



A REPORT FOR
THE CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

TOWARDS A GREEN ISLE?

Local Sustainable Development on the Island of Ireland

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About the Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh and Dublin, was set up in September 1999 to research and develop co-operation across the Irish border in education, health, business, public administration, communications, agriculture, the environment and a range of other practical areas. It is a joint initiative by Queen's University Belfast, Dublin City University and the Workers Educational Association (Northern Ireland), and is financed by the EU Peace Programme, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The Centre has published research reports on cross-border telecommunications, cross-border health services, all-Ireland co-operation to tackle disadvantage in education, EU cross-border funding before and after the Good Friday Agreement, cross-border co-operation in local government, cross-border co-operation between local history societies, the cross-border dimension of the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease crisis, and cross-border mental health and social well-being.

The Centre has also organised a wide range of North-South and cross-border conferences, seminars and study days in the areas of education, health, agriculture, European co-operation, tourism, ICT, telecoms, citizenship, animal health, currency issues, business research, community development and ageing.

The Centre also administers Universities Ireland and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), and is developing the online cross-border information signposting system, BorderIreland.info.

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Geraint Ellis, Brian Motherway, Bill Neill and Una Hand

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Abbreviations

CDBs	County/City Development Boards (RoI)
CSO	Central Statistics Office (RoI)
EAP	European Union Environment Action Programme
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (RoI)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
DAHGI	Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (RoI)
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (UK)
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
DoELG	Department of the Environment and Local Government (RoI), now the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
DoEHLG	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI)
DoE (NI)	Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland)
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Security and Public Safety (NI)
DRD	Department of Regional Development (NI)
FBC	Foyle Basin Council
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LAn21	Local Action 21
LGMB	Local Government Management Board
LSPs	Local Strategic Partnerships
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIEL	Northern Ireland Environment Link
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
PEACE	EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for Northern Ireland and the Southern border counties
RDA	Regional Development Agency (England)
SNI	Sustainable Northern Ireland (formerly Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme, SNIP)
TSN	Targeting Social Need
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United National Environment Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WRI	World Resources Institute
WMO	World Metrological Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

FOREWORD

by Judena Goldring

Director, Environmental Policy Division

Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on this draft report.

I am impressed by the quality of the report, which gives a comprehensive account of how Local Agenda 21 fits into the overall sustainable development agenda and presents a balanced analysis of the present position together with recommendations for future developments.

I do not propose to comment on the recommendations in detail. However in relation to recommendations 1 and 2, I can confirm that:

- The Department of the Environment is continuing with work to deliver the commitment in the discussion paper *Promoting Sustainable Living* to publish a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland; and
- Provision for the effective delivery of [local] sustainable development is one of the factors being taken into account in the Review of Public Administration.

I welcome the positive references in the Report to the Northern Ireland Regional Development, Regional Transport, Waste Management, Biodiversity and Investing in Health Strategies, and the acknowledgement that these, together with the New Targeting Social Need and equality agendas, reflect the commitment to sustainable development in the Programme for Government 2002-2005. This commitment continues under the current direct rule arrangements, most recently confirmed by the statement “sustainable development...continues to underpin the development and delivery of public sector policies and services under the current administration” in paragraph 44 of the Northern Ireland Priorities and Budget 2004-06, published on 13th January 2004.

The Environmental Policy Division (with myself as Director) within DOE has the lead responsibility in taking forward sustainable development. However for the past two years the Division’s main efforts and focus have been on clearing the backlog of overdue environmental

EU Directives and building expertise and experience in environmental policy development. We now have up-to-date environmental regulation in Northern Ireland in all the key areas, including waste management, water and air quality and natural heritage, for the first time. This effort has involved the making of around 40 pieces of legislation within the last two years, some of which – for example, the Waste Management Licensing, End of Life Vehicles, Landfill Regulations and the Environment (NI) Order – bring in major new controls.

I am confident that this has been the right priority because without a modern environmental regulatory framework in place it is very difficult to take forward sustainable development in any meaningful way. Indeed, all of our work on the regulatory framework is an essential part of the sustainable development process. Having cleared the regulatory backlog, the Department is now looking forward to taking increased action in the area of sustainable development. We are putting increased resources into a team, and work on a sustainable development strategy will, therefore, receive renewed impetus.

The Department is also interested in taking forward discussions on the role it might play in developing the new Sustainability and Environmental Governance Centre in Queen's University Belfast.

Overall, therefore, there is a fairly positive picture to show for sustainable development in Northern Ireland. I hope some of this very significant progress can be reflected in your report.

Finally, I can assure the readers of this report that the sustainable development is, and will continue to be, an important theme underpinning the work of this Department, and of its Environmental Policy Division.

JUDENA GOLDRING

Director

Environmental Policy Division

TOWARDS A GREEN ISLE?
LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND
A report for the Centre for Cross Border Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Project Overview

This report presents the outcome of a one-year research project on local sustainable development on the island of Ireland funded by the Centre for Cross Border Studies. The project has been undertaken by a team of researchers based in Belfast and Dublin, coordinated by the School of Environmental Planning at Queen's University, Belfast.

The aims of the project were to:

- Ascertain and compare the current state of implementation of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) programmes and projects in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- Explore and compare the degree to which LA21 processes can contribute to civic identity-building in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and explore the approaches to civic participation;
- Explore the potential for collaboration between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in establishing and implementing local sustainability strategies.

The research methodology used in this study included:

- A desktop review of sustainability policy on the island of Ireland;
- Quantitative research on the adoption of LA21 and local sustainable development processes among local authorities and stakeholders using extensive postal surveys;
- Qualitative research using case studies and focus groups exploring the themes identified in the surveys;
- Focus and discussion groups involving representative stakeholders from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to review the project findings and to reach tentative conclusions.

Each of these four components has contributed to a rigorous analysis of the state of local sustainable development across the island, resulting in a set of recommendations that aim to reinvigorate local sustainability practice in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The report concludes that much progress has been made across the island of Ireland over the

past decade, particularly in terms of enhancing the capacity for local sustainability, with the activities of committed individuals, developments in the institutional frameworks and the mobilisation of communities all improving significantly. However, this capacity is not yet being used to its full potential, with an inconsistent promotion of sustainable development, particularly in relation to the transition from policy formulation to implementation.

The shift in emphasis marked by the evolution of Local Agenda 21 to Local Action 21 at the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 has yet to resonate within the island of Ireland. The report argues that it is now time to re-launch local sustainable development and that distinct benefit can be secured if this incorporates cross-border cooperation and environmental citizenship. An accelerated sustainability process will, however, require action at every level of governance, the inclusion of social partners and individual citizens, and a renewed commitment to the principles of sustainable development.

While the full report gives a complete account of the research project, this summary outlines the main lines of argument and provides the main findings and recommendations in full.

2. Sustainable development policy in an all-island context

The initial stage of the research involved a review of the policy context within which local authorities and sustainability practitioners operate on the island of Ireland. This found a strong policy hierarchy for sustainable development from the global to the regional, that stressed the urgency of action on a range of sustainability issues and placed the force of the UN, EU and national governments behind the implementation of LA21.

The policy review also revealed how national policy has evolved rapidly in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland over the last ten years, with many parallels between the processes in each country. In the case of the Republic of Ireland, this process has quickly developed an institutional framework better suited to the delivery of sustainable development, which now includes regional authorities, city and county development boards (CDBs) and strategic policy committees (SPCs) within the local authorities. All of these bodies have a strategic focus and an approach based on partnership and inclusion. As these are essential prerequisites for effective local sustainability practices, this framework offers significant potential for the future. It is, however, too early to fully measure the impact of these new structures, as so far they have only shown themselves to be capable of planning and goal setting, with their abilities to implement

too nascent to evaluate.

Most of these new institutional elements do not have direct parallels in Northern Ireland, although the newly established local strategic partnerships (LSPs) may develop along the lines of the CDB model. Although the other devolved administrations in the UK have developed integrated frameworks for implementing and monitoring sustainability practices, such development seems to be less evident in Northern Ireland.

Although the potential for cross-border cooperation in sustainability has been recognised by the North/South Ministerial Council, it is yet to be acted upon.

3. Case Studies in Local Sustainable Development

The policy review was supplemented by four case studies that illustrate how sustainability can be promoted on the ground. The case studies were:

- ***Foyle Basin Council (FBC)***

An umbrella voluntary organisation, working on the Derry/Donegal border with the aim of promoting environmental quality in the Foyle river basin, and working with councils on both sides of the border in the promotion of Local Agenda 21.

- ***Suburban Environmental Management – A Participatory Approach (SEMPA)***

A pilot project funded by the EU LIFE programme, led by Fingal County Council, that piloted innovative ways of involving local communities in area planning processes. Several communities from the north Dublin suburbs were involved in a two-year process.

- ***Sliabh Beagh Cross-Border Partnership***

A partnership of 13 community development associations based around the Sliabh Beagh Mountain in counties Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan. It is a local rural regeneration project based on initiatives such as a large-scale walking/cycling mapping project, ICT networking projects, and an arts programme.

- ***Groundwork (NI)***

A Belfast-based NGO working to bring communities together through local urban regeneration projects. It is seen to have been successful in a number of cross-community initiatives in interface areas of Belfast.

These case studies were selected either as examples of good practice or as projects that offered significant lessons on advancing sustainability through an integrated and participatory

approach. They illustrate the potential of local sustainable development and show how this can incorporate all-island and environmental citizenship dimensions, while revealing some of the challenges faced. These include the need to adopt a culture of participation within local authorities and to improve the capacity of the voluntary sector to engage with sustainability processes, as well as the pivotal influence of existing power structures. The case studies also underline the fact that, in the absence of a broader sustainability culture, local successes tend to depend on the efforts of specific individuals, committed and informed champions, within both the local authorities and community groups.

4. Local Agenda 21 on the island of Ireland: a review of progress

A major element of the research involved quantitative surveys of both local authorities and social partners to assess the progress of and issues raised by local sustainable development. All local authorities on the island of Ireland were surveyed, with the LA21 officer or equivalent as the preferred point of contact. 43% responded to the postal questionnaire sent out in June 2002. Questions covered topics such as responsibility for LA21 and sustainable development, whether formal LA21 plans had been developed, what this might have entailed, what were the barriers to better development of the principles, and opinions on the terminology and concepts of local sustainable development. The majority of respondents had sustainable development as just one area of responsibility, with a quarter spending less than 10% of their time on it. Most local authorities had engaged in some sustainability related activities, with just over half having adopted a formal LA21 plan. Only 43% of respondents thought that "Local Agenda 21" was an appropriate term for the process of promoting local sustainable development. Both north and south, support from senior management or from central government is seen as a main ingredient for success.

204 social partners were also surveyed, identified through various databases of interested NGOs and community groups, and also through the local authority questionnaire, which included a request to identify interested partners. A response rate of 18% was achieved. The social partners' survey covered similar areas to the local authority survey in order to provide alternative viewpoints on these issues. Among the respondents, the main sustainability-related activity was awareness raising, followed by capacity building. Awareness among the groups of their local authorities' LA21/sustainability activities was not very high. The social partners were more sceptical about claims of local success in promoting sustainable development. The low response rate in the partners' survey reflects, among other things, the absence of accurate

databases of community groups, the varied nature of such groups' interests and priorities and the customary difficulties in obtaining responses to a postal questionnaire. However, the data set was considered large enough to generate the full range of pertinent issues and allow the analysis move forward to the more in-depth qualitative phase.

This quantitative research was complemented by three focus groups organised with practitioners:

- Cork: seven participants from local community groups plus one local authority (CDB) official;
- Dublin: five local authority personnel from three authorities and two related agencies;
- Belfast: four local authority personnel and two individuals representing social partners.

These group discussions were used to examine some of the main findings from the surveys and case studies in more detail. They also allowed for substantial additional input of experience and viewpoints from practitioners and added considerably to the research project's information base.

Focus group participants confirmed that many activities are taking place in all areas that could be described as LA21-related but are not currently progressing under this banner. They also described a working reality that is crowded with priorities and pressures, and the consequent need for simplifying structures and increasing resources.

5. Key findings

These different research activities have revealed a sufficiently complete picture of local sustainable development on the island of Ireland to warrant the following findings:

5.1 Progress of LA21

- 54% of local authorities on the island of Ireland have now begun a process of LA21.
- Beyond this quantitative finding, it is clear that LA21 has been very successful in raising awareness of the possibilities of local sustainable development and in stimulating debate on how local areas can contribute to the challenges created by Ireland's links to a global community facing severe ecological, economic and social problems. The primary concern remains the ability to move from debate to action.

- The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have many examples of successful local sustainable development, which have not only focused on establishing frameworks for addressing environmental issues and embedding sustainability concepts in local government, but also provided some path-finding examples of participatory inclusion.
- The progress of local sustainable development is, however, disparate and needs acceleration through additional support and increased prioritisation at all levels of governance.
- The structure of local governance has changed considerably in recent years, largely in a manner that is potentially favourable to the sustainability agenda, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. However, there is a concern that as sustainability is incorporated into emerging governance structures, it may lose the fundamental identity that has been so important in highlighting the need for long-term strategies and establishing links between the local and the global. There is also a risk of separation and uneven prioritisation of the environmental, social, economic and cultural components of the concept.

5.2 Policy framework

- The policy framework for sustainable development appears well developed at the national levels of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- However, to date this framework has not been fully successful in embedding sustainability values in local institutions and practices. An acceleration in pace is required in terms of exploiting the potential of existing structures to enhance local sustainability practices.
- The changes to local governance in the Republic of Ireland, and potentially coming from the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, could enhance the opportunities for the policy development at a local level, but for reasons articulated above should not be solely relied upon to adequately steer the transition to sustainability.

5.3 Participation, environmental citizenship and communication

- Local participation practices have developed considerably in the past decade. While local authorities are beginning to bring a wide range of stakeholders on board for discussions of sustainability, it is often not on a full partnership basis, and there is an excessive reliance on local authority leadership. Full partnership is a goal in itself, and

also a key step towards the realisation of local sustainability.

- LA21 has the potential to foster enhanced civic identity and the research has found examples where this is occurring on a localised scale. However in general LA21 has not generally been sufficiently embedded in truly discursive participatory processes to enable the wider potential of environmental citizenship to take root in an island context of cultural division, and its potential is, for the most part, underdeveloped.
- Awareness among communities remains an issue of concern, particularly of the language and framework of sustainability utilised by local authorities. Work is required on language and communication in order to facilitate a fuller sharing of concepts and values.

5.4 The role of champions and capacity building

- Success in LA21 often depends on specific committed individuals in local authorities or NGOs. There are many such champions for sustainability who deserve recognition and support.
- While these individuals may provide inspiration for those around them, an over-reliance on individual leadership leaves local sustainable development vulnerable and not fully embedded in governance structures.
- A key factor in the successful promotion of LA21 is therefore the development of a culture of, and senior political and officer support for, local sustainable development within local authorities so that individual action is rewarded and allowed to spread.
- The prime requirement for further embedding local sustainability concepts is energising and capacity-building among practitioners, through the support and demonstrable commitment of managers and government.

6. Recommendations

These findings imply a strong and extensive agenda for action to enhance and extend the implementation of local sustainable development on the island of Ireland. The central goal is to further embed local sustainability concepts and values in local government and local development, both institutionally and among practitioners. In presenting the recommendations, the research suggests that it is appropriate to focus on five themes, or priorities, that define the main actions that should take place, with the all-island dimension particularly providing a new way of looking at networking and opportunities for mutual learning. This dimension should

become a key driver for refocusing of attention.

While the full report gives a detailed justification for each of these recommendations, all are listed here, along with the stakeholders best placed to take them forward.

Theme 1: The policy and institutional context for local sustainable development

RECOMMENDATION 1: Northern Ireland should develop and publish its own Guidelines on Local Action 21.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment (NI), District Councils, Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI).

RECOMMENDATION 2: Northern Ireland should publish a Sustainable Development Strategy, articulating its own vision for the region.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment (NI), Northern Ireland Executive/NIO Ministers.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The delivery of sustainable development should inform the evolution of governance structures in Northern Ireland.

Main stakeholders involved: Northern Ireland Executive/NIO Ministers, Northern Ireland Assembly, Review of Public Administration.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Republic of Ireland should update and re-issue Towards Sustainable Local Communities: Guidelines on Local Agenda 21 (2001).

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI).

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should each re-establish an LA21 practitioner network, supported by central government.

Main stakeholders involved: Local Government (NI and RoI), Comhar, SNI, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

RECOMMENDATION 6: Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should develop an integrated support package aimed at enhancing the capacity of local governance to sustain and implement local sustainable development. This package should include

training, policy guidance, achievement recognition and programme funding elements.

Main stakeholders involved: Local Government (NI and RoI), Comhar, SNI, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), CBDs (RoI), LSPs (NI).

Theme 2: Communication and language

RECOMMENDATION 7: Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should develop and issue communication guidelines for local sustainable development.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should work together to create and endorse a local sustainable development icon or marque.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

Theme 3: Integration and multi-dimensional sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 9: A distinction should be maintained in government policy and initiatives between the modernisation (reform) and sustainability agendas.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

Theme 4: Fostering environmental citizenship

RECOMMENDATION 10: The role of social partners in LA21 needs to be specifically recognised and strengthened by linking LA21 to existing community regeneration practices and providing support funding for the voluntary sector.

Main stakeholders involved: Local government (NI and RoI), social partners (NI and RoI), Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), CBDs (RoI), LSPs(NI).

RECOMMENDATION 11: Direct public engagement in local sustainable development initiatives needs to be strengthened and deepened.

Main stakeholders involved: Local government (NI and RoI), Department of the Environment,

Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

RECOMMENDATION 12: Locally elected representatives should be targeted as a key group to be brought into the sustainability agenda.

Main stakeholders involved: Local government (NI and RoI), Department of the Environment and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

Theme 5: Cross border considerations

RECOMMENDATION 13: Creation of an All-Island Local Sustainable Development Roundtable

Main stakeholders involved: North/South Ministerial Council, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), SNI, Comhar.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Convening of an All-Island Summit on Sustainable Development.

Main stakeholders involved: North/South Ministerial Council, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

RECOMMENDATION 15: Establishment of an all-island element to the networks of local sustainable development practitioners.

Main stakeholders involved: Social partners, local government, CDBs (RoI), LSPs (NI), SNI, Comhar.

7. Final Reflections

Sustainable development is driven by a way of thinking and doing based on social, economic and environmental principles. The local sustainability agenda centres on embedding these principles into all aspects of local government and community development. Since governance and local development are at the heart of the project, local and central government institutions must take the lead. Not only are they the key actors in developing governance systems, but they must also recognise their position in terms of resource advantage and the consequent need to ensure that communities are empowered and resourced to fully participate.

The recommendations above indicate the scale of the task required to ensure the incorporation of sustainable development values into local governance and local development. Clearly this is not a short-term project, reflecting the significant changes implied in governance, partnership, decision-making and indeed everyday behaviour and cultural practices. However the central theme of the recommendations is the reinvigoration of existing processes and the realignment of future developmental paths in favour of sustainability values. In other words, many positive steps can be taken relatively quickly.

The call to move from agenda to action acknowledges the particular value of implementation in demonstrating tangible value of local sustainability that will lead to increased political and public support. Moving to action also starts a process of learning-by-doing, as stakeholders begin with small experiments or gentle innovation that can develop both competence and confidence.

The findings of this project provide an opportunity for reflection for all local sustainability stakeholders on the island of Ireland and complements the calls to action that came out of the 2002 World Council on Sustainable Development. The opportunity to learn from the experiences of the last decade and refocus on an accelerated transition to truly sustainable development should be not be lost.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The global and local context for sustainable development*

The research for this report was undertaken over twelve months from March 2002 to March 2003, exactly ten years after the world woke up to the idea of sustainable development at the Rio Earth Summit. This was a propitious time for such a project, with growing frustration towards the idea of LA21 in the UK and Ireland (eg see Tuxworth 2001, Earth Summit Ireland [ESI] 2002) and when a decade of progress was revisited at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) at Johannesburg in August 2002. In its issue of September 2002, published just before the WSSD, *The Ecologist* reviewed the state of the planet and compared the official promises made in over 300 international environmental treaties with what had actually been achieved in addressing global environmental and social problems (see Appendix 1). While the agreements made at the Rio Summit in 1992 were hailed as being ground breaking at the time, and certainly stimulated some extremely positive initiatives, the evidence quoted by *The Ecologist* suggests these have not fully lived up to their intent. At the same time, the elements of sustainable development have never before been so high on the global political agenda and the extent of sustainability-related legislative and institutional change over the last decade has been remarkable. On this basis, the potential for future progress is considerable, but is yet to be fully reflected in material changes in society.

This report does not intend to comprehensively review the state of the environment on the island of Ireland but draws attention to the fact that the two jurisdictions[†] were signatories to the historic agreements made at Rio, and that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland share environmental, social and economic challenges that urgently require coordinated action. This fact is the starting point for this report and it examines the role of local sustainable development initiatives, particularly Local Agenda 21 (LA21), in meeting this challenge. LA21 was one of the most positive, some may say idealistic, initiatives that emerged from the Rio Summit, and placed a particular emphasis on how sustainable development could be “made real” through changing individual outlooks and behaviour. While later sections of the report further explain the importance of LA21 to the broader sustainability agenda, it is enough here to stress how

*Throughout this report the terms “sustainable development” and “sustainability” are used interchangeably.

†In the case of Northern Ireland, the UK government retains competence for foreign affairs and signs such international agreements on behalf of all the devolved administrations.

local action should be as important to our sustainable future as any of the international conventions or advances in science or technology.

LA21 was re-evaluated and re-launched at Johannesburg, with a clear message emerging that more has to be done to further sustainability at the local level. This report considers the implications of this new context for the island of Ireland, implores the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to take forward LA21 together and calls for realism about the outcomes of current and past activity.

1.2 Aims of the study

It was in this context that the Centre for Cross Border Studies provided funding for this research, with the key aims being:

- To ascertain and compare the current state of implementation of Local Agenda 21 programmes and projects in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- To explore and compare the degree to which LA21 processes can contribute to civic identity building in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and explore the approaches to civic participation involved;
- To explore the potential for collaboration between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in establishing and implementing local environmental strategies and broader community bonds.

1.3 Outline of research methodology

In order to address these aims, a research methodology was adopted with the following elements:

- **Review of policy contexts**

Sustainable development can be seen at once as an all-encompassing idea and as providing a very specific focus for public policy (see Section 3). One consequence of this is that the policy context for local sustainable development is extremely dispersed, covering almost all sectors (health, agriculture, planning etc) and every level of governance (global, European, national, regional and local). The first stage of the research was therefore to make sense of this policy context, identifying the most

significant guidance for LA21 in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and to provide a brief evaluation of the differences in the policy framework either side of the border.

- **Survey of local sustainable development practitioners**

The main primary research activity for the project has been two major surveys of local sustainable development practitioners in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These aimed to reveal the progress of LA21 and probe the views of practitioners on how well they thought local sustainable development was being implemented (see Appendices 2 and 3). Although some similar surveys had previously been undertaken in Northern Ireland (eg SNIP 2000), this research was unique in a number of respects. First, it involved the only surveys undertaken of LA21 activity on both sides of the border. Second, it potentially offers a more accurate picture of LA21 as it involves the views of not just local authority officers, but also their social partners and any alternative perspectives they bring. Third, the surveys for this project examined issues that went beyond the relative narrow confines of LA21 and explored a wider range of activities that were contributing to local sustainable development. The details of the two surveys are as follows:

- *Survey of local authorities*

The survey was targeted at all relevant local authorities on the island of Ireland, and a database of appropriate contacts was developed from existing address lists of organisations such as the Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme (SNIP, now Sustainable NI) and the Department of Environment and Local Government (DoELG, now the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, DoEHLG) in the Republic of Ireland. The survey forms were piloted on four local authorities with the final survey being dispatched in mid-June 2002. A sample of 65 organisations was identified, covering Northern Ireland District Councils, and County Councils, Borough Councils and Regional Authorities in the Republic of Ireland. Following an intense process of follow up calls, 31 responses were received, 28 of which were valid, 12 (43%) from Northern Ireland, 16 (57%) from the Republic of Ireland. This equates to an overall response rate of 43%, (46% for Northern Ireland and 41% for the Republic of Ireland).

- *Survey of social partners*

Phase 2 of the survey involved posting questionnaires to 204 social partners, identified through various databases of interested NGOs and community groups, or through the local authority questionnaire, which included a question on identifying relevant partners. For the purposes of this study social partners were defined as being non-governmental or semi-state organisations involved in the promotion of sustainable development-related initiatives in a local area. The survey was targeted at a wide range of partners, covering all the main groupings of stakeholders usually involved in LA21 (see Table 2.1). 39 responses were returned, 36 of which were valid (18%), 21 from Northern Ireland and 15 from the Republic of Ireland. The response rate was affected by the fact that a significant percentage (5-10%) of forms were returned as having the wrong address, reflecting inaccuracies in the original databases. It also appears that there is a particularly low response rate from organisations that deal primarily with economic and social issues, reflecting the view of the local authorities that these sectors had not fully engaged with local sustainable development initiatives (see Section 5). This, of course, contributes a finding in itself.

As with any postal survey, the interpretation of these surveys take into account the possibility of response bias. It is possible that those councils that had more progress to report were more likely to respond as were those social partners that had more involvement in local sustainable development initiatives. The results have been reported in later sections taking this issue into account, but the risk of research imbalance has also been minimised through methodological diversity, where the survey findings are completed by other data-gathering approaches, noted below.

- **Focus groups and discussion forums**

Given the complex and contextual nature of the way local sustainable development has been interpreted and implemented, it was considered that the quantitative data generated from the surveys would have to be supplemented by more qualitative research to provide a richer understanding of the key issues. The most appropriate approach was considered to be in-depth small group discussions, which would provide an opportunity for practitioners to talk to one another in their own words, a proven way to gain valuable insights into contemporary environmental issues (Burgess et al, 1988a, 1988b). Discussion was specifically geared to the probing of unclear or interesting issues that emerged from the survey responses. An attempt

was also made to bring together representatives of both local authorities and social partners to provide some creative tension and further uncover the nature of their differing perspectives. Three such focus groups were organised to reflect different geographical areas of the island of Ireland, as follows:

- *Northern Ireland*: This group was composed of representatives of four local authorities (Belfast, Ballymena, North Down and Carrickfergus), along with SNI and Invest NI.
- *Cork*: This group was primarily composed of members of Cork Environmental Forum, mostly drawn from the NGO community, although local authority representatives were also present.
- *Dublin*: This group was composed of practitioners from three of the four Dublin area local authorities, including LA21 practitioners and CDB members.

A full list of the people who formed the focus groups is included in Appendix 6.

The focus groups were supplemented by two further discussion groups, one in Northern Ireland and one in the Republic of Ireland, bringing together groups of sustainability practitioners to test the appropriateness and feasibility of the tentative conclusions and recommendations emerging from the research. In Northern Ireland the group was based on those members of the Civic Forum who had recently been involved in formulating its response to the DoE (NI)'s Draft Sustainable Development Strategy. In the Republic of Ireland the group was convened by Comhar and was principally composed of its Education and Awareness Working Group. The full list of the people who took part in these discussions is included in Appendix 6.

- **Case studies**

In order to further highlight some examples of good practice or cases where the themes of civic identity and sustainability were particularly well connected, four case studies were selected to contribute the following to the research (adapted from European Commission, 1999, p 74):

- *Illustration*: to add realism to the evaluation by providing concrete examples of issues raised in the surveys.
- *Exploration*: to assist in identifying various points of view or different constraints, which can help in testing or building hypotheses.

- *Critical analysis*: to verify and validate survey findings.
- *Analysis of implementation*: to examine how effective sustainable development policy has been in terms of its outcomes.
- *Analysis of process*: to examine how effective sustainable development policy has been in terms of its process

The four cases were chosen carefully and in consultation with the Advisory Group established for the study. Two were selected to explore civic identity issues - Groundwork in Northern Ireland and SEMPA in the Republic of Ireland; and two to reflect cross-border working in local sustainable development - Foyle Basin Council and Sliabh Beagh. These case studies were conducted in different ways but were mostly based on semi-structured interviews with local authority employees, politicians and members of social partners. Synopses of these case studies are provided in Section 4, as illustrations of how local sustainable development is being implemented across the island of Ireland, with a full account provided in Appendix 4.

1.4 Structure of the Report

This report comprises six main sections, describing the findings of the research process described above. Following these introductory comments, the next section explores the concept of sustainable development and outlines local attempts to further the sustainability agenda. The third section reviews the policy contexts for sustainability on global, European and national levels, including those in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and highlights the importance of environmental citizenship to the progress of sustainability initiatives. The fourth section describes how a number of organisations have responded to this policy context in the form of the four case studies described above. Section 5 reports the main findings that arise from the research, drawing on the surveys and focus groups. Section 6 makes a number of recommendations intended to re-energize local sustainable development in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The report also includes a number of Appendices. Appendix 1 summaries the agreements and outcomes of the last ten years of sustainable development. Appendices 2 and 3 report the full statistical findings of the two surveys undertaken as part of this research. As these surveys include a wealth of information on how LA21 is being pursued on the island of Ireland, only the main findings are discussed in the main body of the report. However a full analytical account of these surveys is available in the form of two separate, unpublished reports, available from the

research team. Appendix 4 provides more detail on the case studies covered in section 4. Appendix 5 outlines the statement by local governments made at the WSSD aimed at taking LA21 forward for the next decade, and Appendix 6 lists those individuals who have kindly cooperated with this research by taking part in focus groups and other discussions.

SECTION 2: LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, LOCAL AGENDA 21 AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

2.1 The concept of sustainable development

Over the last 15 years sustainable development has become established as a prominent concept in governmental and corporate decision-making, being particularly dominant in specific sectors of activity, including spatial planning, waste management, community development, urban regeneration and natural resource management. Although many of the ideas that contribute to the concept of sustainable development have long antecedents, it was really during the 1990s that it achieved widespread political legitimacy and resonance in civil society (Owens, 1997). The adoption of sustainability as a key societal goal has brought with it a questioning of what we should be trying to achieve and stimulated debates over how we measure progress and welfare. The universal applicability of the concept of sustainable development has meant that it is beginning to adopt the *“mantle of a new renaissance idea that covers the whole of human endeavour and planetary survival”* and that its meaning is constantly *“stretched to accommodate any unrequited social goal from minority rights to debt relief”* (O’Riordan, 1998, p98). This raises the difficulty that sustainability could be applied as a “meta-fix” to all societal ills and, in the attempt to unite the hard-nosed industrialist with the eco-centric environmentalist, become devoid of meaning in itself. However, the concept of sustainable development has introduced a number of core principles that hold great potential to enhance community futures, namely (see O’Riordan and Voisey, 1998):

- maintain and protect essential life-support processes of the planet;
- utilise renewable resources to the point of precautionary replenishment;
- price commodities to reflect environmental and social costs.

Such principles are primarily to be implemented through:

- International agreements on the safeguarding of life support;
- Compensatory transfers to recognise the legitimate needs of the sacrificers and the vulnerable;
- Formal duties of environmental care and robust national policy frameworks;
- Local commitment via formal and informal community democracy.

Such objectives and mechanisms have been largely accepted by most interests in society. However the very breadth of the notion of sustainability that has enabled this consensus has left a major difficulty in that on the one hand it is broad enough to achieve this acceptance, but on the other leaves some of the main principles wide enough to accommodate interpretations from a broad range of ideological standpoints. This has led Jacobs (1995) to suggest that we should conceive of sustainable development on two levels – the first a level of vague principle, like freedom and democracy, that is almost universally agreed (although not by all, see for example, Beckerman, 1994[‡]) and the second a level of interpretation or implementation, where there is a high degree of contestation. At this first level sustainable development can be seen not as a narrowly definable goal, but as a powerful energising force, with O’Riordan (1998) recognising that this itself may prove to be the most important driver towards a sustainable future, noting: *“We are not at all sure where we will end up, but we keep on trying, almost as if a greater force is propelling us”* (p.99).

However it is at the second, more specific level of implementation that sustainable development has the potential to be made real by communities and local authorities. At this level it has been suggested that there may be degrees of interpretation of sustainable development ranging from “very weak” to “very strong”, as summarised in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Interpretations of sustainable development
(derived from O’Riordan and Voisey 1998 and Turner 1993)

Interpretation of sustainable development	Defining Characteristics
<i>Very Weak Sustainability</i>	Technocratic approach: lip service to integration and dim public awareness. Environmental capital is entirely substituted by human capital.
<i>Weak Sustainability</i>	Formal policy integration: limits set on natural capital useage. Tradeoffs still possible. New institutional structures and large-scale investment towards sustainability.
<i>Strong Sustainability</i>	Binding policy integration: full valuation of environmental costs and strong international agreements. Losses of critical natural capital not possible.
<i>Very strong</i>	Eco-centric approach: steady-state economic system based on thermodynamic limits and constraints. Comprehensive cultural shift, sustainability accounting and community-led initiatives.

There is an extensive debate over the different meanings of sustainability, which need not be explored in any further detail here[§], although the practical implications of the situation will be

[‡] Beckerman has used concepts derived from welfare economics to suggest that sustainable development may be “morally repugnant”, “logically redundant” and “totally impractical”.

[§] See for example Redclift, (1987), Carley and Christie (1992), Jacobs (1995) and O’Riordan and Voisey (1998).

returned to in a later section of the report that examines how local sustainable development has been implemented in Ireland. The main point here is that the differing interpretations, ambiguity and jargon-laden vocabulary have meant not only that there is confusion amongst the select policy makers involved in sustainability, but also that sustainable development has failed to enter into popular discourse (Tuxworth, 2001). There is also a danger in getting bogged down in intricacies of defining the ‘true’ meaning or consensual definition of sustainable development. This is neither desirable nor probably achievable (see DETR, 2000). This study will for the most part assume that while different interests will seek different meanings for the concept of sustainability, at a general level there is a consensus around general principles (eg those outlined above), an understanding of the broad problems that sustainable development attempts to address and agreement on some of the main approaches that need to be adopted to advance it. More detailed local meanings are not to be assumed but to be sought out in the study. Indeed allowing people to invent local sustainable development for themselves is an important core value (DETR, 2000).

The attraction and frustration apparently inseparable from the sustainable development agenda are major elements of this study – society has rhetorically signed up to a sustainable future, but appears to be encountering difficulties in adjusting, reforming and reframing decision-making towards such a future. It is clearly a major challenge to try to build a consensus on how this should be done. Local governance provides a particularly promising arena for achieving these goals and for this reason, within the global policy hierarchy of sustainable development, much emphasis has been placed on community-led sustainability action plans.

2.2 Local sustainable development

A dominant theme in debates about how western societies move towards sustainability is an increased emphasis on action at a local level, summed up in the maxim “think globally and act locally”. Indeed it has been suggested that 60% of agreements made at the 1992 Rio Summit and 40% of the European 5th Environmental Action Plan have to be implemented at the local level (Gilbert et al, 1996). This renewed faith among academics and policy-makers has been described in a UK context as the “New Localism” (Marvin and Guy, 1997) where ‘local’ is conceived in both physical (ie spatial, ecological and administrative systems) and social terms (ie reflecting common bonds of culture, identity and tradition etc) (Selman, 1996). This New Localism argues that local authorities are pivotal to sustainable development for a number of reasons.

- Local authorities usually deliver or facilitate the delivery of the public services that impinge mostly on the sustainability agenda, such as land use planning, waste management, transport, environmental health and education. They also control the majority of public open space. However the position of Northern Ireland is virtually unique in that many of these functions are still the responsibility of the central government whether at Westminster or Stormont.
- Through these responsibilities and their general public administration activity, local authorities consume significant levels of energy and other commodities and can facilitate the adoption of best practice in areas such as environmental management systems, energy conservation and participative involvement.
- It is self evident that local authorities are both *local* and have *authority* and, as the lowest tier of government, are well placed to further the sustainability agenda because of their role of creating local policy, facilitating projects and providing democratic accountability at the municipal level.
- Further to this, local authorities play a vital role as symbols of civic leadership and facilitators of active citizenship (Gilbert et al, 1996). This is important because sustainable development cannot just be a statutory, expert-led process but requires significant behavioural and cultural changes by the public. Therefore, if sustainable development is to become an influential and enduring process, it requires a debate around notions of citizenship and reform of governance structures (Selman and Parker, 1997). As such it is arguably the most appropriate level of the state to engage citizens and local stakeholders in the dialogue and intervention needed to precipitate sustainable development (Glass, 2002).

However there is some danger that these claims may be used to over-emphasise the local at the expense of action at broader geographic scales, and that the real political and economic constraints of what can be achieved by local authorities may not be fully acknowledged. It may also encourage a view that local areas are seen to operate in a “black box” disconnected from global, international and national contexts (Marvin and Guy, 1997).

The focus on the local arena for sustainability is neither simple nor exclusive, but does offer some sense of citizen involvement in global futures. In a European context local authorities have been able to collectively define what they see as the most important elements of sustainable development (see Box 2.1) and their role in its progression, via the Aalborg Charter. This was agreed by the participants at the *European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns*

in Aalborg, Denmark, in May 1994 and has been signed by over 1,300 European municipalities. The Charter sets out the objective of moving towards sustainable local communities.

Box 2.1: The Aalborg Charter's definition of Sustainable Development

We, cities & towns, understand that the idea of sustainable development helps us to base our standard of living on the carrying capacity of nature. We seek to achieve social justice, sustainable economies, and environmental sustainability. Social justice will necessarily have to be based on economic sustainability and equity, which require environmental sustainability.

Environmental sustainability means maintaining the natural capital. It demands from us that the rate at which we consume renewable material, water and energy resources does not exceed the rate at which the natural systems can replenish them, and that the rate at which we consume non-renewable resources does not exceed the rate at which sustainable renewable resources are replaced.

Environmental sustainability also means that the rate of emitted pollutants does not exceed the capacity of the air, water, and soil to absorb and process them. Furthermore, environmental sustainability entails the maintenance of biodiversity; human health; as well as air, water, and soil qualities at standards sufficient to sustain human life and well-being, as well as animal and plant life, for all time.

(Part I.2)

There are therefore sound reasons to focus on the local dimension of sustainability, if not entirely addressed in abstraction from other policy spheres. The Aalborg Charter has crystallised municipal agreement within Europe on how the sustainability agenda could be advanced. It is notable that while this has environmental sustainability at its core, it does acknowledge the critical integration with its social and economic dimensions. Indeed the concept of local sustainability has done much to inform new approaches to a range of policy areas beyond environmental matters, such as housing initiatives and employment projects. However the main medium for the uptake of local sustainable development has tended to be the environmentally focused Local Agenda 21.

2.3 Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was launched at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit) at Rio in 1992 and refers to Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, the action plan for sustainable development adopted at the conference, agreed by over 150 countries and seen by the UN Secretary General as a "*landmark event to secure economic, social and environmental well-being for the present and future generations*" (quoted in Buckingham-Hatfield and Walker, 2002). Chapter 28 was inserted into the agreement at the last minute, following an intense lobbying process by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), which initiated the idea of LA21 in 1991 (Brugman, 1997,

Hom, 2002).

LA21 essentially calls for local authorities to enter into a dialogue on sustainable development with their citizens, in order to encourage local action and the cultural and behavioural change required for sustainable development. LA21 is specifically addressed to local authorities, as the level of governance nearest the people, and therefore able to *“play a vital role in educating, mobilising, and responding to the public to promote sustainable development”* (Agenda 21, para 28.1, UN, 1993).

Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 specifies four main objectives.

- By 1993, the international community should have initiated a consultative process aimed at increasing cooperation between local authorities.
- By 1994, representatives of associations of cities and other local authorities should have increased levels of cooperation and coordination with the goal of exchanging information and experience among local authorities.
- By 1996 local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on a Local Agenda 21 for the community.
- All local authorities in each country should be encouraged to implement and monitor programmes which aim at ensuring that women and youth are represented in decision making, planning and implementation processes.

Based on this rather brief outline for local authorities, Lafferty (2001) suggests this definition of LA21:

“..a strategic programme, plan or policy which has emerged from a consultative process initiative by local authorities with both local citizens and representatives of local stakeholders, with a particular interest in involving women and youth” (p2)

It was envisaged that the main aims of the global action plan (Agenda 21, UN, 1993) would be implemented at the local level and that within LA21, an emphasis would be placed on two specific issues (see Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998b):

- The need for each municipality to interpret and relativise the Rio action plan

according to local conditions such as existing programmes, location, demography, economy and the social character of the area. This also implies that it will evolve dynamically over time.

- The fact that the key goals of Chapter 28 are not so much the policy outcomes, but the process itself, i.e. the participative mechanisms used to develop a consensus on social, economic and environmental issues within a municipality.

O’Riordan (1998) suggests that if the wording of Chapter 28 is just taken literally, it could mean that in practical terms local authorities could just develop their own eco-auditing, recycling and energy efficiency efforts. However LA21 has come to represent far more than that, with some councils seeing it as a way of addressing empowerment, especially for the socially excluded, whose future may need the benefits of eco-taxation and the linkage of social class to community uplift. He also notes that many local governments see in LA21 a chance to develop their own political, social and economic futures separate from the restraining influences of central government. The significance of the LA21 idea therefore goes much beyond the initial skeleton documents that emerged in 1992.

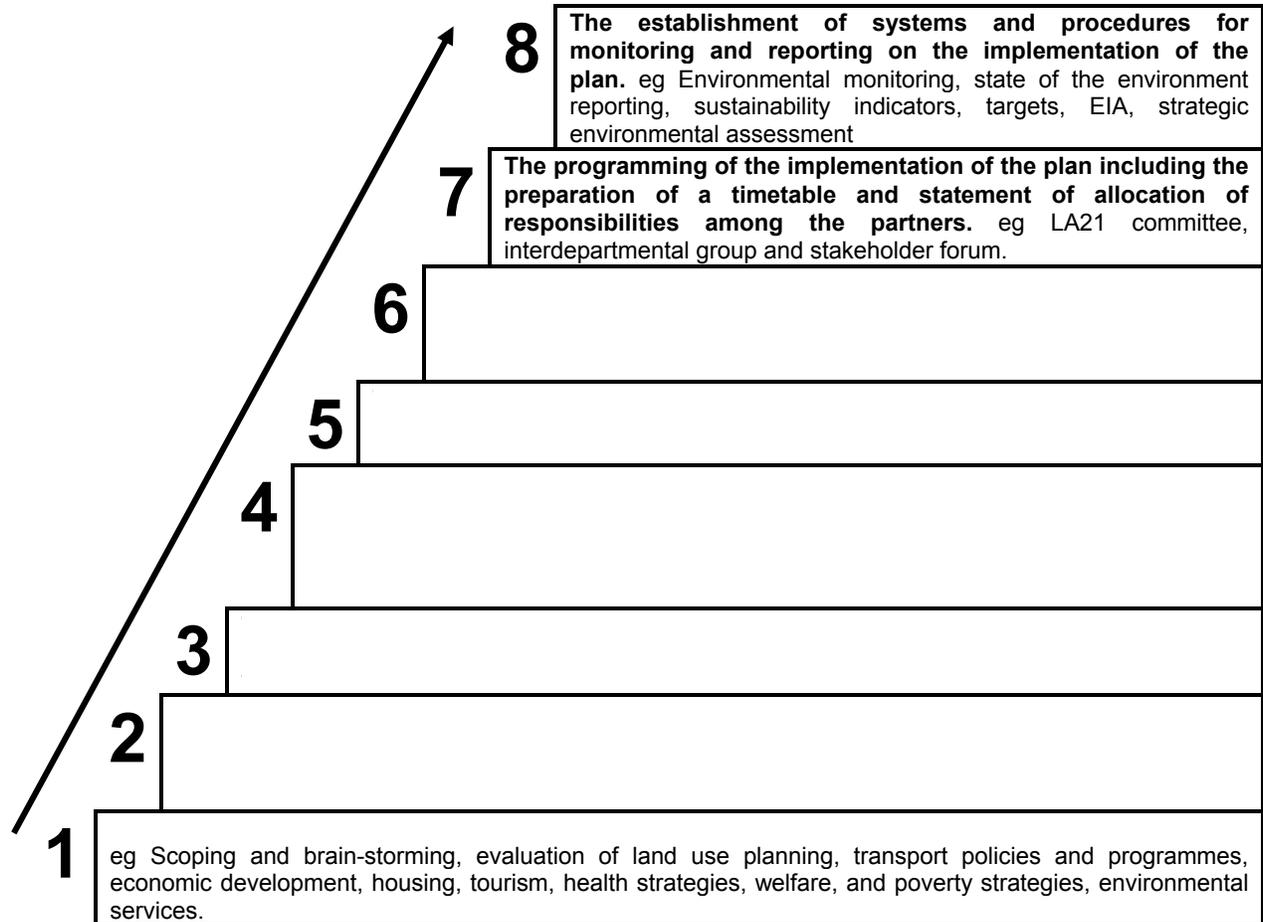
An expectation has therefore developed that LA21 would go beyond the bare nuts and bolts and numerous additional definitions have been developed of what an LA21 should entail (eg Selman 1996, LGMB, 1999, DoELG, 2001). These elements should include the following characteristics (see Lafferty 2001, p3-4):

- An explicit attempt to relate environmental effects to *economic and political pressures*.
- An active effort to relate local issues and decisions to *global impacts*.
- A focused policy for achieving *cross-sectoral integration* of concerns, goal and values.
- Greater efforts to increase *community involvement*, including multi-sectoral engagement, participatory assessment and target setting.
- A commitment to define local problems within *broader ecological, geographical and temporal frameworks*.
- Specific identification with the Rio Summit and Agenda 21.

Furthermore, while recognising that it is up to local communities themselves to define what their Local Agenda 21 should consist of, a consensus has emerged regarding the type of activities local authorities are likely to have to develop if they are effectively achieving the LA21 ideals (eg DETR, 1998 and DoELG, 2001). The Aalborg Charter proposes an eight stage model for

preparing and implementing a Local Agenda 21, as follows:

Figure 2.1: Steps in the LA21 Process
(derived from the Aalborg Charter, 1994 [Part III] and LGMB, 1993)



The progress and implementation of LA21 has been subject to much monitoring and encouragement, not least from ICLEI** and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)^{††}. In Europe the EU has promoted a Sustainable Cities and Towns programme^{‡‡}. It has also generated much academic interest, including a group of researchers involved in the 'Sustainable Communities in Europe' Project (SUSCOM, see Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998 and Lafferty, 2001) among many others. This latter project has been particularly valuable in understanding the international variations in how LA21 has been taken up and advanced. This notes that constitutional arrangement, levels of funding and the degree of involvement of central government and social partners are particularly significant issues in

** see <http://www.iclei.org/>

†† see <http://www.iied.org/>

‡‡ see www.sustainable-cities.org

understanding differences in the application of LA21 principles at the national level.

A recent evaluation of LA21 on a European scale concluded that:

“Local Agenda 21 is now firmly established as a key element in the European sustainable development process, and that it is undoubtedly the major driving force in supporting local government in local sustainability projects and initiatives. Moreover, LA21 has had singular impact in developing local knowledge, awareness and understanding of the sustainable development process, and in providing a context within which local government can contribute to local and global sustainability”

(ICLEI, 2002d)

These issues will be further commented on in section 3, which discusses the different policy contexts in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Beyond the national comparisons provided by the SUSCOM project, there are a myriad accounts of LA21 activities, some noting innovative good practice (eg at a global level ICLEI, 2002b; eg within Northern Ireland NIEL, 2001c; and within the Republic of Ireland, see DoELG, 2001) and many drawing out specific lessons or issues from one or more LA21 processes (eg Scott, 1999, Selman and Parker, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Moser, 2001; Khakee, 2002; Sharp, 2002 and Ryan, 2002). These accounts, along with the level and nature of debate taking place within the thousands of LA21 processes happening across the world, suggest that there are several issues that underline the importance of LA21 to the global efforts to secure a more sustainable future. These include:

- **Take up of LA21**

Perhaps the clearest indication of its importance is the sheer scale of the number of councils and communities that have embarked on an LA21 process, which has been closely monitored by ICLEI and a number of other national and international researchers. ICLEI have conducted two global surveys of the take up of LA21 (see ICLEI, 2002a), finding that by 1996 more than 2000 local authorities in 51 countries had established LA21 processes and active national campaigns to promote the initiative were underway in 9 countries. By 2001 this had increased to nearly 6,500 local authorities in 113 countries, with 18 countries having national campaigns to promote LA21 and some countries, such as Sweden, having 100% of municipalities engaged in LA21 (ICLEI, 2002a), although this probably reflects the level of government resources

put into the initiative. Local authorities from every region of the world, irrespective of wealth and level of development, have initiated LA21, and ICLEI notes that LA21 has had the highest impact on *“water supply, city beautification, education systems, public awareness of sustainability issues, waste reduction, community empowerment, sanitation and energy conservation”* (ICLEI, 2002a, p 24).

- **Local involvement in global governance**

In the context of concerns regarding the globalisation of governance structures, including the increasing influence of non-elected institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and World Economic Forum, LA21 has shown that local authorities can offer some democratic voice in global policies. Indeed it has been suggested that the Rio Summit and the emergence of LA21 even changed the way in which nations looked at their local authorities and the way local authorities looked at themselves (Hom, 2002). Now local authorities are an acknowledged key interest at global discussions of the environment (eg WSSD and other UN-sponsored forums).

- **Citizen participation**

While LA21 has been implemented with different degrees of success and vigour across the world, many country-specific accounts (eg Freeman et al, 1996; Young, 1998; Moser, 2001; Barrett and Usui, 2002) have highlighted the innovative nature of the participation processes used. In the case of Britain, LA21 has even become a conduit for the broader reinvigoration of local democracy (Young, 1997), exemplified in the so called ‘turn to the community’ in urban regeneration policy and New Labour’s project of democratic renewal. LA21 has encouraged councils to experiment in the different ways in which it can engage with the local community, having used Planning for Real, Visioning, Community Profiling, Environmental Forums, Citizen Juries and other facilitative techniques. This has had a direct impact on how local authorities view environmental and sustainability policies (Sharp, 2002) and the success of such techniques has then facilitated their uptake in statutory activities such as land use planning. This has also led to the inclusion of a wider range of social groups and economic interests (see Table 2.1.) than have typically been drawn in by the traditional methods of using leaflets, exhibitions and public meetings. However it must be recognised that many of the problems associated with public participation are still present in many LA21 processes, such as local authorities using the rhetoric of empowerment to retain top-down control or limiting full participation to what they see as

non-critical areas of policy. Furthermore the poor and the young, remain under-represented in decision-making structures (Young, 2000).

- **New resources and approaches for local government**

It has also been claimed that LA21 has been influential by introducing new ways of looking at issues within local government, either because of new support introduced into council work, such as major local employers becoming formal LA21 partners, or because of changed professional perceptions (Church and Young, 2001).

Table 2.2: Range of agencies often involved in a successful LA21 process.

(Adapted from Freeman et al, 1996)

Community	Business	Public authorities and utilities	Cross-sectoral
Residents associations	Chambers of Commerce	Local authorities	Schools, colleges, universities
Community Centres/groups	Chambers of Trade	Parish Councils	Community Health councils
Councils for voluntary service, voluntary support organisations	Industry organisations	Health authorities	Political parties
Urban wildlife/environmental groups	Individual industries	Energy utilities	Housing associations
Religious groups	Business- environment clubs	Training and enterprise councils	Campaigning organisations
Arts and recreation	Trade Unions	Transport interests	Health for all
Representatives of disadvantaged groups.	Farmers	State agencies	Transport consultative committees
			Development agencies

- **The transition to sustainability**

O’Riordan (1998) has suggested that the degree and depth of LA21 processes within any one country can offer a good indicator of how far the country (or region) is making the transition to sustainability. He suggests that along with factors such as policy integration, eco-taxation and the establishment of sustainability indicators, flourishing LA21 activities reflect the overall health of sustainable development in a country and should be seen as a driving force or pilot scheme for a nation’s broader approaches to sustainability.

- **Fostering civic identity**

The final issue to be noted here is a little less tangible, being the contribution of LA21 to civic identity and community spirit, through the necessity of collective action and consensus building (Etzioni, 2000). O’Riordan (2000) notes how the transition to sustainability demands an increase in a sense of stewardship and growing respect for governance and regulation. This issue has very real significance for all parts of the island of Ireland, particularly in the context of the divided society found in the North and the social tensions created by rapid economic growth and cultural change in the South. This issue is therefore specifically discussed in section 2.5. below.

These issues have all added to the enthusiasm and vigour with which local communities have advanced their LA21 processes throughout the 1990s. By the end of the decade, however, it appeared that the initiatives were beginning to run out of steam, particularly in those countries such as the UK and Sweden that had experienced an early widespread adoption of LA21 (Lafferty and Coenen, 2001), and there appeared to be emerging frustrations and concerns over progress. In the case of the UK, a well-placed commentator even pointed to the potential disappearance of LA21, because of its failure to enter the popular discourse (DETR, 2000) and a growing confusion with New Labour’s “modernisation agenda” (Tuxworth, 2001 and Christie and Warburton, 2001). The Republic of Ireland may also reflect this trend as indicated by the reforms being implemented under the “Better Local Government” banner (DoELG, 1996) and the development of the CDBs. As a consequence, some elements of sustainability are becoming mainstreamed as part of these broader approaches to a reform of local governance (Neill and Ellis, 2002). This raises some fundamental questions concerning the future strategies for local sustainable development, clearly spelled out for the UK in a pamphlet by Tuxworth (2001), which also has great relevance to the situation in the Republic of Ireland. He suggests that this mainstreaming clearly has many benefits as some of the key principles of sustainability are taken up, such as cross-sectoral working and enhanced participation. However a complete merging of modernisation and LA21 leaves out some very critical perspectives that are central to a sustainable future, not least the fundamental links between development and the environment and between the local and the global.

The turn of the century therefore did not result in any millennial optimism for Local Agenda 21, but “LA21 fatigue” (Otto-Zimmerman, 2002) and some soul-searching about how local sustainable development progress could be reinvigorated. Given the fairly dramatic impact of the Earth Summit in 1992, it was not surprising that many looked to Rio+10, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August 2002, to provide a strategy for

the next decade, and this was attempted through the adoption of Local Action 21 (LAN21).

2.4 Local Action 21

Although local government was a relatively marginal player at the 1992 Rio Summit, because of its high level of support and innovation in sustainable development, it was included as a major group at the WSSD (Buckingham-Hatfield and Walker, 2002) and therefore expected to provide one of the main strands of action that would emerge from the Summit. Despite much pessimism regarding the overall Summit outcomes, dominated by the debate around the negative role of the US (eg Retallack, 2002), local authorities did look hard at LA21 and issued a rather poorly publicised agreement on the priorities for the sustainable development agenda at the local level.

The statement, endorsed by the full plenary at the Local Government Session at the WSSD made a renewed commitment to the principles of Local Agenda 21, recognising that increased effort had to be made to realise the goals and aspirations of the Rio Earth Summit. Participants committed themselves to a new Local Action 21, an implementation framework for the post-Johannesburg decade of Local Agenda 21 (see Appendix 5). This demanded “*a profound shift in the current development model to one based on true equity and deep reverence for the processes of nature*”, asserting that:

- Local governments implementing sustainable development are determined to enter a decade of accelerated, effective action to create sustainable communities and protect the global common goods.
- Local governments will work to ensure viable local economies, just and peaceful communities, eco-efficient cities and secure and resilient communities able to respond to the change, while ensuring safe and accessible water supplies and protecting our climate, soil, biodiversity and human health.
- Local governments call for Local Action 21 – the *motto* for accelerated implementation of sustainable development in the decade following the Johannesburg World Summit.
- Local governments call for Local Action 21 – a *mandate* given by the World Summit on Sustainable Development to local authorities worldwide to engage in the implementation of local agendas and action plans.
- Local governments call for Local Action 21- a *movement* of cities, towns and counties and their associations towards action for sustainability.
- Local governments will reinforce their commitment to Local Agenda 21 and its implementation throughout the next decade of Local Action 21.

Although clearly it is still very early to appreciate the impact of this renewed commitment, with only a limited debate so far emerging around what LAn21 may mean (eg Otto-Zimmerman, 2002), first indications are that there is still much to do in order to breathe new life into the local sustainable development agenda. The key emerging message from Local Action 21 appears to be the *motto-mandate-movement* maxim, but with practically no national debate within the UK and the Republic of Ireland over this, some fundamental shifts are still required to boost the local sustainable development agenda in these areas. While this does not necessarily suggest that nothing has or is being done in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to advance the agenda, it may indicate that if LAn21 fails to generate new excitement and enthusiasm, such activity will tail off as local authorities face up to other pressing priorities from statutory-driven areas.

2.5 Sustainable development and environmental citizenship

By definition, sustainable development implies enhanced communal obligation and should enable people to better relate to each other's needs, with the consensus that should emerge from LA21 creating an altered perception of community cohesion and the role of governance. This points to the path to sustainability being, above all, a political process, or ethic, with the concept of citizenship at its core. As a consequence, it is possible to link LA21 to the wider resurgence in interest in citizenship that recognises, in the context of economic and cultural globalisation, that there is a need for some kind of generic sense of identity and responsibility in order to avoid social breakdown (Neill and Schwedler, 2001); or as Robert Putnam has suggested, a need to create common meaning and trust across cultural differences through the development of "bridging social capital" (Putnam, 2003). Interest in citizenship has grown through the 1990s, with an increasing emphasis on how societies can manage cultural differences, and associated tensions and conflict (Isin and Turner, 2002) through "deliberative democracy". This requires people to:

"articulate 'good reasons' in public, to convince everyone...societies in which such multi-cultural dialogues take place in the public sphere begin to articulate a civic point of view and a civic perspective of 'enlarged community'"

(Benhabib, 2000, p13).

This has a distinct resonance for sustainable development in general and has emerged in the US as "civic environmentalism" (Agyeman and Angus, 2003). Given the changing cultural

complexion and political climate of both parts of the island of Ireland, this could potentially make a very significant contribution to defining a distinct approach to local sustainability. The reinvigoration of local democracy has been a stated policy goal of the government in the Republic of Ireland. On the NGO side, this movement has been recently strengthened by the appointment of an independent Democracy Commission; while in Northern Ireland the extension of political reform from the regional level to the local is a logical next step in the ongoing Peace Process.

Although it is recognised that the environment is invested with different meanings by different cultural and economic groups (eg Burningham and Thrush, 2001), it is important to recognise that it can be a vehicle for creating a generic sense of responsibility through the idea of “environmental citizenship”. This should be at the core of local sustainability, remembering that Agenda 21 adopted at Rio implied a communitarian conception of citizenship in its call for every local authority to “*enter into a dialogue with its citizens*”. The fact that LA21 should be a “discursively created” rather than an authoritatively given product has always been central to the concept (Barry, 1996, p.116). It is argued, therefore, that local sustainability should be seen in its broader context, not just as being related to discrete areas of environmental protection or social inclusion, but as a way of extending democratic involvement that can foster common ethical concerns, which may in turn create a binding force in civic identification with places. This creates a challenge for the island of Ireland, articulated by David Korten, when he pointed out:

“LA21 has the potential to blunt the edges of cultural identity and special interest conflict by fostering a sense of shared values and civic responsibility. It has the potential through the engagement of free and active citizens to develop a ‘politics of the whole’”.

(Korten, 2000).

This has been further illustrated by Selman and Parker (1999) in their study of LA21 in England, where they found the dominant “storyline” that comes out of the process is not the traditional politics of inequality, but the “*emergent politics of identity, with its emphasis on participation and citizenship*” (p.56). The pursuit of local sustainable development not only is a virtue in itself, but also contributes to addressing some other major social concerns about western societies. Local sustainable development should, therefore, be given high priority on the island of Ireland and, if the opportunity is grasped, may play a leading role on the European stage.

2.6 Local sustainable development as a cross-border^{§§} concern

^{§§} “Cross border” is used here and elsewhere in the report to refer to “all-island” issues and not just those

The citizenship dimension to sustainable development offers some optimism for reaching across the political and cultural borders on the island of Ireland. However, somewhat ironically, by design LA21 has been pursued by the lowest level of government, and thus rather isolated to individual communities, albeit within a national and international policy framework. For the island of Ireland this has meant that local authorities in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have looked away from each other, towards Dublin or Belfast and London respectively for guidance, cooperation and inspiration, rather than linking with other communities on the island. While there is some history of cooperation between the two jurisdictions on environmental management^{***}, this has not been extensive given the range of issues that are directly affected by the border, which include water and fisheries management; habitat conservation; waste management; tourism; forest management, and pollution prevention and control (Buick, 2002). This research is based firmly on the belief that there are strong grounds for an all-island perspective for sustainable development, forming a common, shared framework through which local sustainability can be pursued. This is based on a range of factors:

- The island of Ireland clearly forms a single ecological and geographical unit that transcends the two political units. It is therefore essential that an all-island perspective is adopted in environmental and resource management issues such as water and air quality, renewable energy, animal health, coastline management and biodiversity.
- Any local environmental, social or economic issues in the border region that could usually be addressed by cooperation between neighbouring local authorities become international issues, which can be only dealt with under different legislation either side of the border.
- The distance of border regions from their respective central governments has disadvantaged these areas in terms of infrastructure and investment so that they can lack effectiveness in tackling social, economic and environmental issues (Buick, 2002).
- The island, particularly in the context of the EU, forms a distinct economic region, with shared economic markets in many of the sectors that are critical to sustainable development. This not only has major significance for LA21 along the border, as work, travel and consumption behaviour transcends the two jurisdictions, but also has island-wide significance for the introduction of progressive eco-taxes, as the distortions of unequal taxation are very evident in fuel smuggling and waste management. The island

related to the area immediately around the Irish border.

^{***} For example, the Erne Hydroelectric Scheme of the 1940s, the Foyle Fisheries Commission, the Dublin-Belfast rail link and protection of habitats through the Natura 2000 scheme (see Buick, 2002).

also provides a single and potentially more efficient market for the collection and processing of recycled materials and other activities requiring minimum economies of scale.

- The increasingly European dimension to trade, fiscal policy and environmental regulation is based on the premise of a virtually boundary-free economic area. This creates difficulties along borders, with the boundary between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland being the only land border for both nations. This requires particularly close working on environmental issues, not only for the reasons previously stated but also for compliance with a growing number of EU regulations, not least on trans-boundary participation rights in environmental decision-making (Macrory and Turner, 2002). Compliance with such legislation forces recognition of an all-Ireland environmental citizenship.
- While the north/south differences on the island are often stressed, it is worth remembering that within an EU context, the UK and the Republic of Ireland share an 'Anglo-Irish' constitutional structure of local government (see Lafferty and Coenen, 2001, p.273) that sets them apart from all other member states. This has deep significance for LA21 as they are likely to more closely share institutional and political challenges, with trans-national learning more relevant between these two countries than with other member states.
- Finally, as argued above, local sustainable development has the potential to act as an empathetic civic glue and provide a fertile ground for overcoming the divisions that face the island, in turn leading to community dialogue, where there would otherwise be suspicion and conflict.

The potential of local sustainable development is therefore highly significant not only to global futures, but may also contribute to the specific difficulties faced by the island of Ireland. This cross-border dimension to sustainability has been recognised by the North/South Ministerial Council, which has recognised that there should be increased cooperation on "*strategies and activities which would contribute to a coherent all-island approach to the achievement of sustainable development*" (North/South Ministerial Council, 2000).

SECTION 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN AN ALL-ISLAND CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

The previous section of the report outlined the debate around the meaning of the term sustainable development and described the significance of Local Agenda 21. This section explores how the concept of sustainable development has been adopted in government policy in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; discusses what is already known about LA21 on the island of Ireland, and provides a brief evaluative comparison of the policy framework of the two jurisdictions. It will briefly describe the main sustainability agreements at the global and European levels, before going on to describe action within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The nature of the sustainability agenda and the interconnections between environmental, economic and social systems mean that most realms of government now acknowledge the significance of the concept and have adopted it in some form as a policy goal. This means a comprehensive review of all sustainability policy is impossible within the constraints of this study. It is important to stress therefore that this section focuses only on the main, coordinating strategies and does not, for example, explore individual policy areas such as climate change or biodiversity.

3.2 Global debates and agreements

At the international level, above the European Union, there are innumerable bodies and agreements that attempt to advance different elements of sustainable development, each with different emphases and interpretations of what this may entail. There are, for example the United Nations and its 15 autonomous organisations such as the WHO, UNESCO and FAO; economically-oriented organisations, such as the OECD and WTO, and NGOs organised on a global scale, such as ICLEI, WWF and Greenpeace. While the activities, conventions and publications of all these stakeholders contribute to the world sustainability debate, and all have been involved in a range of single issue agreements^{†††}, the most high profile initiatives have been the UN's multi-issue agreements, particularly those that emerged from the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, the Earth Summit) held at Rio in 1992. This was a milestone in the development and recognition of a global consensus for sustainable development, following a long period of debate^{†††}, particularly the World Commission on

^{†††} For example the Global Biodiversity Strategy (WRI et al, 1992), Strategy and Agenda for Action for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (FAO, 1991) and Climate Change Strategy (WMO/UNEP, 1992)

^{†††} Forerunners of the ideas agreed at Rio included a number of previous international conferences, such as the UN's Habitat Conference in Stockholm in 1972.

Environment and Development (the Bruntland Report, WCED, 1987) that established one of the most used definitions of sustainable development^{§§§}. The Rio Summit gave practical force to the growing consensus through a number of actions, including the establishment of a Commission of Sustainable Development and the agreements noted in Box 3.1. This included Agenda 21, which has been signed by nearly 180 countries, including the Republic of Ireland and the UK. As noted in Section 2, this also introduced LA21.

These agreements formed a framework to be further elaborated and developed, for example by the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, which provides an implementation basis for the Framework Convention on Climate Change. In the case of LA21, the onus was largely placed on local communities themselves (albeit with further national and international encouragement) to further the initiative. The Rio Summit was followed up by an Earth Summit +5 session at the UN in New York in 1997 and a decade after Rio, the WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002, with the aim of:

“Reinvigorating at the highest political level, the global commitment to a North/South Partnership and a higher level of international solidarity to the accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 and the promotion of sustainable development”
(UN, 2000)

There was a widespread feeling that the WSSD did not live up to expectations owing to US obstruction and a lack of political will amongst industrialised nations. It did however produce a new focus for LA21 in the form of Local Action 21 (see section 2.4). While the full implications of this and the other agreements made at the Summit are yet to be fully developed, they essentially provide the new global context for promoting sustainable development. For the purposes of this report, three key documents emerged from the Summit; the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, the Plan of Implementation and the Local Action 21 statement by local authorities. The content of the Local Action 21 statement has been discussed in a previous section and is included, in full, in Appendix 5. The Plan of Implementation and Declaration on Sustainable Development are summarised in Box 3.2^{****}

BOX 3.1: MAIN AGREEMENTS MADE AT THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT, 1992	
AGREEMENT/STATEMENT	EXAMPLE OF CONTENT OR COMMITMENT
Rio Declaration on Environment and Development	Charter of 27 basic principles for sustainable development covering rights and responsibilities of states and their citizens. Firmly established the links between social, economic and environmental issues.

^{§§§} This famously describes sustainable development as being that which “...meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

^{****} ICLEI have undertaken an analysis of how these relate to the local level (See ICLEI, 2002c).

Framework Convention on Climate Change	Aimed to address threat of climate change and mitigate its adverse consequences and was further negotiated and targets set by the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. This sets an aim for developed nations to reduce CO ₂ levels to 5% below 1990 levels by 2008-12.
Statement of Principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests	Objective are to contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and to provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses. It establishes a UN Forum for taking forward a number of key principles for the management of forests and commits nations to the development of national forestry plans.
Convention on Biological Diversity	Requires the sustainable, equitable use of the components of biodiversity, to be realised through national implementation plans for the regulation and enforcement of and education about the agreement
Agenda 21	A global action plan for furthering sustainable development, covering four main areas of political action: social and economic development (Chapters 1-8), natural resources, fragile ecosystems and by-products of industrial production (Chapters 9-22), major organisations and groups of people (Chapters 23-32) with Chapter 28 covering local participation and LA21 and means of implementation (Chapters 33-40).

At a global level there is a general consensus that sustainable development offers a way of tackling some of the most pressing social, economic and environmental problems facing the world. Although this international framework brings together several decades of agreement of what needs to be done, it largely consists of “soft law” (Birnie and Boyle, 1992), which has no legally binding provisions in international law. It is this issue that makes the next level of governance, that of the European Union, of more direct relevance to the implementation of the sustainability agenda on the island of Ireland.

BOX 3.2: SUMMARY OF DECLARATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION, AGREED AT THE WSSD, 2002

(Source: United Nations, 2002)

<i>The Johannesburg Declaration</i>	Signed by nations of the world, reaffirming sustainable development as a central element of the international agenda, it gave new impetus to global action to fight poverty and protect the environment. It particularly emphasises the links between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources
<i>Plan of Implementation</i>	<p>Sets out a broad range of targets and timetables for action, including commitments on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty eradication: e.g. commitment to halve the proportion of the world's people whose daily income is less than \$1 by 2015. • Water and Sanitation: eg commitment to halve the number of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. • Energy: pledge to increase contribution of renewables to total energy supply and phase out “harmful” subsidies. • Chemicals: e.g. adoption of the aim to use and produce chemicals in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment and of a range of measures to harmonise and enforce safe management of toxic substances by 2020. • Management of the natural resource base: commitment to address a range of natural resource problems, covering fisheries, biodiversity, water, forestry, atmosphere. • Health: e.g. commitment to reduce mortality rates for infants and children under five by two thirds and maternal mortality rates by three quarters by 2015. and reduce global HIV prevalence among young men and women by 25% by 2010. • Means of implementation: eg ensure that, by 2015, all children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education relevant to national needs. <p>The plan of implementation also acted as a focus for changes to the global institutional framework for sustainable development and secured a range of financial commitments from governments to further sustainable development.</p>

3.3 Sustainable development in a European context

Much of the legal, financial and policy framework for sustainable development in the UK and the Republic of Ireland is underpinned by the European Union. The EU itself includes a number of interlocking institutions that contribute to sustainable development policy, including the Commission and its directorates, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and related committees (eg Committee of the Regions) and specific EU agencies (eg European Environment Agency).

The array of policy and law emanating from these institutions provides a composite framework for developing sustainability initiatives at a European level. The elements of this framework take a number of forms, including:

- *Treaties.* eg The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which revised the way in which environmental considerations were enshrined in the principles of the EU. Article 2 now

states that “*balanced and sustainable development of economic activities*” is a main goal of EU policy and that “*environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of Community policies and activities...in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development*”.

- *Programmes.* Programmes of the EU set the framework for the delivery of the aims of the Community as set out in its treaties. Most of these programmes involve a range of intermediary funding bodies, used to distribute European and other funds to community and sectoral projects. They are aimed at establishing programmes and projects related to broad European and government priorities such as social and economic development and environmental improvement. Perhaps the most significant in sustainability terms have been the Environment Action Programmes (EAP), which have shifted over time from specifically environmentally focused end-of-pipe solutions to broader sustainability-based anticipatory approaches. The sixth EAP was agreed in July 2002 (Commission for European Communities, 2002) and which identified the priority areas of Climate Change; Nature and Biodiversity; Environment and Health; Natural Resources; and Waste.
- *Instruments.* At a more detailed level, the EU has a huge range of more precise instruments for the direct implementation of its programmes. These are often financial instruments, such as LIFE, which provides project funding for projects that contribute to EU environment policy and sustainable development. Other examples are INTERREG, which aims to build capacity for co-operation within border regions, and PEACE, a special programme addressing issues of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and border counties of the Republic of Ireland.
- *Policy statements.* The EU issues policy statements intended to influence lower level policy debates. Many of these have sought to address the sustainability agenda including, for example, a Green Paper on the Urban Environment (Commission for European Communities, 1990) and the European Spatial Development Perspective (Commission for European Communities, 1999). As part of the preparatory process leading to the WSSD, the EU also developed an overall sustainability strategy, agreed in June 2001, as a framework for the further elaboration of goals and implementation procedures (see Box 3.3.).
- *Law.* European law, in the form of directives and regulations, provides a way of enforcing uniform environmental, economic and social standards across the whole Community. Directives such as Environmental Impact Assessment (Directive 85/337/EEC), Landfill of Waste (Directive 99/31/EC) and Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Directive 92/43/EEC) have had a particularly strong influence

on the environmental law of member states.

BOX 3.3: THE EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (EU, 2001)

The Strategy establishes a long-term vision of how to dovetail EU policies for economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development. It formed part of the EU's preparatory work for the WSSD and identifies the key sustainability challenges that need urgent decisive action on a European scale, as being:

- Climate change.
- Threats to public health, particularly from toxic substances and food safety risks.
- Increased pressure on natural resources, such as fish stocks and fresh water.
- Poverty and exclusion.
- An ageing population.
- Congestion and pollution.

In shaping EU action on these issues it calls for :

- Better policy integration.
- Transparent review of the costs and effects of different policy options.
- Long-term management.
- Sweeping economic reform.
- Increased education and awareness raising.

The European legal and policy framework has established a shared context for sustainability debate in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which have elaborated (or neglected) these initiatives according to local political and institutional culture and priorities. The next section examines how these two jurisdictions have sought to develop a policy of sustainable development and how this has been reflected in the progress of Local Agenda 21.

3.4 Northern Ireland and the UK

The policy context for Northern Ireland is partly determined by the lead of the UK Government, which has responsibility for defining an overall response to international conventions and issues and under Direct Rule, controls policy development and implementation. The UK policy framework will therefore be briefly described, followed by a discussion of how the Northern Ireland Executive has sought to elaborate its approach to sustainable development through its devolved responsibilities. As with other sections covering the policy context, the discussion will be primarily focused on the key sustainable development policy and will not detail many of its constituent policy objectives related to trade, transport, climate change etc

A national sustainable development strategy for the UK has evolved from the first attempts by the Thatcher administration to integrate environmental responsibilities with the objectives of every central government department (eg DoE, 1990). Following the Earth Summit, the UK

government launched a fleet of documents relating to the commitments made at Rio including: *Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy* (HMG, 1994a); *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* (HMG 1994b); *Climate Change: the UK Strategy* (HMG, 1994c) and *Sustainable Forestry: the UK Strategy* (HMG, 1994d). These policy developments were accompanied by the creation of a Government Panel on Sustainable Development and a UK Roundtable on Sustainable Development.

These policy areas and the institutional context for sustainable development have evolved quickly in the intervening years. The Government Panel and Roundtable have merged as a UK Commission on Sustainable Development, advising not only the UK government, but also the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The strategies developed in the wake of the Rio Summit have also undergone profound evolution since 1994, with enhanced understanding and commitment to the issues. For example, the *Climate Change Strategy* was followed by a whole *Climate Change Programme* (2000) with a wide range of policies and measures, including the creation of the Carbon Trust. More recently Rio influenced the Energy White Paper that made a commitment to cut CO₂ emissions by 60% by 2050 (DTI, 2003). The UK Government has also been relatively successful in integrating a whole range of other policy concerns with the sustainability agenda, including planning, transport, social inclusion and international cooperation^{†††}.

The 1994 Sustainable Development Strategy was replaced in 1999 by the Blair government's sustainable development vision, "*A Better Quality of Life*" (DETR, 1999a; see Box 3.4). This has been supported by the development of national sustainability indicators for the UK (DETR 1999b; see Box 3.5) and an annual reporting mechanism for monitoring the progress towards sustainable development (eg DEFRA, 2003). The general trend shown by these monitoring reports has been that the UK has seen improvements in nearly half of the headline indicators, particularly those concerned with economic and social issues, and significant deterioration on those related to crime, waste and traffic volumes (ibid)^{†††}.

BOX 3.4: "A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE": THE UK'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (DETR, 1999a)

The strategy sets out the Government's belief that sustainable development relates to "ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come" and entails meeting the following objectives:

^{†††} see www.sustainable-development.gov.uk.

^{††††} There was no comparable data for one of the indicators so it was not reported on.

- Social progress that recognises the needs of everyone.
- Effective protection of the environment.
- Prudent use of natural resources.
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The strategy then sets out:

- The principles of sustainable development.
- Some of the priorities for action in the UK.
- Key actions the Government is taking.
- Commitments that the Government has made.

The strategy notes that the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have the opportunity to define their own policies and indicators for sustainable development within this framework to reflect the needs and wishes of their citizens.

BOX 3.5: QUALITY OF LIFE COUNTS: INDICATORS FOR A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK

(DETR, 1999b)

A total of nearly 150 indicators have been identified covering issues as wide ranging as the economy, community, the environment, resource use, energy, industry, agriculture and poverty. There are 15 "headline indicators" that encompass the most important dimensions to sustainability in the UK, as follows:

- Total output of the economy (GDP and GDP per head).
- Total social investment as a percentage of GDP.
- Proportion of people of working age who are in work
- Success in tackling poverty and social exclusion (eg children in low income households).
- Qualifications at age 19
- Expected years of healthy life.
- Homes judged unfit to live in.
- Level of crime.
- Emissions of greenhouse gases.
- Days when air pollution is moderate or higher.
- Road traffic.
- Rivers of good or fair quality.
- Population of wild birds.
- New homes built on previously developed land.
- Waste arisings and management.

This framework provides a fairly robust mechanism at the UK national level for implementing and measuring the progress towards sustainable development, and has been accompanied within England by the establishment of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) with responsibilities for their own sustainable development strategies. Central government has also looked to the devolved administrations to elaborate their own approaches to sustainable development. The Welsh Assembly is required to take into account sustainable development when considering any legislation^{ssss} and adopted its Sustainable Development Scheme in 2000, committing the Assembly to integrate sustainable development into everything it does. The Scheme is supported by an action plan, a set of 12 indicators and a regular statistical bulletin.

The Scottish Executive has also committed itself to integrate sustainable development in its Programme for Government, has published 24 sustainable indicators and developed strategies for Biodiversity and Waste, Energy, Travel (WET). It has also established a Cabinet Sub-committee on Sustainable Scotland.

In contrast to the other administrations and regions of the UK, Northern Ireland has a poorly developed policy context for sustainable development. Although it published a discussion paper on sustainable development in May 2002 (DoENI, 2002; see Box 3.6) no government response has yet been issued. While a long awaited sustainable development strategy may have been postponed as a result of the suspension of the Assembly, it appears that the next step is likely to be a further round of consultation, with a strategy following at an undisclosed time after that (SNIP, 2003). This does not mean, however, that sustainability is completely neglected in the policy agenda in Northern Ireland, as it is a strong theme in the *Regional Development Strategy* (DRD, 2001; see below) and was included in the Programme for Government (NI Executive, 2001), which made a proactive commitment to sustainable development, stating that it “*will be a key theme running through our work and priorities*”. Evidence of this commitment has recently emerged with the allocation of Executive Programme Funds to SNIP to establish a team to work with the Executive to develop sustainable development training, indicators and policy within government.

<p>BOX 3.6: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LIVING A Discussion Paper on Proposals for a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (DoENI, 2002)</p>
<p>The discussion paper outlines a number of questions the DoE would like to hear views on, rather than setting out many proposals of its own. It therefore asks about an appropriate definition of sustainable development for Northern Ireland, focussed on the principles stated in the overall UK strategy. It outlines existing programmes and policies that have created a platform for sustainable development and asks how the policy framework could be enhanced to meet sustainability criteria. The paper also outlines the UK headline indicators and asks whether these are appropriate for Northern Ireland. The paper also proposes the potential creation of an interdepartmental body and Northern Ireland Forum for Sustainable Development.</p>

The Regional Development Strategy (DRD, 2001) is of particular significance as its key guidelines are built on the four objectives of sustainable development articulated in the UK’s Sustainable Development Strategy (DETR, 1999a). In the absence of a Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy, it is the most comprehensive statement of how the Government sees how Northern Ireland can reconcile economic, social and environmental demands. Although its primary objective is to coordinate regional development and land use, it

§§§§ S.121 of the Government of Wales Act, 1998.

does encompass a much wider range of issues, including those related to transport and education, and attempts to present an integrated view of government. Furthermore, it developed from a highly regarded participative exercise, which has led to it being regarded as a pioneer document in this field by, among others, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (2002). However it does fall short of a corporate sustainable development strategy such as those produced by the other devolved administrations, meaning that sustainability policy has lacked coherence in Northern Ireland and has probably hindered the full reflection of the concept in specific areas of public policy. Other issues such as equality have taken a more central place in recent Executive policy, although key initiatives in these realms, such as the statutory duty placed on all public bodies to promote equality^{*****}, and New TSN for tackling social exclusion, all contribute to some elements of a broad sustainability agenda. Some of the other key government strategies produced under devolution do explicitly mention sustainable development, even if they do not seek to promote it in a robust way. These include the *Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy* (EHS, 2002), the *Regional Transport Strategy* (DRD, 2002), the *Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy* (EHS, 2000) and *Investing in Health* (DHSSPS, 2002), which all form part of a loose commitment to sustainable development.

3.4.1 Progress on LA21 in the UK and Northern Ireland

This policy framework plays a critical role in enabling and encouraging local activity in sustainable development. The robust policy at the national level has contributed to the fact that, in an international context, progress on LA21 has been reported to be relatively successful in the UK, which is seen as one of the pioneers in Europe, with an early take up by many local authorities (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998, Lafferty, 2001). The initial progress of LA21 across the UK has been attributed to the example set by a number of trailblazing local authorities such as Sutton, Kirklees, Leicester and Lancashire and to the support of the Local Government Management Board (Church and Young, 2001). It was given a further boost in 1997, when the Prime Minister expressed a need for every UK local authority to have completed an LA21 plan by December 2000 (LGMB, 1999) and when central government published guidance on the development of LA21 strategies (DETR, 1998). As a result, the UK has seen high levels of public involvement in debates about local sustainability and a recent estimate suggested that 91% of local authorities had agreed an LA21 action plan (Tuxworth, 2001). This provides the basis for a fairly positive assessment of LA21 in the UK:

^{*****} S.75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act.

“...tens of thousands of people have taken part in a process that has developed both their environmental awareness and their perceptions of how such issues are related to broader social issues. In the best cases there has been capacity– and confidence-building, and the creation of new local structures that seem certain to be self-sustaining.”

(Church and Young, 2001, p126)

In the last three years, however, there appears to have been a trailing off of LA21 activity and a questioning of its future direction in the UK. One of the reasons for this has been the mainstreaming of some elements of local sustainability as a result of the broader New Labour agenda of democratic renewal and the modernisation of local government (Tuxworth, 2001; Church and Young, 2001). This appears to have marginalized the impact of LA21 as an exciting area of innovation and cutting edge policy, and subsequently reduced its attraction for professional and political leadership of local authorities.

There is no shortage of reviews and evaluations of LA21 across the UK (eg Audit Commission, 1997; Morris and Hams, 1997; Voisey, 1998; Buckingham-Hatfield and Percy, 1999; Church and Tuxworth, 2000; Young, 2001), but the position of Northern Ireland has been neglected in such studies and its position vis-à-vis LA21 has been rather unclear. Thus, while it has been estimated that 91% of UK local authorities have developed LA21 plans and the Scottish Executive has reported that all of its local authorities have completed such strategies⁺⁺⁺⁺, until the survey reported in the next section was undertaken, it was estimated that in Northern Ireland only nine out of twenty-six councils appeared to have reached this stage by 2000 (SNIP, 2000). Some of the reasons for this appear to be:

- A lack of a Northern Ireland Strategy for Sustainable Development and hence a lack of definition of how local action can contribute to a wider policy framework.
- The fact that there has been less government promotion of the LA21 initiative in Northern Ireland.
- The functional responsibilities of local authorities are limited compared to local authorities in other parts of the British Isles, providing significant financial and functional constraints to the development and implementation of LA21 plans.
- Although SNIP has promoted LA21, it has been unable to replicate the support once provided by the Local Government Management Board in Great Britain.
- Other factors linked to exchange of experience and models of best practice, covered in

⁺⁺⁺⁺ www.sustainable.scotland.gov.uk/strategy/la21.html

Section 4.

However the modernisation agenda that seems to have affected the trajectory of LA21 in Great Britain has not yet been significantly reflected in Northern Ireland, with a more radical reform of local government being put off until the completion of the ongoing Review of Public Administration. There are nonetheless some similarities in this reform agenda with the emergence of 26 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in Northern Ireland. These are responsible for the delivery of PEACE II funding in each district council area and are required to develop Integrated Area Plans, based on public participation, covering the economic, social and environmental needs of the area. They may therefore become important actors in advancing the sustainability agenda. While the LSPs have clear parallels with the County/City Development Boards (CDBs) in the Republic of Ireland, there are some fundamental differences, particularly the fact that LSPs are focused on the PEACE II funding and lie outside the normal regulative and administrative functions of local government, rather than being integrated with it, as in the case of CDBs.

Although relatively little is known of the LA21 process in Northern Ireland, there is clearly a wide range of local sustainable activity. It is clear that some councils, such as Belfast City Council, have made serious attempts to integrate the sustainability agenda within their statutory roles and have prepared their own set of sustainability indicators (BCC, 1999a, 1999b). A significant number of sustainability-related partnerships have also been developing an understanding of key economic, environmental and social issues at a local level, including Belfast Healthy Cities, the Arena Network, Northern Ireland Environment Link and Bryson House. Sustainable NI (SNI) has been particularly active in promoting local sustainable development initiatives in Northern Ireland since 1997, including a community waste minimisation project, community visioning and action planning and the Sustainable Communities Programme^{****} which aims to promote sustainability through community development.

3.5 The Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland has also been very active at the national level in developing a policy framework for sustainable development and has witnessed a similar evolution to that of the UK,

^{****} This is a UK wide project, undertaken jointly with ENCAMS, Forward Scotland and the Community Development Foundation

albeit in a more compressed timescale. A national sustainable development policy has evolved from initial attempts to instil environmental values into corporate government activity, beginning with the publication of the *Environmental Action Programme* (DoE, 1990), which committed the government to the principles of sustainable development, integration of environmental considerations into all areas of policy and adoption of the precautionary principle into government decision-making. Unlike in the case of the UK, the Irish government did not immediately prepare national strategies to detail the commitments it made at Rio, but as the implications of its economic growth emerged during the 1990s, it began to put into place a more robust policy and, crucially, an institutional framework to cope with the local and global consequences. 1992 therefore saw the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and initial studies on the impacts of climate change (DoELG, 1992). Single issue policy was developed over the five years after Rio and there was some development of guidance for LA21, with a national milestone coming with the publication of the 1996 State of the Environment Report (EPA, 1996), shortly followed by the National Sustainable Development Strategy (see Box 3.7).

BOX 3.7: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A STRATEGY FOR IRELAND

(DoE (RoI) 1997)

The overall aim of the Strategy is:

“to ensure that economy and society in Ireland can develop to their full potential within a well-protected environment, without compromising the quality of that environment, and with responsibility towards present and future generations and the wider international community”.

The strategy sets out a large number of objectives, that include:

- Maintaining the quality, quantity and diversity of natural endowments.
- Undertaking a high level of environmental protection to conserve renewable resources and to ensure that non-renewable resources are used prudently or not at all.
- Setting out sustainability objectives for the main strategic sectors of the economy so as to encourage long-term growth and competitiveness within a quality environment.
- Accelerating progress towards a more environmentally sustainable society based, inter alia, on sustainable settlement and housing policies, promotion of sustainable consumption and lifestyle and greater individual and community participation in protecting the environment..
- Developing the means of measuring progress towards sustainability.
- Establishing arrangements for implementation of the strategy.

It also established institutional reform to support sustainable development in the form of a National Sustainable Development Partnership (Comhar), a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Sustainable Development and an Environmental Partnership Fund, and identified regional authorities as having key sustainability responsibilities. The Strategy also provides for local authorities to complete Local Agenda 21 Plans for their areas by 1998.

Although the Strategy offered a new framework for the development of a national sustainability agenda, Comhar (the National Sustainable Development Partnership) has highlighted some weaknesses such as;

- It did not have many quantified objectives for the economic policy areas that undermine the environment;
 - There is no specific legislation concerning sustainable development, although some provision was later made in new planning legislation.
 - While the Strategy has strongly influenced the policy background of new local authority structures, it is not a central part of their brief. In some areas this has made it difficult to have sustainability issues adequately represented.
 - A general lack of linkage of environmental, economic and social issues has to some extent diminished the interest of public and politicians alike, and has led to sustainable development being identified primarily with environmental issues.
- (Comhar, 2001, p1-4).

The sustainable development strategy has, however, provided the guiding framework for all policy that has followed, including that relating to LA21 and that relating to other policy areas, such as poverty (DSFA, 2002), waste management (DoELG, 2002b), climate change (DoELG, 2000) and biodiversity (DAHGI, 2002).

Land use planning is a specific dimension of the government framework for sustainability, with the Planning and Development Act 2000 having sustainable development written in as a key objective of the planning system, a virtually unique feature within Europe. This has stimulated integrated area plans (e.g. Clones), which have been successful in developing inclusive participatory processes. The Act also contained some regressive aspects, particularly in relation to the introduction of a fee for submitting comments on a planning application. The National Spatial Strategy (DoELG, 2002c) is also of key relevance. Providing a framework for spatial development up to 2020, it accepts that such development should be guided by sustainability principles, for example reducing the need to travel and minimising the consumption of non-renewable resources. Similarly, the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (Government of Ireland, 2000) introduces “*sustainability proofing for regional development plans*”. The regional level of governance was established in 1994 with the creation of eight Regional Authorities, followed by two Regional Assemblies in 1999. These authorities have responsibility for sustainable development strategy at a regional level and for the coordination of Local Agenda 21 amongst their constituent councils.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government undertook a comprehensive review of the implementation of sustainable development in Ireland prior to the WSSD, which highlighted the links between the various policy areas and overall progress on integration (DoELG, 2002a). The review document also sets out the priorities for the next ten

years (see Box 3.8). It is comprehensive in the coverage of the types of initiatives that have been instigated at the national level and provides a good understanding of the context in which LA21 has developed.

BOX 3.8: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW DECADE (DoELG, 2002a)
<p>“Making Ireland’s Development Sustainable” sets out the themes and principles to be supported in the next decade of progress towards sustainable development. It also identifies the priority areas for action, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate change.• Nature, Biodiversity and Heritage.• Environment and Health.• Waste Management. <p>Cross-sectoral priorities include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Spatial Strategy.• Regulatory Reform.• Strategic Environmental Assessment.• Local Agenda 21.• Research.• Indicators. <p>Notably, the North/South strategies and activities for protecting and enhancing shared environmental resources across the island are also identified as a priority.</p>

3.5.1 Progress on LA21 in the Republic of Ireland

Although the national and institutional framework of sustainable development policy in the Republic of Ireland has many parallels with the UK, progress on implementing LA21 has generally been perceived to be less advanced. Indeed, the same assessment that described the UK as a pioneer of LA21, suggested the Republic of Ireland’s national performance was one of the most “tardy” in Europe, being relatively weak in putting LA21 into practice (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998, Lafferty, 2001). On a more positive note, this assessment registered that there had been a marked increase in national support, although this was still poorly represented at the local level, which also reflects experience north of the border. Compared to the UK as a whole, LA21 in the Republic of Ireland has not been subject to as high a level of analysis, with some official (eg DoELG, 2001) and NGO assessments (eg Earth Summit Ireland, 2002), complemented by valuable tales told of local experiences of developing LA21 (eg Kelly, 2000 and Ryan, 2002). Ger Mullally (1998, 2001) has provided the most insightful analysis of the Republic of Ireland’s experience, showing that there are as yet few indications of the implementation of LA21, with no authority having moved substantially beyond the first stage identified in Figure 2.1, and with LA21 largely remaining of “latent potential” rather than making

“visible progress”. There are, however, grounds for optimism in that an institutionalising process towards local sustainable development has been taking place (Mullally, 2001). This process is beginning to overcome what Mullally sees as the major structural impediments to LA21, such as a top-down constitutional arrangement that leaves local authorities heavily dependent on central government, the ill-defined responsibilities of each level of government, and a failure of councils to engage in full public participation. Thus relative to Northern Ireland, the Republic’s local authorities appear to have more capability to deliver sustainable development, although Coyle (1996) notes that compared with most European municipalities, they remain under the heavy constraints of central government.

One of the key concerns identified by Mullally (1998) is that LA21 has been too centrally-driven and that this process began with the publication of the LA21 Guidelines in 1995 (DoE, 1995). Based on similar guidance issued by the LGMB in England, these were almost entirely generated from within the DoE and aimed to provide councils with the justifications, participative responsibilities and practical suggestions for action. The 1995 Guidelines were buttressed by the publication of the National Sustainable Development Strategy in 1997 (DoE, 1997; see Box 3.7), which further emphasised the central role local authorities have to play in environmental protection as “*agents of sustainable development*” (ibid, p3). The Strategy restates recommendations from the 1995 Guidelines and *Better Local Government* (1996) that councils should lead by example and “*green their own performance and operations*” (DoE, 1997, p187). The Strategy adds its own request, “*that all local authorities complete a Local Agenda 21 for their areas by 1998*” (p188) – a target that was soon seen to be unrealistic (Mullally, 2001).

The emerging failure to meet this target led central government to suggest that every council designate an LA21 officer and that these should come together in a National Local Agenda 21 Officers' Network to provide a focal point for local people and a channel of communication for the different levels of governance (Mullally, 2002). This network included representatives from central government, regional government and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), the Irish public sector management development agency. A small working group from the Network drafted revisions to the 1995 Guidelines, which were published in 2001 (DoELG, 2001). These guidelines highlight recent institutional reforms, elucidate many of the practicalities of implementing LA21 and list examples of the process in action. However, once the guidelines had been published, the Network appears to have gone into recess.

A major factor influencing the rapid evolution of the institutional context for local sustainable

development in the Republic of Ireland has emerged from the reform process heralded by *Better Local Government* (DoE, 1996), which has allowed a reconciliation of the participative aspirations of LA21 with the representative and administrative functions of local government (Mullally, 1998). Of prime importance here is the emergence of County/City Development Boards (CDBs) as a solution to the inefficiencies and lack of integration of local government (Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 1998). These Boards comprise representatives from local government and the local development sectors such as community groups, as well as state agencies and social partners. They would therefore appear well-placed to deliver a consensual approach on sustainability issues.

'The fact that the CDBs are broadly focused on a strategic approach to local development and are to be supported by the Community Forum suggests that this would be an ideal vehicle for a community wide approach to LA21'

(Mullally, 2001, p30)

This Community Forum has been created to provide a voice for the community and voluntary sector in the work of the Boards. In the case of Dublin City, the Forum elects three of the 27 Board members and also develops projects among its member groups. The Guidelines on the CDB Strategies (Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 2000) is an important document in the policy framework for sustainable development, with the fundamental principles including *"the acceptance of the principles of sustainable development, participation and inclusion, decision-making based on consensus and shared responsibility"* (para 3.2). Furthermore their strategies have to have a degree of rigour in how they reflect the principles of sustainable development in that:

'The CDB Strategy will itself need to be 'proofed' against both wider National policies and against wider National and Regional strategies and plans. In relation to National policies, key ones will be those relating to poverty and exclusion, rural development, equality; social, economic and cultural policies; and environmental sustainability'.

(Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 2000, para. 3.12)

The CDBs are therefore increasingly becoming central to the delivery of local sustainable development in the Republic of Ireland

CDBs exhibit some important parallels with the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England in that they both have a broad-based composition and sustainability responsibilities. An

advantage of the CDBs, however, is that they represent far smaller constituencies and therefore are potentially capable of delivering a strategy that is closer to the needs of the community. Indeed the whole of the Better Local Government programme does have close parallels with the modernisation of local government in the UK. While these steps do ensure that sustainability is integrated and better represented in the decision-making process, it does potentially face some of the same difficulties discussed above and in Section 4 below, in that through mainstreaming of sustainability, some of the most important tenets of LA21 may actually be lost.

The activities of Comhar have been more sustained and it is important to note that not only does it act as a *national* forum for sustainable development, but it has a specific role vis-à-vis LA21, acting as a focus for debate, guidance and support of local sustainable development across the Irish Republic. It has identified local sustainability/public participation and education as one of its key priority areas and directs the efforts of one of its four working groups to this end (Comhar, 1999, 2002).

These policy milestones and institutional reforms provide a neat way of conceptualising the progress of LA21 in the Irish Republic, for which Mullally (2001, p133) has usefully distinguished three different phases up to 2001:

- *First phase*: followed the launch of LA21 Guidelines (DoE, 1995), which saw a small number of local authorities (Cork County Council, Dublin Corporation, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council and Louth County Council) mobilising around LA21. These councils tend to still be the ones that are most advanced with the process.
- *Second phase*: began with the publication of the Sustainable Development Strategy (DoE, 1997), which saw 16 local authorities initiate the process, mostly by undertaking state of the environment reports.
- *Third phase*: from mid-1998 central government realised targets were not being met and suggested the creation of an LA21 network. Mullally suggests 14 councils could be described as being in this phase, although some were postponing a full initiation of the LA21 process until further guidance was issued by central government.

The WSSD and its preparatory process have marked a further milestone for LA21 in the Irish Republic. Not only did this stimulate state and social partner reflection on national progress to sustainable development, but it also generated new evaluation of the LA21 process. This coincided with the publication of the new LA21 guidance (DoELG, 2001), and in its overall review of sustainability, central government offered an assessment summarised thus:

“At individual and local level, there is increased provision for public participation and involvement through the process of Local Agenda 21 and the new structures established under the local government reform process... ..Despite this progress, there are concerns that full participation has not yet been realised, and that some groups and sections of the community are still excluded from decision-making processes, at times because of a lack of resources to enable their participation”

(DoELG, 2002, p 58)

That lack of resources is a major theme in another report for WSSD prepared by Earth Summit Ireland (ESI), a group of environmental NGOs. In contrast to the National Report, it expressed a high level of frustration and failure on the part of Ireland in its attempts to advance LA21, providing the following assessment:

“The Irish record on Local Agenda 21 delivery is a poor one...Ireland has essentially failed to restructure its failed local governance structures in the context of Local Agenda 21”

(ESI, 2002, p 88)

The review is not entirely gloomy, as it does point to good practice, quoting the Cork Environmental Forum as an example of how NGOs and local authorities can work together effectively, and identifying the critical role of the “visionary local authority manager” who helped establish it.

On the eve of the WSSD, a further assessment of LA21 was provided by Comhar, suggesting that:

‘Much of the work on public participation has taken place under the local government reform process rather than under Local Agenda 21. With some exceptions little progress has been made specifically on LA21 participation. The process is very time-consuming, and the LA21 officers appointedare not assigned full-time to this work. Traditionally, the whole area of participation ...has not been part of the local authority culture, but progress is being made.’

(Comhar, 2001, p7)

There are, therefore, mixed judgements on the trajectory of the Republic’s progression towards sustainable development at the national and local levels. There is clearly an ever-growing policy framework, with the institutional context becoming more robust and better able to implement the sentiments expressed in such documents. The framework reflects many of the developments experienced at the national level in the UK, although it is debatable whether the Republic of Ireland has yet developed a local government culture of innovation and leadership in

sustainable development. Such assessments are, however, entirely relative, and if one compares the policy framework with that which exists in Northern Ireland, it appears substantially robust. The next section aims to explore some of these comparisons in more detail.

3.6 Sustainable development policy in a comparative perspective

From this brief review of the policy context for sustainable development in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it is possible to make the following points that will be significant when considering the recommendations of this report:

- There is an extremely strong policy hierarchy for sustainable development from the global to the regional. This urges the pressing need for action on a range of sustainability issues, emphasises the role of local action and places the force of the UN, EU and national governments behind the implementation of the objectives of LA21.
- The UK has an integrated and effectively monitored framework for sustainability, which has been further elaborated by the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, but is less well constructed in Northern Ireland, where sustainable development policy appears relatively incomplete. In the absence of a completed sustainable development strategy, the Regional Development Strategy coupled with the Programme for Government in Northern Ireland remain the best coordinating mechanisms.
- The policy framework is also relatively strong in the Republic of Ireland and it has rapidly developed an institutional framework better suited to the delivery of sustainable development. At the present however this still remains at the stage of “latent potential” rather than having made visible progress.
- Local authorities clearly have differing capacities north and south of the Irish border, with CDBs of growing relevance in the Irish Republic. In Great Britain it appears that the sustainability agenda has merged, probably to its detriment, with broader attempts at local government reform. This may emerge as a significant issue as the work of CDBs develops, but is yet to significantly affect Northern Ireland.
- Sustainable development has been identified by the Environment Sector of the North/South Ministerial Council as a topic of research, specifically the *“identification of strategies and activities which would contribute to a coherent all-island approach to the achievement of sustainable development”* (North/South Ministerial Council 2000), but as yet this is undeveloped.

It must be noted, however, that while the policy contexts of each country are generally understood, these only partly explain the capacity of local communities to address the sustainable development agenda, which will also be contingent on a range of other factors, including the capacity for action of local authorities, individual officers, supportive stakeholder groups and indeed the strength of opposition or inertia to such initiatives within the same organisations. Some of these issues will be explored in the next sections via case studies, focus groups and surveys.

SECTION 4: FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP: CASE STUDIES OF LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Introduction

While previous sections have established the theoretical and policy context for local sustainable

development on the island of Ireland, this section briefly describes the four case studies undertaken as part of the project. These all provide insights into the nature of the local sustainability process and the ways in which groups and individuals have been able to participate in it. The case studies are therefore aimed at casting light on the degree to which the noble sentiments embodied in LA21 are capable of translation into meaningful results on the ground. They also convey important messages about the difficulties and possibilities of fostering “environmental citizenship”. It is important to note however, that the case studies are not meant to illustrate best practice, but help to ground the subsequent statistical analysis in some real life examples and possibilities. As such they have been influential in drawing up the recommendations for this report.

As explained in Section 1.3, the four case studies were carefully chosen, first to provide examples of where the local dimension to sustainable development has stimulated cross-border initiatives (Sliabh Beagh and Foyle Basin Council), and second to show how local sustainable development can foster environmental citizenship, as articulated in Section 2.5. The Foyle Basin Council ambitiously, and ultimately unsuccessfully, tried to bridge a natural ecological territory spanning two political jurisdictions. SEMPA (Suburban Environmental Management – A Participatory Approach), a major community planning project completed in 2002 and covering 30,000 residents in the north-eastern suburbs of Dublin, made participation central to its organisational identity. The Sliabh Beagh Cross Border Partnership is presented as an example of bridging cross-border environmental project work, which has been hailed by a former member of the Northern Ireland Executive as *“a model of co-operation for mutual benefit”*. And perhaps most ambitiously, and also with recent acclaim, the environmental and regeneration charity Groundwork (NI) continues to pursue the goal of environmental citizenship across Belfast’s fraught peace lines.

The case studies are briefly described in this section, followed by an attempt to evaluate what they convey about the more general approach to sustainability on the island of Ireland. Each of the case studies is described in more detail in Appendix 4.

4.2 Summary of the case studies

4.2.1. Foyle Basin Council

Having its origins in a campaign against a proposal to build a waste incineration facility in the Northwest, the Foyle Basin Council (FBC) evolved to form a partnership with Derry District Council in the late 1990s, advancing a widely-acclaimed grass roots vision of LA21 in Ireland.

The evolution was substantially helped by PEACE I funding in 1997, although the initiative ultimately had difficulty in being sustained once that programme ended. With a core value of maintaining the integrity of the Foyle Basin eco-system, FBC took a lead role in pressing forward a cross-border dialogue on what in practical terms sustainability should mean in this part of the island. Ultimately the dialogue process faltered and the FBC office closed in late 2002. This tells us something about the nature of voluntary body existence in the sustainability policy process, yet it would be too easy to single out funding or over-dependence on committed individuals as accounting for the fragility of this sector^{§§§§§}. While these were significant contributing factors to the demise of the FBC, as the fuller case study shows in Appendix 4, it also involved the inability of the local political culture to fully embrace the concept of discursive democracy.

The noble aspirations of FBC and the possibility of a negotiated consensus on a Northwest sustainable vision ultimately fractured around the re-emergence of an incinerator proposal and the strongly opposing views on how to react to it, with dialogue made more difficult by the seeming inability of the FBC to shake off implications of partisan party political associations. The transition to sustainability clearly involves conflicts and trade-offs that cannot be expected to entirely float free of general political choices and, in this sense, the environment can divide as much as it can unite. Yet the FBC provides a lesson in that a longer view must be taken when attempting to foster an environmental citizenship. It is all too easy to dismiss this notion as wishful thinking amidst the ‘realpolitik’ of governance which touches on other aspects of identity on the island of Ireland, but it clearly remains the case that it is possible either to facilitate or to impede the emergence of sustainability as an ethic for living. Conflict over environmental issues in a context of an uneven distribution of power and resources remains inevitable. However, robust LA21 processes and structures can at least ensure that reasons for proposed courses of actions are articulated, thus giving a greater chance for the eventual rooting of what Benhabib (2000) terms a “civic point of view”.

4.2.2 SEMPA

The second case study of SEMPA (Suburban Environmental Management – A Participatory Approach) was selected on the basis of the prominence given to its role as an EU pilot study on innovative planning processes. The planning project, costing over 5 million Euros, was completed in September 2002. It covered 30,000 residents in the north-eastern suburbs of Dublin and embraced a full range of socio-economic difference from exclusive residential

^{§§§§§} The role of such individuals, the so called “Policy-orientated Evangelists” (PoEs), set in a context of corporate antipathy, is referred to elsewhere in the report.

enclaves to areas of social deprivation. The outreach project was led by Fingal County Council and focused mainly on the need to develop an area management plan to support the assignment of Special Amenity Area status to the Howth Peninsula and protect the coastal ecosystem of North Dublin Bay. This case study, based on interviews and secondary material considered more fully in Appendix 4, provides a number of valuable insights. Firstly, it shows what can be done with sufficient resources – SEMPA had generous funding and was therefore able to adopt an inclusive approach to sustainable development going beyond narrow environmentalism. A wide range of stakeholders were drawn into a discursive process that linked policy development on recreation, tourism, transport and public open space with green concerns, while a schools component of the project resulted in an environmental education resource CD-ROM. Although the project was not able to draw in the most marginalized sections of the community, it did engender an inclusive sense of local place, reminiscent of participatory approaches to Local Action 21 in Leicester where, on an admittedly larger scale, the term “eco-city” provides an umbrella for common environmental belonging. Spin-offs in the SEMPA area provide evidence of local capacity building, including the continuing existence of some of the project planning groups in the form of local environmental forums. However the sense of environmental citizenship that was built in the SEMPA area will only endure if plan proposals are followed through to implementation so that visionary enthusiasm does not turn into cynicism and a withdrawal from a politics of the whole.

4.2.3 Sliabh Beagh Cross Border Partnership

Like the Foyle Basin Council, the third case study also straddles the border in Ireland. The Sliabh Beagh Partnership was selected as an example of successful cross-border cooperation around a sustainable development theme in a situation where the ‘Troubles’ had led to the prolonged closure of many roads linking the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, massively reducing the area’s capacity for economic, social and environmental regeneration. The Sliabh Beagh Partnership was founded as an association of ten community groups drawing membership from Fermanagh, Monaghan and Tyrone when the political tension began to thaw. Its catchment area of 800 square miles covers the Sliabh Beagh mountain range and surrounding lowland, which is home to 16,000 people. Although once described as “*amongst the most deprived rural parts of the island of Ireland*” (Peter Quinn Consultancy, 1996), the natural capital of the area provides a core sense of “local place”. This provided a central focus for the activities of the Sliabh Beagh Partnership, which demonstrates what a motivated voluntary sector can achieve when it takes full advantage of funding possibilities and makes a

full commitment to the theme of sustainability. This does have to be qualified, however, by the fact that the Partnership has been united in its vision for the area, so that, to date, it has not had to confront any really divisive environmental issues, as was the case with the Foyle Basin Council. If the Partnership should face such issues in the future, there is, however, a greater chance that a sufficient sense of environmental citizenship will have evolved through the implementation of its programmes to make consensus a stronger likelihood. This assessment is based on a number of factors more fully elaborated in Appendix 4, including complimentary acknowledgements from auditing bodies and politicians. In essence, the success of Sliabh Beagh as a relatively autonomous social partner in local sustainable development activities has been due to the continuity of a small core of dedicated paid staff orchestrating a range of community-wide environmental projects under the more or less unifying theme of eco-tourism. Interview evidence suggests that the creation of supervised walking and cycling trails, recycling initiatives, craft development, tourism support skills, marketing schemes, infrastructure improvements and an arts programme, all linked through an IT network, have heightened local awareness of a common identity with the environment as a unifying bond. Resources, community dedication, a rootedness in the uniqueness of the local, and the visionary power of a broad theme have been crucial.

4.2.4 Groundwork (NI)

The final case study was chosen because those involved consciously seek to build environmental citizenship in the most difficult conditions. This relates to the work of Groundwork (NI), which is an NGO linked to the wider Groundwork movement in the United Kingdom. Formed in 1982 with a focus on the reclamation of urban fringe derelict land, the Groundwork organisation has recently shifted its emphasis towards using environmental improvements as a way of contributing to community building. There are 46 separate Groundwork trusts with more than 450 board members and over 750 employees. Each local trust is autonomous, drawing funds from private and public sources. Groundwork (NI) has focused activity within Belfast and developed local experience of working in difficult, cross-community contexts through a philosophy of building self-worth. It has been involved in over 100 projects, with 5 or so key ones in interface areas, which try, against the odds, to use environmental themes to create common identity and meaning using staff locally recruited from both sides of the community. Current work in the Short Strand/Inner East Belfast area gives a flavour of the hard implementation edge to Groundwork's intervention using local environmental problems and opportunities to build community self-confidence as a prerequisite to more constructive inter-

ethnic dialogue. This augments other inter-community mediation efforts in the area following the outbreak of serious violence and rioting in the summer of 2002 in a part of East Belfast where 3,500 nationalists form an enclave community in predominantly Protestant territory. Activities have included painting of convivial murals, tree planting, clean up campaigns, community art projects, local history projects building connections to place, and public open space schemes. One project that symbolises the Groundwork spirit was where pupils from primary schools on either side of the community divide met together on a weekly basis to construct an artwork to be placed on the interface. A single large bronze face was created from an amalgam of the individual faces of the children and erected in the summer of 2003.

Amidst the wide variety of exogenous factors supporting or militating against the building of common environmental feeling in such difficult contexts of cultural animosity, it is impossible to exactly measure the contribution of the notion of environmental citizenship to the nurturing of empathetic civic glue. While excessive claims must be avoided, it cannot go unremarked that in the summer of 2003 ethnic violence at the East Belfast interface has been seriously reduced.

4.3 Reflections on the case studies

The case studies, only four from a much wider range of innovative practice now taking hold across the island of Ireland, encourage a number of conclusions that will be further addressed in the report's recommendations. In some cases these are also confirmed by the wider survey of practice set out in Section 5. At this point it is possible to make the following observations:

- *Environmental Citizenship*

The case studies provide evidence that the concept of environmental citizenship is far from idealistic and can strengthen the transition to sustainability. They also show that nurturing the social capital required for environmental citizenship can be a slow and intensive process, which faces a range of countervailing forces. In the context of divided or atomistic societies, however, the concept can be shown to be a foundation on which wider benefits can be built.

- *Need for robust capacity*

Local sustainable development depends on robust partnerships between councils, citizens and social partners from a variety of sectors. The case studies have demonstrated the important role social partners can play in the sustainability process. When supported by resources and appropriate expertise, such as in the case of

Groundwork (NI), they can act as a vital stimulus and reservoir of experience that can bring long term benefits to a local area. However, other case studies, particularly that of the Foyle Basin Council, reveal the range of financial and human resource pressures faced by some social partners, particularly in the voluntary sector, pressures that are not always fully appreciated by the local authorities they work with. This suggests that action may be needed not just to enhance the human and financial resources of local authorities for the pursuit of sustainability, but also those of the social partners that are expected to enter into partnership with them.

- *Strengthening the idea of sustainable development*

Previous sections have discussed the range of interpretations of sustainable development, noting that there is a tendency for local authorities to use weaker versions of the concept, which generally avoid the more difficult trade-off decisions, but do not maximise long-term benefits. The case studies suggest that social partners are more likely to express more ambitious objectives related to stronger interpretations of sustainability. This therefore underlines the importance of having a range of stakeholders within local sustainability partnerships, so that the full range of local development options can be considered.

- *Cultures of participation*

The case studies also tell us something about the need to enhance participation within local sustainability initiatives and show some of the benefits this can bring. This may involve the use of innovative methods, but also requires a change in local political relationships. While it is generally accepted that this needs significant changes in the culture of local authorities, the case studies, particularly FBC, suggest that social partners also have to adjust to a new spirit of partnership. In the past many voluntary sector bodies, especially those involved in local campaigns, may have had an adversarial relationship with local councils, yet an effective sustainability partnership demands every stakeholder to act differently, in a more discursive way, requiring openness on all sides. For environmentally-based stakeholders there is therefore a need to appreciate the subtle differences between sustainability as a negotiated consensus and environmentalism as an area of political struggle.

- *Importance of existing political structures and leadership*

Notwithstanding this last point, the case studies also underline the pivotal position of elected representatives in ensuring that sustainability becomes a local political priority. Sustainable development may stress the value of more participative forms of democracy, but it essentially requires the established form of representative democracy

for it to take hold. This is not an easy task to negotiate as it may become frustrated by more traditional schisms in a local area (e.g. FBC) and require elected representatives to share control with stakeholders who have gained legitimacy through means other than the ballot box (e.g. SEMPA).

- *Implementation and results*

Earlier sections of the report stressed the need to move local sustainable development from a process focussed on debate to one based on implementation. While two of the case studies (FBC and SEMPA) focussed on the discursive elements of sustainability, Sliabh Beagh and Groundwork (NI) highlight the benefits of actually making things happen. In particular they point to the fact that when actions lead to observable changes in the quality of life, the process of local sustainable development can become self-reinforcing.

- *Cross-border working*

Two of these case studies involved explicit cross-border dimensions (FBC and Sliabh Beagh). Indeed, it may be easier for social partners than local government to overcome the political and administrative constraints that limit greater levels of co-operation and sharing of experience. This offers some hope that robust sustainability partnerships at all levels of governance may contribute to greater cooperation across the ecological unity of the island.

This section has provided an insight into the constraints and potential of local sustainable development as it is occurring on the ground and illustrates the energy already involved in the process. Such vital energy needs to be supported and, as it has been in all four chosen cases, channelled into participatory processes linking together local government, social partners and civil society. No one case study gives a formula for best practice, but they all suggest that if there are greater opportunities for sustainability practitioners to share their experiences, the expertise and understanding needed for local sustainable development would evolve a more rapidly.

SECTION 5. LA 21 ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND: A REVIEW OF PROGRESS.

5.1 Introduction

This report has emphasised the importance of local sustainable development, has argued that there is merit in approaching this on an all-island basis and has outlined the different policy contexts that exist in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The previous section provided a number of examples of how different communities north and south of the border have engaged in local sustainable development. This section paints a detailed picture of the state of the Local Agenda 21 process and its institutional arrangements across the island of Ireland and highlights the crucial issues that need to be addressed to make more effective progress towards sustainable development. It draws on the key elements of the primary research and condenses the findings from local authority and social partner surveys^{*****} and the follow-up focus groups in Cork, Dublin and Belfast. Where appropriate, it also makes some reference to the findings of the case studies reported in the previous section. The structure follows closely the main research objectives, namely:

- The language of sustainable development: Interpreting Local Agenda 21?
- How far has Local Agenda 21 been implemented?
- Comparison of LA21 in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.
- Civic identity and Local Agenda 21
- The potential for LA21 links either side of the Irish border.

5.2. The language of sustainable development: Interpretations of Local Agenda 21

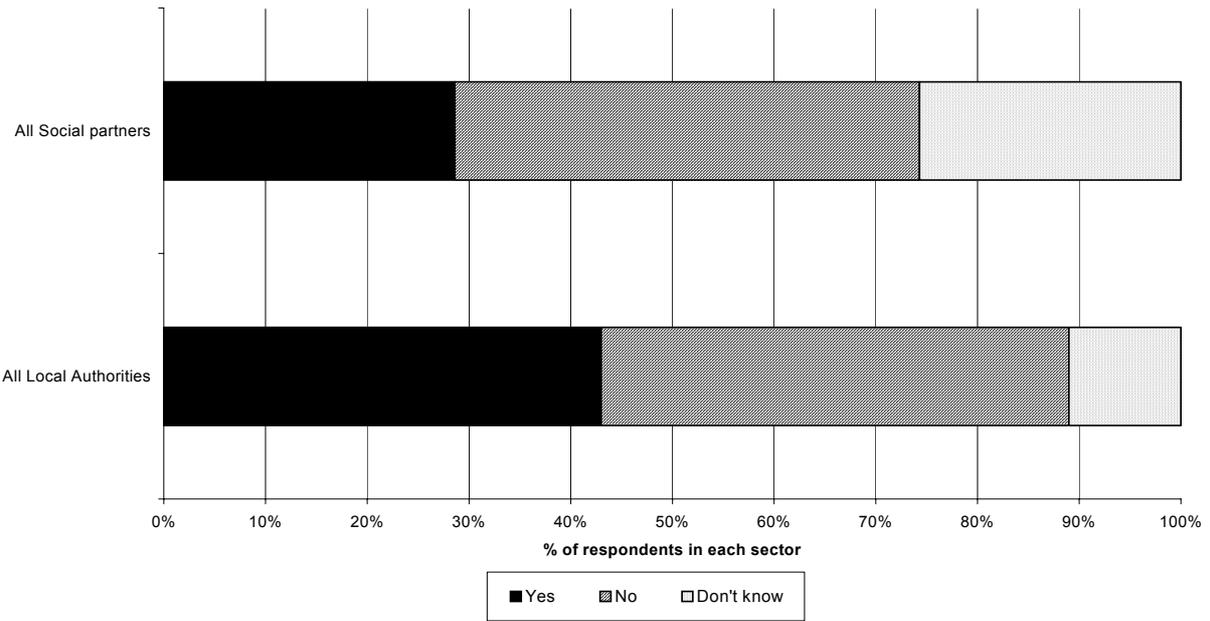
Section 2 noted the problems arising from the terminology associated with local sustainable development and how research in the UK has shown there to be little understanding amongst the public about the language used in sustainability debates (see DETR, 2000). This has been identified as a major stumbling block for local attempts to advance sustainable development, as without a coherent or clear language of sustainability the education and participation needed to make it a reality will be impossible.

As a starting point therefore, this research attempted to gauge if local authority officers and social partners felt that LA21 was an appropriate description of the process of developing sustainability at a local level, with only 43% of local authorities and 29% of social partners across the island of Ireland suggesting it was. Significantly fewer respondents from Northern

^{*****} A full statistical account of these is provided in Appendices 2 and 3. While only the highlights of the findings are discussed here, the full recommendations of the report take all the results of the surveys into account. The findings of each of these surveys are also available from the research team

Ireland from both sectors see the term as appropriate. It is also important to note that only a proportion of what could be described as being local sustainable development is formally accounted for under the LA21 banner, with 75% of all councils suggested they were involved in other initiatives, apart from LA21, that contributed to sustainable development.

Figure 5.1: Do you think the term “Local Agenda 21” is now an appropriate description of the process of developing sustainable development at the local level? (Based on responses from 28 local authorities and 33 social partners.)



This suggests a significant lack of confidence in the terminology that should represent a global consensus on forging local sustainable development and is supposed to have guided local authorities actions in this area for the last 10 years. Discussion at the focus groups shed some light on this, confirming the low level of confidence in the current brand of local sustainable development. Participants from a deeper ecological perspective articulated the view that Local Agenda 21, and indeed the concept of sustainability itself, could sometimes simply be labels superficially applied to convince people that certain policies and plans are good for them – the rhetorical spin of sustainability acknowledged by many other researchers (eg Myers and Macnaghten, 1998). As one of the focus group participants noted:

“...one point of view has been to justify progress in terms of [economic] development, but just put the label of sustainability on it and people will think it is good for them.”

(Participant, Social Partner, Cork focus group)

as separate reports, with a more detailed analysis of each of the surveys.

Some of the focus group participants suggested the current language of local sustainable development lacked a visceral appeal to the desire “*do something for the environment*”, a dimension which was being crowded out by weaker interpretations or by the economic development strand of the sustainability concept.

This is partly a reflection of the change in circumstances since Local Agenda 21 was introduced. In 1992 the main aim was to get local authorities to acknowledge sustainability as part of their remit, which has clearly been achieved. However ten years later a more implementation-orientated focus is needed to translate this heightened awareness into action. This is the aim of Local Action 21, although it is still unclear how successful this will be.

Indeed it is evident that in the years since the Rio Summit many activities that were then part of a campaigning agenda have now been incorporated into various and diffuse aspects of local authority operating cultures and institutional arrangements. As a result of such institutionalisation, the concept of sustainable development has lost some of its visionary appeal and the project has had to draw in an expanded set of stakeholders, with very different cultures and worldviews. It is therefore almost inevitable that the more idealistic elements have been replaced by more practical, management issues, which some have interpreted as reasons for LA21 having lost its energy and wider appeal. It is in a sense a victim of its own success. The following are examples of focus group comment in this regard:

“I am on the steering committee of LA21 in the city council and we have not met in a year. I really would say that LA21 as envisaged in 1992 is no longer there. We are doing it in another guise and a lot of other guises”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

“What you are finding is people do not always take actions under LA21 but there is actually a lot happening that would be classified as such. The problem is that there is not a broad understanding within communities and with people in the street as to what LA21 is. I think the name is unfortunate.”

(Participant, Social Partner, Cork focus group)

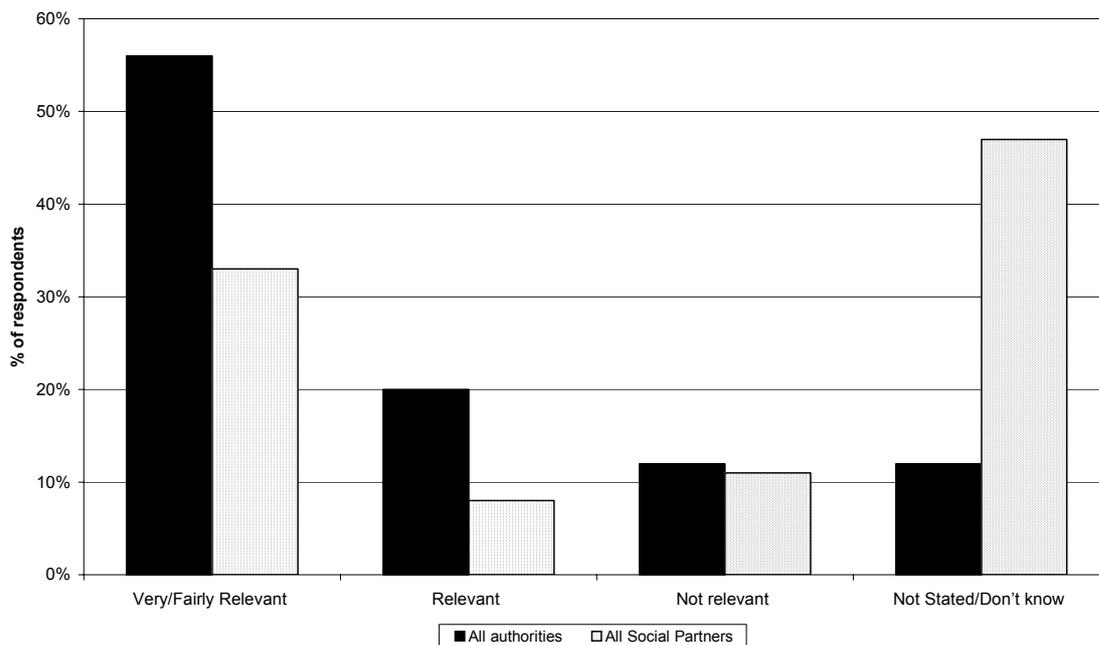
Discontent with the language, in other words, derives not just from the fact that aspects of local sustainable development have diverged from an initial point of genesis but that the term lacks resonance with the public. Even politicians and policy professionals, as pointed out in the focus groups, grapple with a semantic vagueness. Another focus group participant made the useful observation that, while both LA21 and local sustainability suffered from poor brand recognition, nevertheless:

“The public can relate to concrete things like waste minimisation and the desirability of good public transport....There is the need for a more evocative strapline to which the public can relate.”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

While it is also clear that LA21 and local sustainable development have a degree of international saliency (albeit perhaps limited to policy makers), no convincing alternative terms were thrown up by either the survey or focus groups, with “quality of life” perhaps the best contender, though far from ideal. Therefore, while there is some dissatisfaction about the adequacy of the existing language of sustainable development, there seem to be no viable alternatives and to those involved in the process at least LA21 still retains some relevance (see Figure 5.2. below). This graph also illustrates the fact that it is those less close to policy development (i.e. social partners) who are more confused about the relevance of the term.

Figure 5.2: How relevant do you think “Local Agenda 21” is to the current attempt to promote sustainable development? (Based on responses from 25 local authorities and 36 social partners.)



We therefore have a classic dilemma – the terminology of sustainable development is clearly inadequate and is now even becoming an obstacle to the implementation of the values it embodies, yet there is no adequate alternative. As a result of this, a large majority of local authority officers, who have become accustomed to these semantic debates, believe that LA21 remains relevant to the overall objectives of sustainable development, as expressed at a focus group:

“We use terms like LA21 and sustainable development interchangeably, but most people in the council know what we mean...it identifies the broader agenda”.

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

On the other hand, the public and even social partners are significantly confused about this issue. There is therefore a substantial communication problem that needs to be addressed. As research quoted in Section 2.1 notes (DETR, 2000), the best approach to enhanced public understanding of sustainability will be through unbundling it into its constituent elements, such as natural resource use and community support, or as one focus group participant put it, breaking it down into “bite-sized chunks”. This way people can discover their own meanings by relating to local problems (eg waste management, transport). It is clear individual issues such as these are the biggest motivational factors for the vast majority of the public, rather than the overall informing philosophy of sustainable development. Again, this view was expressed at a focus group:

“It all comes down to the punter in the street who says ‘How does this affect my life?’... and that’s the language in which we should speak [to the public]... not about sustainability and other things... if we cut down trees, there’s going to be a wind sweeping through here that’s going to blow everything to bits.. it’s this type of language, how it really affects them”.

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

Communication and engagement with the public on local sustainable development therefore have to be considered and relevant – past practice has clearly been inadequate in this respect and this is an area that needs more attention in the future.

Therefore to summarise:

- Although Local Agenda 21 has been effective in raising local sustainability as an issue over the last ten years, it now appears to be suffering from fatigue, while the key task appears to have moved on to one of implementation (see Section 5.3 below). Nonetheless, LA21 is quite identifiable by policy makers who seem to perceive it as a loose bundle of principles, even if the exact meaning and content remain rather blurred. The term Local Action 21, launched at the WSSD, appears to retain the recognition of Local Agenda 21, but with an emphasis on implementation. Given the global effort that the UN and ICLEI will probably put into the dissemination of Local Action 21 ideals, it would be foolhardy for the island of Ireland to attempt to invent a new term for this process, although it clearly needs to be made directly relevant and reinvigorated at an Irish scale.

- Activities under the Local Agenda 21 banner appear to account for only a proportion of local initiatives that advance the sustainability agenda. This may be leading to further confusion over the term and more denigration of its relevance, but forcing such activities into the LA21 framework would create further tensions and would be ultimately cosmetic and rather meaningless.
- The phrases “Local Agenda 21” and “local sustainable development” currently have little public resonance, with LA21 seen being an appropriate term for the process of promoting local sustainability by only a minority of local authorities and social partners on the island of Ireland. In the past, the language used by councils often tended to inhibit rather than encourage public understanding, which is part of a broader immaturity in the language of sustainable development, which really just has to evolve (DETR, 2000). The lack of an alternative vocabulary means that, while most local authorities still see it as being relevant to sustainable development, social partners remain confused and sceptical.

5.3 Implementation of LA21 across the Island of Ireland

While some data have been collected at an international level on the progress of LA21 (eg Lafferty 2001b, ICLEI, 2002a) and to a lesser extent, within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (eg SNIP, 2000, DoELG, 2001), these have failed to provide a detailed and up-to-date picture of how far sustainable development has progressed at a local level. In particular, there has been little consideration of how such localised issues can be affected by trans-boundary complications. The surveys undertaken to assess these deficiencies are described and analysed elsewhere in this report but the following discussion examines the main elements of LA21, including the structures established to implement it, considers how far the process has been established in local areas and examines how various stakeholders rate LA21 progress. It finally attempts to identify the key elements that contribute to successful LA21 processes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

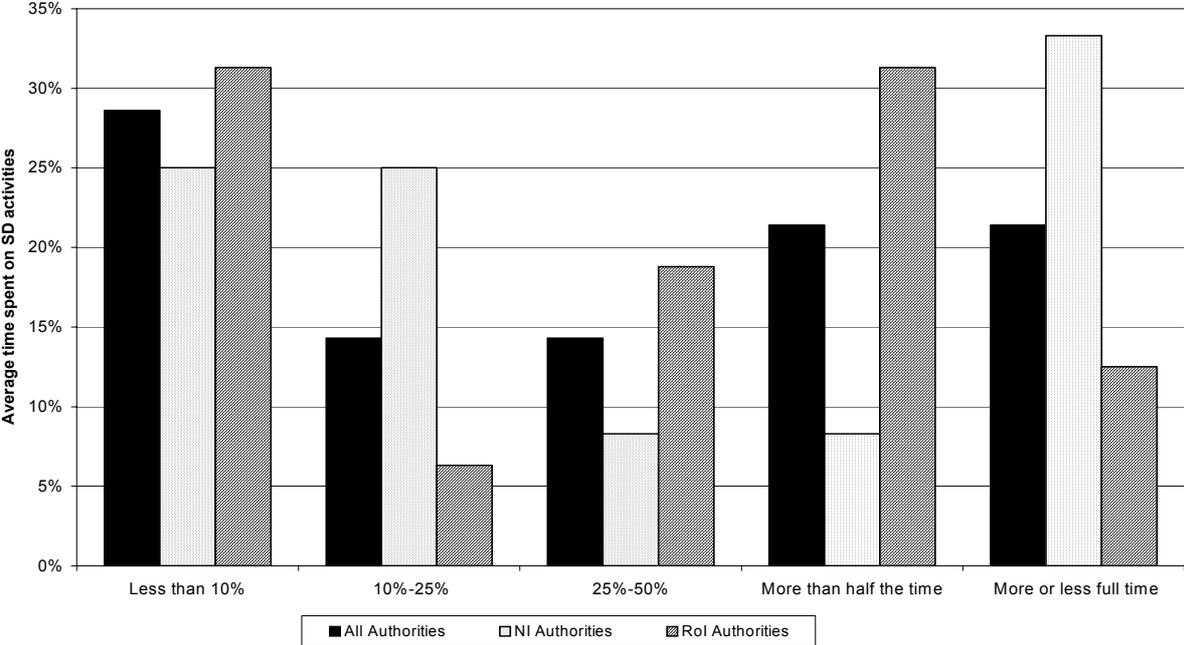
5.3.1 Structure and institutional factors

LA21 has presented a number of challenges to existing local government structures, particularly in that it aims to integrate policy across all sectors and demands enhanced levels of participation. It also requires social partners to reflect on their relationship with these structures. One aim of the surveys was therefore to establish the capacities of the different stakeholders and the ways in which they were organised to engage with LA21.

5.3.1.1 Local authorities

The non-statutory basis of LA21 has meant that local authorities have tended to vary greatly in the degree to which they have sought to integrate LA21 into their activities. This is also reflected in the level of human resources dedicated to local sustainable development, with significant differences north and south of the Irish border. Figure 5.3 thus notes the time dedicated to sustainable development by the survey respondents, who, it has been assumed, are generally the lead officers for this issue within the various councils. Figure 5.4 illustrates the other human resources dedicated to sustainable development-related activities within the local authority.

Figure 5.3: Please estimate the percentage of your time dedicated to sustainable development-related activities. (Based on responses from 28 local authorities.)

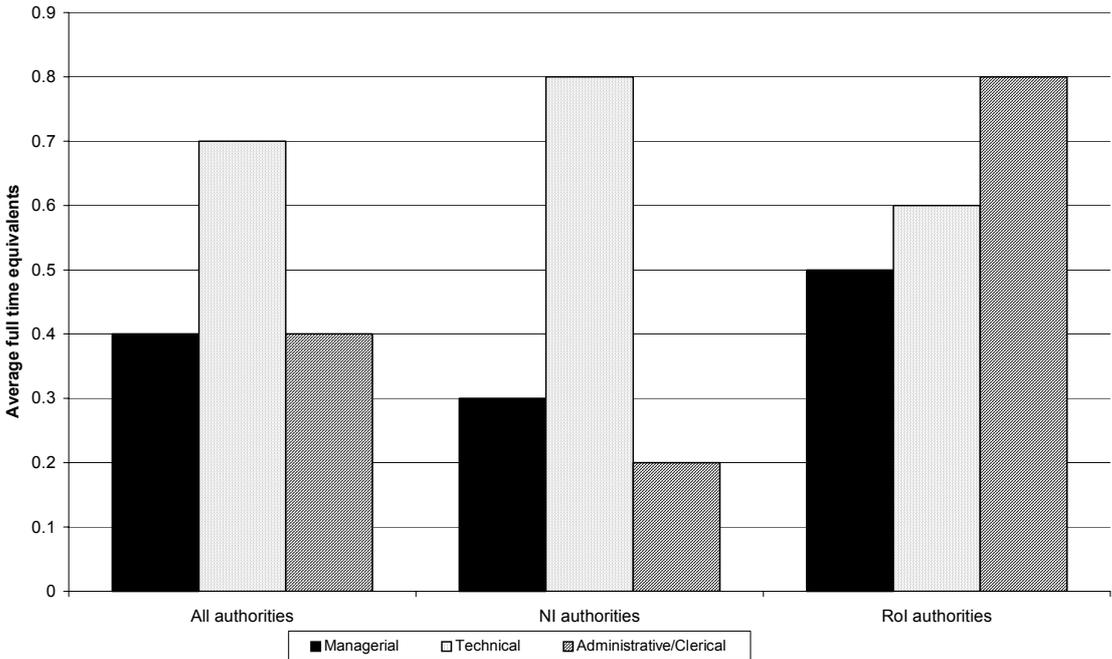


The figures suggest that just over 20% of all councils on the island of Ireland have full-time sustainability officers, operating with surprisingly little administrative or technical support. Furthermore, in nearly 30% of councils, the lead officer spends less than 10% of his or her time on this activity. Given the high level of endorsement of LA21 from the international community and both national governments, this represents a shocking lack of commitment at the local level. There are, however, significant differences in how local authorities on either side of the border have organised their sustainability efforts. It is possible to generalize that Northern Ireland councils are more likely to view local sustainability activity as a discrete area of activity rather than integrating it into the delivery of other public services, shown by the much higher proportion of officers dedicated to sustainable development, but with far less administrative support (Figure 5.4). While this means that

there is a dedicated officer promoting LA21, it can have a downside, as noted in one of the focus groups:

“If you are given responsibility for LA21 or social inclusion it becomes a ghetto...there is a danger that people will say ‘Oh, he’s looking after that and the rest of us can get on with our lives’...”
 (Participant, Social Partner, Cork focus group)

Figure 5.4: How many other people work full-time or part-time on sustainable development initiatives within the Council? (Based on responses from 28 local authorities.)



In the Republic of Ireland local sustainable development appears to be dealt with by more senior officers, having more administrative and technical support, but they are also responsible for a much large range of other services. This has been interpreted as being a direct result of the different functional responsibilities of local government on either side of the border. In the Republic of Ireland sustainability has been handed to service-delivery departments such as housing and planning and integrated with them, while in Northern Ireland the minority of councils that have decided that LA21 is an effective way of fulfilling their role of civic leadership have established discrete posts to take forward the initiative.

This point is further elaborated by the fact that in Northern Ireland responsibilities for sustainable development tend to lie with the environmental health department (36% of NI councils), development department (27% of NI councils), or the chief executive’s department (36% of NI councils). In the Republic of Ireland, responsibilities lie with either the environment/planning department (56% of RoI councils), or a department of community and enterprise (44% of RoI councils). These structures tend to reflect the ways in which elected

representatives consider LA21, with the respective departmental committees tending to be responsible for all sustainability policy, although a few councils (3 in Northern Ireland and 1 in the Republic of Ireland) have established specific LA21 committees. In the case of the Republic of Ireland, 77% now deal with LA21 issues at their Strategic Policy Committee, reflecting the way in which recent modernisation has been able to mainstream sustainable development initiatives (see Sections 2 and 3). A final view of how councils organise their sustainability activities is provided by the different approaches to integrating sustainable development into council structures shown in Figure 5.5.

For a wider comparative perspective, the findings the surveys conducted for this research have been integrated in this graph with those from the ICLEI survey (2002a). This suggests that overall councils on the island of Ireland, particularly those in Northern Ireland, tend to be making a broader attempts to integrate sustainability than most European municipalities, although there is a strong focus on those that require least overall disruption to established ways of working (eg staff training, interdepartmental group work). Less than one third of the councils in Ireland have attempted to integrate sustainable development with every element of the council's work, just below the European average. However, it must be remembered that in the surveys conducted both for this research and for ICLEI, it is likely that there is a response bias towards more sustainability active councils. There is however, clearly more to achieving adequate integration than a mechanistic merging of certain activities, as one focus group participant noted:

"It is a very slow process, because what you are trying to do is change a culture within an organisation, but that's the only way you will do it... you can have all the leaflets you like in the world... you can have all the projects you want, but unless people have this stuff in their subconscious, it's not going to happen"

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Cork focus group)

While many councils state that responsibilities for sustainable development are integrated and that officers are corporately engaged with LA21, the focus groups and case studies reveal a situation where institutional inertia is kept at bay only through the energy and relationships of committed individuals. This results in over-dependence on such individuals and in such circumstances results in a fragile corporate commitment to sustainability. This was shown to exist in one of the case studies (the Foyle Basin Council) and was also raised in some of the focus groups, for example in the case of a County Manager in the Republic of Ireland and a Chief Executive of a Northern Ireland council. Indeed, as one focus group participant stated:

"Local authority officials A and B were very involved with our network and got involved with our group and developed a series of initiatives on health

and LA21. They brought people over to try and bed this down together but then, of course, they moved.... I think there is always a risk of that. There is no steady approach. Concepts bed down for a while but then people move on....”

(Participant, Social Partner, Dublin focus group)

5.3.1.2 Social partners

In successful LA21 processes, the contribution of other stakeholders tends to be equal to that of the local authority. The range of social partners involved in local sustainable development activity is illustrated by the type of organisations that responded to the survey (see Figure 5.6). Social partners also varied in terms of the size and geographic scope of their activity, 43% being primarily local, 32% regional, 21% national and 3% international. There are significant differences in that far more social partners from the Irish Republic were locally based (26% in NI and 61% in the RoI), while most Northern Ireland organisations were organised on a regional level (53% in NI and 11% in the RoI). Social partner organisations are also generally small, with only one employing more than 100 on the island of Ireland, and half of them operating from offices with less than 10 people. It appears that social partner organisations in Northern Ireland are marginally larger. In terms of how the organisations were funded, the dominant sources were central government funds (49% of all authorities) and membership fees (13% of all social partners).

Figure 5.6: Type of organisation: social partners
(Based on responses from 36 social partners, with some indicating more than one area of activity)

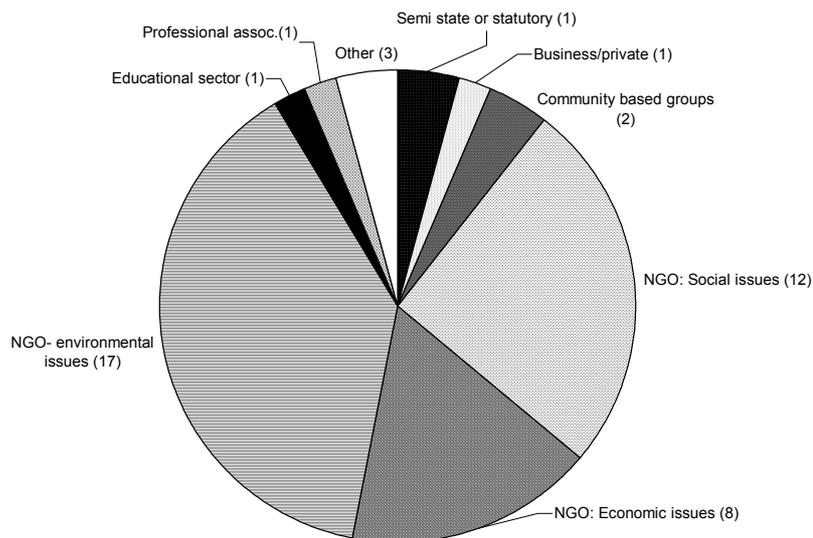
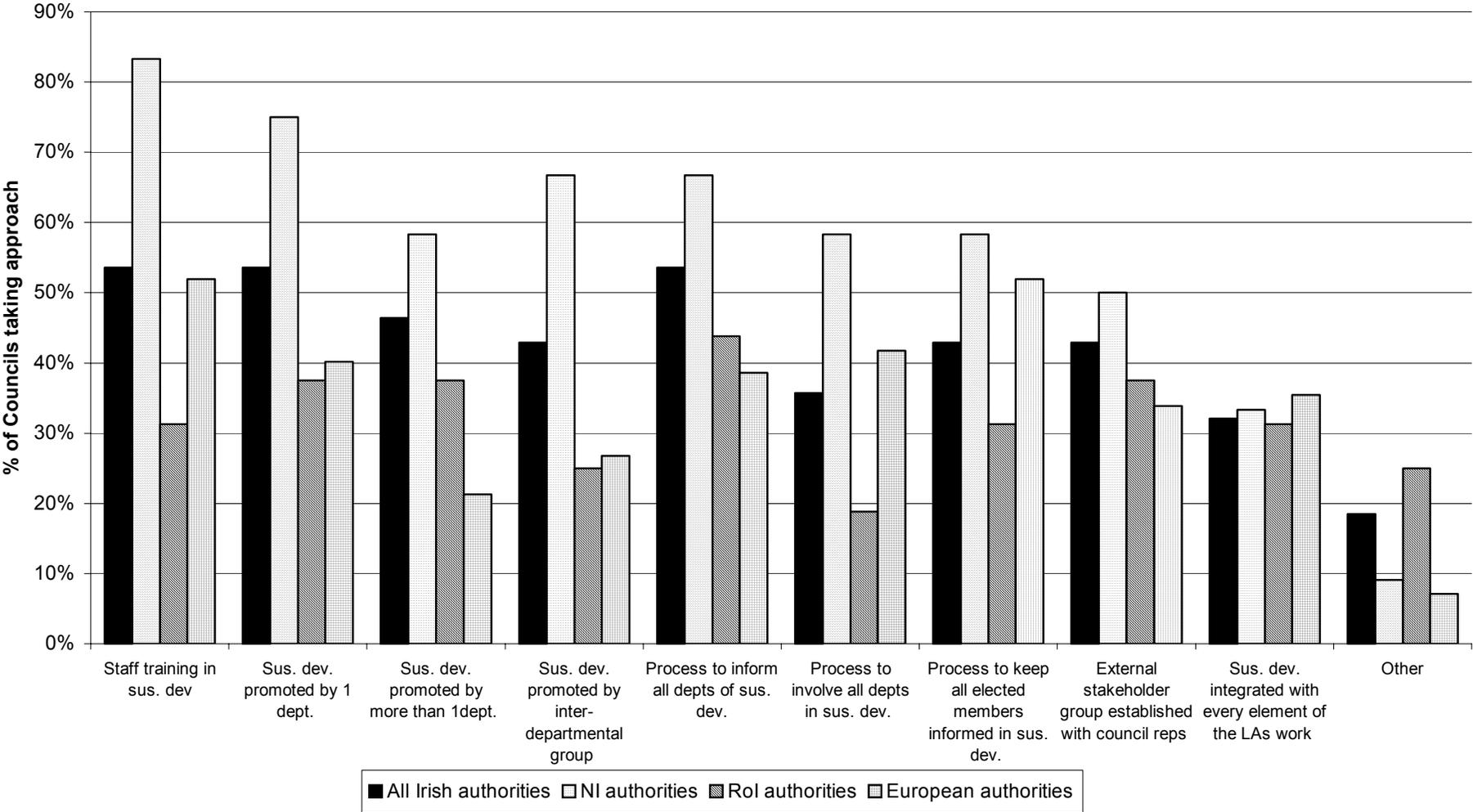
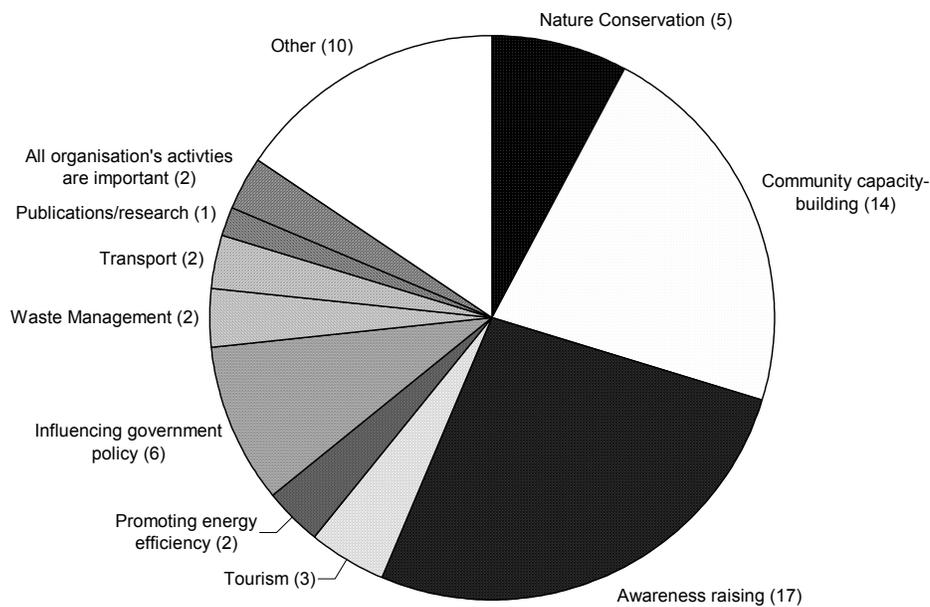


Figure 5.5: What approach has the Council taken to integrating sustainable development into its structures? (Based on responses from 12 local authorities from Northern Ireland, 16 from the Republic of Ireland and 127 European authorities.)



It therefore appears that while there is a wide range of social partners involved in local sustainable development, these groups are generally small, with a high dependency on central government funds, which in turn may influence the relationship with local authorities. The case study of the Foyle Basin Council discussed in the previous section further highlights some of the difficulties faced by some of the NGOs involved in LA21, showing that there may be real capacity issues affecting how they can contribute to the process. This was also raised as an issue in the Cork focus group, where a number of constraints on the voluntary sector were noted, including difficulties in securing adequate insurance for facilitating volunteer support for LA21 activities. Yet each social partner is likely to contribute different things to this process, as shown in figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: What are the most important things your organisation does to promote sustainable development? (Based on responses from 21 social partners from Northern Ireland and 15 from the Republic of Ireland, with some social partners noting more than one important activity).

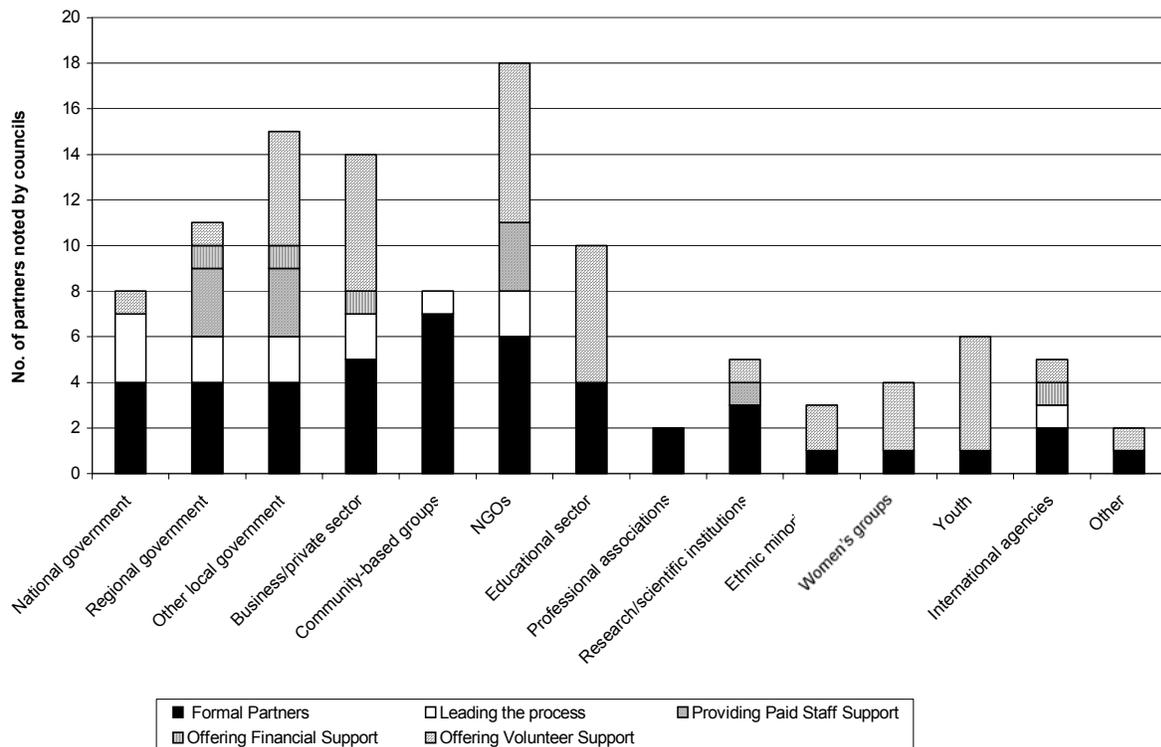


Most significant here is the importance of the communication/education function of LA21, with nearly half of all social partners involved in capacity building and awareness raising. It is also clear that the social partners see themselves primarily in an advocacy and lobbying role rather than service delivery, underlining the fact that very few LA21 processes on the island of Ireland have begun to grapple with implementation issues. The fact that social partners also see themselves as having to convince local authorities to adopt different perceptions (eg stronger notions of sustainability) or alternative ways of working, also suggests that they do not see themselves as full and equal partners.

5.3.1.3 Local Partnerships

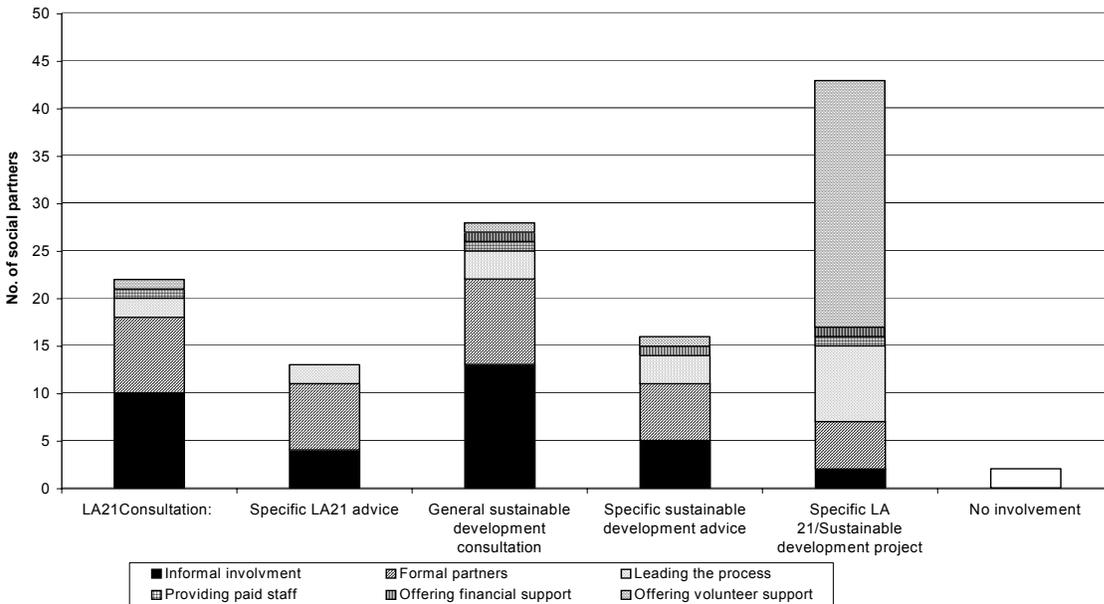
The way in which local authorities and social partners work together on sustainability issues is discussed in more detail section 5.3.2, but it worthwhile noting here how each group sees sustainability partnerships working at the local level. From the local authorities' point of view, they appear to see these partnerships as being diverse and robust, although few identify social partners as leading the process, with most seeing them as playing relatively ancillary roles (see Figure 5.8). Furthermore, at the focus groups local authorities tended to concentrate on their own performance in LA21 and did not really reflect on the role of social partners.

Figure 5.8: Please identify formal partners in the LA21 or sustainable development –related process by sector and indicate the support they are providing. (Based on responses from 28 local authorities)



However, from the perspective of the social partners, they define their own role in local sustainable development as that shown in Figure 5.9. This largely confirms the view articulated by the local authorities that few social partners were leading LA21 initiatives and that the most significant contribution is through volunteer support – which, it was acknowledged at the Cork focus group, provides extremely good value because of all the goodwill that comes with it. Figure 5.9 does, however, add a further dimension in that it notes that it is specific projects, rather than managing the LA21 process, that social partners are most involved in.

Figure 5.9: Please note the appropriate involvement, if any, of your organisation in any of the following sustainable development-related activities in your area (All social partners) (Based on responses from 28 social partners)



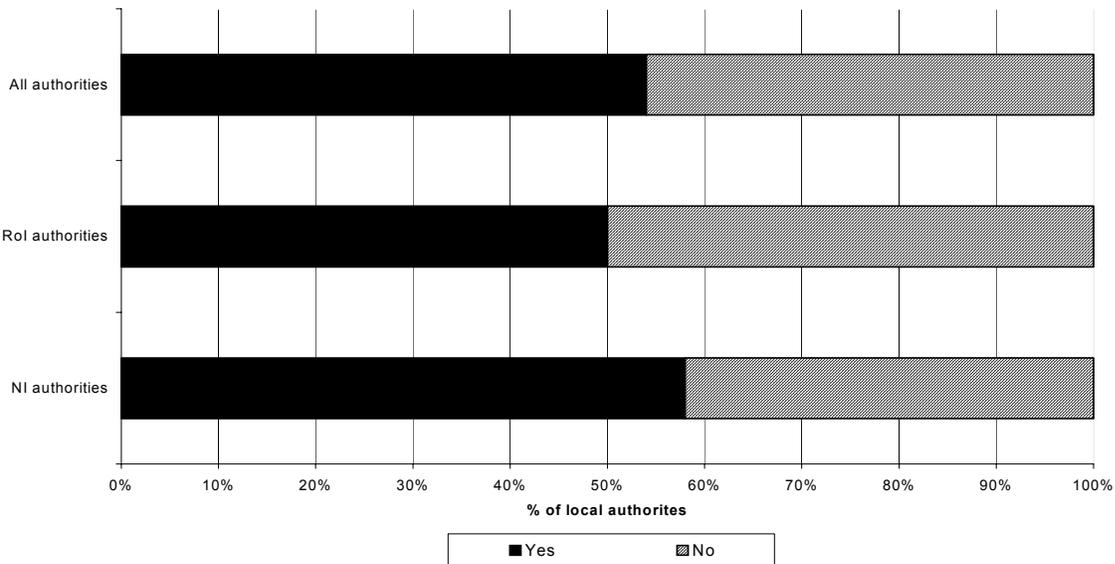
5.3.2 Process

While the previous section throws some light on the way LA21 is organised, this section will measure the progress made against the objectives of LA21. A key indicator here that only 56% of local authorities claimed they had “*formally established a process that it refers to as Local Agenda 21*”, with the marginal differences between north and south shown in Figure 5.10. It is also significant that when asked a similar question, only 41% of social partners (50% in NI and 31% in RoI) said that an LA21 process had been established in their area, with 44% not knowing whether it had or not.

Given that LA21 has undergone extensive international and national promotion for over 10 years, and that the original LA21 agreement requested that local communities initiate this process by 1996 (UN, 1993), the fact that only half of local authorities in the island of Ireland have begun the process is a disappointing finding and suggests a significant implementation deficit (Hogwood and Gunn, 1991) in the whole sustainable development policy process. Indeed 16% of all councils suggested that a decade on from Rio they still had no plans to establish an LA21 process. This confirms the earlier identification of the Republic of Ireland as a relative late-comer to LA21, having implemented the initiative the “latest and least” (Eckerberg and Lafferty 1998, Lafferty and Coenen, 1998). However, this survey would also suggest that Northern Ireland would best be understood as being aligned with the Republic rather than the

rest of the UK, which was characterised as being a “pioneer”, exhibiting “early and many” examples of implementation. This must, however, be set alongside the fact noted above, that LA21 does not hold the monopoly over local sustainability and such initiatives are being introduced in a wide range of contexts.

Figure 5.10: Has the local authority formally established a process that it refers to as “Local Agenda 21”? (Based on responses from 12 local authorities from Northern Ireland and 16 from Republic of Ireland).



The research has also uncovered a fairly widespread view that much (but by no means all) of what LA21 initially set out to do has now been mainstreamed as part of a broader approach to modernising local government incorporating participation, integration of different policy areas (economic, social, etc) and the promotion of citizenship. Thus, the Better Local Government initiative (DoELG, 1996) in the Republic of Ireland has ensured that many of the elements of sustainable development are now being mainstreamed into local authority practice. For example, City and County Development Boards in the Republic must now proof their strategies against the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the National Sustainability Development Strategy, equality and gender issues (Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 2000). While this is not as well developed in Northern Ireland, the new Local Strategic Partnerships there already incorporate this ethos (see Neill and Ellis, 2002) and it could be expected to expand into all areas of governance following the current Review of Public Administration⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺. An important point to make here, however, is that while this reform mainstreams some elements of the sustainability agenda, it is *not the*

⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ www.rpani.gov.uk

same as LA21, as the main thrust of institutional reform has been to emphasise democratic renewal and administrative efficiency above other considerations. Indeed by adopting *only* the modernisation agenda (ie abandoning LA21 in favour of LSPs, CDBs etc) some of the distinct and important objectives of local sustainable development may be lost. Amongst these are the fact that LA21 fosters the development of global-local relationships, helping local areas (and their citizens) to see themselves as literally part of the global community, with subsequent reflections on issues of justice and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, while the modernisation reforms tend to enhance democracy and the effectiveness of public services, they tend to relegate the priority of limiting the adverse environmental outcomes of development, despite growing warnings of global consequences. Indeed, this dimension of sustainable development was highlighted in one of the focus groups, where one participant pointed out that a key feature of LA21 is feeling connected to a wider world dimension where people appreciate that they can make a difference:

“Local sustainable development is not going to be real until we all integrate it as part of our lives.... where people feel they are part of it and that it is not something that was dreamed up in Rio and then implemented by putting it in as part of the line management of organisations.”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Cork focus group)

In the context of modernisation and other sustainability activities, councils were also then asked to describe what activities they had undertaken as part of the LA21 process. As a way of measuring progress, it was assumed that most councils would aim to follow the typical step-by-step approach illustrated in Figure 2.1: building on reflection of current practice, participative debate on problems and solutions, a vision statement, action plan, implementation and monitoring. Given that councils across the island of Ireland have come late to LA21, few councils, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, have progressed from earlier policy formulation stages to implementation, as shown in Figure 5.11. This clearly parallels the international context that is demanding a shift from *Local Agenda 21* to *Local Action 21*.

This is quite a significant graph, as in addition to portraying the overall progress of LA21 on the island of Ireland, it indicates that some authorities (particularly in Northern Ireland) are issuing aspirational vision statements and LA21 action plans without having engaged in multi-sectoral dialogue or extensive public participation – perhaps the defining idea of LA21. This could be interpreted as contributing evidence that LA21 is being used as a rhetorical label for business as usual. Figure 5.11 also shows the proportion of councils that had undertaken some form of consultation with local communities, showing that, as demonstrated in earlier sections, LA21

has proved to be an innovative environment for participative techniques. The councils responding to this survey did indeed claim that they were using a large range of participation methods (see Figure 5.12) although more traditional methods such as public meetings and leaflets tended to dominate, with subsequent implications for inclusivity.

Figure 5.11: If a LA21 process has been formally established, what has it involved so far? (Based on a response of 12 local authorities from Northern Ireland and 16 from the Republic of Ireland)

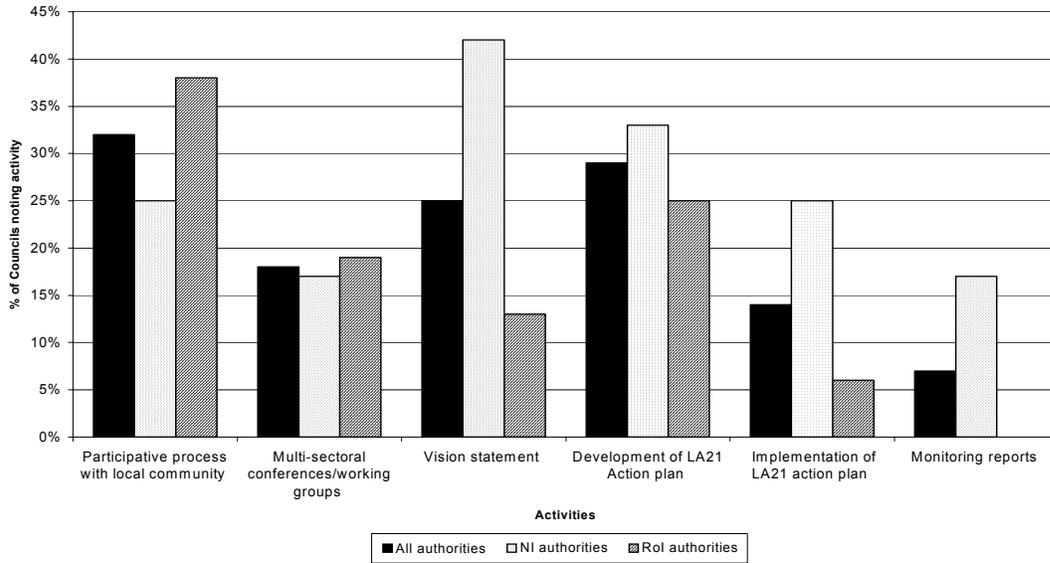
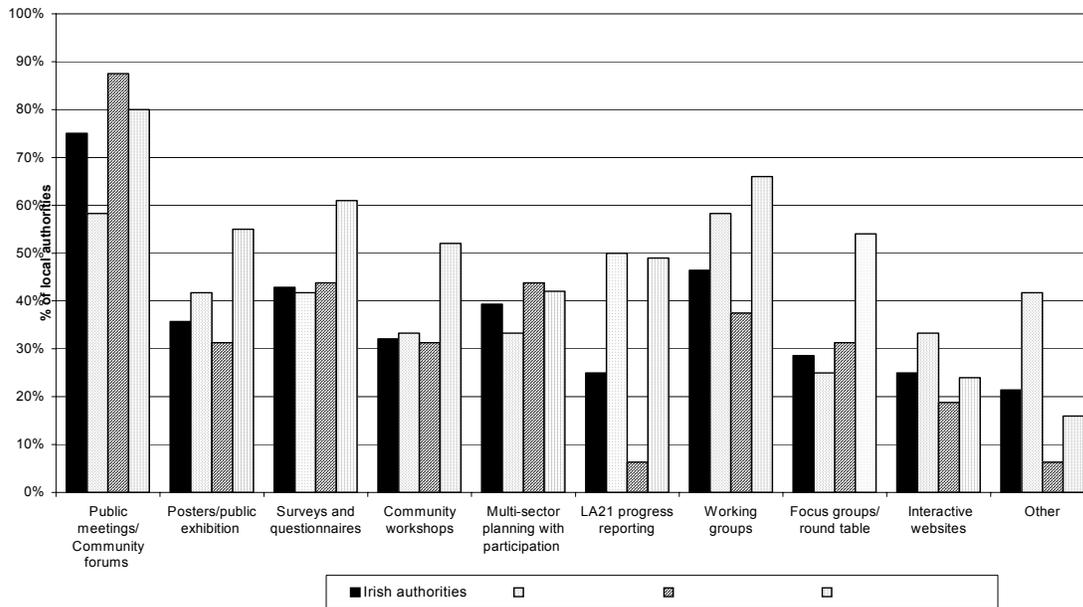


Figure 5.12: What participation methods have you used to engage the public in the LA21 sustainable development-related process? (Based on a response of 12 local authorities from Northern Ireland and 16 from the Republic of Ireland)



However, while local authorities regard these exercises as having been relatively successful, social partners appear to be far more sceptical about the effectiveness of participation, as noted in Figure 5.13 below. Some of the focus groups gave a further insight into how participation was perceived in some of the local authorities, with one suggesting that “*the community is good, but needs to be driven*”, while another noted a common experience:

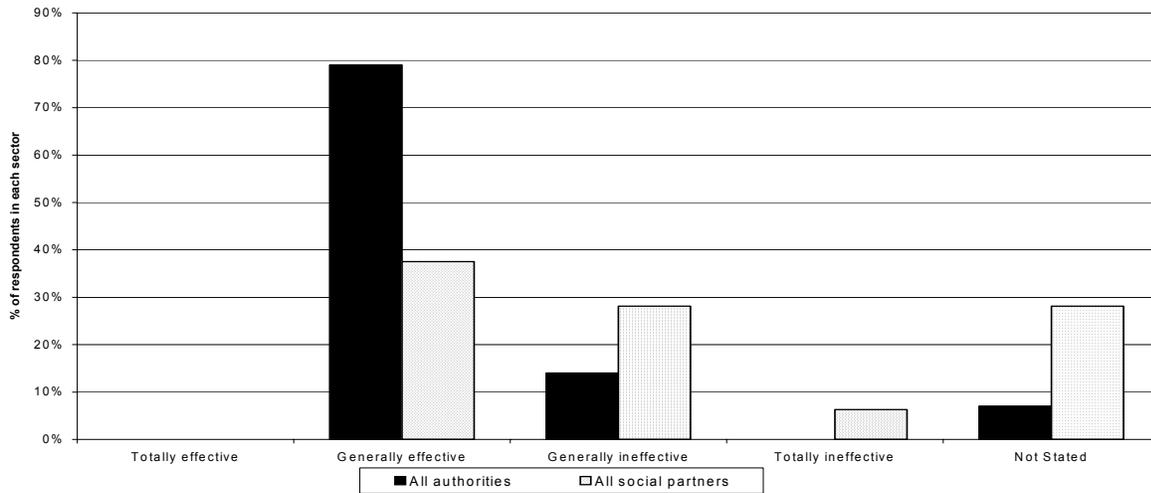
“I go in and suggest we do some seminars and workshops and the reaction is ‘Jesus, we’re too busy for that kind of stuff’... but it is essential that we should be informed from a broader base...”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

Therefore although LA21 may have instigated changes in the operating culture of local authorities, so that they now better incorporate the language of sustainability and participation, which should not be denigrated, there does appear to still be something of a reality gap between how they view effectiveness of the participatory relationship and how this is viewed by social partners.

Therefore, in terms of process, it is not possible to provide an overly optimistic picture of LA21 in an all-island context, but it is worth giving credit to the substantial progress that has been made on these issues in a relatively short period of time. The majority of councils do now claim to have begun a LA21 process, although as this section has shown, the existence of an LA21 process does not necessarily mean that it is robust. There are, however, some very good examples of local sustainability partnerships such as the Cork Environmental Forum, although it appears that generally relationships between local authorities and social partners are not particularly strong with many social partners remaining unaware of council LA21 initiatives.

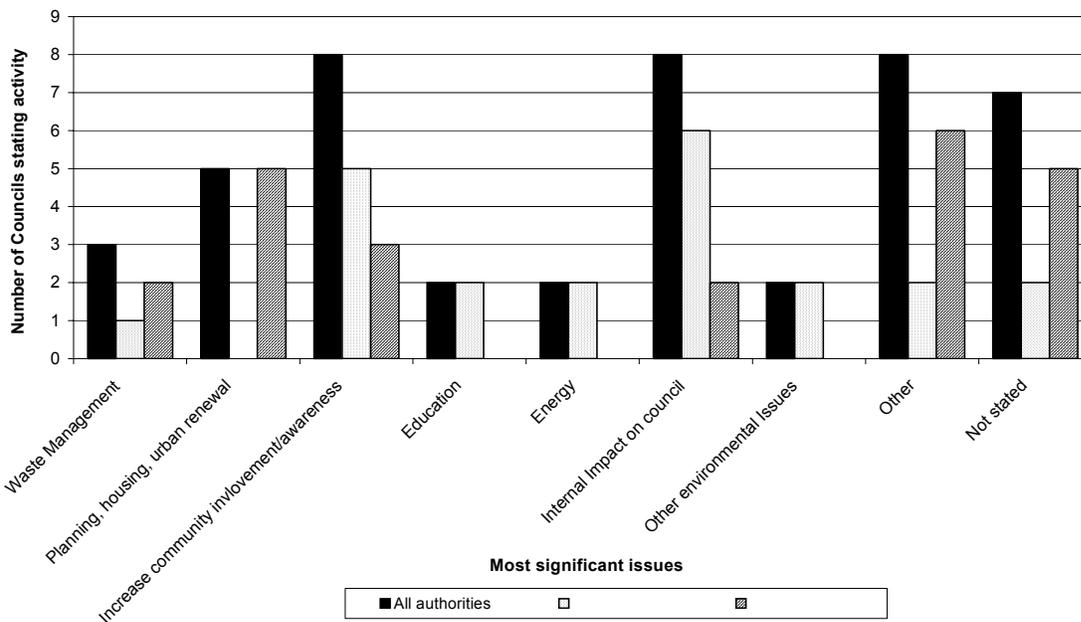
Figure 5.13: How successful do you feel LA21 participative methods have been? (Based on responses from 28 local authorities and 32 social partners)



5.3.3. Content of LA21

This section moves the analysis on to consider the type of activities that have been incorporated into LA21 processes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the aim of understanding how this relates to the broader ideals of LA21. Local authorities were thus asked about the main dimensions of their LA21 process, as shown in Figure 5.14.

Figure 5.14: What is the most significant dimension of LA21 activity engaged in by your local authority? (Based on responses from 16 local authorities from Northern Ireland and 27 from the Republic of Ireland)



The interpretation of this figure must be qualified by the fact that the LA21 label does not

identify the entirety of local sustainable development initiatives. Notwithstanding, there appears to be little consensus on what councils regard as being the most important dimension to LA21. In principle there need not necessarily be any consensus on this, with each community free to define its own priorities, which is clearly happening across the island of Ireland. In general terms, initiatives mentioned broadly fall into three categories: those dealing with the physical environment, participative and environmental consciousness-raising processes, and generic environmental issues including, most importantly, waste management. Given that the surveys were targeted at LA21 participants, it is not surprising that environmental issues appear predominant, yet it is clear that social goals are increasingly becoming integrated into sustainability initiatives, especially when this is regarded as being wider than the LA21 initiative. Notably no council suggests that the economic dimension to sustainable development is the most significant. This perhaps confirms that local authorities have been focused on the environmental dimension of LA21, rather than attempting the potentially more complex, yet arguably necessary task of integrating social, economic and environmental issues.

There are also clear differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. For example, no Northern Ireland council notes planning or housing as a significant dimension, presumably because they do not have statutory responsibilities for these areas. This raises a number of concerns, as the fact that local government does not control such functions does not make them any less significance to local communities. Indeed these are important determinants of quality of life in a local area, yet they are excluded from the LA21 process in Northern Ireland because of the centralisation of such functions.

While local authorities have identified the key dimensions of their LA21 activities, there are concerns about whether the different strands of activity are being effectively integrated, with fears of fragmentation and lack of joined-up thinking. This tended to be raised in the focus groups, with some suggesting that the integration of the economic, social and environmental aspects of development has some considerable way to go:

"I think the problem with sustainable development and the whole environmental issue is that economics take precedent over everything else. I would prefer to see the community development and the social element of life brought in more."

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

"...in local government the agenda for development is absolutely 'Concrete is Good' ... by raising social issues you literally feel ostracised"

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

One social partner participant in Northern Ireland referred to any number of local initiatives (waste minimisation, recycling, local transport schemes and so forth) but made the incisive point that practice must move away from the notion of discrete projects:

“Sustainable development should not be a scheme or series of initiatives which need to be promoted – rather it should be central to government policy and department plans and objectives should flow from it.”

(Participant, Social Partner, Northern Ireland focus group)

Some attempts are now being made to approach development in a more integrated way, with the establishment of CDBs in the Republic of Ireland and Local Strategic Partnerships in the Northern Ireland, but the problem, participants observed, is really a matter of broader organisational culture.

5.3.4 General overall rating of LA21 success

The defining feature of LA21 is the development of a consensus-derived action plan, as councils work with local communities to share understanding of the issues and formulate a common view of the future. Although this does not necessarily imply a converging of beliefs and values, it does suggest a high level of communication between social partners and local authorities. The degree to which this idealised model fits with reality is illuminated through the different views local authorities and social partners have of the benefits and success of LA21. Local authority officers, through conviction or duty, are certainly more optimistic than social partners. For example, although councils reported that only 54% have formally established a LA21 process, over 80% were satisfied that, owing to locally instigated actions, the ideals of Rio for LA21 had been generally or partially achieved. However, as Figure 5.15 below suggests, social partners were more critical with around 60% claiming that Rio ideals had been generally or partially achieved. There were also some significant differences north and south of the border, with both social partners and council representatives marginally more likely to be critical in the Republic of Ireland.

In a further attempt to understand how the key stakeholders in LA21 evaluated the process, council representatives and social partners were asked how their local authority (or in the case of social partners, the one they were most closely associated with) rated in relation to other councils (see figure 5.16). This reiterates the more optimistic view of local authorities but raises a number of questions, namely how aware both sectors are of other LA21 activity across the island of Ireland and whether examples of good practice that do exist are well known.

Significantly, a high proportion of social partners (25%) did not know how to rate the performance of their local council, either because they were unaware of the council's LA21 activity, or because they did not know how other councils had been addressing the issue.

Although the surveys portray the aggregated *feeling* about the success of LA21 processes, clearly the ultimate test is what is happening to the environment, the economy, social exclusion etc. with Appendix 1 suggesting that sustainable development policy is yet to bite. On these points, some focus group participants bordered on despair, or as one member put it, "*things out there are just getting worse.*"

Figure 5.15: To what extent do you think local activities have achieved the ideal set out for Local Agenda 21 in the Rio Declaration? (Based on 28 responses from local authorities in Northern Ireland and 36 from the Republic of Ireland)

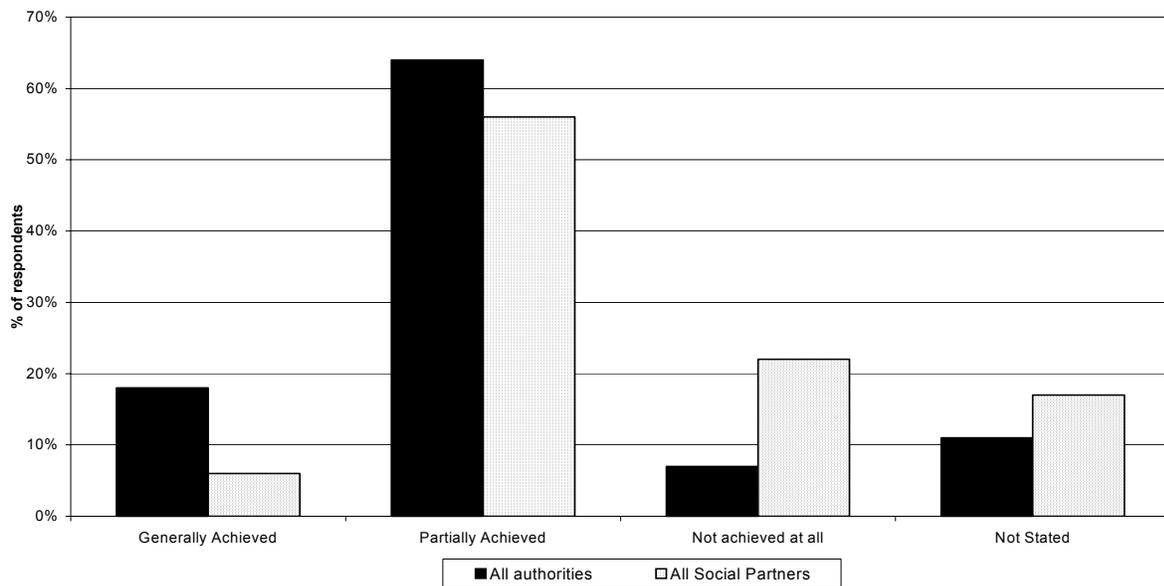
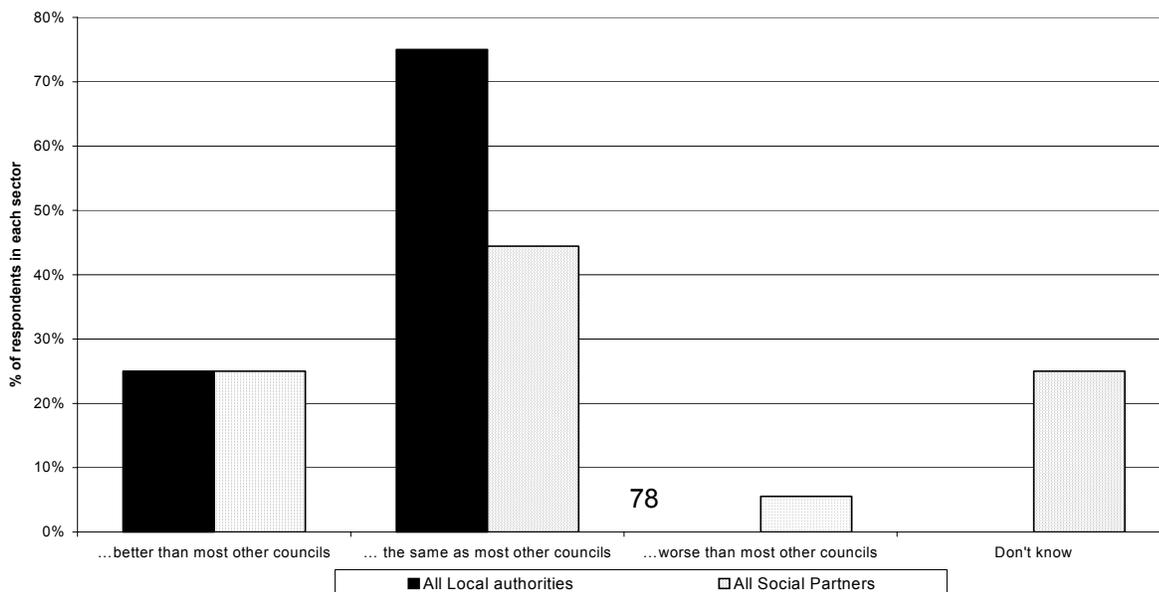


Figure 5.16: Is it your perception that your council is better or worse than other councils in the way it has promoted sustainable development? (Based on responses from 28 local authorities in Northern Ireland and 36 in the Republic of Ireland)



A comment on the Republic of Ireland that is just as relevant to Northern Ireland highlights the effort that is still needed:

“There is an emerging problem with Ireland’s environmental image at European level. There are several instances pending at various stages from complaint to court case, where the European Commission is challenging this country’s compliance with EU directives, either in terms of the timing of the effort, its reach or its quality. The Irish strategy seems to be to stretch out the process for as long as possible, reaching compliance only at the point where the court action is likely to result in decisions against the Irish position.”

(Clinch et al, 2002)

As one focus group member from the Republic of Ireland stated:

“I’ve been involved in reports which we have provided over the years which have been lauded at international level and then the people come from other countries and you are mortified by having to justify what you have said....To get beyond rhetoric we should set targets and those targets should be rewarded when they succeed and more importantly should incur penalties when they are not met...”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Cork focus group)

From a more positive perspective, other focus group participants took a longer-term view, seeing the transition towards sustainability having at least begun and acknowledging the potential length of such a journey:

“Things have changed so dramatically in 10 years that we forget what it was like... we had people working in the same departments for 20 years who didn’t talk and departments which didn’t talk to each other... suddenly you have people who were saying ‘That’s a load of shite’ promoting ‘intersectorality’.. once you start the atmosphere, things start moving.”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

“Do we really think we are going to produce sustainability? Of course not, perfection is never going to happen, but we do need to accept the good that has happened and not be disappointed that we have not achieved 100%. If we achieve 5%, that’s a huge achievement.... Although I’m not saying we’ve even achieved that yet”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Cork focus group)

5.3.5 Key to successful LA21

In addition to assessing performance and progress in LA21 across the island of Ireland, the research also aimed to identify what makes a successful LA21 process. Local authorities and social partners were therefore asked what they considered to be good practice and a huge range of projects was identified (see Box 5.1). Local authorities tended to only mention projects

led by councils, highlighting the areas they saw as being the most successful. There were three key themes for these; partnership, waste management and county development boards. The social partners identified a far wider range of examples, primarily focused on environmental initiatives, but with a strong identification of those projects that both protected the environment and had a strong civic identity element, such as Groundwork (see section 4.2.4 and appendix 4.4), youth forums and North-South twinning projects.

Box 5.1: Most significant local sustainable development initiatives as identified by social partners

NORTHERN IRELAND

- **Recycling and waste minimisation/management.**
The impetus for these initiatives appeared to be coming from various local authorities, in particular Belfast City Council. The Northern Ireland charity Bryson House was also a key organisation. Bryson House was also the lead organisation in a community development and energy efficiency project. It was also noted that some of the organisations were using funding through the landfill tax to employ community environment and education officers in the local authorities (eg Ulster Wildlife Trust).
- **Neighbourhood renewal**
6 respondents cited initiatives involving renewal of deprived areas. The lead organisations were the councils, city centre management companies, Encams, the Department for Social Development, and a joint North/South project involving Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways Ireland.
- **The Saffron Project**
This is creating jobs and educating the public in the Belfast Hills. This was an initiative led by an environmental group.
- **Planning and transport issues**
The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) and the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) were noted as being significant sustainable development initiatives.
- **Partnerships/forums**
There were also references to the work of two forums and two partnerships. For example, the Civic Forum and Belfast LA21 Forum initiated by Belfast City Council provide forums for various sectors pursuing sustainable development.
- **Partnerships**
Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs) bring together social partners, local authorities (usually the lead organisation) and other community stakeholders to deliver EU funding. The respondents from Northern Ireland mention these LSPs throughout their survey responses and it appears that these may have the potential to put into practice what one social partner calls the “truly integrative value of sustainable development”. Community Safety Partnerships were also mentioned, led by the PSNI and involving the local authority and other community stakeholders. These dealt with basic security issues and evoked the response from one social partner that these issues are “crucial to the success of sustainable development”.
- **Community Relations Policy**
One respondent mentioned this initiative, because “Sustainable Development in Northern Ireland is the Peace Process” (Respondent’s emphasis).
- **Other issues**
A number organisations also saw analysis tools such as sustainability audits/indicators and Best Value practice, where the local council has a duty to consult on service delivery, as significant

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND:

- **Development plans**
Three respondents referred to the development plans issued by City/County Development Boards. The Dublin City Council Management Plan was mentioned by one of the respondents.
- **Agriculture**
Support for small farms from government funding bodies and Focal Farming Programmes was seen as significant.
- **Coastal Management**

A coastal zone management plan, not formally included in LA21 but encompassing many similar principles, was noted by one respondent.

- **Community initiatives**

Several community-based initiatives were noted by the Republic of Ireland respondents, including community visioning and community based indicators for monitoring.

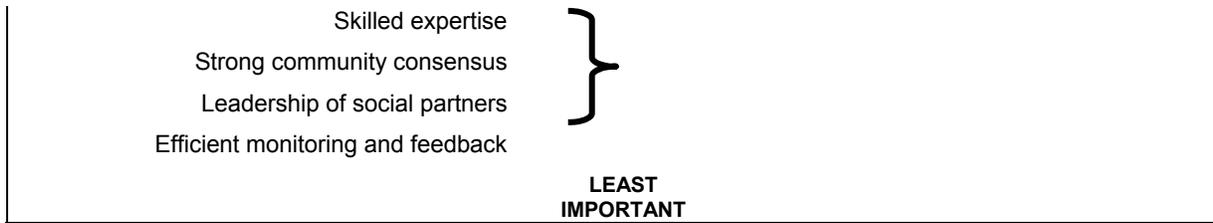
- **Neighbourhood renewal**

Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) led by Dublin City Council where community participation is high were included, as was the redevelopment of Dublin Docklands, where a Dockland Council was formed involving community representatives. Village renewal, led by the social partners and the local authority as well as a social partner-driven Community Forum, were important to a rural based respondent.

Social partners and local authority representatives were also asked to explicitly rank a number of factors taken from previous ICLEI surveys, according to which they thought to be most likely in determining the successful promotion of sustainable development, as shown in Table 5.1. This reveals that at the moment local authorities and social partners both see internal management within the local council as being the most important issue. This suggests two things. The first is that sustainable development has not yet truly entered the corporate culture of local authorities. Secondly, as LA21 is not a statutory duty, it may constantly need re-approval from the higher management to maintain its position against competing priorities. This may also reflect the stage of LA21 in Ireland and the fact that relatively few councils have engaged in implementation of LA21 programmes. It may be that at this relatively early stage in the process, greater emphasis needs to be placed on factors internal to the local authority, in order to get the initiative off the ground. As implementation progresses, it is likely that more external factors will come to play a more important role.

Table 5.1: Factors in determining successful local authority promotion of sustainable development (based on responses from 27 local authorities and 28 social partners)

Local authorities	MOST IMPORTANT	Social partners	
Leadership of senior council officers	↑	Inter-departmental co-operation	
Support from national government		Support from national government	
		Community interest	
Inter-departmental co-operation		Leadership of social partners	
		Adequate financial support	
Community interest		Strong community consensus	
Reliable and accurate information		Skilled expertise	
		Reliable and accurate information	
		Leadership of senior council officers	
Adequate financial support		Leadership of elected members	
		Efficient monitoring and feedback	
Leadership of elected members			



There are also noticeable differences here between the sectors and on either side of the border. Looking first at the contrasts between social partners and local authorities, a distinct difference is the value that council representatives place on internal matters compared to those related to stakeholders. Thus issues related to community involvement take a much lower precedence than suggested by the social partners, perhaps reaffirming some of the points made earlier about how superficially councils view the participative elements of LA21. The differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland appear primarily to relate to the role of central government, with those north of the border seeing this as being far more important to a successful LA21. To a large extent the limiting factors reported by survey respondents on progress on LA21 (Table 5.2) are the mirror image of the previous table, with similar differences between the sectors and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Table 5.2: Factors in limiting local authority attempts to promote sustainable development. (based on responses from 26 local authorities and 28 social partners)

Local authorities	MOST IMPORTANT ↑ ↓ LEAST IMPORTANT	Social partners
Insufficient support from national government	↑	Insufficient financial support
		Insufficient support from national government
		Lack of leadership of senior council officers
Lack of leadership of senior council officers		Lack of interdepartmental co-operation
Lack of leadership of elected members		Insufficient information
Insufficient financial support		Lack of leadership of elected members
Lack of inter-departmental co-operation		Lack of community consensus on priorities
		Insufficient expertise
Lack of leadership of social partners		Lack of leadership of social partners
Insufficient community interest		Insufficient monitoring and feedback
Insufficient information	Insufficient community interest	
Insufficient monitoring and feedback		
Insufficient expertise		
Lack of community consensus to set priorities		

The emphasis on internal matters by council representatives brings into focus once again the powerful role that key individuals play in any LA21, whether from within local authorities,

businesses or the voluntary sector (eg see the case study on the Foyle Basin Council). An example from a council in Northern Ireland indicates that since the retirement of a chief executive who was committed to mainstreaming the ethos of sustainability, the environmental agenda has slipped significantly down the priorities of the local authority.

It therefore appears that, in the absence of a robust corporate or political culture of sustainability, or in the absence of it being a statutory responsibility, a drive towards successful local sustainable development remains quite dependent on the personal commitment of enthused and dynamic non-elected individuals who can be labelled as Practice-Orientated Evangelists (POEs). The dependence on such individuals has major implications for the fragility and long-term viability of the local sustainable development agenda north and south of the Irish border. As one participant expressed it:

“The lack of committed local political and executive leadership across the board means that LA21 in Northern Ireland is patchy. As such LA21 is not structurally embedded despite the rhetoric... European initiatives from the top down tend to set the pace but as yet do not quite engage with universal bottom up enthusiasm and pressure for change”

(Participant, Social Partner, Northern Ireland focus group)

A final point here is the emphasis placed on the role of national government, which is seen as being critical by ICLEI (2002a), and underlines the importance of not seeing local sustainable development as divorced from the wider arenas of governance (see Marvin and Guy, 1997). It is relatively easy to point to failings by local authorities to promote sustainable development, but the constraining, enabling and encouraging role (or lack of it) of central government must be acknowledged. In the Cork focus group some disquiet was expressed about what was seen as Dublin’s centralising dominance and there was a fairly cynical view expressed in other focus groups:

“There you are, you’ve just finished your Business Plan and a bloody letter arrives from the Department of Local Government... and the reaction tends to be ‘Just give them a few paragraphs and they will be happy’...”

(Participant, Local Government Officer, Dublin focus group)

The previous section on the policy context highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of central direction in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the value placed on these illustrated by Tables 5.1 and 5.2 above and confirmed by some of the focus group discussions, where some local initiatives were even seen to be thwarted by national policies:

“People must feel it makes a difference by fitting into national and international

policies. We can do very valuable work locally with small projects but unless the national projects are analysed properly we are not going to have a major impact..."
(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

5.3.6 Summary of implementation issues

- A small majority of local authorities on the island of Ireland have begun to develop a Local Agenda 21 process, although very few (14%) have actually started to implement an LA21 policy. Only a small number (16%) have no intention of developing LA21.
- Although most councils have begun a LA21 process, there are signs that they have not integrated a full range of issues, with discrete council-led initiatives dominating examples of practice. Some councils also appear to be adopting LA21 vision statements and action plans without any extensive participation process.
- Some elements of the sustainability agenda are now being effectively mainstreamed as part of the broader reform of local governance, which has seen encouraging developments in the integration of policy areas and development of more participative structures. This must not, however, be seen as being a replacement for LA21, as it tends to neglect certain elements that make sustainable development so central to global futures.
- Within local authorities there appears to be a lack of a corporate culture and dedication to the concept of sustainability, meaning it lacks prominence and integration within the range of council activities, which encourages a reliance on enthusiastic individuals to take forward the sustainability agenda. This clearly needs to be addressed through both central government and local authority arenas.
- Although there is evidence that councils are now developing partnerships with a large range of social partners, it appears that these are often regarded as junior partners rather than as having a central role in LA21. Councils and social partners also seem to hold quite divergent views on a number of issues related to LA21, including its overall relevance.
- Social partners are particularly unconvinced about the participatory activities promoted by local authorities, seeing them as encouraging but not yet effective. Councils are still tending to use the more conventional consultation methods (such as leaflets and public meetings) rather than embracing the innovations adopted elsewhere (such as citizen juries and planning for real). On the other hand social partners do have high expectations of consultation, and may also need to appreciate the differences between environmentalism and community development as an area of political struggle, and

sustainability as a negotiated consensus.

- At the present, councils appear to be most concerned with the internal management of the LA21 process and as a consequence do not fully appreciate the role and value of other stakeholder involvement.
- Central government plays an important and undeveloped role in enabling LA21 and is currently viewed as not doing enough to promote local sustainable development, particularly in Northern Ireland.

5.4. Comparative dimensions to LA21

At this stage, it is also worth making a few points about the differences in Local Agenda 21 in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The different policy and institutional contexts have been discussed previously, but the surveys highlighted a number of other key differences. First it is clear that councils and governmental agencies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are speaking a common language of sustainability and share many of the same challenges, obstacles and successes. This in itself should be an argument for broadening exchange of experience. However, as noted above, in Northern Ireland councils are more likely to have appointed someone to the post LA21 Officer (or equivalent) who is more engaged full-time in this activity but with fewer support staff. These officers see their role, as one respondent put it, as “*innovating projects and ideas and passing them on to others*”, ie as a spur to action. Perhaps for this reason, more authorities in Northern Ireland have prepared LA21 vision statements and action plans. In contrast, sustainability concerns are more likely to be mainstreamed in the Republic of Ireland, being the responsibility of officers as part of their other duties, which presumably aids integration. Institutional factors in the Republic of Ireland are also contributing to this mainstreaming, with a modernised local government structure that is now beginning to settle down and with a more robust policy context than found in Northern Ireland (see Section 2).

Institutional differences may also explain the apparently higher level of frustration and cynicism relating to Northern Ireland. This is manifest in the fact that fewer council representatives and social partners from Northern Ireland see LA21 as being an appropriate term for local sustainability and fewer see it as being relevant to the broader debate on sustainable development. This may be attributed to a higher level of dissatisfaction with the state in general, but also more directly to the differing structures and roles of local government on either side of the Irish border (see, for example, Birrell and Hayes, 2001). This may prove to be a major obstacle to local sustainable development in Northern Ireland, where local government is

practically unique in Europe in its constrained responsibilities. Thus while councils are expected to develop LA21 action plans to address a whole range of environmental issues from transport to housing and planning, they lack any control over local policy and implementation in these fields.

While the differences in sustainable development policy between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have been previously discussed in Section 3, there are also contrasts in the way in which LA21 is being implemented in the two jurisdictions:

- The Republic of Ireland appears to have a more robust policy framework.
- Northern Ireland has a greater proportion of councils involved in LA21 and more dedicated staff for this. This has, however, resulted in the activity being less integrated with other council functions.
- Local authorities and social partners have less confidence in the concept of LA21 in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland.
- The functions of local government in Northern Ireland act as a major constraint to developing and implementing local sustainable development strategies.

5.5. LA21 and Civic Identity

The rebranding of Local Agenda 21 as Local Action 21 at the 2002 Earth Summit continues to offer possibilities for using common environmental consciousness as a kind of empathetic civic glue, as described in Section 2.5. Both parts of the island of Ireland face their own and shared challenges of citizenship, but this becomes critical in Northern Ireland, with one focus group participant referring to how the environment can be:

“...common ground on which people can talk to one another and get an alternative conversation going...it can encourage people to look outwards rather than inwards”
(Participant, Social Partner, Northern Ireland focus group)

The example of Groundwork was described earlier, as was the emphasis on participation in SEMPA in Greater Dublin (see Section 4). In general terms, however, the foundation for the creation of common discursive agreement on local sustainable development has yet barely been laid on the island of Ireland. Despite the fact that social partners have a more pessimistic view of the consultation that has taken place, they do see it as a way of enhancing citizenship. As one participant put it, the value of LA21 as a civic building process in a potential conflict

situation is something not just peculiar to the Northern Ireland:

“We are now dealing with some highly charged conflict situations in Cork. The conflicts that worry me in this city are between Travellers and the settled community and between refugees and asylum seekers and inner city communities. There is a LA21 aspect to this because you are talking about very excluded communities. Perhaps there is learning potential from Northern Ireland where communities are very polarised.”

(Participant, Social Partner, Cork focus group)

Therefore, in terms of LA21’s contribution to civic identity, this research has found that:

- Certain good practice projects point the way to moving the environment to centre stage in order to foster a sense of common civic responsibility.
- LA21 has not generally been sufficiently embedded in truly discursive participative processes to enable the wider potential of environmental citizenship to take root.

5.6. Potential for cross-border collaborative links

The value of an all-island dimension to sustainable development has been discussed in the introductory chapter, and the mutual benefit of co-operation on sustainability matters to Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland has already been as recognised in the remit of the North/South Ministerial Council. This should be developed in the context of respecting the constitutional relationship between the two jurisdictions, the peace process and the consolidation of existing cross-border institutions. While the potential for co-operation, mutual learning and sharing of good practice through LA21 is quite considerable, the surveys and focus groups nevertheless overwhelmingly demonstrate that Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland contact at this level, while not absent, is minimal. Local authorities and social partners did identify a number of useful existing collaborations, including waterway management initiatives (eg Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Blackwater Catchment initiative), waste management schemes (eg All Ireland Recycling Network) and twinning projects (eg Edge Cities network that includes Fingal County Council and North Down Council, and a project twinning the mountain areas of Mourne and Wicklow). These are in addition to the existing networks and collaborations identified by other reports for the Centre for Cross Border Studies, many of which have sustainability content (eg Laffan and Payne, 2001, Birrell and Hayes, 2001)

The reasons for the lack of Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland local authority linkages on LA21 are not hard to surmise. Firstly, as one focus group member put it:

“I don't think it's got any more value that any other two local authorities getting together and talking honestly about what's going on”

(Participant, Local Authority Officer, Dublin focus group)

Indeed the need to keep sustainable development conversations going between both parts of Ireland and the rest of Europe was a recurring theme in focus group discussion. Secondly, the legacy of the ‘Troubles’ in unionist parts of Northern Ireland has probably impeded the willingness to nurture all-island linkages. The focus group research and survey responses have highlighted a number of reasons why all-island cooperation on the issue of LA21 could in future be of value, namely:

- The need to manage many of the sustainable development challenges, such as biodiversity, air and water quality and climate change on the basis of ecological, rather than political territories.
- The distorting impact of the border in the case of economic measures such as the climate change levy on fuel and the landfill and aggregates taxes in Northern Ireland.
- The opportunity to provide a larger pool of shared experience and good practice, given the relatively small size of both jurisdictions in a European context. Furthermore it allows a sharing of best practice without the need for (unsustainable) travel to mainland Europe.
- Practical benefits from cooperation in seeking solutions to common problems in a shared wet and windy environment on the western edge of Europe, with a shared political, legal and cultural Anglo-Irish tradition.
- Symbolic benefits of opening up dialogue with the “other” based on the relative neutrality of the environment. The idea of environmentally twinning councils in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was endorsed in focus groups
- Most importantly, the opportunity which a possible launch of Local Action 21 in an all-island context provides a basis for reinforcing the image of Ireland as a ‘green land’ with obvious spin-off to tourism and economic development. There is a common perception, especially in the Republic of Ireland, that Ireland’s green image has of late been sullied and it is suffering from a declining environmental image (Macrory and Turner, 2002). If Leicester is ‘Environment City’, why is Ireland not ‘Green Isle’?

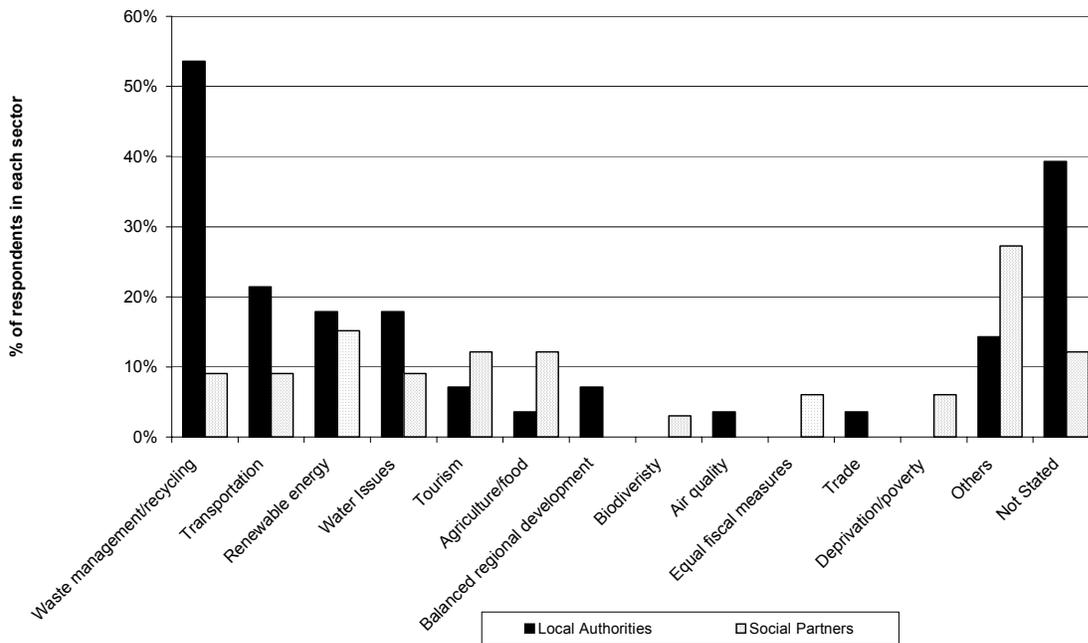
Significantly, social partners and local authorities in Northern Ireland articulated a much greater need to establish cross-border linkages than those in the Republic of Ireland, with interest declining the further one goes from the border in the South. While there was some consensus

on the *need* for all-island cooperation, the lack of any previous debate on what form this could take meant that there was little agreement on what issues should have higher priority, as Figure 5.17 illustrates.

It is suggested therefore that the following key findings emerge from this research in terms of cross-border cooperation:

- There are a number of well-founded and well-articulated reasons to establish some all-island basis for the management of sustainable development initiatives.
- Current cross-border activity in relation to sustainability is extremely patchy and operates in terms of discrete issues, rather than as a strategy for sustainable development.
- While there is a recognised need for action, it is felt most strongly in Northern Ireland and in the border areas of the Republic of Ireland.

Figure 5.17: Which issues, if any, require a cross-border response to more effectively promote sustainable development on the island of Ireland? (Based on 26 responses from local authorities and 32 social partners)



The debate over how sustainable development can be tackled on an all-island basis is extremely immature and as such a consensus on the priority areas has yet to emerge.

This section has provided a detailed picture of the state of local sustainable development in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland during 2002. This has been brought together in a

number of themes that are central to the aims of the overall study and the main findings under each of these themes have been summarised at the end of the discussion. These create a strong agenda for what is needed to foster a deeper all-island commitment to sustainable development. Specific recommendations on how this can be done are discussed in the next section.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This investigation has provided an up-to-date picture of local sustainable development activities and processes on the island of Ireland. It has come at a time of global reflection on the concept of sustainability, a decade on from the optimistic consensus forged at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, and when there are signs of some flagging in the enthusiasm for the concepts at global, national and local levels. An attempt was made at the WSSD in Johannesburg to refocus the drive for local sustainable development onto implementation through the evolution of *Local Agenda 21* into *Local Action 21*. This shift of emphasis has barely begun to resonate within the island of Ireland. This report has been an attempt to take stock of what has been achieved in the last decade and to help define how best the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland can cooperate to secure local implementation of the sustainability agenda in the future.

The last decade has seen enormous change in Ireland, both north and south. In the Republic of Ireland massive economic growth has now created a base of prosperity making it possible to think more confidently about what sustainable development should mean. In Northern Ireland significant but more modest economic growth has been accompanied by a period of increasing political stability. As this research suggests, since Rio and especially in the last five years, an ethic of sustainable thinking and the institutional reform that supports it have begun to evolve in both jurisdictions. However the opportunity for both parts of the ecological unity of the island to cooperate for mutual advantage on sustainability issues remains largely untapped. This section draws together the main findings from this research project and attempts to identify some key actions for the implementation of a more progressive development practice across the island of Ireland, greater cross-border cooperation, realisation of the potential of environmental citizenship and protection of the notion of a clean, green isle.

6.2 Key findings

The research has produced a picture of local sustainable development on the island of Ireland,

updating our understanding of the current state of play:

6.2.1 Progress of LA21

- 54% of local authorities on the island of Ireland have now begun a process of LA21.
- Beyond this quantitative finding, it is clear that LA21 has been very successful in raising awareness of the possibilities of local sustainable development and in stimulating debate on how local areas can contribute to the challenges created by Ireland's links to a global community facing severe ecological, economic and social problems. The primary concern remains the ability to move from debate to action.
- The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have many examples of successful local sustainable development, which have not only focused on establishing frameworks for addressing environmental issues and embedding sustainability concepts in local government, but also provided some path-finding examples of participatory inclusion.
- The progress of local sustainable development is, however, disparate and needs acceleration through additional support and increased prioritisation at all levels of governance.
- The structure of local governance has changed considerably in recent years, largely in a manner that is potentially favourable to the sustainability agenda, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. However there is a concern that as sustainability is incorporated into emerging governance structures, it may lose the fundamental identity that has been so important in highlighting the need for long-term strategies and establishing links between the local and the global. There is also a risk of separation and uneven prioritisation of the environmental, social, economic and cultural components of the concept.

6.2.2 Policy framework

- The policy framework for sustainable development appears well developed at the national levels of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- However to date this framework has not been fully successful in embedding sustainability values in local institutions and practices. An acceleration in pace is required in terms of exploiting the potential of existing structures to enhance local sustainability practices.
- The changes to local governance in the Republic of Ireland, and potentially those coming from the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, could enhance the

opportunities for policy development at a local level, but for reasons articulated above, should not be solely relied upon to adequately steer the transition to sustainability.

6.2.3 *Participation, environmental citizenship and communication*

- Local participation practices have developed considerably in the past decade. While local authorities are beginning to bring a wide range of stakeholders on board for discussions of sustainability, it is often not on a full partnership basis, with an excessive reliance on local authority leadership. Full partnership is a goal in itself, and also a key step towards the realisation of local sustainability.
- LA21 has the potential to foster enhanced civic identity and the research has found examples where this is occurring on a localised scale. However LA21 has not generally been sufficiently embedded in truly discursive participatory processes to enable the wider potential of environmental citizenship to take root in an island context of cultural division, and its potential is, for the most part, underdeveloped.
- Awareness among communities remains an issue of concern, particularly of the language and framework of sustainability utilised by local authorities. Work is required on language and communication in order to facilitate a fuller sharing of concepts and values.

6.2.4 *The role of champions and capacity building*

- Success in LA21 often depends on specific committed individuals in local authorities or NGOs. There are many such champions for sustainability who deserve recognition and support.
- While these individuals may provide inspiration for those around them, an over-reliance on individual leadership leaves local sustainable development vulnerable and not fully embedded in governance structures.
- A key factor in the successful promotion of LA21 is therefore the development of a culture of, and senior political and officer support for, local sustainable development within local authorities, so that individual action is rewarded and allowed to spread.
- The prime requirement for further embedding local sustainability concepts is energising and capacity-building among practitioners, through the support and demonstrable commitment of managers and government.

6.3. Recommendations

These findings imply a strong and extensive agenda for action to enhance and extend the implementation of local sustainable development on the island of Ireland. The central goal is to further embed sustainability concepts and values in local government and local development, both institutionally and among practitioners directly.

The recommendations presented here were tested in tentative form through discursive forums with major representative stakeholders, both north and south. In Northern Ireland, Sustainable NI and members of the Civic Forum provided a sounding board for the appropriateness of the recommendations, while in the Republic of Ireland, Comhar (the National Sustainable Development Partnership) cooperated through both its Education and Awareness Working Group and its Plenary Forum. The project advisory group also had input into this process. The views received were taken into account in forming these final recommendations, but the latter remain the ultimate responsibility of the research project team.

A fundamental conclusion is that there does not appear to be an immediate need for further development of the policy and institutional framework in the Republic of Ireland. The past decade has witnessed several major policy initiatives in local governance in the south, and to place further emphasis on this arena would be misplaced, create additional costs and require further periods of bedding down. What is needed now more than anything else is a focus on implementation and the full exploitation of the considerable potential offered by these structural developments. This is not so true of Northern Ireland: it also needs to focus on implementation and to make the best use out of its existing institutions, but is not as well served by current institutional arrangements. A clear strategy for sustainable development is required, as is the full development of institutions to deliver such a strategy. Such institutional reform would best be part of the ongoing Review of Public Administration.

This suggests that the emphasis should therefore be placed on making existing structures more effective, re-energising and re-focusing them towards sustainability goals. This is timely now for several reasons. Firstly, the environmental and social imperatives for accelerating progress remain overwhelming. Secondly, the extensive personnel changes noted among practitioners, particularly in the south, has largely settled down now and thus there is a new cohort of LA21 and local sustainability practitioners who should be targeted for capacity building. A core justification for re-energising activity at this time is the consensus on the need for a move from

planning to implementation. This is the thrust of Local Action 21, and also fits well with the current stage of CDB planning in the Republic of Ireland and the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland.

In presenting the recommendations, the research suggests that it is appropriate to focus on five themes, or priorities, that define the main actions that should take place, with the cross-border dimension particularly providing a new way of looking at networking and opportunities for mutual learning and becoming a key driver for re-focusing attention.

Sustainable development offers substantial challenges to current societal and institutional activity. Frustration over lack of progress often arises from a failure to appreciate how fundamental the sustainable development agenda is. Given this, progress in the past decade has been impressive in many ways. However stronger political prioritisation would of course greatly enhance progress. This is a long term project.

Theme 1: The policy and institutional context for local sustainable development

As noted above, it is suggested that for local sustainable development to really take root, there are some requirements for development of the policy and institutional framework of Northern Ireland, primarily a focused and clearly articulated strategy. In the Republic of Ireland, structures are in place, but in both jurisdictions there needs to be a reorientation of local sustainable development from policy-making to implementation. Key priorities are:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Northern Ireland should develop and publish its own Guidelines on Local Action 21

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment (NI), District Councils, Sustainable NI

The development of these Guidelines should be used to further stimulate District Councils and other local institutions into action on the post-Johannesburg agenda. The Guidelines should emphasise the need to embed sustainability across the board (rather than just through LA21), reflect an all-island dimension and stress the citizenship perspective of local sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Northern Ireland should publish a Sustainable Development Strategy, articulating its own vision for the region.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of the Environment (NI), Northern Ireland Executive/NIO Ministers.

The Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy should reflect both its constitutional relationship with the UK and its all-island context, drawing on existing policies such as the Regional Development Strategy. The Sustainable Development Strategy should emphasise the implementation of local sustainable development, the evolution of a more effective institutional framework and a coherent view of how best to ensure that citizenship becomes central to sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The delivery of sustainable development should inform the evolution of governance structures in Northern Ireland.

Main stakeholders involved: Northern Ireland Executive/NIO Ministers, Northern Ireland Assembly, Review of Public Administration.

The values of sustainable development should become central to the evolution of governance structures, not least because they would further develop the democratic institutions needed for a lasting peace. This includes consideration of the roles of District Councils and Local Strategic Partnerships, defining an overseeing role for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister and the broad need for more effective institutional support for sustainable development. There will be a number of opportunities for including the sustainable development perspective in institutional reform, including the Review of Public Administration.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Republic of Ireland should update and re-issue “Towards Sustainable Local Communities: Guidelines on Local Agenda 21” (2001).

Main stakeholders involved: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI).

Justification for an update is as stated in recommendation 1. The current document has been a valuable resource, but an update could address the implementation agenda and provide new stimulus for action. Consideration should be given to producing one all-island set of guidelines, based largely on the Republic’s current document, but with appropriate additions on institutional and policy contexts, and good practice examples drawn from all areas.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should each re-establish an LA21 practitioner network, supported by central government.

Main stakeholders involved: Local Government (NI and RoI), Comhar, Sustainable NI, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the

Environment (NI).

It is suggested that the new Guidelines suggested in recommendations 4 and 5 above should be used as springboard for renewed networks of local sustainability practitioners, based on existing structures in both jurisdictions, but extending now to other constituencies such as CDB personnel, heritage officers and social partners and linked into broader all-island structures (see Theme 5: Cross-Border Considerations below). Such networks should be resourced from central government, with a support secretariat provided as was previously the case in the south. A suggested mode of operation is biannual plenary meetings enhanced by regular communication via channels such as a dedicated email list-server system and an electronic newsletter. This package of network support is not expected to represent a significant burden on the facilitators and once established could be largely self-sustaining. An all-island dimension is discussed under theme 5 below.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should develop an integrated support package aimed at enhancing the capacity of local governance to sustain and implement local sustainable development. This package should include training, policy guidance, achievement recognition and programme funding elements.

Main stakeholders involved: Local Government (NI and RoI), Comhar, Sustainable NI, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), CBDs (RoI), LSPs (NI).

While both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have some supportive institutions, such as Sustainable NI and Comhar, this research has highlighted the limited success in implementing sustainability in the culture of local governance, whilst committed individuals and organisations have faced a range of institutional constraints. It is recommended that there should be a more coordinated and resource-backed effort to enhance the capacity and culture of local governance structures to follow through on commitments to sustainable development. This could be organised on an all-island basis and could include: certified sustainability training and study bursaries; the further development (and implementation) of sustainability checklists and proofing mechanisms; promotion and adoption of eco-auditing and EMAS procedures; recognition awards for individual and institutional contributions to local sustainable development; core funding programmes for social partners central to the local sustainability process. Explicit support is also needed for social partners and this is addressed in Recommendation 10.

Theme 2: Communication and language

This research has shown that the language of LA21, including the term itself, has resonance among policy makers but is largely unrecognised by a large proportion of the public. Action is required to improve communication between practitioners and the public. Research undertaken by central government in the UK suggests that the language of sustainability has to evolve, as people reach their own understanding of it, but that it is possible to speed up that evolution. A number of initiatives can be taken on an all-island basis to improve this communication and incorporate it with the other recommendations made here:

RECOMMENDATION 7: Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should develop and issue communication guidelines for local sustainable development.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

Such guidelines could be incorporated into the broader LA21 Guidelines discussed above and should be aimed at providing practitioners in every sector with practical advice on how to communicate the concepts and values of sustainable development. This could be used to develop a more coherent language of sustainability on the island of Ireland and could include the coinage of an appropriate slogan for LA21 as an all-island 'brand'.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should work together to create and endorse a local sustainable development icon or marque.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

A distinctive icon would symbolise local sustainability on the island of Ireland, strongly support the communication guidelines noted in Recommendation 7, help link the great range of sustainability activity, increase public recognition and understanding of local sustainable development and add the potential of place-promotion. In the absence of a common LA21 being pursued by each locality, such an icon would also help supply coherence to the sustainability project. It would be of significant advantage if this marque could be applied on an all-island basis, as the common tourism icon is currently used, and could clearly be associated with the cross-border institutions recommended in Theme 5 below.

Theme 3: Integration and multi-dimensional sustainability

While it is generally recognised that social, economic and environmental dimensions have to be included in sustainable development initiatives, it is not always fully appreciated that these need

to be integrated, rather than just balanced. Sustainability is also too commonly associated with solely environmental action, which on its own is an insufficient influence on our current development trajectory. Actions aimed at entrenching a more integrated concept of sustainable development include:

RECOMMENDATION 9: A distinction should be maintained in government policy and initiatives between the modernisation (reform) and sustainability agendas.

Main stakeholders involved: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

The research has uncovered a fairly widespread view that some of the process innovation encouraged by LA21 has now been mainstreamed as part of a broader approach to modernising or reforming local government. This is particularly the case in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, but less so in Northern Ireland, where it is likely to emerge from the Review of Public Administration. This has effectively promoted issues such as participation and encouraged the balancing of different policy goals (economic, social etc), but has tended to enhance policy effectiveness in social and economic terms rather than incorporating more long-term environmental measurements of performance and integrating all three dimensions to achieve win-win outcomes. These moves are certainly to be applauded, but should not be seen as a substitute for local sustainable development and LA21, which need to be refocused to take into account this new context. It is important therefore to understand that just because advances are being made on the modernising agenda, sustainable development will not inevitably follow. This view should be articulated through central government policy and initiatives.

Theme 4: Fostering Environmental Citizenship

It has been argued that LA21 can foster enhanced levels of “civicness” and that the concept of environmental citizenship could provide a new and beneficial dimension to sustainable development on the island of Ireland. This research has pointed to some examples of where this has occurred, facilitating dialogue between otherwise disparate groups (eg Groundwork and the Sliabh Beagh Partnership), and this should be possible in many more cases. While a more rigorous and energetic impetus to local sustainable development deliberations and actions will help deliver this, specific action is required to address how local authorities engage with social partners and broader civic society. In order to achieve this, a far more strategic approach is needed to clarify how effective participation can be achieved, including the recognition that in

some cases a minimum level of community infrastructure may have to be developed before such participation can take place.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The role of social partners in LA21 needs to be specifically recognised and strengthened by linking LA21 to existing community regeneration practices and providing support funding for the voluntary sector.

Main stakeholders involved: Local government (NI and RoI), social partners (NI and RoI), Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), CDBs (RoI), LSPs(NI).

Until now NGO and business partners often appear to have been given limited roles in the development of LA21 action plans, and rarely given any significant role in implementation. This has hindered the development of a broader sustainability culture, left control of the process in the hands of local government and limited the enthusiasm that has been brought to the process. Although the culture of councils is gradually changing in this respect, it remains a barrier to the implementation of LA21. Local authorities need to place their trust in the many competent social partners that exist and work with them to ensure that sustainable development is delivered as a truly collaborative venture. For its part, central government should articulate the need for equal status of social partners in its LA21 guidance (see Recommendations 1 and 4) and support those social partners that wish to initiate and lead the LA21 process. There are already established precedents for such support (see DSD, 2003a), such as the range of initiatives proposed under Northern Ireland's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (DSD, 2003b), the Community Chest, the Community Empowerment Networks and the Community Empowerment Fund proposed by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (NRU, 2003). The Environment Fund and other support mechanisms have also produced valuable results in the Republic of Ireland. The developing recognition of support needs in recent years is to be commended.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Direct public engagement in local sustainable development initiatives needs to be strengthened and deepened.

Main stakeholders involved: Local government (NI and RoI), Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

Sustainable development requires both active local partnerships and an informed and involved citizenry. While this research found that LA21 had stimulated many councils to engage with local communities, the methods and depth of the consultation generally remain shallow, with the persistent exclusion of some key groups such as youth and ethnic minorities. This appears to be caused by a local government culture that does not fully accept the value of consultation,

coupled with an absence of adequate facilitation skills. A fresh look is needed at participation, with a heightened expectation of the role of the public in the local sustainability process. It should be recognised that in some cases a minimum level of community infrastructure may have to be developed before such participation can take place. This can be only achieved by setting out clearer participation strategies in central government guidance (see Recommendations 1 and 4), an emphasis on the development of local social capital, and the adoption of more appropriate methods of engagement, such as citizens' juries and participative budgeting. It is also clear that both local government officers and those working for social partners will need further training in the methods and objectives of participation if this is to feed into the sustainability process more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 12: *Locally elected representatives should be targeted as a key group to be brought into the sustainability agenda.*

Main stakeholders involved: *Local government (NI and RoI), Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).*

The research findings suggest that local politicians are often not as central to planning and leadership activities as should be the case. If Local Action 21 is re-launched as an all-island local participative venture for mutual advantage, it should improve its profile as a political priority, but a need will remain for specific action to engage elected representatives. Some local authorities are already active in this regard, and certainly the Strategic Policy Committees in the Republic of Ireland are in some cases changing things considerably. It is recommended that any training and support package put together as a result of Recommendation 6 should include components for elected officials. More generally, LA21 practitioners should remain cognisant of the resource available through the local knowledge and local mandate of elected officials.

Theme 5: Cross Border Considerations

This research has identified the cross-border dimension to local sustainability as being both necessary and an attractive perspective from which to reinvigorate progress. This is an area identified by the North/South Ministerial Council as requiring increased cooperation, but not yet significantly acted upon by any of the cross-border institutions. While each jurisdiction needs to develop its own ways of implementing and re-energising the sustainability agenda, there is much scope for joint working. Many of the actions recommended above will encourage this dimension to sustainability on the island of Ireland, but it may be further encouraged by:

RECOMMENDATION 13: *Creation of an All-Island Local Sustainable Development*

Roundtable

Main stakeholders involved: North/South Ministerial Council, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI), Sustainable NI, Comhar.

There is a need to provide a strong all-island voice on local sustainable development, with the UK's Sustainable Development Commission providing a potential model for its activity. Sustainable NI in Northern Ireland and Comhar in the Republic of Ireland could potentially jointly service the Roundtable, and indeed the best model may be in the form of a joint working group comprising members of these two bodies, and possibly also drawing on the new practitioner networks discussed in Recommendation 5. The Roundtable could provide a valuable arena for enhancing cross-border discussion and action on this issue.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Convening an All-Island Summit on Sustainable Development.

Main stakeholders involved: North/South Ministerial Council, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (RoI), Department of the Environment (NI).

A major all-Ireland 'event' could be the key element of the envisaged all-island LA 21 re-launch. Such an event could act as a milestone for the shift to a new, implementation focused, all-island version of local sustainable development and help define sustainability for such all-island context. The Summit might also be used to establish commitments to local sustainable development and ultimately re-enthuse local sustainability partnerships by highlighting the progress, need and potential of further implementation of the sustainability agenda. It might also provide an opportunity to launch some of the other initiatives mentioned under this theme.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Establishment of an all-island element to the networks of local sustainable development practitioners.

Main stakeholders involved: Social partners, Local authorities, CDBs (RoI), LSPs (NI), Sustainable NI, Comhar.

Recommendation 5 noted that there is a need for broad-based local sustainable development practitioner networks within both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In order to further consolidate the cross-border dimension of sustainability and maximise the pool of experience across the island of Ireland, it is suggested that this should also have an all-island dimension. This might mean, for example, annual joint meetings of the two networks, and other interactions through the communication tools such as email networks. This will promote awareness of local sustainable development practice and policy across different sectors and between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. This would require a moderate level of funding and could

be administered jointly by Sustainable NI and Comhar, or could become the responsibility of the Roundtable noted above.

6.4 Frameworks for implementation

In an attempt to clarify the framework for implementing these recommendations, the following pages set out the interventions needed at each of level of governance if the ambitions for local sustainable development are to be achieved. These identify specific stakeholders to take forward each of the above recommendations, adding detail where necessary and stressing potential all-island dimensions where appropriate.

A reinvigoration of local sustainability requires action at all levels of governance and includes those outside the government system, such as social partners and individual citizens. Although the recommendations do tend to look to local authorities and central government to lead the process initially, this is not to suggest a sidelining of local partners and community groups. Indeed they are clearly the most important constituency in the whole process. Resourcing communities, in terms of finance, access to information and ability to participate, is a prerequisite for any serious move towards local participation and sustainability. However despite the ultimate emphasis on local implementation, the initial impetus needs to come from central government (meaning the NI Executive or NIO Ministers and the Government of the Republic), particularly in the establishment of the various cross-border measures recommended in this report. This should also include ministerial involvement in any re-launch events or processes, and generally provide a strong signal from central government on the need to prioritise this agenda.

Intervention level: North-South Ministerial Council	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<p>Convene All-Island Sustainable Development Summit to launch a new, implementation-focused, all-island version of local sustainable development and re-enthuse local sustainability partnerships (Rec. 14). This may also be used to launch a range of other initiatives noted in the recommendations, including an All-Island Network of Local Sustainable Development Practitioners (Rec. 15) and Guidelines issued by respective central governments.</p> <p>Establish an All-Island Sustainable Development Roundtable to advise the two governments and provide a strong all-island voice on local sustainable development (Rec. 13). The Roundtable would be expected to develop a package of measures that will recognise, support and exchange good local sustainability practice on the island of Ireland, including a twinning scheme for local sustainability partnerships North and South and an award scheme to recognise good and innovative local sustainable development practice</p>	<p>N/S Ministerial Council, DoE(NI), DoEHLG (RoI), local authorities and social partners</p> <p>N/S Ministerial Council, DoE(NI), DoEHLG (RoI),</p>

Intervention level: Central government (Republic of Ireland)	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<p>An update and re-launch of the LA21 guidelines, to reflect the post Johannesburg and all-island context (Rec. 4). This guidance should provide an implementation focus for a re-launched LA21 and stress a number of the issues noted in other recommendations, such as an enhanced role for social partners (Rec. 10) and more effective participation processes (Rec. 11).</p> <p>The re-launch should also mark the rejuvenation of the LA21 officers network, widened to include other actors such as CDB personnel. (Rec. 5) This network should be supported and encouraged through enhanced communications (such as an email list server or an electronic newsletter).</p> <p>Either as part of these guidelines or as a separate process, there is a need for central government to publish guidance to practitioners on how to engage with the public on sustainability issues (Rec. 7). This should take the form of a tool kit for communication that could address issues of language and terminology, and could possibly go as far as developing some form of marque for local sustainability in Ireland, aiming to aid recognition and awareness (Rec. 8).</p> <p>The guidelines to be re-launched at a major gathering of practitioners, with ministerial involvement, and used to establish a wider-based network of local sustainable development practitioners in the Republic of Ireland (Rec. 5)</p> <p>Recognising that local authorities and social partners do not always have the capacity to deliver sustainable development, the DoEHLG should develop an integrated support package for these two sectors that could include certified sustainability training, awards of recognition and support funding for social partners central to a local LA21 process (Rec. 6).</p>	<p>DoEHLG</p> <p>DoEHLG, local sustainability practitioners</p> <p>DoEHLG</p> <p>DoEHLG, Minister for the Environment</p> <p>DoEHLG</p>
<p>Possible cross-border dimensions</p> <p>Central government would be expected to support most of the of the cross-border initiatives identified in this report, with the DoEHLG providing key assistance to the North/South Ministerial Council in the convening of the Summit (Rec. 14), establishment of the All-Island Sustainable Development Roundtable. (Rec 13) and a cross border network of practitioners (Rec. 15).</p> <p>The LA21 guidelines (Rec. 4) could be developed into an all-island product without incurring major cost. Legislative and other discussions would need to be expanded, and the case studies would need to be drawn from a wider base, providing a larger pool of good practice. This is a desirable approach but may be viewed as a more medium term aspiration.</p>	

Intervention level: Central government (Northern Ireland)	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<p>Establishment of a Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy to provide a coherent focus for local sustainability (Rec. 2).</p> <p>The governance structures of Northern Ireland are undergoing major review, as part of the ongoing review of the peace process and the Review of Public Administration. These should be used as an opportunity to enhance the existing institutional arrangements (Rec. 3) to provide more robust local governance and more integrated central government structures.</p> <p>Development of LA21 guidelines (Rec. 1). This guidance should provide a strong implementation focus for a re-launched LA21 and stress a number of the issues noted in other recommendations, such as a larger role for social partners (Rec. 10) and more effective participation processes (Rec. 11).</p> <p>Either as part of these guidelines or as a separate process, there is a need for central government to publish guidance to practitioners on how to engage with the public on sustainability issues (Rec. 7). This should take the form of a tool kit for communication that could address issues of language and terminology, and could possibly go as far as developing some form of marque for local sustainability in Ireland, aiming to aid recognition and awareness (Rec. 8).</p> <p>The guidelines to be re-launched at a major gathering of practitioners, with ministerial involvement, and used to establish a wider-based network of local sustainable development practitioners in Northern Ireland (Rec. 5)</p> <p>Recognising that local authorities and social partners do not always have the capacity to deliver sustainable development, the DoE should develop an integrated support package for these two sectors that could include certified sustainability training, awards of recognition and support funding for social partners central to a local LA21 process (Rec. 8).</p>	<p>DoE (NI)</p> <p>Northern Ireland Executive/NIO Ministers, NI Assembly, Review of Public Administration</p> <p>DoE(NI)</p> <p>DoE(NI)</p> <p>DoE (NI), Minister for the Environment</p> <p>DoE (NI)</p>
<p>Possible cross-border dimensions</p> <p>Central government would be expected to support most of the of the all-island initiatives identified in this report, with the DoE (NI) and the DoEHLG (RoI) providing key assistance to the North/South Ministerial Council in the convening of the Summit (Rec. 14), establishment of the All-Island Sustainable Development Roundtable. (Rec. 13) and a cross-border network of practitioners (Rec. 15).</p> <p>The LA21 guidelines (Rec. 4) could be developed into an all-island product without incurring major cost. Legislative and other discussions would need to be expanded, and the cases studies would need to be drawn from a wider base, providing a larger pool of good practice. This is a desirable approach but may be viewed as a more medium term aspiration.</p>	

Intervention level: City/County Development Boards (RoI), Local Strategic Partnerships (Northern Ireland)*	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<p>CDBs embody many of the local sustainability principles and so are key to their further embedding, with the qualification that sustainable development is taken on as distinct remit (Rec. 4).</p> <p>Any review of CDBs' remit and goals should include enhancement of the sustainability element, and make responsibilities more precise and explicit (Rec. 4).</p> <p>CDBs have no direct equivalent in Northern Ireland, and this represents a comparative structural weakness. It is to be hoped that the upcoming Review of Public Administration will give due attention to the need for enhanced strategic planning based on integrated, participatory processes in Northern Ireland (Rec. 3).</p> <p>There should be involvement of CDB/LSP personnel in the reactivated LA21practitioner networks (Rec. 5). Any guidelines should be developed to take into account their potential role (Recs. 1, 4 and 7)</p>	<p>DoEHLG (RoI), CDBs, DoE(NI), LSPs</p> <p>DoEHLG (RoI), CDBs,</p> <p>DoE(NI), LSPs, NIO Ministers/NI Executive, Review of Public Administration</p> <p>DoEHLG (RoI), CDBs, DoE(NI), LSPs.</p>
Possible cross-border dimensions	
<p>CDBs represent an important innovation in the Republic of Ireland, offering a range of valuable insights into potential future practice in Northern Ireland. CDBs as a growing reservoir of sustainability practice should also be included in any all-island initiatives such as twinning initiatives or practitioner networks (Rec.15).</p>	

** These are not directly comparable types of institution, with the CDBs having statutory status, yet the LSPs in Northern Ireland do have the potential to take on a greater range of functions.*

Intervention level: Local authorities (NI and RoI)	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<p>Support and capacity building of practitioners should be seen as a main priority, The critical value of committed individuals working in local authorities needs to be recognised and supported (Rec. 6). Suggested ways of doing this include the establishment of an award of recognition of the work of such individuals and the creation of a mutually supporting network (Rec. 5).</p>	<p>Local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</p>
<p>Building a stronger sustainability culture and capacity within local authorities by the increased promotion and adoption of eco-auditing and EMAS procedures; certified sustainability training for key staff and elected members (Recs 6 and 12); and the development of sustainability checklists and proofing mechanisms for new policy and projects (Rec. 6).</p>	<p>Local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</p>
<p>Local authorities should press for and then apply new or revised LA21 Guidelines (Recs. 1 and 4), with the aim of expressing an all-island, citizenship focus “brand “ of LA21 .</p>	<p>Local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</p>
<p>Local authorities should seek to develop stronger alliances with social partners (Rec. 10), recognising that they may be in a better position to lead LA21 processes, with potential advantages of enhancing citizenship dimensions.</p>	<p>Local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</p>
<p>Communication and engagement with the public needs to be improved though more direct information (Rec. 7), adopting a more strategic approach, more innovative participative practice and improved staff training and resourcing (Rec. 11).</p>	<p>Local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</p>
<p>Locally-elected representatives are a key group in establishing sustainable development as a local priority, but currently they are not providing adequate leadership. Specific training should be provided for this group, with a particular emphasis on the citizenship dimension to sustainable development (Rec.12).</p>	<p>Local councillors, DoE(NI), DoEHLG(RoI)</p>
<p>Possible cross-border dimensions</p> <p>Local authorities represent a key resource of current LA21 practice on the island of Ireland and may offer a range of valuable insights into potential future practice across the island. Local authorities should be encouraged to exchange practice with other councils on the island (Recs. 13 and 15).</p>	

Intervention level: Social partners/community groups	
Key action	Main stakeholders
<i>Social partners should be given an enhanced role in local sustainability partnerships, in some cases having the responsibility to lead or implement the LA21 process (Rec. 10).</i>	<i>Social partners (RoI and NI), local authorities (RoI and NI).</i>
<i>The capacity of social partners to be involved in local sustainable development also needs to be developed, through awareness-raising, training and financial support (Rec. 10).</i>	<i>Social partners (RoI and NI), local authorities (RoI and NI). DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</i>
<i>The value of committed individuals working in social partner organisations should be recognised and supported (Rec. 6).</i>	<i>Social partners (RoI and NI), local authorities (RoI and NI), DoEHLG(RoI), DoE(NI)</i>
<i>Several specific social groups have pivotal roles in promoting sustainable development on the island of Ireland. Pre-eminent amongst these are Sustainable NI and Comhar, which are in a position to coordinate the inputs of a wide range of government and non-governmental stakeholders, while others, such as Groundwork, have value as examples of good practice. There are under-represented sectors, including those representing marginalized groups such as youth or ethnic minorities (Rec. 11), as well as more mainstream partners from social or economic sectors (Rec. 10).</i>	<i>Sustainable NI, Comhar, NICVA, other social partners or umbrella groups</i>
<i>Social partner contributions should be recognised and included in practitioner networks (Recs. 7 and 15).</i>	<i>Local authorities (RoI and NI), DoEHLG (RoI), DoE(NI)</i>
Possible cross-border dimensions	
<i>Social partners represent a key resource of current LA21 practice on the island of Ireland and may offer a range of valuable insights into potential future practice across the island. Social partners should be encouraged to exchange practice with other councils on the island (Recs. 13 and 15)</i>	

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