STRATEGIC PLAN OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Maria Carmela Serluca
University of Sannio, Italy
mserluca@unisannio.it

Abstract:
Public authorities are called firstly to promote the social and economic development of the territory administered and improve the citizens quality of life by offering more and better services. With this in mind, the management of the limited resources extemporaneous and shortsighted is no longer unthinkable: it is necessary to have an overview of the long-term that goes beyond the administrative office and see the active involvement and substantial of all local actors. The characters of complexity, which qualify the function of the local authority, are the main reasons for the growing interest in strategic planning. The preparation of a strategic plan can be the best way to follow in order to define a clear pattern of development, to identify possible courses of action, priority projects and related business solutions. This work aims at explaining the ways in which strategic planning can contribute to build social capital or relational capital aimed at improving the community governance and achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

Keywords: strategic plan, sustainable growth, inclusive growth, welfare
1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at clarifying the strategic planning in the light of the management business literature. The research questions are: "What is the role of strategic plan in local government? Which are the process to build the strategic plan? How to improve the community governance and achieve sustainable and inclusive growth?". The methodology used is deductive, according to a model of doctrine. The various doctrinal positions in terms of strategic plan and the various definitions of elaborate strategic plan have been thus analysed. It has also been verified and identified the correct methodological path to follow in order to reach the processing of the document. The strategic plan has become a tool increasingly used in Italy by local authorities. It does not derive from legislative requirements but it is a voluntary document promoted by the leaders of the town. By collaborating with them it is identified a political plan of medium and long term development, in accordance with the social and environmental capital of a territory to be submitted to continuous comparison with the system of local actors.

2. THE STRATEGIC PLAN ROLE

The strategic plan includes all activities by which it is possible to define the mission of the institution, establish the general objectives and develop policies that will optimize resources to effectively achieve the objectives in order to meet the needs and expectations of citizens (Meola & Antonelli, 2006, p. 18).

In this context, the strategies are a number of choices addressed to systematically influence the tendency of a specific urban area in terms of development paths of administration, consistent with the varied system of constraints and opportunities that the local tissue can sustain in a prospective path (Mazzara, 2009, p.5).

The planning can therefore be understood as a formalized procedure to produce a result articulated, in the form of integrated system of decisions. It will particularly be necessary breaking down, articulating and, above all, rationalizing the process by which decisions are made and integrated in the organizations (Mintzberg, 1996).

In local government through the strategic planning process, the administration must identify the route to follow throughout its mandate, evaluating threats and opportunities in order to define their long-term goals. Such decisions will be essential to produce actions that orient and guide what an administration is, what and why it does (Bryson, 1995, p. X).

The strategic plan "clearly is a leadership and management innovation that is likely to persist because, unlike many other recent innovations, it accepts and builds on the nature of political decision making. Raising and resolving important issues is the heart of political decision making, and the heart of strategic plan. Strategic plan seeks to improve on raw political decision making, however, by helping to ensure that issues are raised and resolved in ways that benefits the organization, its key stakeholders, and society "(Bryson, 2011, p. 40).

3. THE STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

The characteristic elements of the strategic plan process can be identified in leadership, partnership and participation (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2006, pp. 19-21).

1. The local political leadership is based on:
   - political legitimacy from the people and the system of actors;
   - a strong and accountability transparency in decision-making;

---

1 "Who promotes the process and provides the necessary resources of legitimacy? The ideal situation, according to which the plan <strategy> is sponsored by a cohesive coalition that assumes the collective problems of the city and the area, is very rare in practice. In fact, the strategic plan is often a political initiative promoted by the mayor or by an administrator rather than a chance of identification by the technical actors or, more rarely, social. The strategic plan is thus also a tool in the hands of a few actors that pursue quite goals different to those stated in the text and in the planning documents "(Pasqui, 2005, p. 82).
• the tension to build truly shared and consensual visions;
• the search for ways to give voice to unorganized and weaker interests;
• recognition of partnership that go not only started, but also maintained;

2. Partnership, negotiating agreements and public-private partnerships have become the rule for new models of governance. The conditions to contribute to the effective improvement are:
• the presence of mutual respect and reciprocal trust;
• the presence of a sufficient capacity for the management and trading;
• the careful choice of partners;
• the previous formulation of few clear rules of the game, not subject to negotiation;
• the transparent distribution of tasks and responsibilities between partners and clarity in the distribution of benefits between public and private;
• accountability on the part of public leadership;
• maintaining pertaining to public administration of a strong power of appraisal of projects and monitoring of their implementation;

3. Public participation in decision-making, which is at the same time a challenge, a goal and a condition of success.

The strategic planning is a “process of «deliberative democracy». It joins the representative institutions elected through a wider involvement of collective actors, public and private, in fundamental decisions on the future of the city” (Perulli, 2007, p. 33). It will be necessary to involve citizens' organizations and the interests of both strong and weak. Key player in the whole process is the public body, the important role assigned to it comes from the fact that it is the only actor "to have the necessary authority, or rather the position and legitimacy, to influence the initial decision of the other stakeholders to work together with the strategic project" (Cavenago, 2004, p. 189). For this reason it assumes in the process, in its different phases, different roles: not only the manufacturer of the plane, but promoter, facilitator, coordinator, evaluator of compatibility and implementer.

With the introduction of the strategic plan process, the local authority can achieve significant benefits (Mazzara, 2009, pp. 12-13):
• the systematic assessment of the environment in which it operates;
• the identification of the critical factors and tendential trends characterizing the way of functioning of the institution and to develop their roles;
• the achievement of mandate and consequently of their respective missions;
• the identification of the strategic instances that need to be embraced;
• the definition of the ways to achieve these instances through the analysis and review of the objectives of the mandate and mission, service levels, its costs and financing, and management or organization.
• analysis of possible development model to be pursued.

The value of strategic plan is the process and not just the final product. The preparation of a strategic plan outside of any prescriptive nature is made possible only by relying on an efficient organization and recognition of the authority of the institution that has initiated the preparation of the plan (Martinelli, 2003, p. 40).

The whole process starts from the precise definition of clear objectives, outside easily understood, specific compared to the expected result, realistic in relation to the resources available, to the time of realization and graded according to priorities.

But to be able to attribute the strategic status, it is essential to meet the following requirements and answer these questions: "Characteristic - is the goal relevant, represents the contents of the program

2 The term accountability means the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, to define the relationships between planning, decision, action and control. In particular, it is necessary to report on how to use the economic and financial resources, the fairness with which the subjects involved have acted in the management, adequacy and compliance behaviours undertaken for its objectives, and the results actually achieved in time " . Ricci, 2005, p. 13). To achieve an effective system of accountability it is necessary: 1. A detailed and clear programming process; 2. A clear definition of responsibilities internal and external; 3. An adequate system of accounting; 4. An effective internal monitoring and evaluation; 5. A periodical information on action; 6. A significant benchmarking activities; 7. An appreciable use of technology in communication processes. (Ricci, 2010, p. 77).
to which it belongs? Governable - is the administration able to decide on the content of the objective independently from other stakeholders? Critical - can the failure to achieve the objective determine a substantial adverse impact on the perception of the institution towards the citizens and stakeholders? Challenger – is the achievement translated in terms of performance and great impact? Measurable - is the goal measured by objective indicators that make the results different over time?” (Goretti & Meacci, 2013, pp. 408-408).

The definition of the decisions that have strategic importance is, and has to be preceded by a moment of analysis of the context in which the institution is located. In other words it is necessary an evolutionary analysis of the needs of the area in terms of potential demand and real, the identification of possible scenarios to be taken and explication of the strategy in intervention programs arranged in a defined sequence of priorities, in relation to trends and expectations of citizens, but in connection with the superstructure where it belongs: the European Community, State Region and Province.

In the process of identification of strategies, that the institution will have to realize, it is crucial the involvement of stakeholders and citizens through active participation.

The active participation of citizens in the construction process of the strategic plan is a challenge and the condition for the success of the plan itself. This involvement enhances and strengthens elective democracies with extensive involvement in the decision-making system. The task of the local authority will provide “all logistical and technical support operating so there are opportunities for comparison, but also verification and synthesis tools” (Meola & Antonelli, 2006, p. 24).

The stakeholders involved in the process can develop mutual trust, understanding, cooperation, ability to work together and improve their ability to dialogue.

The process to be successful needs "a strong insurance policy that the result of joint work will be taken into account, that the decision-making system is ready to receive advice and guidance from the project groups and discussion.

Otherwise it is likely to produce a simple communication, not less important than the previous one, but it could lose its main competitive advantage: the ability to create dialogue between the actors on strategic issues and to draw signs for the future, taking into account the different opinions and needs "(Red, 2005, pp. 79-80).

Particular attention should be placed on communication, in order to establish a direct comparison, sharing and collaboration between the local authority and stakeholders.

The communication must be conceived as a real process that fits into all actions, projects, services institution. The overall objective is to ensure "openness, visibility and transparency of all activities carried out by a circuit of information spread, effectively and efficiently to the parties concerned, that can ensure and encourage their participation and involvement in the process " (Ilex, 2011, pp. 120-121).

The government needs to communicate with citizens and one of the ways to achieve this goal is the use of new communication technologies (Information and Communication Technology - ICT) through a multi-channel approach, using a variety of tools in a coordinated manner with each other (web pages, 3

3 Strategic will be the decisions aimed respectively at:
- the identification of the mission of the local authority;
- the proposition outside of the vision intended to be created and shared with the community;
- identification of areas of intervention by the administration and the resulting functions and services deemed "relevant”;
- the definition of appropriate policy interventions in the context of these strategic areas of interest;
- setting up an effective system of relations with the stakeholder system administration (the “opening to the outside” of the administration)” (Mazzara, 2009, p. 35).

4 Bryson has a different opinion about. He believes that “the participation of citizens may not be necessary for the legitimacy of the process since the council elected or appointed is already directly involved and that this is done in the context of democracy that is not direct but representative ”(Bryson, 1999, p. 77).
social networks, logo, wineskin the traditional activity of dissemination of news in the press and local TV stations, as well as traditional forms of meeting such as seminars, meetings, conferences), so as to be effective with respect to the number of individuals covered, the information provided and the feedback obtained. It is a constantly evolving process that does not end in the preparation of a document or unchangeable in a number of projects, but an instrument subject to constant checks and revisions, which supported the implementation of cost-effective solutions for the majority of citizens (Meola & Antonelli, 2006, p. 24). It is a constantly evolving process that does not end in the preparation of a document or unchangeable in a number of projects, but an instrument subject to constant checks and revisions, aimed at supporting the implementation of cost-effective solutions for the majority of citizens (Meola & Antonelli, 2006, p. 24).

4. STRATEGIC PLAN, TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The strategic plan is one of the most innovative instruments of territorial governance experienced in recent years by the most dynamic cities in Europe and in Italy that accompanied profound economic, social and environmental issues, implementing participatory processes and inclusive of all forces in the area and thus constituting a powerful incubator of policies and development strategies shared. Compared to the shape and structure the plan is supposed to take, there are no patterns or reference models, but it is possible find some basic elements (Mazzara & Sangiorgi, 2012, p. 744):

- introductory information about what the plan is and why it was decided to adopt it, its purposes, the actors who participate, the process of incorporation and the methodology used, what it contains, how to read and interpret its contents, the benefits after its adoption, the tools of participation and communication used;
- a summary of the internal and external environment;
- the vision, mission and values of the plan;
- a programmatic vision and shared actions proposed in it, namely, the translation of the strategic lines into individual goals, projects and actions through diagrams, descriptions and summary tables;
- communication and monitoring schemes that will follow the development of the projects.

The shared interest is to help local actors to find ways to grow and mobilize toward common goals of development, redefining the identity of the city, the identification of processes for the conversion of the social and economic structure of an entire area including forms partnership, strengthening of existing networks between different actors, identification of projects and actions possible with public funds, national and community, but also with additional resources such as private funds.

5. CONCLUSION

The strategic planning for the development of the territories is one of the issues on which the local public administrations have placed more attention in recent years. The principal idea is that it is crucial to read their own territory at the local level, to select the priorities sustainable and drive around these priorities the public and private resources. Local institutions of each nature and political orientation are primarily responsible for the development of a territory, for the power they direct the development choices, their legitimate share of social control and for their role of facilitators of the dynamics of social cohesion.

The performance of a strategic planning process leads to profound changes in the decision-making power of the government. The local authority, which makes use of inclusive decision-making processes of the stakeholders in the development of the strategic plan, cannot avoid starting similar processes within their organization in order to involve senior management, employees and citizens in decision-making organization. It is essential to develop and support networks where synergies among institutional actors and collective subjects, both inside and outside the territorial reference, become the most effective and efficient way to produce the mobilization of the best cultural resources available in the area.

The aim is always to "support the process of social development and revitalization of the local economy through the expansion of networks of collaboration among stakeholders, promoting forms of public-private partnership and the involvement of citizens" (Lecci, p. 14), indipendently from the structure, the content, the method of construction of the plan.
Local authorities aim at playing an active and leading role in promoting the socio-economic development of the territory they administer through a shared process, trying to create new incentives for the efficient management of public affairs. The preparation of a strategic plan, outside of any prescriptive nature, is possible only by relying on an efficient organization and recognition of the authority of the institution that has initiated the preparation of the plan.

The process to be implemented cannot be improvised, following the current fashion or by relying on expert/external consultants, but it requires the development of an adequate culture, both to realize the document itself and manage the application. In a bottom-up development and integrated local programming perspective, the ability and willingness to submit concrete actions to submit to continuous examination represent the premise in order that everyone has a validity within the administration of the institution.

The strategic plan will be accompanied by politics and public administration, because the risk is to remain on paper if there is not the necessary conviction to use it. Only in this way, the strategic plan can help to place the City in a more technical, managerial and modern dimension, in which the administrative action proves to be better targeted and more verifiable and, as such, more effective than it is now.

REFERENCE LIST
