

Case Study



FCM ICMD



Transferring knowledge and experience in Regional planning: Association of Municipalities of the Precordillera (Araucanía, Chile)

Summary

In October 1999, the Regional County Municipality (MRC) of Papineau and the Association of Municipalities of the Precordillera (AMP) in Chile signed an agreement to work together in the area of regional planning. The partnership operated within the framework of FCM's Municipal Partnership Program.

Regional planning is a priority for all Canadian communities, but in Chile, because of the political and regulatory context, few municipal associations are actively working to obtain the tools and resources necessary to deal with the planning and development of their territory.

Study and training missions led to the creation of a Technical Committee within the AMP, as well as an action plan. Once the exchanges and work were finished, the AMP had taken the first steps to ensuring the sustainable development of its resources. However, this partnership's greatest successes were to have sown the seeds of regional planning with Chilean elected officials, and to have provided municipal professionals and technicians with tools that allowed them to consolidate their learning.

Introduction

The Municipal Partnerships Program, administered by the International Centre for Municipal Development (ICMD) of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), aims to strengthen the capacity of municipalities and municipal associations in developing countries with a view to improving service delivery public administration and promoting sustainable development at the local level.

The program supports the establishment of long-term partnerships between Canadian municipalities and local governments in developing countries, as well as the implementation of short-term capacity-building activities such as training workshops and technical exchange missions between staff and elected officials from municipalities, municipal associations and associated institutions.

Context

Regional planning: A Key Responsibility of Canadian Municipalities

Regional planning in Canada is an important priority in the municipal world, implemented within a regulatory framework that provides considerable opportunity for public participation and takes into full consideration environmental concerns.



Part of the group (mayors, professionals and technicians) during an overseas training mission.

In Quebec, Regional County Municipalities (MRCs) are key players in the regional planning system. A provincial law obliges each MRC to approve and update a land use plan. This document must, among other things, establish the main land use designations, identify areas of special interest (heritage, natural environment, etc.) and zones vulnerable to risk (floods, landslides, etc.). This work requires that the MRCs develop a comprehensive understanding of the territory and natural resources. Working in collaboration with the Quebec Ministry of Environment, the MRC of Papineau developed an innovative approach in this field. This collaboration produced an Ecological Reference Framework (ERF), which allows development decisions to take into consideration the carrying capacity of the natural environment, an essential factor in sustainable development. The ERF permits an analysis of development opportunities (such as the potential for agriculture and forestry), development constraints and the risks inherent in the use of these natural areas (flooding, groundwater contamination, etc.).

Chile: Towards a System of Comprehensive Regional Planning

Chile's municipalities are required to produce physical plans for urban areas. As in Canada, these areas typically represent only a small portion of the total municipality. On the other hand, Chilean municipalities have no power to regulate the development of rural areas. However, this situation is in the process of changing; discussions are underway to reform the existing legislation.

These potential changes require the development of new knowledge and new methods. It was in this context that the expertise developed by the MRC of Papineau and its counterparts were seen as being relevant to the needs of the newly formed municipal association.

The Approach: A Partnership Based on Regional Planning

Knowledge Transfer

The needs and the expertise of the municipalities involved in this exchange are complementary. For the Chilean municipalities, the tasks accomplished by the MRC of Papineau could be assimilated as long as they were adapted to the specific needs of the AMP. The transfer of knowledge was accomplished through several technical exchange missions between Canada and Chile.

To carry out the training programme, the MRC of Papineau secured the support of the Quebec Ministry of the Environment, CLC-Camint Inc, and the

Digital Information Management Agency of the Outaouais (L'ATINO), a non-profit organization whose members include most of the actors involved in regional planning and development of the Outaouais (a region in Quebec where the MRC of Papineau is located). L'ATINO's objective is to facilitate the decision-making process by supplying relevant information from a regional database.

A Technical Team and a Plan of Action

The training process allowed productive exchanges and led to the creation of a Technical Committee within the AMP. The work carried out by this committee, as well as the subsequent exchanges, which took place in Canada and in Chile were part of a broader action plan based on the following themes:

- Developing mechanisms for consensus building;
- Structuring a regional database;
- Improving the knowledge base related to regional planning;
- Initiating a regional planning process for the entire AMP.

Results: From Conceptual Framework to Political Action and Implementation

In three years, the partnership between the AMP and the MRC of Papineau resulted in a transition from technical and policy concepts, to mastering practical methods and techniques related to the ERF, and integrating these concepts into the policy debates and priorities of AMP elected officials.

In a country where regional planning is exclusively a ministerial exercise carried out at a national or regional scale, there is still a need to build the acceptance of having municipal territorial associations conducting regional planning. Even more challenging is the transfer of responsibility for this function to municipal governments.

While it is common practice among Chilean municipalities to collaborate from a sectoral approach (tourism development, economic promotion, political alliances in support of a common cause, etc.) and to share in the costs of such associations, there are few municipal associations such as the AMP actively working to obtain the common tools and resources to deal with the combination of planning, management and development of their territory.

In this regard, one of the most important accomplishments of this partnership is to have sown the seeds of regional planning in which elected officials from several municipalities are able to work closely with municipal professionals and technicians to strengthen the learning process.



Participants in a training session on regional planning

Success in the political arena was needed to ensure the implementation of the parallel processes developed by the Technical Committee. After three years of exchange and work, the AMP reached a stage, which enabled it to develop a comprehensive plan of its territory. The steps taken include the identification of development opportunities and constraints related to land and water resources, and detailed mapping of zones vulnerable to risk, all with a view to ensuring the sustainable development of its resources.

In addition to securing strong political support, the AMP realized the following accomplishments:

- A permanent technical coordinator responsible for analysis and mapping in relation to the Ecological Reference Framework, (ERF) as well as the development of numerous thematic interpretations based on the ERF.
- A Technical Committee including one official from each of the municipalities, to support the technical coordinator in carrying out the necessary digital mapping for the Geographic Information System.
- A prototype for an interactive Map Navigator, accessible via the Internet, which can provide any number of municipal officials and employees with direct access to a large number of thematic maps covering the complete territory of the AMP.
- An outline of a cartographic database of the territory (in progress).

In addition to this knowledge base, the mayors of the AMP have been trained in consensus building techniques (internal and external) used in the process of formulating and implementing a regional plan.

Analysis: Towards an Innovative Model of Consensus Building

Having overcome various obstacles, this partnership was able to create new and unique synergies between Chilean and Canadian elected officials and technical staff. This inspired constructive exchanges and creativity within the group.

The partnership evolved over time, adapting itself to changes in the political landscape and to the human, technical and financial constraints it confronted.

The AMP worked hard during the partnership to develop and acquire new technical and professional expertise. The AMP is now in a unique position in Chile, and is making progress in uncharted territory with many challenges lying ahead. Indeed, one of the most significant obstacles is that the existing legal framework does not yet recognize associations of municipalities. As a result, municipal associations in Chile cannot offer permanent contracts to their technical teams. Another obstacle is the voluntary nature of municipal associations. Without a national regulatory framework, there is no requirement for



ABOVE: Canadian mayors participating in a session of the Padre Las Casas Municipal Council in which one of the topics on the agenda was the Partnership with the MRC of Papineau.

BETWEEN: Members of the Chilean Technical Committee in a training workshop on the Ecological Reference Framework.

municipalities to coordinate their efforts in order to address regional planning at a broader scale. These obstacles make it difficult to secure necessary human and material resources, and threaten the sustainability of efforts taken to date.

The continuation of this initiative depends on the commitment of elected officials to keep the AMP alive and their willingness to make available adequate human and material resources. At the same time, the political and legal context is in continuous evolution in Chile. As the State continues to move towards the decentralization of power, responsibilities and obligations, municipalities will increasingly be perceived as future partners able to play a role in the area of regional planning.



A friendly exchange between mayors following an evaluation mission.

The achievements of the AMP are attracting many elected officials from other municipalities in the Araucania region with an interest in this new approach. There is a favorable climate for change among various elected officials at the municipal, regional and national levels. This bodes well for the use of municipal associations to take on responsibility for planning and development of the full extent of their territories, including both urban and rural areas.

Lessons Learned and the Replication of the Experience

The AMP and the MRC of Papineau partnership aimed to provide municipal elected officials with a high-level understanding of regional planning and to transfer practical technical and professional capacities to municipal staff. The partnership also sought to initiate a dynamic process of consensus building among municipalities with sufficient momentum to enable the association to be proactive about its own development and equip itself with the necessary tools. After three years of work both the Chilean and the Canadian participants have learned the following lessons:

- The adoption of a new conceptual model involving a matter as complex as a comprehensive regional planning system requires considerable time and sustained support from a training team.
- The participation of both elected officials and municipal staff in different work sessions and field trips contributes to a better understanding of the objectives and issues associated with the regional planning process.
- The contribution of women involved in the partnership ensures a diversity of points of view and enriches reflection and dialogue.

- A basic geomatics infrastructure must be in place in the participating municipalities in order to initiate this type of technology transfer.
- The existence of a permanent technical and professional unit is essential to carrying out the analysis and mapping tasks, and allowing for the full regional planning process to be carried out.

The experience of this partnership suggests that the replication of this model is possible in Chile and in other countries. However, this model should not be promoted without taking into account some important elements:

- When selecting a municipal association, there should be a history of collaborative achievements and a clear commitment to be involved in a process that demands a serious and sustained level of involvement.
- Government authorities and other relevant organizations active in planning must be involved from the beginning of this type of project.
- Substantial effort must be devoted at the national level in order to engage the appropriate government authorities to promote needed changes that would enable the work of municipal associations.

For more information on the Municipal Partnerships Programme of the FCM:



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