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Participation, Discourse and Consensus: Local Agenda 21 in a Deliberative Democracy Perspective

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1 INTRODUCTION

Local Agenda 21 originates from the UN Earth Summit meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In Rio a majority of the participating countries signed 5 documents which indicated the actions and guidelines that were required for the world society in order to steer the development in a sustainable direction. One of these documents is Agenda 21; *the action plan for the realisation of a sustainable development.* Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 describes the important role local and regional governments have in the process towards implementations of a sustainable development. This chapter is today commonly known as 'Local Agenda 21'.

The core idea of Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 is that local authorities should undertake a consultative process with their inhabitants in order to arrive at a consensus on an action plan or a 'Local Agenda 21' for the community. This emphasises that democratic participation is a necessary factor if the work aimed towards a more sustainable development is to be successful. Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is a strategy for the local communities' adaptation to the goal of sustainable development, and it is, by its very nature, a reform for planning and democracy at the local level. In this paper, I will pursue further the democratic elements of LA21. Ideas about communication and dialogue in LA21 point immediately to a form of understanding of democracy which is put forward in Jürgen Habermas' theory of the discourse democracy or the 'deliberative' democracy. By deliberation Habermas means: 'rational discussions and mutual considerations (deliberation) between free and equal citizens' (Kalleberg 1999:36).

This paper[1] is divided into two parts. *Firstly*, I will introduce a certain type of values based on deliberative democracy and try to show that this perspective involves elements present in LA21. The objective is to show that such values are suitable for clarifying the rationality which permeates LA21. *Secondly*, I will use this background to design a specific model of LA21 as a communicative process.

The point of using a theoretical perspective is not to give LA21 a new purpose or to try to change its character. LA21 is anchored in the Rio-accord, and it has already been adapted to the Norwegian context. As a result of this, some bounds for what LA21-work should involve have already been drawn up. However, LA21 involves a form of democratic values which may represent an 'input' to a *further* development of democracy towards an 'ecological democracy': LA21 presents us with challenges with regards to *how* we may use democracy to achieve changes towards a sustainable development. By using Habermas' normative perspective, we can realise norms which can then be used to deduce guidelines for how a consultation process towards a sustainable development, such as is the focus in LA21, can be arranged.

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[1] The paper builds on, and is a further development of, my master thesis in political science entitled *Lokal Agenda 21 i et deliberativt demokratiperspektiv. En casestudie av Fredrikstad kommune* (2000).

2   JÜRGEN HABERMAS' THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

To Habermas, democracy is to be viewed as a deliberation process: the objective is to put forward norms or alternative plans of action which can achieve public support. Through the *discourse principle,* Habermas defines a standard for how to assess what is a valid decision or norm: 'Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse' (Habermas 1992:66).

Habermas does not explain exactly how we should progress or how institutions or organisations may be organised in order for them to make decisions that have such validity. He does, however, highlight the *conditions* necessary for a discussion, and he states the insights and means for progress which actors will have to make use of in order to reach a rational consensus on political issues.

2.1   The ideal speech situation

Habermas builds his understanding of democracy from insights on how communication works: he claims that language carries with it an inherent *telos*, an objective, of achieving an understanding between people[2]. *The discourse principle* points to the phenomenon that a person who claims to others a universalistic view in a case or on a subject will have to utilise insights from linguistic and communication theory. In a world where there exists a countless number of differing views of what are good or correct values, communication and language make up the base upon which democracy has to be built. Considering the universal distribution of communication and its ability to bring forward a mutual understanding, it is difficult to argue against the neutrality of the discourse principle (Habermas 1996a:209).

According to Habermas, there is therefore no basis for decision-making other that which we can all agree on in a practical discussion. Broad participation in the discourse then becomes necessary in order to decide what should be considered as valid norms. Habermas assumes that the participants want to settle their conflicts through mutual understanding and not solve them through coercion or by making compromises. It is then most logical to initiate discussions and try to develop a common ethical self-understanding. (Habermas 1996a:206). The principal element in relation to the democracy is however that communication between people does not necessarily lead to an agreement between them. In order for communication to function optimally, it is necessary that the conditions for communication are respected and recognised, and Habermas therefore wants to inform his contemporaries about the significance of re-establishing *communicative action* as an organising principle.

In regard to this, Habermas points to *the ideal speech* situation. By this he means a situation which promotes *the better argument*. Such a situation refers to three requirements

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[2] The main point in Habermas' theory of communicative action is, according to Eriksen & Weigård (1999:14), that linguistic utterances may be viewed as 'speech acts' that constantly precondition us taking stand to certain implicit validity claims. The claims for *truth, correctness and sincerity* are, according to Habermas (1984:99-100), present in every speech action, and this turns human communication into a medium with a rationally committing character. When the actions of actors depend on a validity assessment of other actors' statements, a co-ordination of the actors' action plans, and thus also of their actions, may happen (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:54, Habermas 1984:95).

(Cohen & Arato 1992:348): 1. *Symmetry:* the discussion must be accessible to all potentially involved parties. 2. *Reciprocity:* one has to make sure that economic and political forces do not limit the dialogue in such a way that the participants cannot participate on equal terms.

3. *Reflexivity:* the participants must have the opportunity to change the discourse level and the strength of the arguments as the discussion unfolds.

When these criteria are realised, we make sure that the debate is *free of control* or coercion-free and thus that the decision-making situation is legitimate. The transcendental power of language is inherent in these conditions: it is possible to change the individuals' positions through their submitting to *the better arguments*. An 'ideal deliberation' aims at attaining a rationally motivated consensus, – to find reasons which may convince all those who are bound by the outcome that this is the best alternative (Eriksen & Weigård 1998:41). In order for a norm to have universal support, there is an implicit objective in regard to the search for a consensus. This represents the belief that only those norms that express a *general will* are accepted as valid (Habermas 1992:63).

Habermas' understanding of democracy is related to the ideal discussion, but Habermas does not believe that this should be understood as something which may be fully realised: it is an ideal that democracy may be measured against. However, what Habermas points out is that we should arrange our democracy in such a way that the dialogues take place out *in openness* and *in public*.

2.2   Participation and the public sphere

Politics is thus not majority rule, but deliberation. Habermas suggests a view of democracy where the communication in society will be secured and given better conditions. Democracy is more than discussions and decisions in the parliamentary apparatus: the public will cannot be read from deliberating delegates' decision-making, but will have to be found in the *free communication flow* in the civil society (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:170). The resource-based power exists in the civil society, but the public does not act, it only deliberates. The *communicative power* must thus be turned into an administrative power. The common belief which is created in the free-wheeling political debates in the civil society must be given a binding legal form through the legislative-political system (Eriksen & Weigård :231). It is only politicians, as legislators, who have unlimited access to making decisions with normative discretion. In order for such decisions to have democratic legitimacy, it is absolutely necessary that there previous to the decisions being made has been a comprehensive deliberation process. In order for this to be realised the society needs to be; decentred or unhierarchised with several centres of power and authority, and several ways of making one's voice heard, but also a set of procedures and arrangements for information, deliberation and negotiations both within and outside the formal power apparatus (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:171). This will expand the basis for comment, improve the access to information and increase the argumentation exchange before a decision is made.

3 LA21 AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

3.1 Which values can be used to Illuminate LA21?

I have focused above on one particular way of viewing democracy. The next question is how this perspective can be related to LA21?

LA21 involves utilising the communication between actors in the local society in order to create change. Similarly, Habermas' perspective provides an understanding on initiating a discussion which should be characterised by a certain amount of rationality. Habermas stresses that participation is *necessary* in order to secure legitimate decisions. This is a perspective which includes the instrumental, but that also goes further. Democracy should, with the help of institutional procedures, guarantee the communicative rationality in such a way that it makes people change their beliefs and find solutions which are in everyone's common interest. On the other hand, LA21 is related to a concrete (sustainable development) objective, while Habermas' instrumentality is found in the procedures that makes a result possible amongst many possible results. The deliberative perspective has not shown us how we may realise sustainable development amongst other possible development routes. In Habermas' coercion-free debate, both the road to the goal and the goal itself depend on the participating actors and the way they define the relevant problem.

However, the principal element in a LA21 process is the fact that we take for granted the superior objective of sustainable development. The actors in a *sustainability* discourse, or in a LA21-work, have agreed upon engaging in a restricted debate: When one starts the work, it is preconditioned that one participates under the premises laid down by the discourse – namely that this should be a work to create sustainable development. The Mayor of the Municipality of Fredrikstad, Svein Roald Hansen, put it this way when he presented the Fredrikstad Declaration in February 1998[3]: '*the objective is clear, we must set the development on a sustainable track. That point is not up for debate*' (KS 1998). In regard to Habermas, LA21 does thus involve us introducing a form of 'limited deliberation'. Our starting point is the UN process for environment and development and we have the concept 'sustainable development', as defined by the Brundtland commission, as our basis for the LA21 discourse[4]. Even if the objective is consensus on a path towards sustainable development, there is however a broad spectre of solutions which may be sustainable. A Habermasian perspective thus proves useful as the perspective provides us with a 'recipe' for how to achieve a consensus about the direction of sustainable development in a local context.

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[3] An important milestone in the introduction of LA21 into municipal environmental policy in Norway was the decisive 'Fredrikstad Conference' held in February 1998. More than 700 participants from 150 municipalities took part, discussing in depth the 'launching' of LA21 in Norway. During this conference the *Fredrikstad Declaration* was adopted. The Fredrikstad Declaration states a moral obligation to support the goal of sustainable development and signals the will to start LA21 processes.

[4] The World Commission for Environment and Development (WED) defines the term 'sustainable development' as: 'a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs'. The definition contains two important points; to meet the basic needs of the world's poor is the first priority, and; the idea of the limitations that current technology and social organisation pose on the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs (WED 1991:42).

According to Habermas, we need a specific type of discussion situation to be able to achieve the *common good* rather than our *private interests*. In regard to the objective of sustainable development, there is a basis for common forming of opinions and exchanges of political opinions through environmental issues because this concerns the common interests which may be in opposition to the self-interests. As the consideration for the community involves thinking sufficiently long-term for it to include the considerations for future generations, there is an obvious potential in activating an obligation towards environmental values (Dryzek 1997:94). Habermas wants to show us that by arranging a free and open debate, we can create solutions to our common good and thus handle the conflicts created by a value-pluralistic world[5]. It is only after comprehensive communication has taken place that it is possible to establish a common understanding and opinion (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:255). Most importantly in relation to sustainable development is to allow different interests to meet each other in an open debate on sustainability: when the idea is to reach a consensus, private interests and special interests will become diminished in the public space as it will not be legitimate in this space to argue for political solutions based on pure self-interests (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:247). When one no longer has to give reasons for ones demands publicly, but may merely refer to an article which gives one the right to certain benefits, one loses the educative and forming effect inherent in public political argumentation (Eriksen 1999:103). This is why it is necessary for priorities and political decisions involving sustainable development to withstand public scrutiny and not be decided in closed rooms.

The demand for a public debate further requires that there are arenas or *public spaces* in the municipality which can work as meeting places for the authorities and inhabitants. The establishment of such public forums or public spaces contributes to changing the legitimation basis for the people in power. They have to enter the public arena in order to give reasons for their decisions and build public support (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:238). However, according to Habermas, the essential factor is that the dialogues actually take place. Only an actually implemented discourse can create the co-operation, the understanding for other people's point of view, the production of arguments and the common conviction of agreement which is necessary to produce a rational consensus on common interests which constitute the basis for a norm (Habermas 1992:67). If we are to use democracy to create change, and this should take place in the direction of finding common interests, we are thus dependent on engaging in discourses. This is the core of LA21 and sustainable development in relation to a deliberative understanding of democracy: by opening up for a broad debate between affected parties, we are able to reach a consensus on a common strategy of action within the objective of sustainable development. – But then we are dependent on starting discourses. In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), Habermas shows us how the political will-formation can be viewed as a process model of such political discourses.

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[5] It should be mentioned that Habermas in his description of common interests does not talk about animals or the rights of other species. Habermas' perspective is *anthroposentric*. However, the term sustainable development also has such an anchoring: the definition does not relate to the environment, but to humans and human needs. In the foreword to the Brundtland report, G. H. Brundtland writes (WED 1991:10): "the environment does not exist as a field separate from human action, ambitions and needs, and attempts to keep it isolated from other human activities have given the word 'environment' a glimmer of naivety in some political circles".

3.2 Democratic will-formation through discourses.

Habermas (1996b:168) focuses on five different forms of politically relevant discourses. In brief, these are the following: *pragmatic* discourses – as long as the issue concerns more trivial value choices, and when only empirical conditions are taken into consideration, the pragmatic discourse will do; *bargaining* concerning the instrumental side of politics, characterised by an action situation where the actor takes other actors' ability to make rational choices into consideration before he or she makes his or her own choices; *ethical-politcal* discourses where the question of who we are as human beings and what we want in regard to important questions of life may be answered; *moral discourses* that come about when one tries to settle conflicts from a neutral and impartial position; *legal discourses* directed towards the consistency of the rules of law, where previous discourses have resulted in that it must be possible to formulate political decisions in legal categories.

In Habermas' model of political legitimation, the foundation is that pragmatic, ethical-political and moral discourses will lead to the legal discourse (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Process model of ideal-typical political discourses (Habermas 1996b:168)
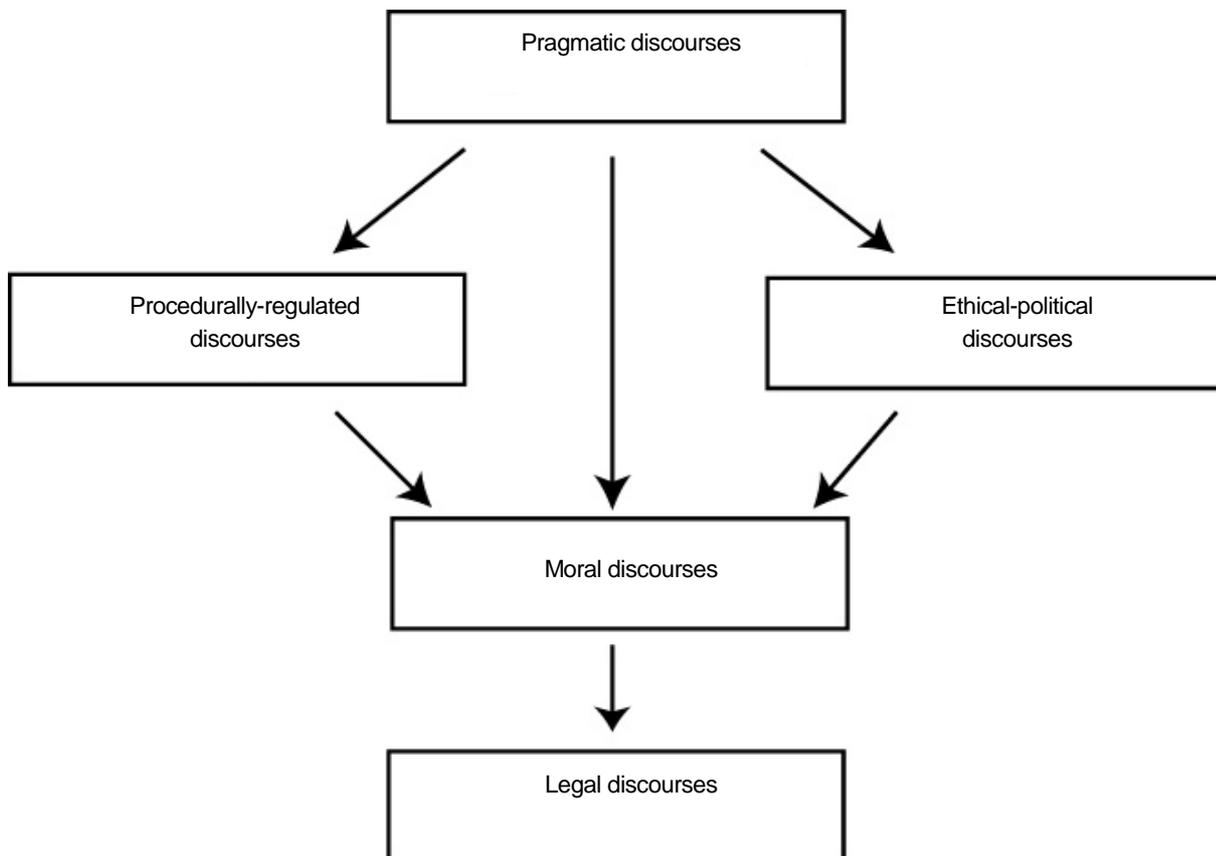
3.3 Towards a deliberative model for LA21

We have established that the starting point for the LA21 dialogue is sustainable development. The question is thus how issues related to sustainable development can be understood more concretely in a deliberative perspective. The questions asked are:

–   How will the political system (the municipal institution) that the subject of LA21 exists within, be able to create a necessary co-operation basis when there exist various interests and conflicts over which strategies that should be chosen in order to achieve sustainable development?

–   How do we ensure a change towards sustainable development through discourse?

In the rest of this paper, I will try to illuminate these questions. Firstly, I will set down the deliberative norms; that is, the idea of communicative rationality, consensus, public access and openness in dialogues as a basis for the work with LA21. Secondly, I will use Habermas' ideal-typical model for political discourses. When LA21 is related to these discourses and these are institutionalised, that is, related to the municipal decision-making apparatus, we will ensure that working with LA21 has democratic legitimacy.

What I present in the following is a deliberative model of LA21, which can apply to LA21-work in general, nationwide. However, I will use some examples from Norway to further illustrate the case. Stating this it has to be pointed at the major difference of what LA21 was intended to be – as a task given to municipalities all over the world by the UN assembly in Rio – and what LA21 has come to mean in Norwegian communities. Most clearly this relates to the fact that very few municipalities have made a Local Agenda plan. The main picture in the Norwegian municipalities is that the LA21 work is fragmented and divided into a range of different small projects, and where the sum of this is called LA21.

When I present my model of LA21 I will view LA21 not as limited to making a LA21-plan, but as a consecutive work steering the development in a sustainable direction.

4   A CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.1   The need for communicative action

A process directed at finding collective solutions requires a form of communicative action. Dryzek (1997:85) states that democracy may function as a problemsolver. Through co-operation within several different arenas, democratic problemsolving focuses on the creation of a flexible process which involves many different voices and perspectives. Such a form of problemsolving involves learning by doing.

From such a starting point it becomes evident that the process has to be characterised by a leadership that is open to contributions and that wants to leave the responsibility for the process to several actors in the local community. When the leadership works to achieve anchorage, mobilisation and involvement, there must also be an opportunity and sufficient time for many people to participate. This implies that information about the work has to be made available, as well as a focus on the fact that both politicians and bureaucrats should have an inclusive attitude to the decisions being made. This means that they include the inhabitants when sketching plans, actions and projects in the LA21-work . Such an anchoring was supported by a report from The Ministry of Environment in 1991. According to this, it is preconditioned that participation should lead to results for those involved; the participants must have an influence: 'without influence, the planning loses credibility' (The Ministry of Environment 1991 in Høyer 1999a:57). According to the report, the participation should take place throughout the planning process from the registration phase, through the formulation of the planning proposal and until the decision-making phase. The effort made to achieve active participation should start as early as possible.

LA21 can be seen as a continual dialogue and a learning process directed towards an objective where all the inhabitants participate. The inhabitants participate by expressing their opinions, by taking part in projects, through letters to the editors of papers, through popular meetings or by working through their own organisations. The debate is thus not understood as a limited form of discussion where all participants are defined as discussion partners, but as the collective effort made by a local community in order to define the direction of sustainable development in a local context. Such a process should ensure that the actors are given responsibilities and that they have as equal rights as possible and that they are given good opportunities to contribute. This also requires efforts to integrate groups that at the outset do not take initiative to participate in the process. In regard to this, the municipal actors have a special responsibility to include and open up for participation from groups of the inhabitants that are not well organised, or 'weak groups'. Chapter 28 in Agenda 21 highlights the importance of integrating women and young people in the work. There is thus a principal perception of *self-help* as a basis for such a perspective on communicative action. The development must come from ourselves, it must include ourselves and we must believe that our understanding of the challenges and our response can contribute to the solving of problems. We are thus talking about a form of local self-confidence building as capital in order to achieve change (Amdam 1998:1).

Even if as many people as possible should be given the chance to take part in the work, the number of participants in projects or co-operation groups must be kept at a manageable

level. In this regard, chapter 28 in Agenda 21 focuses on a co-operation with local business, organisations and industry. The demand for governance and steering of the LA21-dialogue involves, according to Kommunenes Sentralforbund [The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities] (KS) (2000) a form of formalised co-operation. In their 'recipe' for LA21, KS (2000) writes that it can only be successful if the authorities, trade and business, and voluntary organisations co-operate as equal partners. This may be achieved by establishing independent bodies or forums that function as advocates or frontrunners in the LA21-work. In Norway, such LA21 forums are developed only to a limited degree[6]. Fredrikstad Miljøforum [Fredrikstad Environmental Forum] today functions as one of the few ongoing examples of such a formalised co-operation recommended by the KS (Bjørnæs & Aall 1999:39, Lindseth 2000). The work in Fredrikstad Miljøforum shows that co-operating over environmental issues is problematic and may create conflicts. However, experiences also show that there is a significant potential in such co-operation bodies. By inviting different groups to join the work, the authorities are forced to take in different views and more nuances may become evident through the debate (Lindseth 2000). A discourse power can be strengthened when the actors sit down to discuss. It thus becomes an important strategic element to set the agenda, focus on themes that create positive environmental involvement and to arrange for a debate to actually take place.

However, the challenge is to make this a communicative process, rather than one where such forums become the object of a power struggle where different forms of expertise clash (Rugset 1998:73). The principal democratic element in this regard is that the participation should not only have a strategic or instrumental perspective. If the actors are to free themselves from their self-interests, the focus will have to be on the themes and challenges where the dimensions of *the common interests* are brought into the dialogues. In light of the deliberative perspective and following the recommendations of the KS, in practice these forums should function as independent bodies in order to ensure a free and open debate. It will at the same time be important for politicians to be involved or informed about the work in such bodies, in order for the planning to ensure real influence for the participants. If LA21 becomes a project being carried out by the 'civil society', a process completely separate from politics, we will end up with incapacitating and taking the edge off the LA21-work. By letting politicians take part and letting them send their signals into the debate on what is politically feasible and desirable, they are made responsible, and the inhabitants have a greater guarantee that the politicians actually follow up the work at a later date.

The deliberative ideal emphasises that debates should be open. This can be understood in such a way: everybody who takes part in the forum's debates should be able to raise any issue they want, and they should be given an opportunity to speak. In addition, the work should be directed towards arriving at a consensus. If a forum is to be allowed to manage a process, the municipal bodies must give the forum space to manoeuvre, that is, they must be able to involve actors and have the opportunity to point out the challenges involved in the work. At the same time, it is a significant problem within such forums that the inhabitants and the politicians will meet each other with different political powers. In Fredrikstad Miljøforum,

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[6] However, we have a long tradition with user-participation in Norwegian local management; aimed at both planning and implementation of concrete measures. The debate concerning the need for a larger degree of participation can be traced back to the 1960s, and is particularly linked to the 1960s plan of developing suburbs, housing sanitation and road development. In the period from 1987-89, local 'Gro-commissions' were started in several Norwegian municipalities involving representatives from business, voluntary organisations and the local authorities (Bjørnæs & Aall 1999:40). After 1992, most of these commissions were discontinued (Sverdrup 1996 in Bjørnæs & Aall 1999:40).

one experienced conflicts because actors from voluntary organisations wanted the forum to be more offensive and promote environmental issues to the local community to a larger degree (Lindseth 2000:98). Such a direction was opposed by the politicians and the bureaucrats of the municipality who did not want the forum to become a 'radical' environmental organisation (Lindseth 2000). When new groups are invited to join an extended consultation in order to formulate a plan, while it is the formal representative bodies that will make the decisions, tensions easily arise. (Bjørnæs & Aall 1999:45). A forum which leads democratic processes may also contribute to removing the authority from the local council, something which may constitute a democratic problem. As the assistant mayor of Fredrikstad stated: 'Such a forum cannot decide the municipal environmental politcy. We have other, democratically elected, bodies to take care of such matters' (Ringen 2000 [interview] in Lindseth 2000:98). It is thus obvious that the municipal apparatus wants to set up some borders in order to be able to protect it and not create doubts as to who is in authority.

The principal challenge in this is thus to reach a decision in relation to what these forums *can* do and where the boundaries with the parliamentary apparatus should be drawn. When such basic premises are laid down, the next work will be to ensure that the debates in the forum are open and free of prejudice. Debating various political cases in an LA21 forum may contribute to politicians (and bureaucrats) realising the importance of prioritising some cases and committing themselves to work for cases within the decision-making body: the local council. However, this is dependent upon the existence of a co-operative environment in the outset, so that the forum can withstand clashes of opinion and conflicts of interest.

4.2   Consensus and the precautionary principle

The consensus-building which LA21 puts emphasis on involves actors pulling together and being able to sort out conflicts during the process. The point of LA21 is that we precondition various interests and views, and therefore the degree of co-operation between various actors can show us whether and how these interests may be co-ordinated. In this regard, a LA21 process will require real debates and exchanges of opinion. According to Habermas, communicative action can result in a consensus if it functions according to the requirements for an ideal discussion situation. At the same time it may also result in that one can only agree upon a temporary agreement (*modus vivendi*). The parties thus leave some cases waiting, but at the same time they clarify both the basis for the disagreement and what will be worked on further (Amdam & Amdam 2000:157).

Working for sustainable development is a long-term process where one cannot expect all answers and solutions at once. In the deliberative model, the search for consensus is an implicit objective which constitute the basis for a norm achieving such a universal support (Habermas 1992:63). The aim is to reach an agreement, but if that cannot be done, consensus should not appear as strategic use; the agreement should not be forced. In regard to LA21, a useful strategy for achieving agreement can be to approach the problem in stages. This will involve beginning with cases in which success is easily achieved and where more problematic cases can be introduced when the trust and the understanding have improved (Amdam 1998:3). It is important that such a consensus is achieved through a broad debate where all parties agree on what to postpone, and which cases and themes to proceed with.

In relation to establishing a consensus, it is also relevant to make a link between deliberation and the precautionary principle. Majority decisions do not satisfy the requirement that a decision should be accepted by all participants in a free debate. At the same time, Habermas points out that the majority principle may be seen as a form of *conditioned* agreement (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:227). The majority principle is related to the need to make decisions. Habermas' point is that majority decisions can only be accepted if the principle is used in cases where decisions can be reversed. When a case is decided by voting, the decision can only be accepted if the minority is given an opportunity at a later time to work for 'their' solution (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:227). In this context, the precautionary principle, an important decision-making principle with regard to sustainability, is relevant. It relates to cases that – according to Habermas – should not be subjected to majority decisions. The precautionary principle was defined by the following in White paper 58 (1996-1997)[7]:

> The precautionary principle entails that, in cases where there is a danger of serious or irreversible damage, the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for carrying out an encroachment on nature or for postponing environmental measures.

The precautionary principle's basic dimension is *uncertainty,* and that the uncertainty should benefit the environment (Høyer 1999b). If we keep the precautionary principle as a basic principle in working with LA21, this will have consequences for the decisions and deliberations being made. For example, in the cases where we talk about irreversible encroachments and where there is a sufficient degree of scientific uncertainty about the cause-effect relation, there must be *absolute* limits for the 'deliberation'. The deliberation is necessary to be able to achieve a consensus as to *whether* the precautionary principle should be used in a concrete situation. If the result of the deliberation – in the next round – is that the case is defined as having an irreversible character, the precautionary principle should be used[8]. The decision is then 'non-deliberative' in the sense that one should not open up for compromises or that it is not 'permitted' to hammer through a majority decision about performing such encroachments. The precautionary principle applies to activities one expects to involve especially negative consequences for the environment. We thus have a duty to act in the best interests of nature when we are uncertain as to whether what we do has significant, negative consequences for nature and the environment (Høyer 1999b).

In line with Habermas, the precautionary principle focuses on not ignoring important interests in cases that are irreversible. In this way, the principle functions as a demand to assess whether decisions made under LA21 are legitimate in regard to the objective of sustainable development[9].

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[7] The principle received its support in international environmental politics through one of the regional follow-up conferences for the consideration of the World Commission's (WED) report: the so-called Bergen conference in 1990 (Høyer 1999b)

[8] The following example may illustrate the point: if the result of the deliberation is that a development of a water system should be viewed as an irreversible encroachment and a basic scientific insecurity about the cause-effect conditions when it comes to the consequences of human encroachment is experienced, it should not be allowed to use compromises to reach the conclusion of 'partial development' that joins protective and development interests.

[9] Kaiser and Storevik (1997) point out that the precautionary principle is the most characteristic trait of sustainable development.

4.3   A democratic discourse

A perspective on planning as a democratic discourse perceives individuals as interpretative learners who can change their opinions and actions over time (Amdam & Amdam 2000:170). Sustainable development focuses on a form of social planning as social change. In this regard, Lafferty & Langhelle (1999) point out that the concept 'sustainable development' has proven so successful because it gathers broad support and is thus able to create a basis for dialogue, co-operation and change. When the concept is made the object of debate to such an extent, this is also a potential for the normative planning; an unclear status concerning the concept entails that the debate on LA21 becomes a debate on defining the objective of sustainable development. When actors meet with an intention of creating a new development, but have no clear demands as to how this development should be, the debate will feel easier accessible and therefore we can ensure broader participation.

When such a LA21 discourse is to be directed towards realising sustainable development, it will be necessary to have the identification of principal sustainability themes as a strategic starting point. It is thus possible to start by asking: 'how can we be more sustainable in our consumption?', or 'how can we limit our transport emissions?'. Such questions may initiate *pragmatic discourses* directed toward finding out which means achieve the objective most efficiently (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:107). In regard to LA21, it will be necessary to find practical solutions with regard to organisation and preparation of the work. This should build on established routines and already defined solution alternatives. In a report mapping the obstacles in the SFT (Norwegian Pollution Control Authority) project 'Bærekraftige lokalsamfunn' [Sustainable Local Communities], there is a categorisation of different types of obstacles (Aall et al. 1999). In regard to this, the authors (Aall et al. 1999:73) point to the lack of knowledge and media interest as typical examples of *trivial obstacles.* It can reasonably be expected that the inhabitants locally will be able to conquer these without too great an effort. They are thus examples of a type of pragmatic discourses. As long as such considerations remain pragmatic considerations, it will not be necessary to subject these types of priorities to a broad and open debate.

However, LA21 will often be related to *ethical discourses*. The sustainability discourse involves more than just finding practical solutions, and ethical discourses are aimed towards clarifying what constitutes the good life, and what kind of life is required to achieve this[10]. When such questions are subjected to group interpretations, we can create a common identity when being forced to take in other people's views in addition to our own subjective assessments (Habermas 1996b:161). Making the right choice becomes here much more than a calculating position – it is rather a questions of finding an identity, clarifying who we are , and what we want to be (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:108). LA21 focuses on attitudes and that the participants in the process must reach an acknowledgement that it is important to prioritise sustainable values. Such an approach will involve that the objectives and the means merge; without the pleasure and personal development involved in taking part in this work, there will not be sufficient motivation to work towards sustainable development. Questions on sustainable development can be answered by referring to the qualities a good society should possess. If environmental protection is important to us, we can only find reasons for this in our common value basis. Environmental protection refers to

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[10] In Aall et al. (1999), it is pointed out that the 7 municipalities in the Sustainable Local Community project experienced several real objective conflicts in the local environmental debate. This supports the claim that LA21 should involve an ethical discourse.

the ethical dimension of our reason because it concerns the quality and standard of the society we want (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:219). In regard to this, Lafferty (1996:85-86) shows that sustainable development can be supported morally from two different angles: the school of 'ethical realism' and the school of 'ethical consensualism'. For consensual ethics, one can refer to the term's acceptance by 156 governments in Rio de Janeiro, and as ethical realism one can refer to a large number of research reports and scientifically grounded arguments for the term's 'necessity'. The core idea of nature's limits and 'physical sustainability' is in agreement with the ideas of the law of nature; the dominant ethical period just before the humanistic-scientific revolution (Lafferty 1996:86). Information about the threat that environmental destruction may cause us coupled with the possibilities for a development focusing on the quality of life, rather than just wealth and growth, thus become important ethical aspects of sustainable development. Through focusing on sustainable values, the participants should not only just see what is the most strategically correct thing to do as it is in our interest to safeguard the environment, but that this also contributes to the realisation of *the good life* for as many people as possible. Through the sustainability discourse, a local society can in this way contribute to the building of a local identity that has its origin in global norms and challenges. When sustainable development has such normative power, it becomes necessary to dedicate time and attention to ethical-political discourses. Sustainable values demand support, both according to ethical consensualism and ethical realism, and are thus supported by 'good' arguments.

Even if LA21 should be aimed at discussing themes and initiating projects which focus on the objective of sustainable development, the objective of sustainable development will also result in discussions on what is the *most* sustainable. Working with LA21 will thus — as it goes from the superior focus of how the local community should take part in a more long-term perspective — to situations where we must try to think sustainability as we make individual choices, consequently lead to *moral discourses*. We can agree that sustainable development is an important objective, but the concept also involves a possible conflict of objectives between economic and environmental interests. It is thus not given what will prove the most sustainable solution in regard to concrete political priorities. The moral discourse is aimed at providing answers to what has to be done when different interests and different views of the good life are in conflict with each other.

Fredrikstad council experienced a conflict through the so-called 'FREVAR-case' which may stand as a good example of a type of moral discourse. FREVAR is a waste incineration plant that the council co-owns. In the summer of 1998, FREVAR considered expanding their capacity so that they could receive waste from other parts of Central-Eastern Norway as well. A consultancy agency made a preliminary study, and the local council wanted to proceed with a larger report on the consequences. Several environmental organisations joined in an action group to fight against the plans (Lindseth 2000:99). The core of the conflict was that the environmental organisations believed that an expansion would not be a good solution for the environment and that there thus were financial motives behind the expansion. On the other hand, FREVAR and the council stated than an expansion would also involve environmental benefits (Lindseth 2000:100). After much pressure from the environmental organisation, as well as high media profile of the case, the outcome was that the council turned around and rejected an expansion, even before the already started report on the consequences was completed.

The case exemplifies the considerations or moral discourses a council is faced with, and it also points to the fact that the concept 'sustainable development' includes elements

which may both support conservation interests and 'growth' or expansion interests. According to the definition of *sustainable development,* its most important focus is to secure basic human needs, simultaneously this – according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WED) – should not conflict with the demand of ecological sustainability. It is thus not possible to decide unequivocally whether one should start an expansion which may lead both to the incineration of more waste and the creation of new jobs, but also increased transport and pollution, by referring to the objective of sustainable development[11]. Debates concerning what is the most sustainable lead us into a *utilitaristic* estimation where it can not be decided beforehand what is the best solution for the environment, and where several factors that we cannot control also influence the total environmental result[12]. A vision of realising sustainable development will give the actors the possibility to come up with different suggestions as to what is the most sustainable.

Even if the objective of sustainable development may be ambiguous, it will still be important that such judgements as found in the FREVAR example will have reflection around this objective as their starting point. The idea of sustainable development is that we should change course and, even if in some cases we cannot find how best to achieve this, the discourse may also contribute to refining our view of what aspect of the objective or what themes it is worth emphasising in each relevant case. As previously mentioned, the concept 'sustainable development' here functions as a potential for the normative planning: an unclear status concerning the term makes the LA21 debate also a debate on defining the objective of sustainable development in each individual case. A possibility to proceed with the definition of this objective is to start using indicators for sustainable development.

4.4   Indicators for sustainable development as guidelines for the democratic discourse

Several attempts have been made to realise what sustainable development should mean by developing so-called 'sustainability indicators'. Høyer & Aall (1997) make a review of the existing international experiences with the use of different forms of environment and sustainability indicators. In this context, Høyer & Aall (1997:70-71) point out a division between 'warm' and 'cold' indicators of sustainable development, and this is particularly relevant when we examine LA21 in a deliberative perspective[13]. The cold indicators are developed by experts who 'know' what sustainable development is. These are 'correct' and logically consistent indicators, but they do not always lead to a response with the public and

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[11] The expansion of the activity will involve more waste from the rest of Eastern Norway being transported to Fredrikstad.

[12] Cf. the debate in Norway about building a gas power plant where the Labour government (2000-2001) argued that the development of gas power in Norway would constitute a good environmental solution in that it will contribute to the reduction of the total Nordic CO_2 emissions. On the other hand, several opposition parties – KrF in particular – argued that the development of gas power is a bad environmental solution that goes against the precautionary principle (Bondevik 2000).

[13] Macgillvray (Høyer & Aall 1997:70-71) points out The Human Development Index (HDI) as an example of a 'warm' indicator system. OECD's 'pressure-state-response' (PSR), is mentioned as an example of a 'cold' indicator system. The PSR model was developed early in the 1990s by, amongst others, Norwegian researchers at Statistics Norway (Aall 2000). They here presented relatively complicated indicators which should provide information on how human activity influences the environment through emissions and other activities, how this is reflected in a changed quality and quantity of natural resources (state) and finally to describe society's response in order to impede these changes or repair environmental damage. The model is being used by the OECD, The Nordic Council of Ministers, The Ministry of Environment and it has also been attempted to be implemented in some municipalities, but it has then been met by reactions indicating that the model is too 'cold' (Aall 2000).

politicians. The 'warm' indicators are not necessarily very precise, but they may initiate action more easily – even if these actions are not particularly sustainable (Høyer & Aall 1997:70-71).

The division between warm and cold indicators reflects the introductory discussion in the chapter about introducing a form of 'limited deliberation'. The critical consideration that has to be made is thus how much should be restricted and how much should be open for discussion in the work with LA21. In this context, *one* possibility is to use indicators that go a long way towards setting demands for a reduction in the consumption as a starting point and basis for the work[14]. The point is that such strict demands may lead to it becoming even more problematic to create support for the LA21 work. When the objectives become clearer, the co-operation can be structured according to clear formal regulations and established routines. The alternative solutions will then also become more clearly defined. If the LA21 work is linked to indicators that are associated with strict ecological objectives on limiting the total consumption in the municipality, this may soon become a debate with very few participants: the demand for a radical change may frighten both business, industry and the authorities from involvement in the debate. For example, politicians and bureaucrats in Fredrikstad did not want Fredrikstad Miljøforum to develop into a radical environmental organisation, – and they thus set limitations for the scope of the forum's debates (Lindseth 2000).

If we in actual cases have wishes and ambitions to achieve solutions involving radical changes of direction, it can thus be argued that it is an idea to keep the objective of sustainable development as a *broad* framework and starting point for which solutions it is possible to reach. The point here must be to point out the importance of having a balanced relationship between 'free deliberation' on one side – where all possibilities are open to the local debate in order to achieve concrete proposals and interpretations – and, on the other hand, present a framework for the same deliberations linked to a clearer understanding of minimum standards for sustainable development than what the councils can read from White papers and laws. Such a basic recognition should rest in a balance between 'cold' and 'warmth'. We must unite scientific expertise and cold indicators, giving great attention to ecological objectives, with warm indicators which focus less on sustainability, but which, because of being less ambitious, can initiate action more easily.

Such a combination may be achieved by having a thematic agenda building on a scientific recognition about which themes are the most important to prioritise as a starting point[15], but without us specifying clear demands for the reduction of the consumption. The so-called Retnings-analyseprosjektet [Direction-analysis project] is such an attempt to closer specify a

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[14]Aall et al. (1999:52) stress the three perspectives found in White paper 58 (1996-1997) and which are linked to the objective of sustainability in general: an ecological sustainability perspective, a welfare perspective and a generation perspective (fair distribution between generations). Aall et al. (1999:114) point out in this context that it will have consequences for our actions if we emphasise that the distribution perspective – particularly the welfare perspective which concerns fair distribution between the currently wealthy and poor countries – of the sustainability objective should be emphasised, or whether it is 'sufficient' to relate to the ecological perspective. If the ecology perspective is emphasised, it will not be necessary to reduce consumption, only to prioritise changes in the *composition* of the consumption. If the welfare perspective is to be emphasised in addition to the ecological perspective, it will be necessary to also change the total *volume* of the consumption (Aall et al. 1999:115).

[15] In 'Vår Felles Framtid' [Our Common Future], there is a list of the themes and environmental problems to be given the highest priority on a *global* scale. (WED 1991). The principal objective for sustainable development policy should be (WED 1991:46): -strengthened growth;- changed quality of growth;- coverage of the inhabitants' basic needs for work, food, energy, water and hygiene; - ensured sustainable population;- protected and increased resource basis;- re-orientation of technology and risk management;- incorporation of environmental considerations and economy in the decision-making processes.

thematic agenda (Aall 1998). In this project, motions were made about sustainability themes as the starting point for municipal deliberation of what sustainable development should mean more concretely for each council. The proposal for a municipal sustainability theme (see table 1), attempts to unite environmental principles, environmental content and environmental processes without specifying clear demands for how the organisation or the action should be carried out. In this way, the indicators are 'fairly warm'. They channel the action in towards some selected themes, while simultaneously the absence of specific demands make it possible to preserve the solution space and the various accessible alternatives of action. This may be exemplified through the following: a transport policy that refer to a strict objective of clear emission reductions might limit the debate to a discussions on how we can make a city car-free, while an objective that only points to the need to reduce the total mobility (cf. point 8 in table 1) also makes other solutions possible.

Table 1 Proposal for municipal sustainability themes. Source: Aall 1998:8

<u>(I) Environmental principles:</u>
1. The precautionary principle
2. Fair distribution within living generations
3. Fair distribution between living and future generations
<u>(II) Environmental contents:</u>
4. Protection of biological diversity
5. Reduction of the use of energy
6. Reduction in emissions that destroys the atmosphere
7. Reduction in the consumption of material resources
8. Reduction in the total mobility
9. Emissions to local recipients within the tolerance limits of nature
10. Sustainable harvesting of nature resources
11. Human-caused changes of the environment should not damage our health
<u>(III) Environmental processes:</u>
12. Popular participation
13. Make all sectors responsible
14. International involvement
15. Working with attitude formation

The focus on 'warm' indicators that unite the environment, culture and social aspects to a greater degree will also focus more positively on the environmental debate. In this context, it is possible to imagine that we could link issues of transport and mobility with themes related to how to make the core of the city more vibrant and alive. When the inhabitants are asked the 'right' questions, and there is a focus on the positive sides of the environment, this may lead to the inhabitants changing their attitudes. This is how more restrictive politics in regards to the use of cars in the city may appear as a relevant solution at a later date. This is why one should be cautious of working with indicators that are too 'cold', or minimum demands that are too strict with regard to what sustainable development should involve in a local context.

Finally, it must be pointed out that rather than us specifying the issue of sustainability in detail, it is a basic condition that the discourse must involve the politicians, and it must ensure that sufficient political will for action is built. LA21 emphasises *change* in the direction of sustainable development and there is thus a point of focus that LA21 must *be politicised,* that

is that themes, cases and processes in an LA21 debate must be introduced to decisive bodies in the municipal apparatus. The communicative power must be transformed to an administrative power; the common opinion that evolves in civil society must be translated through law into committing decisions (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:231). When such moral discourses as LA21 touches upon are introduced to the municipal apparatus, we make the creation of opinion and the participation more legitimate and binding. Only then may the local communities translate visions into concrete actions. In this context, one must also focus on the legal aspects of an LA21 discourse.

4.5   The need for a legal discourse

Eriksen (1999:227) points out that it is important to note that there are *legal* deliberations also on the municipal level.   A legal discourse ensures that new programmes are investigated and evaluated alongside the existing legislation, and that there are limits drawn between different interests and fields (Habermas 1996b:167). However, a legal binding in itself is a difficult question involving different degrees (Amdam 2000). Usually, one imagines that a budget is binding, until amendments are made. This is founded in the law – in this case the municipality law – and it often gives the administration initiation authorisation. The Planning and Building Act provides similar bindings on the physical side, with regard to both the protection of areas and planning for development. More 'verbal' plans, such as council plans and council part-plans, are more political plans – intentions – that can be changed at any time. They thus have a weak legal status, and in many cases this is how it should be since they should be more opinion-forming and process related than binding (Amdam 2000).

The decisive factor is that the deliberation should try to clarify opinions, find out when there is consensus, but also conflict and how to work further with conflicts (Amdam 2000). Habermas (Eriksen & Weigård 1999:14) emphasises that all knowledge in principle is fallible, and we should thus in this process only legally 'lock' those things which for various reasons need to be locked (conflict areas) and where there exists agreement that it should/ought to be 'locked'. This in itself is a challenge in normative planning because one perceives the status as unclear. Amdam & Amdam (2000:180) show, however, that in relation to the processes surrounding the various part-plans in the municipal planning, the legal discourse is almost completely lacking.   When this does not happen, there will not be established a necessary minimum of a confrontational process which may legitimise the planning documents and provide validity for the work. The plan thus receives a dubious legal status and there is thus a possibility that actors may use it, abuse it or not use it all according to their own interests (Amdam & Amdam 2000:180).

In regard to legal bindings in the work towards sustainable development, Norway has committed herself *internationally* by signing the UNCED-agreements and the documents from the meeting in Rio in 1992 [16]. Within in our *national* legislation, there is a clear legal binding such that the consideration for sustainable development is mentioned in the

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[16] In this context, Agenda 21 – the action plan for sustainable development – constitutes the natural starting point. This agreement can be understood as 'soft law'. This in contrast to 'hard law' involves there being no explicit conditions or demands for the national implementations (Birnie 1996:53). However, soft law expresses a strong expectation that states will gradually incorporate action norms in relation to the agreement (Birnie 1992:53). In Agenda 21, there is also an explicit encouragement, and it is viewed as desirable that as many countries as possible start their work (Grubb et al.1993:53). Agenda 21 can thus be viewed as if the countries have accepted a political and moral commitment (Mugaas 1997:31).

municipality act's object clause[17]. The main point is, however, that such international obligations and superior national objectives often remain visions. When these are not followed up by legislation which may oblige the management and the inhabitants to take on the values, they become pure symbolism (Dryzek 1997:86).

In regard to the LA21 work at municipal level, in a legal context it is the focus on the democratic processes which is the most central. LA21 focuses on the voluntary work and, in this context, there are significant challenges for the parties in the LA21 process with regard to the degree of obligations they choose to relate to the LA21 work. The LA21-secretariat at The Ministry of Environment points out the importance of introducing something new into the co-operation between the different actors in the municipalities[18] (Rivelsrud 1999:38). The Ministry of Environment is interested in knowing whether the councils manage to develop binding and action-directed *contracts* between the actors in the local communities (Rivelsrud 1999:38). Voluntary agreements and self-regulation have been used in industry in Norway in regard to pollution control and are a kind of management tool in environmental politics (Jansen & Osland 1996:249). The LA21 process focuses on the establishment of more binding agreements between the strategic actors from trade and industry, organisations and municipalities. If the various actors agree to use private legal agreements etc., such bindings may appear as alternatives to command and control.

At the same time, there rests a particular responsibility on the politicians in the LA21 work. A better legal clarification will also have to imply that planning documents arising from the LA21 process must be given a status in relation to other plans and in relation to legislation, regulations and other sources for what is right (cf. Amdam & Amdam 2000:180). Legal bindings thus do not only involve the formal legislation process, but also an operationalisation of political programmes in order for the politicians to clarify how to relate to various objectives in society on a practical level (see Eriksen 1999:227). In regard to LA21, it may be argued that the success of the work depends on such legal considerations being carried out. An example would be that action plans for sustainable development or LA21 measures would then have to be seen in relation to other plans, such as plans for business and trade development, health and culture. This may involve the plans containing absolute limitations in the form of them defining minimum standards for sustainable development that these sectors cannot violate in their operation plans. Such a legal clarification will in practice involve a co-ordination of the politics at a municipal level, having sustainable development as the basic condition. It will also make evident how the sustainable interests stand in relation to other interests[19].

In this regard, it also seems relevant to emphasise the precautionary principle and actions of irreversible nature. Several people single out the greenhouse effect as an example of an environmental problem of such a nature. Høyer (1999b) speaks out that it should be possible

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[17]It may also be pointed out that our legal system also plays a part in regard to sustainable development. Jansen and Osland point out that there are mainly two ways that the legal system functions in regard to environmental issues (Jansen and Osland 1996:218). Firstly, there is a legal complaints body. Persons and organisations that are parties in a concrete case where they have legal interests have the possibility to forward a complaint against administrative decisions. Secondly, there lies within the legal system a possibility to perform an assessment of decisions made in accordance with the existing legislation and regulations. The Pollution Act is particularly important in regard to this. The prosecuting authority is often assisted by the Norwegian Pollution Control Authority when investigating violations of this law (Jansen and Osland 1996:218).

[18] The LA21-secretariat was transferred to The Ministry of Environment' division for Environmental Data, pollution and environmental efficiency 01.09.2000.

[19] Possibly clarify which aspects and themes within the framework of sustainable development should be prioritised.

to concretise further in a legal form which forms of serious and irreversible environmental consequences the principle should include, and which procedures should be followed in order to reveal any scientific uncertainties for thus to ensure that the principle does not become watered down and is actually implemented in environmental politics.

It should also be pointed out that we are here moving towards a limit in relation to the municipal apparatus' possibilities to control the social development towards a sustainable direction. There is a limit to what a municipality can and will do when there is no governmental politics on a national level characterised by sustainability[20]. A clearer anchoring of sustainable development on a national level, with stricter legislation in regard to non-sustainable production and consumption will to a greater degree make it possible to change the direction on a municipal level.

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[20] An example from the country's first planning document entitled *Lokal Agenda 21 – Kommunedelplan miljø / Lokal Agenda 21 i Sogndal kommune* may illustrate the point: 'It is a dilemma to have to take consideration of the global climate in Sogndal when the central authorities move in the opposite direction. It must however be an objective to reduce the local car traffic in Sogndal' (Sogndal council 1996, p. 31 in Lafferty et al.1998:36).

5 SUMMARY

LA21 is a form of democratic participation; this entails that the participants in the process should be able to identify with the solution that is presented. This focuses on organising a process in such a way that the inhabitants feel that they together 'own' LA21. Such a process requires adherence to a *common fate*, that is a common understanding of the importance of broad participation, equal co-operation and a feeling for the challenge (the work) being everybody's concern.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to meet the requirements in Habermas' ideal discussion situation, but rather, in a practical context, to focus on the fact that the LA21 discourse should build on a communicative rationality, ensure the most equal conditions possible for the participants, as well as keeping an openness in regard to sustainability issues. That the debate should be initiated by a municipal leadership that gives attention to the objective of sustainable development clarifies the strategic-instrumental element in LA21. I have here focused on the necessity of using indicators that define minimum standards for sustainable development, and that the precautionary principle should be given attention. In this way, we can ensure an instrumentality in relation to directing the discourse in order to mobilise the population for the work towards sustainable development.

Further, I have pointed out that the dialogue can forward co-operation and thus strengthen the voluntary work so that both the municipality council, business and inhabitants will take on commitments. I have similarly also pointed out another aspect: if LA21 should involve a change in the direction of sustainable development, there will also be a need for the municipal decision-making apparatus to be linked to the public reasoning. That is that the ethical and moral discourses being raised among the inhabitants must be moved into the local council in order for *the better arguments* to be turned into political decisions. This can be done by having politicians enter both; moral political discourses that decide how concrete cases should be decided, and; legal discourses that clarify, on a more superior level, how to ensure that sustainable values are protected. With regard to the last point, it is suggested that there should be limitations in all sector plans in the form of defined minimum standards of sustainable development that these sections cannot violate in their action plans. To summarise, we may set up some criteria for the LA21 process based on a deliberative perspective. The following demands or elements may be said to be related to such a type of *communicative* LA21 process:

A process with its basis in indicators that:
- Define minimum requirements for what sustainable development should mean in a local context

- Build both on scientific facts on which problems and themes should be prioritised at the same time as they can initiate local action. – That is, they are 'fairly warm'

A consultation process characterised by:
- The entire population being given the possibility to participate through projects, actions and planning processes

- Attention around the ethical aspects of sustainable development and the 'necessity' of prioritising sustainable development

- Information and profiling of the work

- Municipal leadership that mobilises, motivates participation, and is able to identify problems and possibilities

- Politicians and bureaucrats who are present and take part in sustainability debates

- Establishment of LA21 forums/bodies that can be advocates in the LA21 work

- Real confrontations and discussion of disagreements. Moral discourses in order to assess whether there are conflicts between different perceptions of sustainable development

A process which contributes to:

- Strengthening the LA21 work through legal discourses so that it achieves status in relation to other legal sources

- Emphasising and making visible structures for popular participation such as LA21 bodies and other meeting places so that power can be transferred from the municipal bodies to civil society

- Developing the local community so that the local initiative is stimulated and increased

- Business, organisations and the municipality being committed to the work

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