

- the absence of interest at the national level in the application of indicators at the local level – towns obligatorily report a lot of data, although they are then often aggregated at higher territorial units and the data are no longer useful for local planning. There is no pressure from the state level to use indicators at the town level, and towns are also not appreciated from the state level in their use of indicators for planning.

Ways and opportunities for overcoming the barriers (Best practice – common opinion):

- Long term cooperation with HCCZ
 - a) it has been shown that the above described barriers are mostly being overcome gradually by the fact that towns are included within categories D-A according to what they are capable of. They hence introduce sustainability principles and subsequently the principles of self-evaluation over a longer time. Essentially, it seems a good thing to firstly allow towns to apply sets of their own indicators (see Category B) so that they become acquainted with the demands of the evaluation process, and only then be inspired to apply the firmly stipulated indicators pursuant to which sustainability audits in towns are formed.
 - b) What is efficient in this sense is communication between municipalities that facilitates the sharing of examples of good practice.
- Intensive cooperation between experts and town representatives:
 - a) the development of indicator sets has proved to be effective when there is close cooperation between experts and town representatives – the high demands of experts for the indicator set were reviewed on the one hand, and on the other there was a desire on the part of towns for a minimalist approach to a set of indicators – the indicator set hence took an optimal form – it is possible to carry it out at the town level, while it also includes important indicators for evaluating given areas
 - b) systematic personal and written consultation over the issue of indicators in a specific field was compiled by the experts in the audit – thanks to cooperation in drawing up the audit, its authors learned how to use the indicators in a natural way. Experts on the other hand may take into account their own experience with the implementation of indicators in the creation of the methodology.
- Intensive cooperation between experts and representatives of HCCZ:
 - a) HCCZ representatives formed a team of professionals who have looked into the issue of evaluating various parameters of sustainability for many years already. Simply said, there was a very good working atmosphere among all members of the team, including a willingness to share in resolving problems that they came across together. The unity and cohesion of the team was in our opinion of fundamental importance for the success of the creation of the indicator set.
 - b) the precise knowledge of the HCCZ representatives regarding the situation in towns enabled the experts to formulate the indicator set parameters and the principles of its implementation relatively well right from the beginning. The first discussion with town representatives hence played out over quite a

realistically formulated indicator set (it thus prevented the development of scepticism over the chances of compiling the audit by towns)

- c) the experts had the opportunity to communicate with each other during personal meetings and electronically. It was thus possible to make use of findings regarding the suitability of various approaches of other team members during discussions with town representatives. This proved to be very positive. The team was able to find compromises within the overall approach of individual areas (approximately the same number of sub-areas of interest within ten set areas and the number of indicators in each of them)

- Appropriate choice of the coordinator of LA 21 activities

The person who coordinates the activities of creating and using indicators in all areas of sustainable development, i.e. the LA 21 coordinator in a town, is of great significance in overcoming barriers. This person represents the communication channel between the leading town representatives (the mayor and the council), the town administrators who contribute to the creation of the indicator set and the creation of the Audit for individual areas, and the experts. This person should have:

- ✓ a sufficiently powerful position – this is secured by the support of leading town representatives,
- ✓ a willingness to broadly help the people carrying out the audit – a careful study of the general methodology, be the contact point between the experts and the auditors, and between the auditors themselves
- ✓ great personal motivation for the work and overcoming barriers

6. The main findings from the indicator set implementation (Audit LA 21) in the City of Chrudim

Chrudim is the only town in the Czech Republic which is currently (as of June 2013) seeking to obtain LA 21 Category A. The town representatives decided to directly adopt the indicators in practice, in particular because they found during the phase of the development and testing of indicators that working in decision-making processes and managing the town in general with objective information is of great benefit to the town, and in addition they were able to overcome many barriers during the indicator development and implementation phase, and the process of evaluation on the basis of alternative indicators became a normal part of the town administration's work.

We let the town representatives summarise their findings in interviews regarding the conditions necessary for carrying out the implementation of LA indicators and the processing of the audit. We also came to very similar conclusions on the basis of participative monitoring. A note: It is difficult to distinguish recommendation and best practice here. On the whole the following text is a digest of the best practice of implementation of the indicators on the local level. Each item (bullet) might be taken as a recommendation of the City of Chrudim to other cities.

- The ideal situation is when a town works over the long term on improving its performance in the field of sustainable development and freely comes to the conclusion that further systemic changes are not possible without objective information (see the approaches among LA 21 categories D-A). Each of these categories meaningfully bit-by-bit increases the demands on a town.

- It is very effective in a given issue (in the form of workshops, training sessions, etc) to gradually educate town administration officials in matters pertaining to sustainable development generally so that they are gradually familiarised with alternative indicators (although they are currently not being used directly).
- The process of introducing indicators should be gradual – a town should allow itself sufficient time for incorporating the indicators into its management system.
- The key to the correct implementation of indicators – carrying out the audit at the local level - is a highly motivated person who assists the administrators-auditors overcome general problems, motivates them and coordinates the entire activity so that the result of the implemented indicator set meets the expectations of the town representatives and experts, and ultimately the administrators themselves.
- What is very important is the opportunity to consult with the experts on individual areas of sustainable development where alternative indicators have been introduced. The experts provide the town with feedback and highlight where the town has managed to compile the information well and where there are potential shortcomings either in the collection of data or their implementation.
- Also beneficial to a town is the chance to consult over problems with the implementation of indicators with other towns either directly or through meetings of towns at conferences and workshops organised by HCCZ.
- It is also necessary to take into account the fact that the implementation of indicators may uncover problems that were previously not so obvious and which aggravate town inhabitants to a certain extent regarding a town's quality of life or the quality of the town's and the town council's work. It is therefore necessary to discuss these issues and explain the given findings to the town's population.
- To ensure that town management and indicator use settings are correct, it is necessary to maintain a certain continuity in a town's management – sustainable development must be in the interest of the alternating political representatives of the town. This has been managed so far in Chrudim. The LA 21 coordinator plays a significant role by ensuring continuity in these activities. What is also vital is the interest of the local population for whom the quality of life in the town (established by previous councils) is very important.

Appendix

Structured interview for the case study “Using indicators at the local level from the perspective of their creators and users: Implementation of an evaluation system – an indicator set in the town of Chrudim.”

(Evaluation of users from the perspective of creating, testing and implementing an indicator set at the local level)

A) Retrospective evaluation of the testing phase and pilot compilation of the Audit in the town of Chrudim in 2011-2012

1. What was the **motivation** for cooperating on the development and testing of the indicator set for evaluating sustainability at the local level, and what **barriers** had to be overcome?
 - a) from the perspective of the “authorities” (council, mayor, deputy mayor)
 - b) from the perspective of the executors (town administration officials)

- c) from the perspective of the LA 21 coordinator in the town
2. How would you evaluate the cooperation between the experts designing the indicators for individual areas of sustainability evaluation and between the indicator users-auditors?
 - a) from the perspective of professional communication (knowledge of issues at the town level, professional knowledge)
 - b) from the perspective of personal features (e.g. excessive promotion of the opinions of experts or excessive giving in to the opinions of the town representatives)
 3. Describe the **advantages** that the testing and pilot compilation of the SD Audit-indicator set implementation brought:
 - a) to the “authorities”
 - b) to the executors
 - c) to the inhabitants
 4. Describe the **disadvantages** that the testing and pilot compilation of the SD Audit-indicator set implementation brought:
 - a) to the “authorities”
 - b) to the executors
 - c) to the inhabitants
 5. Did you undertake any evaluation of the benefits of testing the indicator set? If yes, in what way (informal discussion, workshop discussion, etc.)?

B) Evaluation of the current process of implementing the indicator set – compiling the SD Audit in the town of Chrudim (2013)

1. As one of the four original test towns, you decided in 2013 to submit an application for the granting of LA 21 Category A. Why do you think the other three towns did not do the same?
2. What was the **motivation** of the Chrudim town representatives to implement the indicator set, and what **barriers** had to be overcome?⁵
 - a) from the perspective of the “authorities” (council, mayor, deputy mayor):
 - b) from the perspective of the executors (town administration officials):
 - c) from the perspective of the LA 21 activities coordinator in the town
3. What is the cooperation like with the national experts who now comprise the advisory-evaluative body?

⁵ Motivation and barriers may be the same as in the testing phase wherein the barriers could be overcome to a significant extent during the testing period. We nevertheless expect that new types of motivation could occur (e.g. new legislation, the increased interest of town inhabitants, better training of officials), as well as new barriers to implementation (e.g. changes in the composition of the town council, new town administration employees, loss of interest by town inhabitants). The question is therefore appropriate.

4. Describe **the anticipated and existing advantages** that compiling the SD Audit – indicator set implementation bring and will bring:
 - a) to the “authorities”
 - b) to the executors
 - c) to the inhabitants
 - a) Describe **the anticipated and existing disadvantages** that compiling the SD Audit – indicator set implementation bring and will bring:
 - b) to the “authorities”
 - c) to the executors
 - d) to the inhabitants
6. If at the end of undertaking the SD Audit – indicator set implementation – no evaluation was carried out by the Government Council for Sustainable Development’s LA 21 Working Group, do you think that you would still have carried out the Audit on the basis of the existing “Methodology”?
7. Would you have undertaken the compilation of the SD Audit – indicator set implementation – only the basis of the “Methodology” with the chance of consulting the national experts on the completed Audit, or was the fact that you had the opportunity to go through a testing phase a major impetus for you?
8. Will you incorporate the results of the Audit within the town management tools?
9. Will you present the results of the SD Audit to the town’s inhabitants in some way? If yes, how?
10. How would you change the present methodology in future years?

