Land use management for sustainable European cities

Interview

Mayor of Kavala, Mr. Kostis Simitsis

Dear Mr Simitsis, could you please give us in one sentence the description of the Local Action Plan of Kavala?

A well-targeted action to involve local citizen in the planning and elaboration of city plans to integrate new areas within the urban web.

What are the real problems, needs or challenges that the Local Action Plan addresses?
The LAP considered the change of urban plan for the region of Panagouda, which although it is within the city limits due to historic reasons was neglected and was left out from the general urban plan. As a result the local residents although the hold titles of their property cannot capitalize on this by constructing new houses. This was a real problem for us and we used the LUMASEC project to mobilize the local citizens and through strenuous and numerous meeting of the Local Action Group to have them express their views and opinion on the planning of a new general plan that will incorporate the Panagouda region into the general urban plan of Kavala Municipality. At the same time, we consulted with the local citizens to introduce in the new building plan for Panagouda region new practices and regulations for development of the region taking into consideration the new environmental sensitivities, alternative energy source uses, a green city, etc.

What are the specific features of the context that have shaped the Local Action Plan?

The LAP for Kavala Municipality as implemented for LUMASEC project had the specific feature of "involving people" in the changes and planning process for the general urban development plan. It was the first time in our city to use such practices including into the process the citizens of the concerned area. This does not mean that we simply took into consideration their views and opinions. This was something that is required by law. In the LAP we went a step further. We organized the work in such a manner where the local citizens were invited to bring into the process their own planners, engineers and constructors to contribute specific elements on how to make their neighbourhood better, with contemporary urban uses, environmentally friendly and thus to increase the value of the much depressed area.

What are the key aims of the LAP and in what way do they contribute or add something to what is already being done in the city?

The key aim of the LAP was to prepare the plan to incorporate a specific swat of city land that was left out from the general urban development plan. As such, the LAP in the Kavala Municipality had a tremendous added value not only for the overall development of the city but it was extremely important for the local residents who see their property stagnant and undervalued.

All these will change with the implementation of the LAP. Yet, besides this main objective, implementing the LAP we managed to initiate a novelty for urban planning in our city and this is the participatory process that was used in the LUMASEC project.

What are the key components, measures or actions in the LAP?

The pivotal aim of the proposed Local Action Plan was to solve the immediate problems of people living in the area. Both the living standards and the financial status are going to rise with the implementation of the Local Action Plan. Furthermore, the Local Action Plan aims in raising the environmental pressure in the area which is very important because the nearby "Panagouda" urban forest is the bigger green space in the city of Kavala. Lastly, the Local Action Plan aims in creating a higher quality living environment for all Kavala residents and to increase Kavala's attractiveness.

The creation of an ecological park in the area defined from the forestry service as forest will promote sustainable development education amongst Kavala's students.

At city level what were the origins for the ideas in the LAP? When do they date back to? When did the actions sparked off by the LAP start? When did they end or are they still ongoing?

The exercise implemented by the LUMASEC programme had at its aim to create a Local Action Plan for the region of "Panagouda". A complete urban plan study for "Panagouda" region was undertaken as part of the work the municipality of Kavala was going to carry out in the LUMASEC project. The Local Action Plan witch is actually an extension of Kavala's urban plan is now finalized and subject to approval from local, regional and state authorities involved.

This was and still is a long and difficult procedure due to Greek state bureaucracy. When this procedure is over, "Panaguda" region will be officially part of Kavala's urban area and the residents will

be able to obtain property rights for the land they live in. Building renovation will then be legal and new buildings will be built with the appropriate permits from authorities. Part of the local action plan concerns "Panagouda's" stream which is now mapped and its boundaries are officially set by coordinates.

Key issue to the Local Action Plan is the involvement and participation of the region's inhabitants. Many of them were long time active, trying to find a solution to their problems and some of them were activated due to the anticipation raised from the implementation of LUMASEC project. They even appointed an external expert acting as their advocate planner.

What were the key stages of implementation? What were the set backs and obstacles faced? How were they overcome? It is easier to get people to talk about mistakes and bad practice when there was a success at the end. At what stage is the LAP at this moment?

The most difficult part of the project was the luck of official urban data for the region. Despite the fact that Kavala is part of the EU urban audit program, the available data are not adequate. Lack of inter-communal cooperation is also a big challenge. Residents living in adjacent to "Panagouda" regions feel threatened by the municipality's effort to embed "Panagouda" region to Kavala's urban plan. They fear that their properties value will diminish when "Panagouda" area starts development.

The biggest challenge is the creation of the ecological park especially regarding the few families living now in the area. The designation of the area as forest is something that can not be de-characterized according to the Greek legislation. So the next steps for the creation of the ecological park is to find the tools and procedures that will help the implementation of the eco-park especially regarding the demolition of the 20 buildings and the relocation of the families living there.

The LAP is completed and soon will be presented to the local residents for the final consultations.

How did the group learn from URBACT exchanges and network partners? What methods were used, what was learned and how was it incorporated into the LAP?

The way the LUMASEC project was organized and implemented each of the involved partners had an aspect of urban planning to contribute to the general partnership. We all learned from each other. A very useful element of the translational partnership were the study visits and the presentation of "good practices".

Who had the main idea, who was the initiator, and who were the main players?

The main idea was initiated by the office of the Mayor and the Municipal Committee that examines the problems of the city and sets the priorities for their solution. Key issue to the Local Action Plan was the involvement and participation of the region's inhabitants. Many of them were long time active, trying to find a solution to their problems and some of them were activated due to the anticipation raised from the implementation of LUMASEC project. They even appointed an external expert acting as their advocate planner.

Who brought the group together, called meetings and provided the animation?

The advisors and executives from the Municipality staff who had taken the responsibility to manage and implement the project had the task to mobilize the local citizens, invite them for consultations and organize and manage the several meetings of the LAG that was responsible for the overall supervision and management of the programme. The LUMASEC Lead Expert, Mr. Didier Vancutsem assisted the process and he had the chance to participate in a couple of the meetings providing useful and valuable guidance and advice.

How were managing authorities involved? What problems arose? What was learned? Have you had separate meetings with them to discuss the LAP(s)? Have they participated in the LSG at all?

Have any provisional indications been given in respect of possible funding?

The Managing Authority of the Region of East Macedonia – Thrace was very supportive to the implementation of LUMASEC. Although they are located in another city, they participate in a number of meetings and provided guidance and advice on specific issues that concern urban planning procedures. The representatives of other local authorities such as for example the Port Authority, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Archdiocese, etc., were well informed about the project LUMASEC and they participated in a number of meetings where they expressed the views of the specific interest of their organizations. They have also participated at the LSG and were supportive in the whole process. The implementation of the LAP will be funded by the Kavala Municipality.

How were the residents or users (primary stakeholders or target groups) involved? What problems arose? What was learned?

The residents were directly affected by the implementation of the LUMASEC project therefore were eager to participate at the LAGs. Invited by the LUMASEC managing and implementation team participated in the meetings, expressed their view and provided information concerning their neighbourhood. The main problem that was evident from this process was that the local residents did not have the expertise nor the capability to follow up with the technical specification of urban planning process. The problem found a solution once again at the suggestion of the local citizens who decided to hire an engineer to support them at the meetings and express their desired and needs in a more professional manner. This was much appreciated and was a lesson learned for us. We should use this practice – appoint an expert representing the local residents- when we make plans to alter, expand and create new urban plans.

What was the dynamic between the actors? How did different departments, different agencies and different types of stakeholder coordinate among themselves?

The cooperation among the different actors was extremely good and we did not face any major problems in coordinating and supervising the implementation of the LUMASECA project. I must say that the Municipal team of experts who had the responsibility to manage

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and implement the project were extremely competent and professional and they did a great job to coordinate all the events, meetings, activities, information, transnational meetings, etc. in the most effective and efficient manner.

Were any tools like stakeholder analysis used to check that all relevant partners had been included?

The local residents concerned about the outcome of the project had hired an engineer to represent their interests better and more professionally. The representative engineer used analysis tools that recorded the impressions, views and demands of the local residents for the purposes of the elaboration of the LAP. These were not quite "tools" but were very useful guidelines and indicators that offered special value to the LAP especially in the issues concerning the use of new technologies, environmental sensitivities, green city practises, etc.

What has changed in the city as a result of the work done in through the local action plan? For example, have new departments or stakeholders been brought on board? Have recommendations been adopted into city policy? Have city funds been allocated to the actions? Have funds been attracted from outside the city? Have certain actions been implemented or launched?

The main change is the process to include an isolated region, that of the Panagouda area within the new city plan. This is a very useful outcome that was implemented only through the output of the LUMASEC project. There is still work to be done and we need to attract funding from various sources in order to complete the works. Yet, thanks to the LUMASEC project we were able to overcome the most serious and important obstacles, whose of getting the local citizens participate in the process and take part in the urban planning process.

Were there any unplanned results that came about because of the work of the LAP?

The implementation of the LAP is proceeding according to the plans and we did not face any obstacles and unplanned results. We hope the process will continue as such to the end.

Can you measure the impacts at local level of of the LAP? What kinds of ways has there been an impact? Has the target group or target area experienced improvements?

The impact is very big in terms of value for the Panagouda area but very limited in terms of the whole municipality of Kavala. Yet, there are 2 elements that are of special value to the whole urban agglomeration. As mentioned before (a) the participatory process and (b) the Inclusion of "green city" ideas in the LAP were quite novel for the urban planning in Kavala and will become prototypes for future interventions in urban planning.

Does the LSG continue to meet and oversee implementation?

The LAP is under implementation and the LSG meets occasionally to supervise its implementation. The participation of residents' representative engineer is more prominent at this stage and its contribution supports the overall implementation of the LAP.

How has the action changed the way things are organised or done in the city?

We hope that the exercise that we implemented through the LUMASEC project will make the participatory process more prominent in the implementation of urban plans in the city. Moreover, we hope that the participatory process – initiated due to LUMASEC – will become common practice in other events planned by the city and other activities in the lives of the citizens.

Has the approach developed in the project become a mainstream aspect of delivery of services at local, regional or national level?

Not as yet. We hope that the lessons learned from the management and implementation of the LUMASEC project will be incorporated in the standard procedures of planning and implementing projects; at least on the local level.

Lessons learned: What were the key factors that led to success?

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The lesson learned was not to underestimate the valuable contribution of the local residents and the participatory process in the elaboration of city plans. The success for the project steamed from the fact the concerned residents had the chance to express their views and record and present their demands for the future restructuring of their city area.

What are the results and experiences related to the three levels of LUMASEC Spatial Patterns / Data, Governance and Capacity building (or other topics like Brownfields and Urban Sprawl)?

All the three levels of LUMASEC were tested in the project implemented by the Kavala Municipality. Yet, the one most successful and valuable one was the element of the participatory process and the involvement of the local citizens on the path to restructure and amend urban plans.

Are the lessons capable of transfer to another situation?

We certainly hope so. The process of participatory decision making that was introduced through the implementation of the LAP for LUMASEC project was a useful tool and interesting way of planning, managing and implementing other projects as well.

What issues are still unresolved? E.g. sustainability of funding, maintaining involvement of the partnership etc.

We are still in the process of securing funding to implement the final stage of the LAP

What makes this case interesting from an external perspective?

The element of working with other partners in different countries of the EU makes this whole exercise an interesting one. Urban planning has a very specific character attributed to the particular features of each region or city. Yet, through the cooperation process of the transnational partnership of LUMASEC we were able to capitalize on other experiences and make them transferable to our own practical needs. The role of the LUMASEC Lead Expert was extremely instrumental on the capitalization process of the transnational

cooperation.

Dear Mr. Simitsis, thank you very much for this interview

Characteristics of the Local Action Plan

Name of the LAP "integrating the Panagouda region into the Kavala municipal plan"
City – Region: Kavala, Northern Greece

Who was the grant recipient, who did the work?
The Municipality of Kavala was the grant recipient. The works implemented by the Technical Services of the Municipality and the office of the Mayor's advisors.

Contacts
Io CHATZYVARITIS (Ms), Mayor's Advisor

Involved persons in the LAP
Personnel from the Technical Services: Ms. Tzeni CHATZILIADIS, Ms. Kyriaki FOTIADIS

Other sources and reports
Civil Engineer, Ms. Tsanaka: representative of the local residents