

# The positive and negative lessons learned from Local Agenda 21

## What are the challenges for local climate adaptation?

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Keynote address at the Clim-ATIC International Project Conference  
Florø, Norway 26-28 October 2010

## Overview of the Local Agenda 21 initiative:

- Theme: **“The medium was the message”**
- Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 – the “Rio Action Plan for implementing sustainable development by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”
- Only one chapter of 40 – but by far the single most successful chapter of the entire action plan
- Why?
- What were the major lessons of the LA21 experience? And what is applicable (or not?) to the challenge of “community climate change adaptation” (the Clim-ATIC focus)

# A brief overview of the essentials of LA21 research:

- The research programme ProSus (Programme for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society: 1995-2009) provided a unique opportunity to document and evaluate national efforts to implement the Rio accords.
- The results on LA21 have been summarized in seven books and numerous reports/working papers (available at <http://www.prosus.uio.no/english/> and <http://www.prosus.org>)
- There are several overviews of analytic approaches and results – different projects, different domains, different approaches, in cooperation with a wide diversity of public, private and civil-society stakeholders.
- The best single overviews in English:
  - Lafferty, W.M. (ed) (2001a): *Sustainable Communities in Europe*, London: Earthscan Publications.
  - Lafferty, W.M. (2001b): “Local Agenda 21: The pursuit of sustainable development in subnational domains”, in Demitri Devuyst (ed), *How Green is the City?* New York: Columbia University Press, pp 63-84.
  - Bjørnæs, T., Norland, I.T. (2002): “Local Agenda 21: Pursuing sustainable development at the local level”, in *Realizing Rio in Norway: Evaluative Studies of Sustainable Development*, Oslo: ProSus, pp. 43-62.

## Selective key analytic perspectives:

- An inductive **short list over the most critical variables** from the 12-nation SUSCOM study
- A list of **four “key aspects in the search for underlying explanatory processes”** – moving towards more comprehensive theory
- Identification of **four “stylized models of implementation”**, generated to capture the most common types of LA21 initiatives actually being carried out
- A set of **“five benchmarks for evaluating and ranking LA21 achievement”**. Commissioned and promulgated by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment for systematic evaluation and pro-active policy.
- All four perspectives are thoroughly documented and applied in the sources listed: (Lafferty 2001a, 2001b; Bjørnæs and Norland 2002)

## These sources have been richly supplemented by:

Two further major collections in Norwegian:

- Aall, C., Høyer, K.G., Lafferty, W.M. (2002): *Fra miljøvern til bærekraftig utvikling i kommunene: Erfaringer med Lokal Agenda 21*. Oslo: Gyldendal forlag
- Aall, C., Lindseth, G., Lafferty, W.M. (2006): *Lokal Agenda 21 i Norge: Så mye hadde vi – så mye ga vi bort – så mye har vi igjen*. Oslo: Unipub

And a most-recent summary overview:

- Aall, C. (2010): “The early-stage experiences of local climate change adaptation in Norway: Comparisons with previous experiences of ‘MIK’ and ‘LA21’ ”. [Manuscript in progress – chapter in forthcoming book on *Democracy, governance and sustainable development: Moving beyond the impasse*, Meadowcroft, Langhelle and Ruud (eds), Edward Elgar 2011]
- The latter in particular provides an excellent “bridge” for discussing the possible transition from LA21 to “Community Climate-change Adaptation”

# Specific blueprints for a “bridge” have also been provided:

## Politically:

- The Norwegian Public Commission to prepare a White Paper on “The vulnerability of society and need for adaptation to the consequences of climate change” [Final report to be delivered Nov. 1, 2010]
- With an accompanying dedicated website: <http://nou-klimatilpassing.no/>

## Academically:

- Commissioned Report 1: *Klima i Norge 2010: Bakgrunnsmateriale til NOU klimatilpassing* (September 2009)
- Commissioned Report 2: *Konsekvenser av klimaendringer, tilpassing og sårbarhet i Norge: Rapport til Klimatilpassingsutvalget* (August 2009)
- Aall, C. and Norland, I.T. (2005): *Indicators for local-scale climate vulnerability assessments*, Report PR06-2005, ProSus and WNRI [Available at ProSus Perspectives website: <http://www.prosus.org/prosusFTP/prosusrep/publications.htm>]
- Aall, C. *Veiledning om klimatilpassing* [a comprehensive “Advisory on climate adaptation”], Vestlandsforskning-notat nr. 1/2009 [<http://www.vestforsk.no/notater/veiledning-om-klimatilpassing>]

## So the lessons, concepts and policy instruments from LA21 are definitely in place

But .....

### How “transferable” is the LA21 experience?

- The medium **was** the message: how much of the “medium” is currently in place and directly relevant for the adaptation challenge?
- Do we have a Rio-Johannesburg mandate for adaptation?
- Do we have an ICLEI as a crucial mediator and promoter between the international, the national and the local?
- Are the pro-active transitional ambitions of promoting “sustainable production and consumption” (LA21) essentially the same as the re-active protective ambitions of “climate-proofing local communities”?
- How essential – on a community to community basis – is the link between “mitigation” to “adaptation”?
- And finally, what of the critical issue of ethics? Is mobilizing for adaptation **now**, ethically the same as mobilizing for mitigation **then**?

## The medium was the message: but how much of the “medium” is in place and directly relevant for the adaptation challenge?

### And do we have a Rio-Johannesburg mandate *for* adaptation?

Answers:

- There is no Chapter 28 of a “Global Action Plan” for local community adaptation in place
- There is, in fact, not a single mention of climate “adaptation” in Agenda 21
- Nor any mention of “climate impacts” in the entire Section 4 on “Means of implementation”
- There are, of course, the assessments of the IPCC Working Group II as to “the vulnerability of *socio-economic and natural systems to climate change, negative and positive consequences of climate change, and **options for adapting to it***” – but these are hardly “marching orders” for the mobilization of local community adaptation initiatives

## Do we have an ICLEI as a crucial mediator and promoter of adaptation initiatives between the international, the national and the local?

Answer:

- ICLEI has initiated a “Local Government Climate Road Map” – but with nowhere near the type of commitment and follow-up as for LA21
- Further, the organisation has now lapsed into a seriously “moralistic” post-Copenhagen mode:

*“As Governments Failed [in Copenhagen], the Onus is on Us:*

*Why is it that national governments are struggling to commit, whereas **local governments have long been committed?** If the international community had followed the lead of local governments in seeking and implementing ambitious climate solutions, we would be well on our way to solving the challenge of climate change.*

*It is **our demand** that world leaders and Heads of State commit to a strong agreement here in Copenhagen. We ask you, nations, to commit to reduce emissions quickly and dramatically in accordance to science. We ask nations to avoid the thresholds of dangerous climate disruption. Your agreement **must** open up clean pathways out of poverty in developing nations. Nations **must** launch a clean energy revolution that transforms and revitalizes our economies.”*

Gino van Bingen, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI  
Copenhagen, 17 December 2009

**Are the pro-active transitional ambitions of promoting “sustainable production and consumption” (LA21) essentially the same as the reactive protective ambitions of “climate-proofing local communities”?**

**How essential – on a community to community basis – is the link between “mitigation” and “adaptation”?**

Answers:

- Mitigation and adaptation are not the same type of project, nor are they necessarily interdependent
- In general, the types of local communities that are most vulnerable – in both the North and South – are not major CO<sub>2</sub> emitters
- Further, the goals and targets for increasing adaptive protection (“resilience”) are in numerous ways (economically, materially, politically and ethically) fundamentally different from mitigation goals and targets
- The financial/material costs for providing **additional** civil protection – on the basis of **new and inherently controversial** risk assessments – are enormous
- The economic, political and ethical conditions for mobilizing collective actors and resources to meet these costs **today**, are fundamentally different from the conditions surrounding the “logic of implementation” of the Rio and Johannesburg agreements

## The “logic of implementation” underlying Agenda 21:

I.Pursue SD goals through internationally sanctioned “soft-law” regimes (Agenda 21, Climate and Biodiversity Conventions)

II.Recognize the principles of “burden-sharing” and “diverse responsibility” among “developed” and “developing” nations, rich and poor, north and south

III.Focus the ethical nature of the project – create moral pressure for action and results by stressing:

- The unanimous support of UN member-states for the Rio Accords: **consensual ethics**
- Growing pressure from natural scientists as to the “the carrying capacity of nature” and “limits for growth”: **natural-law ethics**
- Moral principles of both intra-generational and inter-generational equity: **the ethics of equal entitlement**

IV.Coordinate strategies, action plans and protocols through multi-level governance and democratic decision-making at the global, national, regional and local levels of responsibility

## All four of these premises/conditions have become seriously compromised over the past 2-3 years:

[As documented by the additional attached slides]

I.A general weakening of international “soft-law” regimes (Agenda 21, Climate and Biodiversity Conventions, Kyoto Protocol)

II.A general weakening in commitments on “burden-sharing” and “diverse responsibility” among “developed” and “developing” nations

III.A general undermining of all three ethical theories in support of the Rio implementation logic: consensual ethics, natural-law ethics and the ethics of equal entitlement

IV.A concerted breakdown in the need to coordinate strategies, action plans and protocols through multi-level governance and democratic decision-making across global, national, regional and local levels of responsibility



# Crucial factors undermining the prevailing logic and system for SD implementation

## I. Pursue SD goals through internationally sanctioned “soft-law” regimes (Agenda 21, Climate and Biodiversity Conventions)

- Undermined from the outset by critical academics:
  - “Sustainable development is a fudge.”
  - “It is not the “best”/“most correct” way to pursue ecological balance.”
  - “It doesn’t recognize the need for zero growth.”
  - “It is simply social democracy in a new and deceptive guise.”
  
- Undermined “from within” the UN system:
  - Prevailing conflicts between UNEP, UNDP and the Commission for Sustainable development.
  - Weakening of the commitment to Agenda 21 – introduction of the “Millenium Goals” and heightened “business partnerships” in Johannesburg.
  - A gradual massive shift away from SD and Agenda 21 towards the issue of Climate Change.
  
- A massive investment in time and resources to achieve the Kyoto Protocol (“The only game in town” – seriously flawed in its instruments, only partially supported, and lacking the most significant emitters)
  
- The Copenhagen fiasco: a near-total abandonment of Kyoto, with no serious prospect of achieving a more effective international agreement.



# Crucial factors undermining the prevailing logic and system for SD implementation

## II. Recognize the principles of “burden-sharing” and “diverse responsibility” among “developed” and “developing” nations, rich and poor, north and south

- Gradually undermined by:
  - Continuous non-performance from the wealthiest northern countries
  - Continuous corruption and internal conflicts in countries of the south – particularly in Africa
  - A growing critical consensus as to the ultimate effectiveness of multi-lateral and government-to-government foreign aid
  - A gradual shift in the aid profile: from the “promotion of growth” and addressing the “essential needs of the world’s poor” to CDMs and other quota-related climate-change reduction schemes
  - Increasing conflict among southern and northern constellations of countries as to the nature of climate-change impacts in general, and the responsibility for compensating impact costs in developing countries
  - Specific decreases in development aid by northern countries as a direct result of the growing global economic crisis

# Crucial factors undermining the prevailing logic and system for SD implementation

## III. Focus the ethical nature of the project: Create moral pressure for action and results by stressing:

- The unanimous support of UN member-states for the Rio Accords: **consensual ethics**;
  - Growing pressure from natural scientists as to the “the carrying capacity of nature” and “limits for growth”: **natural-law ethics**
  - Principles of both **intra**-generational and **inter**-generational equity: **the ethics of equal entitlement**
- All three ethical dimensions have been undermined by the factors outlined above:
    - A general weakening of the United Nations (globalization of the economy and the Bush anti-UN policies)
    - A specific weakening of “sustainable development” and “Agenda 21” as core aspects of the UN implementation strategy for the Rio Accords
    - A narrowing of the SD agenda to focus on climate change: The Stern Report and Nobel Peace Prize for Al Gore’s Powerpoint
    - A recent **further** narrowing (Tianjin) – away from a comprehensive global agreement on climate change toward piecemeal agreements
    - An increasingly politicized debate as to the general scientific basis for UN/EU-driven climate-change initiatives
    - A general failure to maintain the “principled priority” of “environmental concerns” vis à vis trade-offs with “economic” and “social” concerns (*vide* Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty)
    - An overall failure to achieve mobilization and implementation along **either** the intra-generational (“the essential needs of the world’s poor”) **or** the inter-generational (the rights of future generations) ethical dimensions of sustainable development

# Crucial factors undermining the prevailing logic and system for SD implementation

## IV. Coordinating strategies, action plans and protocols through multi-level governance and democratic decision-making at the global, national, regional and local levels of responsibility

- Seriously undermined, at all levels, by the growing financial-economic crisis:

### (1) At the global level:

- The process of globalization as primarily a programme for disseminating free-market capitalism and “competitive democracy” has seriously “stalled”
- A move from “Globalization” and “The End of History” towards “Protectionism and the Resurgence of National Interests”

### (2) At the supra-national and national level in Europe:

- Dramatic financial/economic threats to the very existence of the European Union
- Significant cut-backs in public-sector expenditures at the national level
- Growing unemployment, potential deflation and social conflict and disruption
- Increased support for extremist political parties, both ultra-nationalist and ultra-liberalist (free-market populism)

## Crucial factors undermining the prevailing logic and system for SD implementation (cont.)

### IV. Coordinate strategies, action plans and protocols through multi-level governance and democratic decision-making at the global, national, regional and local levels of responsibility

- Seriously undermined, at all levels, by the growing financial-economic crisis:

#### (3) At the local administrative level:

- Local governments are increasingly showing their “age” and “path-dependency” : No longer “parishes” or “cantons”
- No longer legalistic “regulators” of diverse sustenance economies: farming/forestry/fishing
- Increasingly decision-making arbiters and service-providers of economic and social-welfare “goods”, with an “overload” of responsibilities and an “underload” of financial resources
- Increasingly dysfunctional with respect to ecological degradation and sustainable development: governing according to “lines on a map” rather than ecological inter-dependency
- Responsible for governing and administrating a globally driven, short-term “culture of wants” – to the increasing detriment of a regionally dependent, long-term “culture of needs”

## Implications and challenges?:

Both the underlying logic and actual functionality of the Rio-Johannesburg project for global change are significantly weakened and currently “on hold”

The differences between mobilizing for mitigation and mobilizing for adaptation are more crucial and challenging than usually portrayed by either NGOs or critical academics

The challenges for increasing the capacity of existing institutions and procedures for civil protection and preparedness are considerable:

- How will the “new (additional) risk” be assessed and “weighted” on a standardized basis across community diversity?
- How will the “new risk” be made compelling in and through local/regional democratic and administrative procedures?
- Which communities and sectors at risk will be prioritized, and which not?
- Who will bear the substantial “new” costs for both risk assessment, resilience land-use planning, and damage compensation?
- How will the policy goal of exploiting the “positive consequences” of climate change be reconciled and integrated with the goal of protecting against negative consequences?

## Specific implications for the Clim-ATIC initiative?

### Promote a commitment to “base-line” Kantian ethics:

*Don't ask what your national government can/must do for you. Ask what you and your ecological region **should do as a moral community** to promote both mitigation and adaptation.*

### Promote a commitment to the most essential challenge of achieving sustainable development:

*Creating the political will, as a local/regional community, to institutionalize and carry through decision-making procedures for resolving trade-offs among economic, social and environmental interests. Adopting “Environmental Policy Integration” (EPI) as a crucial governing mechanism for regional SD.*

### Promote a new understanding of “differentiated responsibility”:

*Join insights into the dramatic climate-induced impacts of the Northern Periphery with the insights and adaptation initiatives of the Southern Periphery. A new form of “twinning” of regional community networks??*

- The “Hyogo Framework for Action: Disaster Risk Reduction: 2005-2015”
- The “Nairobi Work Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change”
- The UN follow-up: UNEP/ISDR (A) “International Strategy for Disaster Reduction”; (B) “Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction”; (C) “Local Government Alliance for Disaster Reduction”; “Guidance and Indicator Package for Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response” – all with specific climate-change related initiatives.

In sum:

There is a clear need for an initiative like Clim-MATIC

Nor bottom up

← ← *HORIZONTAL-COOPERATIVE* → →

*CROSS-BORDER*

But like regional initiatives everywhere

*INNOVATIVE*

*ANCHORED IN LOCAL IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT*

Neither top down

Clim-ATIC has – *potentially* – a very timely role to play

## Why “potentially” ??

### Good news:

- You have a “medium”:
  - A trans-border regional network
- You have a “message”:
  - The amazing evidence of climate change in the Northern Periphery

### Bad news:

- You have neither:
  - A clearly focused purpose or function (“dissemination”/ “training”)
  - Or viable operational resources

### My ultimate conclusion?:

- Some keynote speeches are more fun than others!

# Three summary perspectives on the LA21 experience

## I. The SUSCOM project: 1995-2000:



1998



1999



2001