

Local Agenda 21 as a Strategic Intervention in Illegal Holiday Home Development

Socio-economic impacts from the illegal development of holiday homes

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This paper explores the socio-economic impacts of the illegal development of holiday homes, drawing also on the case study of Asprovalta in Greece, and proposes Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) as a means that can provide a solution to the problem. Having established this link, it outlines the necessary pre-conditions for its successful implementation and concludes by suggesting their investigation in the Greek context in order to specify whether LA 21 can deliver change in the country.

The economic and social impacts of holiday homes vary. Many rural areas' economic base is being strengthened, as the use of holiday homes creates additional jobs and brings extra income to host communities (Deller, Marcouiller & Green, 1997, p. 687), while their seasonal letting out contributes to their owner's income. Moreover, holiday homes may give a boost to the development of domestic tourism which keeps holiday expenditure within a country (Dower, 1977, p.157; Weatherley, 1982, p. 45; Jaakson, 1986, p. 368). Finally, environmental benefits may occur through the rehabilitation of derelict or

substandard dwellings (Coppock, 1977a, p. 147). However, their development entails also some negative impacts, which are mostly related to their location in the peri-urban space. The sale of agricultural land as recreational plots may lead to the urbanisation of the countryside, while inflation of property prices due to the demand of holiday homes in attractive areas may lead to a conflict between local residents and potential buyers of land (Bielckus et al., 1972, p. 8; Coppock, 1977b, pp. 199, 200).

The negative effects usually outweigh the positive payoffs when the development of holiday homes takes place in defiance of the law. This fact becomes particularly evident in the case of Asprovalta, which is situated in the eastern part of the prefecture of Thessaloniki.



The location of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki in Greece

It comprises of an old settlement, planned in the 1920's and surrounded by a subsequent built area of holiday homes, that was illegally developed. It is a typical example of the way holiday homes are developed in the country, mostly being illegally built around existing settlements. Thus, drawing on the existing literature and the case of Asprovalta, this paper will focus on the negative economic and social effects of illegal holiday home development.

With regard to the economic impacts, there have been several cases in the USA, where the land around small or intermediate centres has become a target for speculators and land-grabbers. Thus, rural slums have been created by a number of "unfinished do-it-yourself vacation homes scattered around the countryside" (Ragatz, 1970, pp. 125, 126). In Greece, where there is a lack of planning control, land-grabbers encroach upon public land and they illegally parcel it out and sell it. In Asprovalta, this tactic resulted in the development of an expanding illegal settlement at the borders of the existing legal one.

Illegal development of holiday homes influences land uses and prices, entailing also a waste of land. In particular, in Asprovalta agricultural land that has been encircled within built parts, lost its particular character and remained uncultivated.

Furthermore, the environmental disruption from illegal holiday home development and the deterioration of natural resources may lead, in the long-

term, to the decrease of an area's attractiveness for recreational purposes, affecting local jobs and income.

Additionally, the life cycle of holiday home communities poses a concern in relation to impacts on the quality and quantity of services (Girard & Gartner, 1993, p. 693). Due to seasonal population increase, some public services (e.g. water and sewer systems, etc.) have to be expanded. However, on the one hand, planning for infrastructure is almost impossible when the future capacity of an area is unknown or when saturated areas continue to grow through land production (Patton & Sophoulis, 1983, p. 263). On the other hand, local government is saddled with comparatively large investment costs (Nyström, 1989, p. 184) which are not redeemed from the seasonal use of some services. In case that such investment is limited to the satisfaction of the permanent population's needs, it is evident that the supply falls short of the real needs. This situation is aggravated in illegal settlements of holiday homes due to the lack of data for the exact seasonal population and the unavailability of public land.

In any case, intervening in an area which is already illegally constructed is more expensive for national and local government than providing it with the necessary facilities before any construction takes place, as there are usually more difficulties – imposed by established circumstances – that have to be overcome. Moreover, the development of illegal

settlements of holiday homes entails a cost for the government at all levels, because of tax evasion from the illegal transaction of land, building permits that are never issued, the concealment of the holiday home as an asset and the concealment of income from its letting out or sale (Alexandropoulou & Makrakis-Karahalios, 1999, pp. 41, 42).

Apart from the above mentioned economic effects, there are several social impacts, affecting such communities. First, in several cases including Greece, the construction of holiday homes is often carried out by the owners themselves, especially when they come from a middle or lower-middle class background and they are unable to further invest in purchase of building materials or employment of engineers and workers (Weatherley, 1982, pp. 40, 45). As a result, the buildings are often of low quality or even dangerous and “they disrupt the scene rather than harmonise with it or enhance it” (Clout, 1977, p. 59).

The above mentioned, together with the lack of respect by urban families for the rural environment, the lack of strong psychological relations between the owners of holiday homes and the area where they are located and their perceptions concerning the development of the area lead to the degradation of the physical environment and the loss of the cultural identity of many settlements.

The solution to the aforementioned problems has to be considered in a holistic view, as they are related to three

characteristics which seem to be both causes and effects of illegal holiday home development. At a first level, it is evident that social justice, defined as the equal distribution of benefits and burdens among citizens and the elimination of mechanisms of oppression and domination (Young, 1990), is severely undermined in such settlements. This is due to the fact that their development not only entails economic and social problems but also deprives many members of society from the benefits they could have gained from the prudent exploitation - or the non-exploitation - of these areas. Moreover, these negative effects have a multiplicative character since the environmental deterioration often contributes to the decline of tourism, thus inhibiting the economic welfare of the local population. The problem is also aggravated by the lack of synergy i.e. communication, co-operation and understanding between local and national authorities, private investors and communities.

Local Agenda 21 as a strategic intervention

Taking all these into consideration, strategic intervention, as defined by Levy (2000) seems to provide a possibility for change as it refers to interventions which a) allow and expand the room for manoeuvre to contribute to social justice, b) have a multiplier effect and c) create synergy between actors in the market, the state and the civil society.

The adoption of LA 21 can be viewed as a strategic intervention, as it conforms to all the characteristics of the latter and therefore it can provide a solution to the problem of illegal holiday home development.

In particular, chapter 28 of Agenda 21, adopted by UNCED in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, makes an appeal to local authorities to adopt a LA 21 action plan, which will reflect the imperatives of sustainable development at the local level. It should be mentioned that as the notion of sustainable development incorporates environmental, economic, political, social and cultural dimensions (O’Riordan & Voisey, 1997; Mitlin et al, 1992), it also applies to the issue of illegal development of holiday homes, since the latter entails both environmental and socio-economic consequences.

In relation to the first characteristic of strategic intervention, inasmuch the notion of sustainable development has extended consideration of rights by stressing the importance of rights of future generations and under-privileged social groups to a safe environment (Haughton, 1999, p. 62), social justice and environmental justice appear intrinsically connected. Thus, since LA 21 is an effort to apply the principles of sustainable development locally, it can also be seen as a mechanism for the promotion of environmental, and therefore, social justice, expanding the room for manoeuvre with regard to local and national

government’s effort to regulate the peri-urban space.

Moreover, the adoption of LA 21 may have a multiplier effect. Opting for initiatives that address local people’s needs and aim at the protection of the environment, LA 21 may lead to an increase in the welfare of environmentally sensitive areas, where holiday homes are usually located. This may also lead to the increase of tourism, which is usually attracted to a region by the quality of the elements of the natural environment, giving a boost to the economic welfare of the local population.

Finally, LA 21 may contribute to the creation of synergy between various actors, as it encourages participation from all members of society in order to improve communication between them (Evans & Percy, 1999, p. 175) and it calls for the creation of partnerships in an effort to create the structures which will enhance locally responsive action (O’Riordan & Voisey, 1997, p. 19).

Criteria for the successful implementation of Local Agenda 21

The successful implementation of LA 21 requires the existence of some crucial pre-conditions (presented in the following diagram) at both the national and local levels, as the parameters for local action are often defined by central governments (ICLEI, 1998, p. 5).

At the national level, the existence of a decentralised framework seems to be of prior importance as local authorities can

perform their role more effectively if their responsibilities, powers and resources are guaranteed by constitutional arrangements (Gilbert et al., 1996, p. 26). However, it has to be accompanied by some other pre-conditions at the local level. First, the provision of adequate financial, human and technical resources to local authorities is essential in order to design and implement local policies and programmes (Gilbert et al., 1996, p. 33). Second, local authorities should be able to provide effective management, administrative structures and practices according to the policies that are going to be implemented (Gilbert et al., 1996, p. 35). Moreover, effective local leadership and policy setting, as well as efforts to achieve inclusiveness and participation of all social groups in the decision-making process, are important criteria for the successful implementation of LA 21.

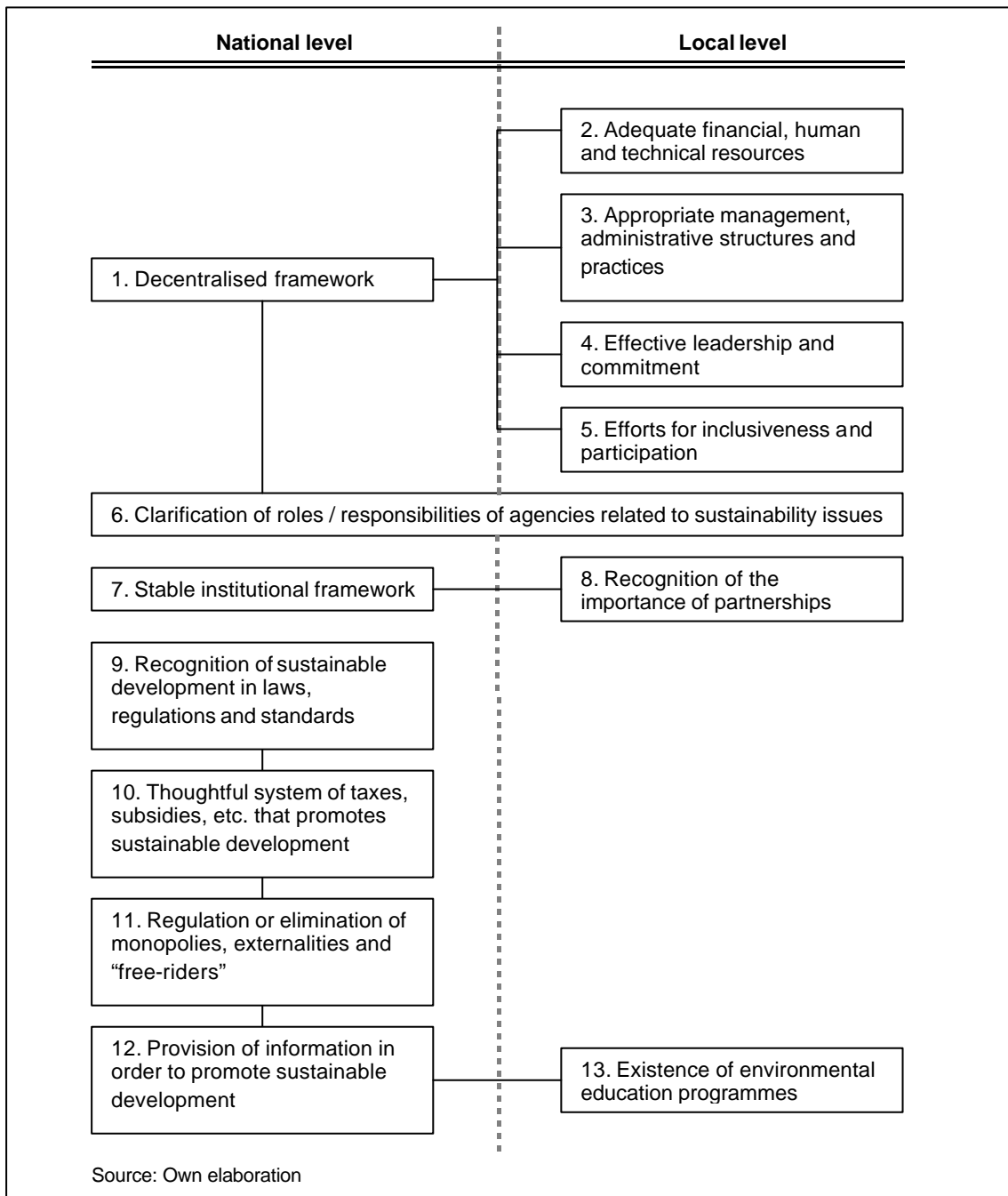
Another important criterion, which facilitates timely and rational decision-making on important issues is the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in policy areas related to sustainable development, both at the national and local levels (ICLEI, 1998, p. 13).

In addition, a stable institutional framework that assures effective long-term action by local authorities is required (Gilbert et al., 1996, p. 27). Furthermore, since local government seldom has the authority or the resources to address all sustainability issues, it should recognise the

importance of the formation of cross sector partnerships and act towards this direction.

The way local authorities respond to sustainable development challenges is also defined by existing laws and regulations, which have to establish sustainable development criteria, taking into consideration their potential impact on other fields. Additionally, national governments have to take into account that taxes, subsidies, fees and charges, regulations and expenditures may have an important impact upon prices of goods and services and they have to be adjusted so that their price impacts provide an economic incentive to citizens to pursue sustainable development (ICLEI, 1998, pp. 8 - 12). Rational market behaviour, infused with imperatives for sustainability is also enhanced by the regulation or elimination of monopolies, externalities and "free-riders" through the proper use of regulations and taxes.

Moreover, the provision of information on all these issues is important with regard to the consumers' ability to weigh up sustainability issues into their purchasing decisions (ICLEI, 1998, pp. 6 - 8). Finally, the existence of environmental education programmes is crucial for the delivery of skills, information and understanding that are necessary for the development of sustainable communities (Evans & Percy, 1999, p. 178).



Reflections

Having proposed LA 21 as a means that can provide a solution to the issue of illegal holiday home development, it would be interesting to explore whether the necessary preconditions for its successful implementation exist in the Greek context. Asprovalta could be an interesting case study since it is considered to be typical with regard to illegal holiday home development in Greece. At this point it should be mentioned that attention has to

be paid to the generalisation of the findings of this study to the whole country.

If these pre-conditions already exist, it would be interesting to see the impact of LA 21 on illegal development of holiday homes in Greece, in the cases that local authorities choose to implement it. If these pre-conditions are missing, which is the rule for the majority of Greek cases despite recent reforms, comprehensive actions should probably be taken specifically for their creation. In any other case an alternative solution to the problem has to be sought.

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