

The strengthening of local decisions

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Abstract

The empowerment of environmental issues in decision-making is a central point for the transition toward green economies and environmental sustainability. Thus, insert the environmental variable in a field where the decisions are guided only by political and economical analysis has proved to be a great challenge for the world today, especially in developing countries. This problem have been reinforced through several situations related, mainly, by the lack of joints among instruments, stakeholders and sectors involved in land-use planning and management. This challenge can be reflected until today because the practices of planning and management still remain without establish a common base of qualified information that provides support for environmental policy instruments and that promotes essential levels of reflection and exchange of information that interact and integrate the same territory. So, this paper aims to discuss a proposal to promote necessary joints for the strengthening of local decision (at municipal level) and suggests that decisions must be taken considering the Environmental Guidelines, one instrument that provides qualified information essential for support the decision-making, supports the development of green policies and helps to legitimize the decision-making process by linking the instruments, public administration, environmental agencies and the society. This paper presents initial studies in a case with a small-sized Brazilian municipality as a reference, which has a great potential to greening their economy based on the exploitation of tourism.

1. Introduction

In Brazil, despite the legal framework in the environmental field, the reality presents serious difficulties in its implementation, being notorious the increasing environmental degradation. The insertion of environmental dimension in a field dominated by political-economic analysis is a major issue for environmental sustainability (IAIA, 2002; GLASSON et al, 2005)

These difficulties become apparent when it is observed that there is an evident disarticulation between environmental policy instruments, which contributes to an inefficient use of public resources and negative consequences for many areas (including the environment). The reasons of this situation are connected to the following issues that can be observed in the country:

- The extra burden to some instruments such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for projects, which has been responsible for supporting decisions with answers that aren't make part of its essence, like for example the choices of development of a region;
- The high level of economical and political pressures for quick decisions answer to authorize the implementation of projects, reducing the efficiency of some instruments like EIA for projects and Environmental Licensing to a matter of time between the submission of the project and its approval. Thereby the environmental analysis is restricted to the establishment of mitigation measures;
- The low level of participation of the stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process, resulting in subsequent conflicts due to lack of decisions legitimacy;
- The lack of articulation between different levels of decision (federal, state and municipal) and sectors involved, which results in non coordination and harmony between the actions of territorial development.

Regarding the instruments problems that relate to the choices of location alternatives, Souza et al (2007) recommend the formulation of a new instrument called Environmental Guideline to adequately address the deficiencies to implement the Brazil's National Environmental Policy, arguing that this instrument is able to contribute with public policies and to pave the way towards green economies.

The authors say that the Environmental Guideline provides evidence to support the decision regarding the development of alternatives, demonstrating their compatibility with the carrying capacity and contributing to an improvement in the processes of participatory planning through the establishment of a uniform level between the different actors, from society and government, thus enhancing commitment and accountability (MONTAÑO et al., 2007).

They define the Environmental Guideline as a process of determining the environmental vulnerability of the territory through the classification of a given geographical area into sub-territorial units, grouped according to skill levels in accommodating certain types of occupation, always in an indicative way. The determination of the different criteria of occupation should be based on scientific criteria and complemented with the criteria established by the society, considering the largest number of relevant environmental factors (physical, biological and man-made) for each type of potential occupancy for the study area (SOUZA et al, 2007).

This instrument can be important to reconcile the economic development with the environmental quality and also to show the places where the investments best fit in local territory. Thereby the Environmental Guideline unfolds many benefits to society, namely:

- Contribute to project's approval procedures, specially for the scoping stage of Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment, focusing on essential requirements of decision-making;

- Provides early information to entrepreneurs for the decision to implement a project, which is also supported by environmental factors identified, anticipating issues that can be harmful to the environment;
- Evidence the government's necessity to fulfill its function of protect the environmental and to produce environmental information making it available to society.

Accordingly it, this instrument has the purpose to assist the formulation of policies and environmental planning, or development strategies. And for this, the final results, shown by set of maps and reports, allows the visualization through scenarios of the distribution of areas susceptible to natural processes and areas with varying potential for activities implementation, always considering the environment's carrying capacity, thus enabling the integration of environmental values in various levels of planning activities and decision making.

Another aspect to be considered it is regarding of society participation in the elaborate process of the Environmental Guideline, they are introduced in the process since the beginning for decide with experts the objectives and criteria that will be considered in its construction, including cultural and social aspects (OLIVEIRA et al, 2009).

In this context, efforts must be made to identify which sectors of investment can maximize environmental, social and economic benefits, without one being above the others. In that way, this paper aims to discuss a proposal to promote necessary joints for the strengthening of local decision (at municipal level) and suggests that decisions must be taken considering the Environmental Guidelines to support the decision-making process in terms of land-use planning and management that observes the capacity of the environment. As well to present a small-sized Brazilian municipality as a reference, which has a great potential to greening their economy based on the exploitation of tourism.

2. Methodological approach

For the achievement of this study were raised some issues and conditions of the instrument Environmental Guidelines that allow the strengthening of decision-making and, in the study case, were made a survey of the different sectors involved in the paths taken by the process of decision making that occur within the institutional environment of a municipality.

For the execution of Environmental Guideline in the administrative environment of one municipality effectively reaches their full potential as an instrument for support decision making, it is necessary to work the building of an appropriate structure to consolidate an institutional environment that enables the integration of the environmental variable in the decision-making at the municipal level.

In the expectative of design a structure that could consolidate the insertion of environmental variable in the decision making process of Brotas are been tracked the paths that management

and planning decisions are taking through documents and law analyses, are been made some interviews and meetings with the team's hall related with this process, and are been made analyses of the posture of management and planning of the city ahead of different situations that arise in everyday life. In which, the previous results are presented here.

3. Results and Discussion

In general lines, as a result of this study were addressed and discussed some aspects and functions of the Environmental Guideline, that seems essential and conditional to the promotion of joints necessary to strengthen decision making. Among these conditions, we will address:

- The qualified environmental database that is presented as common among instruments that interact on the same territory;
- The platform for reflection, discussion and communication between stakeholders and between sectors that working in the same territory;
- The necessary reflection on the choice of any (when linked to laws) options or alternatives of land use for human activities, by the production of possibilities, always in an indicative way.

Starting by the matter concerning the production of a qualified environmental database that is common for land-use planning instruments, cannot be overlooked the role that this aspect of the Environmental Guideline might enable regard the promotion of a joint level required between the instruments that operate on the same territory, among other benefits, this joint can still avoid being generated, or at least reduced, the conflicting actions or decisions with respect to development options of different land-use planning and management instruments.

According to Montañó et al.(2007), the use of an approach for the occupation planning of a determined territory, where performed on sound basis, through information consistent with the wishes of the planner, the spatial basic data to a decision making, can generate in practice the consolidation of this type of approach in different decision support tools such as Master Plans, Basin Plans, and Environmental Impact Assessment, etc., further increasing the exploration of all potentialities presented by instruments that have this feature.

Another condition that deserves attention relates to the possibility of promoting a suitable platform for reflection, discussion and communication between stakeholders and between sectors that work in the same territory, once these levels of coordination and communication channels promoted are essential for promote an environment of decision-making more sustainable, consequently resulting in improvement of environmental quality of decisions and the participative and negotiated planning process, fact that gives legitimacy to the process of decision making.

Vincent and Partidário (2006) demonstrated that lack of communication between different stakeholders in the execution context of EIA and SEA can cause conflicts, proving that scientific

statements are not well accepted when values are not met and arguments are not discussed within clear and accountable communication processes. The authors conclude that the communication should aim at creating conditions for an intuitive integration of environmental values with decision values.

The use of the instrument in a compulsory form, bound by the laws, appears as an important condition for reinforce to any decision the need for further reflection, at least in environmental aspects, regarding land use. The insertion of environmental values of previous form, prior to decision making, can drastically reduce the inefficient use of public resources and time spent in conflict resolution at each decision taken.

Finally, the indicative character displayed by the instrument, when is linked to legal instruments, may have multiple benefits related to the insertion of the environmental variable in the decisions. The fact of not provide explicit rules for use and occupation, and present only the susceptibilities and vocations (and to constraints), which must be mandatorily observed, allows choosing the best responses to different actions and bind directly to the context in which to insert, individualizing responses in time and space (SOUZA et al,2007).

4. The municipality of Brotas as a reference

For a better understand of institutional arrangement that will be faced by this instrument, this paper presents initial findings regarding the context of planning and management of the municipality of Brotas and a brief description of the sectors involved in making decisions on planning at the local level. The reasons for chosen this municipality are several and begin by the level of detail and knowledge developed through years of research in environmental policy instruments in this city and the opening provided by the city for researches in this line.

Located in central São Paulo State, one of the most developed regions of the country, with a small population of 23 thousand habitants in about 1102 km ² (IBGE, 2008) and boasting a strategic and privileged location, the city landscape since the beginning of its development was always linked to the production and the rural agricultural economy. Currently it should be highlighted the growing crop of sugar cane, orange and eucalyptus, which cover about 60% of the land.

Brotas has tried to increase the exploitation of tourism since 1990, nowadays the city is a reference for ecotourism, being one of the first destinations with this focus in Brazil and now it is also recognized as a quality adventure tourism destination all over the country. At the same time, some conditions related to soil characteristics, topography, climate and its location on the state highway system have kept the city at the forefront of the expansion of agro-industrial activities.

Considering the occupation of about 16% of the land with native vegetation in different stages of regeneration, the municipality still has interesting features that could be use to conservation of

natural resources. However, different parts of the territory present critical situations associated with the occurrence of intense erosion caused mainly by inadequate soil management, thus indicating the need for attention to control this type of problem (RANIERI et al., 2007).

Regarding the planning and management of environmental issues, Brotas have different relationships with several institutions, like the Environmental Agency of São Paulo State (CETESB) that has a distinguished role in the state's environmental management; the State Prosecutors, which tends to act mainly on the enforcement of environmental laws, especially in terms of the obligations assumed by entrepreneurs in relation to environmental authorizations and the need to repair environmental damage caused by illegal procedures at the municipality; the Department of Water and Power (DAEE), as the manager of water resources in the State of São Paulo; the federal (ministries) and state governments, which draw up development programs; the municipal council of environmental protection (COMDEMA), which holds the participation of civil society, universities and government, together with public institutions involved in defining and monitoring policies for preservation and environmental restoration in the municipality and help the local executive authorities on environmental issues; and the Non Governmental Organizations.

Brotas has privileged conditions (comparing with other Brazilian municipalities) in its administrative structure in relation to the environmental area at the local level and have a well structured environmental database incorporated to the public administration. However, despite all these structure there is a strong disappointment with the (low) ability to meet the demands posed over these organisms, what, in the most of the situations, mean the inability to prevent or remedy the occurrence of significant environmental damage.

5. Conclusion

Our results are still preliminary and uncertain. The next step of this research will be defining the assignment of each sector and all actions developed by these different sectors that participate in the decision-making process in the planning context of Brotas and try to find how the Environmental Guideline will execute all its potentiality regarding these functions discussed in this paper.

This work concludes that the Environmental Guideline should be understood as an instrument of environmental policy and management that support and guides the decision-making process regarding the occupation of the territory. There is great potential for utilize this instrument as a common base for others instruments and to linking this to other instruments set out in the National Environmental Policy, which could be used to better support land use decisions.

Another aspect to be conclude is that the platform of reflection, discussion and communication between stakeholders and between sectors that working in the same territory and that is provided by the Environmental Guideline has a great potential to increase the legitimacy in decision-making, help the decisions regards environment to be better understood by society,

through the enhance in communication, what will improve the environmental quality of decisions and will make a planning process more participative and negotiated.

Concerning the connection required the instrument in laws, this work concludes that this legal support is indispensable for that the environmental reflection promoted by the instrument to be embraced in any decision regarding the management and municipal planning of options or alternatives of land use for human activities.

So, this new instrument can help the planning, develop and implement of policies and activities in a more “green way” in Brazil. In the case of Brotas, the application of the Environmental Guideline can contribute to articulate the institutions and the society for discussions on the alternatives for the development of the territory, avoiding and mitigating negative consequences in the environment and encouraging activities that best fit in local, like ecotourism.

6. References

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