

Case Study Paper

Preparation of the National Urban Policy Framework

Practical point of view

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Abstract

In the end of 2018, The Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania released a third draft of Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework (LUPF). The document is still reviewed by the National government and relevant stakeholders. Official approval is pending. Efforts to prepare such a document started in 2008 but were unsuccessful. Latest draft of LUPF was based heavily on the International guidelines of urban and territorial planning (IG-UPT), New Urban Agenda, Agenda for Sustainable development 2030 and reacted to the IPCC report published in the end of October 2018. The Goal of LUPF was to create the value basis and precondition for inter-institutional, cross-sectoral cooperation between different administrative levels and stakeholders in order to achieve sustainable urban development. The LUPF was not supposed to be a vision, nor it was supposed to become a toolbox of development guidelines. The document was a basis to restart a planning culture in a country that historically has a difficult relationship with it. It was intended to be a document defining relationships between stakeholders who directly or indirectly impact development decisions no matter how powerful they are or what sector they present. Prepared proposal is not a final document and is intended to be a live framework that must be updated and reviewed in a circular way. This paper will review the preparation process, structure and the content of the document. Paper will conclude with a list of questions that still need to be answered and advice to countries and cities who are planning to prepare such a document in the future.

Keywords

National urban policy framework, planning culture, urban governance

1. Towards an urban policy framework - two failed attempts and one pending

The proposals for the Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework have been prepared in 2018 after recognizing the need to holistically look at the development of urbanized and urbanizing areas, considering the value of culture, existing and planned infrastructure, harmony between nature and heritage.

There were two big efforts before to prepare such an urban policy (in 2009 and 2016) which were both unsuccessful. First attempt might have failed due to an introvert preparation process, while second attempt focused too much on specific territorial planning problems failing to see the bigger picture of Lithuania in the global context of development challenges.

Thus, a decision was made in 2018 to step back and take a deeper look at what is really needed to be successful on the third attempt.

1.1. First attempt

The issue of the National Urban Policy Framework (or Urban Agenda) for the Republic of Lithuania was first raised in 2007, during the first Lithuanian Urban Forum. The Resolution of the Forum states “The current situation of urban development in Lithuania raises legitimate concerns for the professional and civil society. It is necessary to formulate a new type of urban policy oriented towards sustainable development and quality of life, which respects private property and at the same time gives directions and guidelines for urban development in Lithuania.”

In 2009, a draft of Lithuanian urban policy framework was prepared. It was reviewed by the National Government but not approved. The formal reason for which was that the document did not meet the legal requirements for the structure and language in which such a document should be prepared. Looking retrospectively, it might have had something to do with the fact that although the policy draft was contracted from a group of respected planning specialists, it was prepared in isolation without involvement of either governmental institutions, professional networks, academia or civil society.

1.2. Second attempt

In 2016, after the annual Lithuanian Urban Forum, a resolution was drafted which initiated the preparation of Lithuanian Urban Charter. The resolution states “Following the global and European trends, the knowledge of ten-year urban Forums could become a base of the Lithuanian Urban Charter – Lithuanian Urban Development Guidelines by 2030, which would set the main goals of urban development, housing, strategy and would include urban terms adopted by the EU.”

In the end of 2016, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania initiated the creation of the Lithuanian Urban Charter preparation group. This group was made of representatives from the ministry, academia, professional community and young planners’ network. At the beginning of the year, different stakeholder groups were invited to the meetings of the working group to discuss the issues of urban development in Lithuania. Based on the reflections collected in these meetings, Ministry prepared an outline for the Lithuanian Urban Charter which was presented during the 11th Urban forum in the autumn of 2017.

The outline for the Charter provided an overview of the problems of urbanized territories and gave preliminary suggestions how urban development should move forward/how these problems could be solved. The biggest challenge of this outline was that the problems defined in the meetings were very specific to specific stakeholder groups. These required solutions that are as specific as the problems themselves. **Charter become a checklist of problems with specific solutions rather than becoming a document of guiding value-based principles and tool for cooperation** which was named as one of the major problems stopping urban areas to develop in a sustainable way. On the other hand, unlike the first

attempt, the process to prepare the Urban Charter was open to different stakeholder groups and their opinions and suggestions shaped the document.

1.3. Third attempt

In summer of 2018 the Ministry of Environment commissioned the preparation of “Proposals for the Lithuanian Urban Policy” (LUP). The firm chosen for the job was our young urbanism-architecture office that was involved in the working group of the Urban Charter. Thus, began the process which is the key topic of this Case Study paper.

2. Context of Lithuania

2.1. Status quo

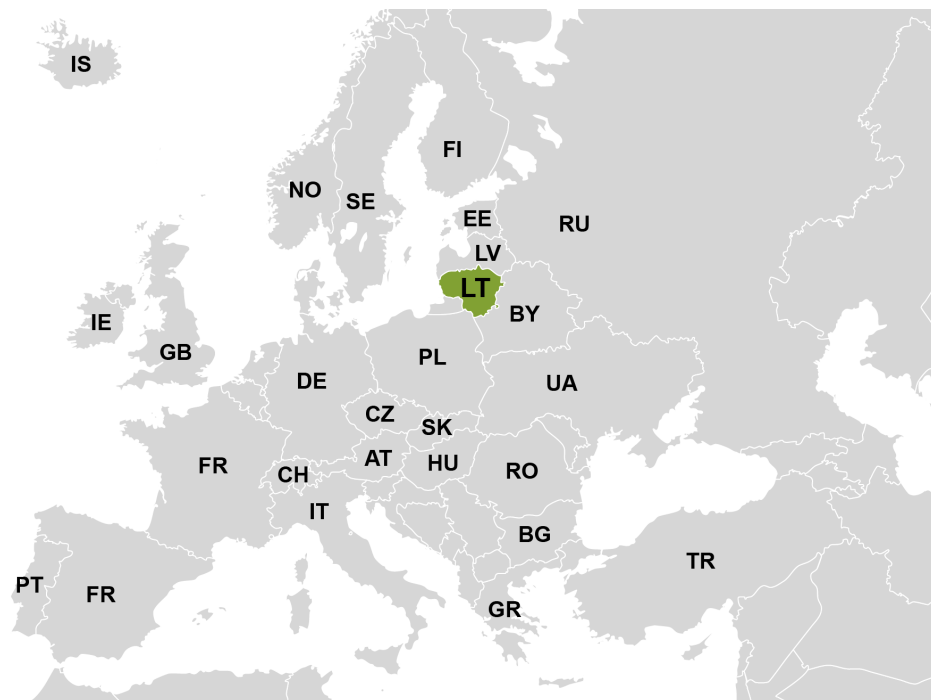


Figure 1 Location of Lithuania (LT) in Europe

To understand better Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework and why it is the way it is, it is important to understand several key facts about the country its culture and mentality of Lithuanians.

Lithuania is a small, post-socialist country with a population of less than 3 million people in Eastern Europe (Figure 1). Since country restored its independence from Soviet Union in 1990, it has been developing fast. On May 1st, 2004 Lithuania became part of the European Union. As a new member, country got access to EU structural funds that were used to improve, transport, communications and social infrastructure, upgrade public spaces, increase productivity of agriculture and industries and other. European investments

contributed heavily in the growth of the economy and improvement of quality of life. Being a member of EU also resulted in an opportunity for people to move freely for work, education or leisure to other EU countries. Between 2004 and 2017, more than 600 000 people emigrated from Lithuania, around 100 000 only between 2004 and 2005 (European migration network, 2019). According to the department of statistics, 67% of people in Lithuania live in urban areas. Average population density in the country: 4,08 persons/square kilometre. Due to internal and external migration, most concentrate in big cities while regions end up shrinking. While most of the population lives in apartment blocks, most development is happening in suburban belts around cities.

Country is mid-way to prepare the National General Plan. Current state analysis of the plan concluded seven major problem areas for the country that are related to human resources, economic activity, unsustainable urban development patterns, environmental pollution and conflicts of interest in coastal, border and natural areas.

2.2. Post-socialist baggage

After the Second World War, while western countries developed their planning culture, explored best ways to meet society's needs, Lithuania was part of the communist bloc. Here, progress was slow, and times were unpleasant. 50 years of occupation left its mark in the history, in the shape of cities, in behaviour and culture of society.

The five-year plans guided development in the Soviet Union. They defined what was to be produced and therefore what conditions are needed for this production and therefore how cities look like and function. Every aspect of life of people was planned: what people do, how they move, where they live, how they live, what they work, where they learn, how they spend their leisure. Planning and architecture were perfect tools to realize political agendas, implement the five-year plans and control societies.

In 1990 Lithuania restored its independence. There was a lot of anger and natural rejection of the old system and many attributes associated to it. Statues of Stalin and other soviet heroes fell, were destroyed or were taken to landfills, many nationalized industrial sites were abandoned. People of an independent Republic could finally choose where and how to live.

Although zoning plans remained as the main tool to control urban development, territorial planning efforts gave little or no direction. "Lithuanian cities underwent big transformations which frequently took place without any clear strategy or masterplans" (Bardauskiene, D, 2007).

Contemporary post-socialist has been going through a complex transitional period from Socialist Ideology to a free market-oriented economy. Orientations to private funds and a more global neo-liberal approach to planning is common to the whole of Europe, but the process is gradual, (Newman & Thorneley 1996) while Eastern cities are going through a 'Shock therapy' (Smith 2007) period. The collapse of Communist state meant that all policies and attitudes had to be changed or revised in a matter of years. The new law of territorial planning on an independent Republic was adopted in 1995. General tendency for cities was to plan for growth, for private car, for private house, for shopping malls. Throughout

independence period, sprawl, big scale commercial developments, reduced quality of public space and automobilization become dominating patterns of a contemporary Lithuanian city.

Socialist period made a huge damage for planning culture in Lithuania and probably other countries of the former Soviet bloc. After being oppressed for 50 years society nobody, especially national government should restrict people achieving their personal ambitions. Planning with common good in mind was “the thing of the past”. Every person got an opportunity fight for their own rights, their own land, their own wellbeing, private land is untouchable.

This change in mentality is crucial to consider when talking about why the proposal for the LUPF focuses on recreating planning culture rather than on the vision for development and sustainable development guidelines and why this proposal as well might be rejected.

3. Process of preparing the proposal for the National Urban Policy Framework

A contemporary country with growing economy, beautiful nature and cultural heritage but low capacities of cooperation between sectors and institutions, imitation of procedures for stakeholder involvement but an enormous potential of a well educated innovative society took a step for the third time to prepare a document that was no longer development guidelines but a “relationship contract” for sustainable urban development.

Proposal for the Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework **aims to create a flexible framework and a prerequisite for inter-institutional, cross-sectoral cooperation between different levels of administration with a view to the sustainable development of urban areas.**

Document emphasizes on the role of territorial planning for sustainable urban development. Territorial planning is seen as a tool to create conditions for democracy, equity, prosperity, adaptation to climate, economic and social changes.

Proposal for LUPF is NOT: a development vision, a set of development guidelines, rules for territorial planning or a planning document of some sort as it is defined in Lithuanian legal system.

The preparation process was divided into two parts: Analysis of international and local documents and relevant cases and definition of the guiding themes, the structure and content of the document

Final document is composed of three interconnecting sections: Directions (1), roles and responsibilities (2) and implementation and monitoring measures (3). LUPF defines four themed directions (1) that local and national governments and relevant stakeholders should follow to ensure Sustainable development of Lithuanian urban areas.

Four directions: Mitigation of climate change impacts and resilience to climate change; Synergy and strengthening of urban links; Liveability and social equity and sustainable spatial development. Roles and responsibilities (2) for National and local governments and relevant stakeholders were prepared reusing and localizing most of the recommendations from the IG-UTP. This section defines roles of each interest group in the implementation of the value driven directions for sustainable urban development. Last part – implementation and

monitoring (3) – is a part where suggestions are given to how to start the implementation of guidelines and responsibility division. This part consists of four sections: Monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development; Participatory decision-making process; Partnerships and Capacity Building.

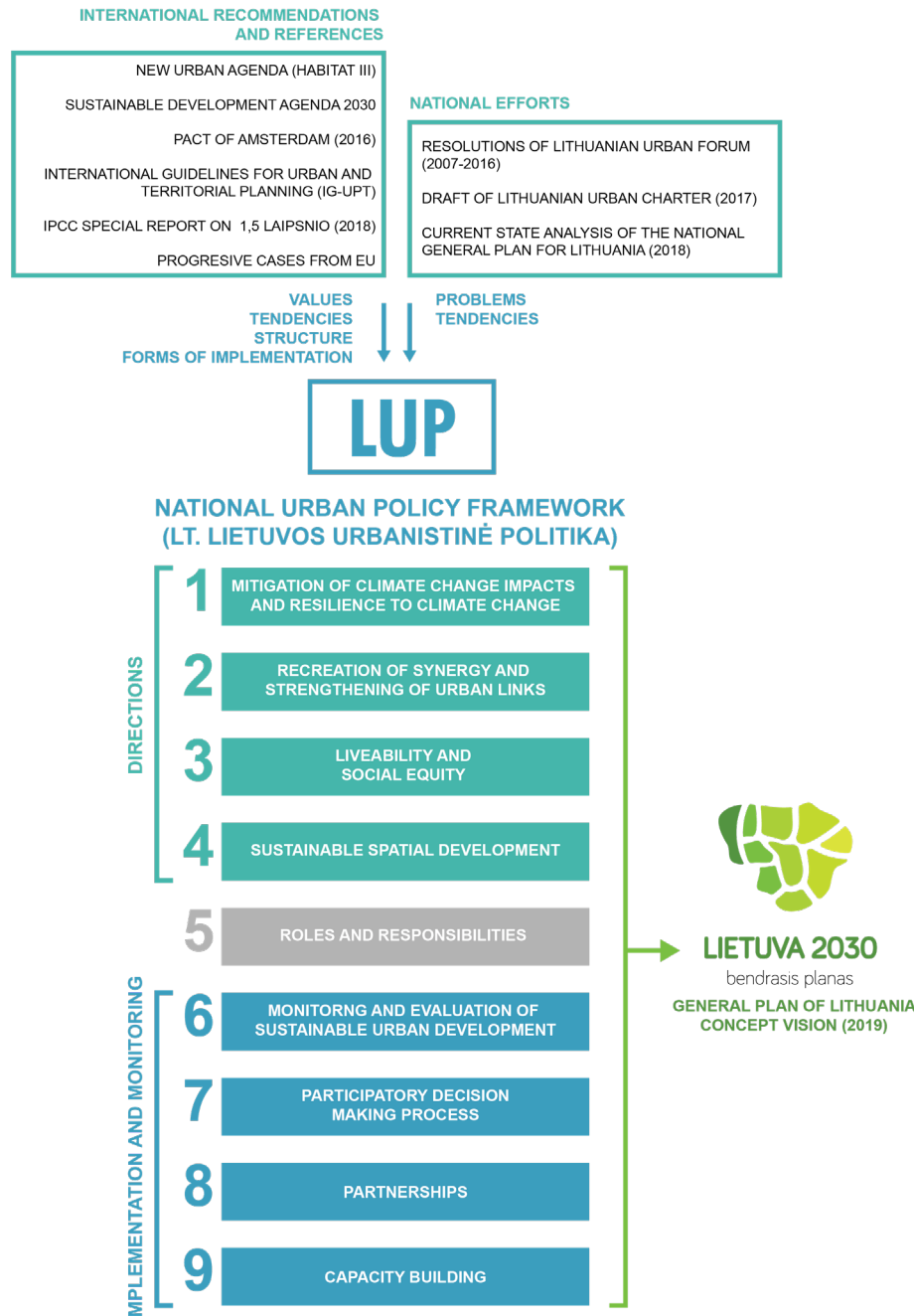


Figure 2 LUPF methodology

3.1. Preparation process

The process started with an in-depth review of international recommendations, Lithuanian strategies and policies connected to the object of the LUPF and previous attempts to prepare urban policy framework and finally bring everything into a coherent, easy to understand value-based document.

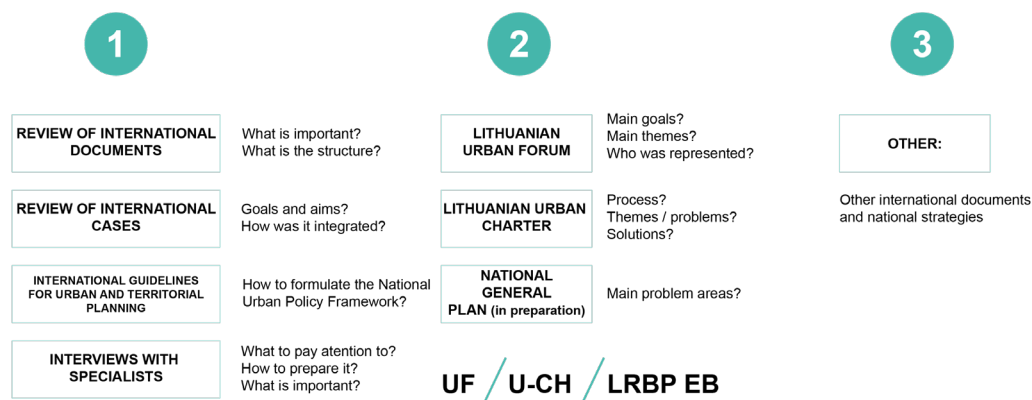


Figure 3 LUPF analysis methodology

3.1.1. Analysis of international recommendations and references

First step of the analysis was to analyse international documents related to sustainable urban development that included: Sustainable development agenda 2030, New Urban Agenda, Pact of Amsterdam, European Urban Charter, Leipzig Charter. These documents provided a better understanding of possible structure of the document, how to formulate ideas and what themes are important to consider.

International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (UN Habitat, 2015), *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (IG-UTP) Handbook* (UN Habitat, 2018) and *National Urban Policy: A Guiding Framework* (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2015) were key documents, from where a lot of concepts and ideas were reused and localized to Lithuanian context. These are truly most useful sources that have bulletproof structures and logic that cover complex concepts.

Three cases chosen for reference analysis were: Agenda Stad (2017), Project Ireland 2040 (2016) and Sustainable development agenda of Estonia (2015). Agenda Stad is concept adapted in the Netherlands in 2017 that aims to encourage economic growth, living quality and innovations by encouraging collaboration between cities to solve urban challenges. Agenda Stad proposes to create partnerships between cities and regions called “City deals”. These partnerships are based on development themes such as new economy, adaptation to climate change, attraction of talents and circular cities. This document inspired to include possible partnership themes in the proposals for LUPF as one of implementation measures. The National Planning Framework and its National Strategic Outcomes and priorities of the National Development plan “Project Ireland 2040” gave an overview of how country that as Lithuania faces problems of shrinking urban regions, define their priorities and development goals. This document inspired to look deeper into possible relationships between urban and rural areas in Lithuania. Sustainable development agenda of Estonia was a case from a neighbouring country with similar history as Lithuania. This document inspired to look further into how country views local challenges of emigration, preservation of local culture and global challenges of adaptation to climate change.

3.1.2. Analysis of Local documents

Second step was to form informative conclusions from the previous efforts to prepare the national urban policy and understand better evolution of problematics that was used in Lithuanian urban forums between the years 2007 and 2017.

Analysis showed that same topics concern planners in Lithuania for more than ten years and yet there is no solution for these problems (poor inter-institutional collaboration, poor cross-sectorial problem solving, uncontrolled, fragmented urban development etc.). This showed that yet another attempt to define problems that were discussed among planners for 10 years in the form of a draft for Lithuanian Urban charter, was not a solution. As explained previously, the second attempt to prepare the national urban policy was concentrating on collecting ideas from relevant stakeholders and the document ended up as a checklist specific of problems with specific solutions, solving which will not tackle systematic problems with urban planning and urban development. These observations helped build a stronger argument that development guidelines or sustainable development toolbox is not a for a country that needs a reboot of a planning culture in general.

3.2. Directions

The selection of direction was a back and forth process. First suggestions for directions focused on the triad of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental aspects. It was later decided that as sustainable development is not a divisive concept and any topic should consider all three aspects of the triad at the same time, therefore it is not a good idea to separate directions into these three topics. Directions in the proposal for LUPF are understood as aspects to be considered while making national or local spatial development decision. At the same time any decision should inherently be aiming for sustainability (social, environmental and economic at the same time).

Proposal offers four directions:

3.2.1. Mitigation of climate change impacts and resilience to climate change

Direction suggest guiding sustainable development in a way that would help mitigate climate change impacts and increase resilience to climate change effects. It calls for ambitious actions to implement decarbonization measures in all sectors, reduce consumption, get ready for extreme events in order to ensure provision of essential services in case of an natural disaster.

3.2.2. Recreation of synergy and strengthening of urban links

Direction suggest looking at urban and rural areas as urban regions: territories that are associated with urban centre by energy provision, goods distribution networks, people commuting to work, water and waste management. It is emphasised on the necessity to create synergies between urban and rural areas, to collaborate and complement each other, share resources. It is encouraged to use territorial planning as a tool for creating conditions for territorial cohesion, reducing ecological footprint, encouraging circular economy.

3.2.3. Liveability and social equity

Strong communities are essential for liveability of urban areas therefore direction suggests creating conditions for community development, economic opportunities for small and social business, creation of possibility to consume culture and preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

3.2.4. Sustainable spatial development

Direction emphasises on spatial aspects of urban development and is divided in four sub-sections: Accessibility to housing, sustainable mobility, engineering services and public spaces. Emphasis is placed on creation of compact environments, effective use of resources, accessibility to water and sanitation, monitoring of housing provision, encouragement of public-private initiatives to upgrade public spaces.

3.3. Roles and responsibilities

The implementation of Lithuanian urban policy framework will require inter-institutional, cross-sectoral co-operation and an inclusive decision-making process. LUPF encourages to look at urban development beyond the administrative boundaries, to look at urbanized and urbanizing territories holistically in order to achieve systematic changes.

IG-UTP (2015) is an irreplaceable source of definitions of different roles and responsibilities for five main groups that directly or indirectly effect urban development: National institutions, Local administration, Professionals and professional organizations, Civil society and NGOs. A fifth group (academic society) was added to the list.

Essential aspect about this section that each group gets a definition of their role and responsibility in urban development and within these rules and responsibilities they relate to other groups. For example, Local administration should encourage access to decision making for the civil society, while civil society should actively participate in the planning process. In this way, a network of interlinked participatory process is created.

3.4. Monitoring and implementation

Last section of the LUPF is composed of four sections: Monitoring and evaluation of sustainable urban development; Participatory decision-making process; Partnerships and Capacity building.

3.4.1. Monitoring and evaluation of sustainable urban development

Throughout the preparation process of the LUPF it became evident that there is a gap in knowledge of how cities are developing. It was impossible to say if cities were developing in a compact way or not as there was no data to support it, no measurable definition with indicators. One could only make conclusions from observation and they would be correct. This section calls for definitions of what sustainable development is and measurable indicators to monitor it.

It is suggested to start with a perception questionnaire to understand better how cities perceive their own plans, what concepts are unfamiliar to them or where most misunderstanding lies.

3.4.2. Participatory decision-making process

Proposals for LUPF highlights the importance of inclusion for urban development. Successful implementation of the LUPF requires openness and the involvement of stakeholders and communities. Inclusion methods require continuous development and maintenance of a community. Section brings attention to the fact that it is common that civil society lack skills to give informed opinions about technical documents therefore it is essential to create conditions of involvement in a language and media different people could understand and respond to. Moreover, it outlines rules for participatory process: consistency, feedback, respect for time and knowledge, understandable media, establishment of common ground and transparency which are essential for a dialogue.

3.4.3. Partnerships

LUPF suggests establishing voluntary engagement partnerships between state, municipal institutions, business representatives' professional associations, NGOs and academic community. Partnerships could be a great way to start sharing experience between cities. It is suggested to create cross-sectoral partnership themes which would bring a more diverse stakeholder group to the table.

3.4.4. Capacity building

Last section of the LUPF emphasises on the need to raise competence of all actors involved in the urban development process. It is focused on administrative and organizational skills, learning about innovative planning methods and systematic thinking. All of which is essential for a constructive dialogue between different institutions and representatives of different specialist fields.

3.5. LUPF as a system

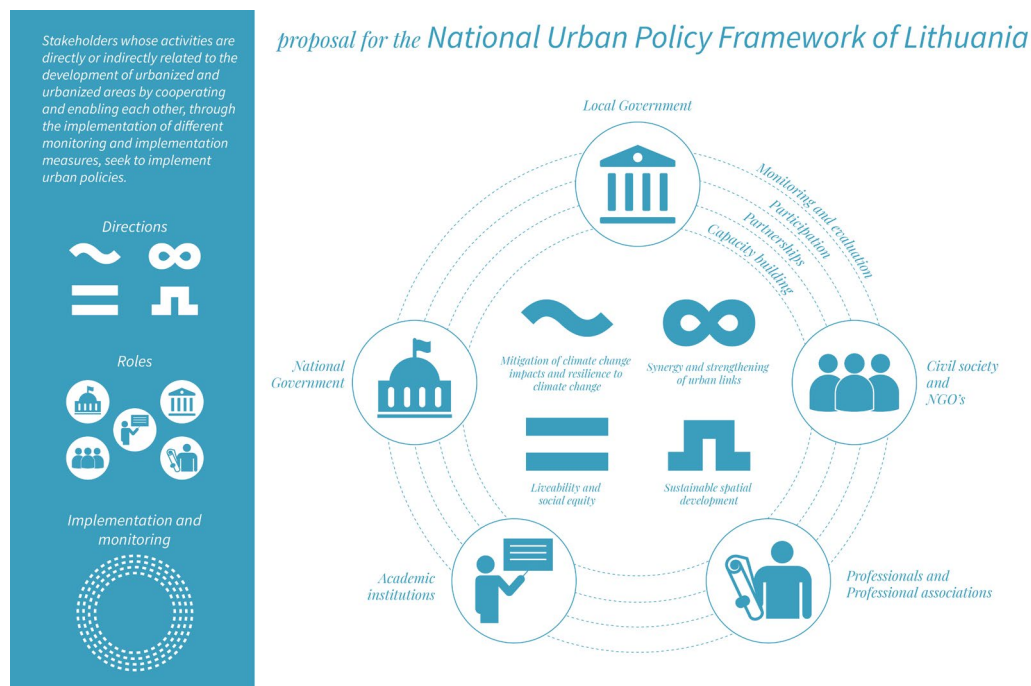


Figure 4 Structure of the Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework

Directions, roles and implementation and monitoring measures are a part of a LUPF system. One part cannot work without the other. The logic of the structure is that LUPF directions for sustainable development can only be achieved if all stakeholder groups work together in implementing, monitoring, sharing knowledge through partnerships, and building their capabilities.

4. Conclusions

The case of Lithuanian Urban Policy Framework is an example of an attempt to organize a system of collaboration, create a base for the National tradition of planning. Although there is a great amount of knowledge and valuable experiences to learn from, localizing logical, sustainable, time proven directions is not an easy task. It makes it even more complex if the culture is resistant to accept necessity to plan in a collaborative way. There is a need for a flexible process, a multi-disciplinary language that is necessary not only to adapt knowledge and good experiences but also to create a new one.

4.1. Reuse and adapt

Although there is a tremendous amount of immensely valuable recommendations prepared by international planning society that could just be translated and used, in countries like Lithuania, that does not have a strong planning culture, direct implementation would mean making a leap in knowledge of how urban areas should develop and there is resistance to making this leap. Therefore, it is an interest of us to share our experience and discuss with fellow planners on how to deal with these issues and integrate international knowledge locally.

4.2. Establish a base before defining development guidelines

Original ambition of the Ministry was to prepare guidelines for urban development. Document was intended to become a toolbox of general truths about urban development concentrating spatial aspects of the city: compact city development, sustainable mobility, quality of public spaces. Soon into the process it became evident that such guidelines are necessary, and they should be further elaborated based on the overall development vision for Lithuanian cities which was to be outlined in the new comprehensive plan for the territory of Lithuania. Preparing development guidelines before the National development vision would be counterproductive as process for generating a vision and further development guidelines requires a very different process than what was planned for this document. What was clearly missing before starting to work on a vision, was a urban policy framework - a value base that defines general directions and relationships between different groups involved in urban development.

4.3. Connect policy with something of national importance

Proposal for LUPF got more weight because it was connected to the preparation of the new General Plan of Lithuania. Original intention was to include different aspects of the policy to the development of the vision for Lithuania 2030. In this way, valuable aspects from the policy become part of a legal document that will guide development for upcoming 11 years.

5. References

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Participation in the congress is supported
by the by the Lithuanian Council for Culture

