

---

## Envisioning for sustainable development. A cross-country experience.

---

Federico Niccolini \*

Department of Economy and Law, University of Macerata  
University Address: Via Crescimbeni, 20 – 62010 – Macerata – Italy

Monia La Verghetta

Department of Economy and Law, University of Macerata  
University Address: Via Crescimbeni, 20 – 62010 – Macerata – Italy

\* *Corresponding author*

### Structured Abstract

**Purpose** – The research is aimed at identifying and testing a methodology and a practical instrument that can guide a process for a shared strategic vision, through an organization or network. The resulted vision can have positive effects on knowledge-management and value-creation capabilities, also in a perspective of sustainability and within SMART development paths.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The chosen methodology is of a mixed qualitative/quantitative type, since it is suitable for collecting data and information about a network or a community on objectives and future perspectives within a group of reference organizations. Vision sharing, implementation of the envisioning process, and its subsequent evolution was also studied via ethnographic research instruments.

**Originality/value** – The adopted and tested methodology highlights the importance of the role of a scientific methodology in envisioning processes, in particular at the inter-organizational level and, more importantly, in a highly complex sector such as sustainable development. In fact, preparing a model of the envisioning process itself can represent an essential instrument for developing strategic objectives shared among networks or communities that intend to promote sustainable, responsible, and integrated development thanks to the simultaneous creation of value.

**Practical implications** – The process of envisioning in SMART communities facilitates interaction between members as a phase in a learning by interacting process, in the growing process of the entire community and the development and increase of social capital, intended as a set of intangible productive resources present in those relationships. In fact, the social capital, also taking on a cognitive level, promotes the development of shared knowledge, leading to the general understanding of common objectives and appropriate ways of acting within the social system<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tsai W. & Ghoshal S. (1998), *Social capital and value creation: the role of intrafirm network*, *The Academy Of Management Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 464 – 476.

**Keywords** – Envisioning process, Shared vision, Networks, Sustainable Development SMART Community

**Paper type** – Academic Research Paper / Practical Paper

## 1 Introduction

More than other communities, the so-called “SMART Communities” should be viewed as “organizational bodies characterized by repeated exchanges between autonomous organizations that interact on the basis of trust and united by a sense of belonging<sup>1</sup>”, or as a network<sup>2</sup>. In this community, a significant factor in reaching the ambitious objectives of “SMART” development is built on characteristics of the “network threads” that connect people in and between the groups<sup>3</sup>, threads that we can identify, even in the sense of belonging and the sense of trust uniting the parts.

In the area of multi-sector “SMART Communities”, i.e., those composed of organizations belonging to different sectors such as local or regional bodies, other public, private, or non-profit entities, individual citizens, and individual-based micro-communities, the theme of sustainable development is no longer relegated to a mere expression of objectives, but is considered a means for the “real” development of the territory and often the “SMART” soul of the community.

In order to create value and wealth, a *learning organization* or *community* needs to initiate and sustain continuous learning processes<sup>4</sup>. On the network level, such learning processes are facilitated by those ones “sharing fundamental aspects in an inter-organizational vision<sup>5</sup>”, the power of which derives from a common enrolment and commitment<sup>6</sup>.

One of the most synthetic definitions of vision is expressed by Senge<sup>7</sup> who defines this organizational variable as the “picture of the future we seek to create”. According to Thoms and Greenberger<sup>8</sup> the vision is “a cognitive image of the future which is positive enough to members so as to be motivating and elaborate enough to provide direction for future planning and goal setting”. *Kouzes and Posner evidences that the connection between people is a necessary condition to identify a shared vision that can lead them in the future*<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Borgatti S. P. & Foster P. C. (2003), *The network paradigm in organizational research: a review and typology*, *Journal of Management*, 29 (6), pp. 991 – 1003.

<sup>2</sup> Kanter R. M. & Litow S. S. (2009), *Informed and interconnected: a manifesto for smarter cities*, Harvard Business School General Unit Working Paper, 09 – 141, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Kanter R. M. & Litow S. S. (2009), *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Senge P. (2006), *The Fifth Discipline*. London: Random House Business Books.

<sup>5</sup> Niccolini F. (2008), *Responsabilità sociale e competenze organizzative distintive*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS.

<sup>6</sup> Senge (2006), *op. cit.*, pp. 202 – 206.

<sup>7</sup> Senge (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Thoms P. & Greenberger D. (1995), *Training business leader to create positive organizational visions of the future: is it success full?*, *Academy of Management Best Papers Proceedings*, Madison: Omnipress, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> Kouzes J. M. & Posner B. Z. (2009), *To lead, create a shared vision*, *Harvard Business Review*, January, p. 21.

A truly shared vision incorporates the aspirations and objectives of the organization or community's members. Sharing also helps the community to see the potential value of the exchange and pooling of resources. On the network level in particular, "the vision can [...] become a driving factor capable of generating creative tension that helps individual organizations to develop their own *core competences* and to coordinate them with those of their partners, creating a distinctive macro-competence with a value greater than the sum of its parts<sup>1</sup>".

The aim of this research is therefore to identify and test a methodology and a practical instrument that can both initiate a process to create and share a strategic vision and also stimulate the ability to manage knowledge and create value at the same time, supported by new instruments and technological mechanisms.

## **2 Research Perspective Adopted**

According to Clancy and Krieg<sup>2</sup> having a vision is clearly helpful in defining systemic objectives. In fact, it is born out of a common spirit when everyone knows how to move on a strategically advantageous direction, committed to a common purpose in which they try to achieve the desired future with a common spirit that pushes [them] to reach what is nearly impossible. Such an approach is also essential for "SMART Communities" that create realistic and ambitious sustainable development objectives.

In this view, it is highlighted how multi-sector "SMART Communities" that want to undertake sustainable development need to follow the path of education regarding the sustainable development itself. The UN has also expressed such a feeling, stressing that "education, including formal training, public awareness, and schooling should be recognized as a process through which humans and society can reach their full potential. Education is fundamental in promoting sustainable development and improving the capability of people to confront environmental and developmental problems<sup>3</sup>".

Information, training and awareness, therefore, can plausibly take on the role of interconnected instruments that are useful and necessary for the above-mentioned goal of education to be realized.

The envisioning process is necessary because members of "SMART Communities" share core values and audacious, ambitious, though realistic, common objectives that are appropriate for orienting strategic processes in a viewpoint of SMART, sustainable development.

### **2.1 – Methodology**

*2.1.1 – General methodological aspects. Harmonization of qualitative and quantitative research techniques.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Niccolini (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Clancy K. & Krieg P. (2001), *Counterintuitive Marketing: Achieving Great Results Using Common Sense*. New York: The Free Press.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Division for Sustainable Development (1992), Reorienting education towards sustainable development, Rio de Janeiro, Agenda 21, Chapter IV, Section 36.3.*

In the organizational science the evaluation of several value-based and cultural dimensions as well as of relational ones, cannot be done by merely quantitative instruments, but requires a method of investigation that is primarily qualitative. In many cases it is necessary to articulate a framework that harmonize the use of quantitative instruments that are able to return more objective and comparable data with qualitative ones.

Quantitative techniques make it possible to obtain comparable, finite-value results by studying variables that are not commonly dealt with in numerical studies; this is in agreement with examples from the literature that refer to successful attempts to give the vision quantitative connotations and comparisons by implementing and using of quantitative techniques<sup>1</sup>.

With particular reference to the qualitative method, with recourse to ethnographic techniques, the aim is to understand the present and future meanings of the interactions between subjects in the context the research is applied to, whether they are individuals or organizations, and therefore to understand the basic future perspective in the vision.

The research method proposed is by its nature primarily inductive, that is, from the interpretation of collected “data”, such as personal and group statements, observation notes, exchanges of opinion, interviews, and connections between envisioning process participants, to the construction of procedures and categories valid in other areas where the same characteristics of the reference population might be found, or practices replicable in contexts with characteristics similar to those in the studied context.

#### *2.1.2 – The proposed methodology – Phases and characteristics of the envisioning process.*

To carry out the envisioning process, it is essential that members were conscious of their own personal visions, which can be correlated explicitly with the expectations and aspirations of the other community members<sup>2</sup>. Collaborators can realize how important are their own explicit and/or implicit contributions in this process, especially if they talk about them, clarifying eventual differences and dispelling possible doubts, in order to propagate enthusiasm and involvement. This process can help members already busy to achieving the vision, whether individual or inter-organizational, to enhance their commitment<sup>3</sup>. In this way, according to Kotter, vision becomes something that enables a transformation characterized by enthusiasm and commitment<sup>4</sup>.

Specifically, the adopted method of envisioning foresees the following phases:

0) *Preliminary phase: identify members of the community that will participate in the envisioning process.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Oswald S. L., Mossholder K. W. & Harris S. G. (1994), *Vision salience and strategic involvement: implications for psychological attachment to organization and job*, *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 477 – 489.

<sup>2</sup> Westley F. & Mintzberg H. (1989), *Visionary leadership and strategic management*, *Strategic Management Journal*, 10, pp. 17 – 32.

<sup>3</sup> Senge P. (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Kotter J. P. (1995), *Leading change – Why transformation efforts fail*, *Harvard Business Review*, 73 (2), pp. 59 – 67.

a) *Analysis and measurement of the level of sharing of some fundamental, founding concepts in the envisioning process (concept of sustainable development).*

For this and the following phase c), structured interviews are useful, asking all participants in the envisioning process the same question, which is predefined in content and form.

A Likert<sup>1</sup> evaluation scale was used, asking questions together with five possible responses, to which a numerical value was associated:

- a) very great extent = 5,
- b) great extent = 4,
- c) moderate extent = 3,
- d) little extent = 2,
- e) not at all = 1.

b) *Identification of a vision already widespread and recognized on the international level in the envisioning sector.*

In this phase, it is essential that guidance in the envisioning process be entrusted to a subject with proven international experience in the sector to be studied.

c) *Measurement of the level of sharing of the vision, recognized and widespread at the international level, among organizations participating in the envisioning process.*

For this reason, one could also imagine investigating the level of sharing of a second vision, using a Likert scale in this case as well. Through a comparative analysis of the numerical results obtained, one can evaluate the organization's level of involvement on behalf of the vision that is highly "appreciated", rather than involvement with another.

d) *Discussion and brainstorming on the results of phases a) and c).*

In this and subsequent phases, the use of working groups, focus groups, and brainstorming<sup>2</sup> is essential. In phase d), an initial process of new knowledge building occurs. The process is similar to that described in the well-known SECI model: also through the well-supported account of good practice and the guidance of the leader/mentor<sup>3</sup>, processes of combining, socializing, and internalizing new tacit knowledge are activated and become explicit in subsequent phases<sup>4</sup>.

e) *Identification of and proposals for the process of envisioning a community vision on behalf of each individual participant.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Likert scale is composed of a list of affirmations (items), semantically linked to the attitudes investigated. Along with the five possible responses, it is submitted to the group of individuals and organizations whose opinion is being studied.

<sup>2</sup> Corbetta P. (2003), *La ricerca sociale: metodologia e tecniche. Vol. III. Le tecniche qualitative. Bologna: Il Mulino.*

<sup>3</sup> Swap W., Leonard D., Shields M. & Abrams L. (2001), *Using mentoring and storytelling to transfer knowledge in the workplace, Journal of Management Information Systems Vol. 18, No 1, pp. 95 – 114.*

<sup>4</sup> Nonaka I. & Takeuchi H. (1995), *The knowledge-creating company. How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation, Oxford University Press, Oxford.*

The preceding phase, activating the so-called “Dialoguing Ba”, forms the basis for starting the process of converting individual participants’ tacit knowledge into implicit knowledge<sup>1</sup>.

The perspective of Westley and Mintzberg is particularly useful in this phase. By *envisioning*, they mean that process of creating a vision in which there are three phases:

- Visualizing the image of the desired future,
- Effectively describing and communicating it to the collaborators,
- Collaborators become aware that they are the main actors and recipients of the vision.

In order to realize the previous phases in the envisioning process, it is essential that leaders (and collaborators) are aware of their own personal visions so they can visualize the image of the future that they desire in correlation with the expectations and dreams of their own collaborators<sup>2</sup>.

The vision becomes a translation of the interests and characteristics of those who belong to the organization<sup>3</sup>.

Without this phase, therefore, it would not be possible to make individual organizations aware of their own visions and, even less, their subsequent articulation.

f) *Dialogue regarding the visions expressed by members of the community.*

In this phase, Nonaka and Takeuchi’s knowledge-creation spiral is reactivated, creating a knowledge space, or a Dialoguing and Exercising Ba.

g) *“Intersected” vote on the visions of individual partners. Participants are called to individually express their preference for the vision of another partner, pointing out motifs and key words.*

To reach the Systemizing Ba and the creation of a shared vision, it is necessary to know intimately the preferences and perspectives of each participant in the contextual process of envisioning and learning.

h) *Analysis of results (of the voting process) and examination of comments on the visions expressed by members of the community.*

In the last two phases, participants were given the possibility to concretely realize one of the stages required by many authors<sup>4</sup> for the envisioning process to become perfect, that is the stage related to dialogue, communication, and “real” aligning with the individually considered visions.

The emphasis on communication and consensus creation is deeply justified by the need to have a positive impact on the vision of the organization itself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nonaka I. & Takeuchi H. (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Westley F. & Mintzberg H. (1989), *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Berson Y., Shamir B., Avolio B. & Popper M. (2001), *The relationship between vision strength, leadership style and context, The Leadership quarterly*, 12, pp. 53 – 73.

<sup>4</sup> Senge (2006), Ensley et altri (2003), Westley & Mintzberg (1989).

The importance given to communication in the analysis of the formation of the shared vision is also confirmed in the considerations made by Ensley and Pearce. They describe a “shared vision” as a team process in which the same individuals form and create the vision<sup>1</sup>.

The vision helps the parties sharing the vision to understand how they themselves should integrate their own efforts. Thanks to vision sharing, the parties become more able to understand how they can help each other and eliminate confusion, and how clarifying intentions renders the interaction easier between the parties. It is a courtesy that leads to an atmosphere where members are more inclined to share their knowledge.

Hambrick<sup>2</sup> uses the term *corporate coherence* to explain how the shared vision (*collective vision*) is the logical one, and how it forms the basis for proactiveness in an organization, translated in units of intention and action.

Katzenbach<sup>3</sup> also refers to the idea of a *collective vision* when he proposes how teams should be profoundly committed to a goal in order to reach a sense of common direction.

i) *Drafting a vision statement.*

The knowledge-creating community reaches this phase of externalization in the second cycle of the SECI spiral of inter-organizational knowledge building.

l) *Testing the preliminary vision statement, by brainstorming and gathering opinions on its strong and weak points.*

The third and last cycle of community knowledge-building is quickly and synthetically, activated through the rapid succession of the Exercising, Originating, Dialoguing, and Systemizing Ba, which leads to the last phase.

m) *Elaboration of the final vision statement.*

This represents the shared vision of the SMART Community. In particular, within SMART Communities (whether they are composed of private or public organizations, non-profit or for-profit entities, new or very old institutions), identifying a process, adapted to the creation of a network vision, means consistent facility in defining all-inclusive objectives for the organization in a heterogeneous, set way.

n) *Identification of some Big Hair Audacious Goals (BHAG) linked to the shared vision.*

The envisioning process cannot be called complete if it does not identify some BHAGs<sup>4</sup>. For SMART Communities, the “SMART” aspect of organizations is also revealed in their ability to coherently and correctly express the fundamental objectives that they aim to realize by achieving the vision.

---

<sup>1</sup> “a team process where team members shape and create a vision” in Pearce C. & Ensley M. (2004), *A reciprocal and longitudinal investigation of the innovation process: the central role of shared vision in product and process innovation teams (PPITs)*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, pp. 259 – 278.

<sup>2</sup> Hambrick D. (1997), *Corporate coherence and the top management team*, *Strategy and Leadership*, 25, pp. 24 – 30.

<sup>3</sup> Katzenbach J. (1997), *The myth of the top management team*, *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 75, pp. 83 – 93.

<sup>4</sup> Collins J. & Porras J. I. (1996), *Building your company's vision*, *Harvard Business Review*, sept/oct 96, vol. 74 Issue 5, pp. 65 – 77, p. 74.



## 2.2. – Research Area and Subjects

The research was undertaken within the SEE (South East Europe) project, whose goal is to “to develop transnational partnerships on matters of strategic importance, in order to improve territorial, economic and social integration processes and to contribute to the cohesion, stability and competitiveness of the SEE region”. In particular, “the South East Europe Programme helps to promote better integration between Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries and neighbouring countries<sup>1</sup>”.



*Figure 1: South East Europe Countries<sup>2</sup>*

In the broadest context of cooperation between countries pertaining to the southeastern area of Europe, the project “*A Sustainable Development Model for Green Mountain (hereafter GM) Areas – Information, Training and Awareness-Raising in mountain regions of South-East Europe*” has been developed. It is a transnational project consisting of eleven different organizations in nine different countries dedicated to the development and transfer of a model for sustainable development and management that is capable of providing an integrated strategy to increase the preservation and appreciation of mountain areas.

The basic general objective of the GM Project is to find ways to construct a new model of living based on the principles and values of the mountain areas included within it. The aim is therefore to develop a systemic strategy for training and increasing awareness while respecting the value of natural and cultural resources in the area of interest.

The project mission is expressed as a willingness to find systemic processes oriented at stimulating the growth of individuals in order to render them capable of interpreting

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about\\_see/programme\\_presentation/index](http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about_see/programme_presentation/index)

<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.southeast-europe.net](http://www.southeast-europe.net)



values related to the natural and cultural resources of mountain areas and to express sensibility, commitment, interest, responsibility, and active participation in their conservation.

To realize such an ambitious mission, information, training, and awareness-raising constitute three essential synergistic phases in a systemic process called “Education for Sustainable Development” (ESD), which can be considered an enduring learning process. So that ESD can develop over time and be assumed as a systemic instrument for training and information and as a vector to increase awareness of the members in a SMART Community aimed at sustainable development, it is necessary to consider strategies that correspond to specific targets that can lead to a vision obtained thanks to a rigorous, trustworthy, scientific process of envisioning.

For this reason, a suitable Working Group (WG) was assembled to identify and furnish indications specifically to implement a system of methods and strategies aimed at information, training, and awareness-raising, i.e., to ESD. The WG was defined by the program as a “phase implemented to guarantee concrete results that will be transferred to each partner/territory and beyond<sup>1</sup>”.

Within such a project, it was deemed necessary to activate an envisioning process characterized as described in the preceding sections specifically to have a solid, realistic, and clear guide to instil itself with the objectives of sustainable development and to develop a smart approach to future development paths.

The envisioning process was then empirically tested with the participation of ten organizations pertaining to the nine different nations (Austria (2), Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy (2), Montenegro, Romania, and Slovenia, shown in the table below<sup>2</sup>), which applied the envisioning process described under the leadership of one of the authors of the present work.

**Table 1.** Organizations involved in the envisioning process

<i>Nation</i>	<i>Organization</i>
Italy	Province of Macerata
Italy	Monti Sibillini National Park
Montenegro	Municipality of Pljevlja
Bulgaria	Bulgaria - Regional Administration Smolyan
Hungary	Kőszeg Micro-Region
Romania	National Forest Administration-Romsilva
Slovakia	Slovak Environmental Agency
Austria	AREC Raumberg-Gumpenstein
Austria	Soelktaeler Nature Park
Greece	Region of Epirus

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/projects/approved\\_projects/?id=123](http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/projects/approved_projects/?id=123)

<sup>2</sup> The organization involved in the project were eleven, but one could not participate in the envisioning process.

### 2.3 – Application to the Context

After identifying the community members taking part in the envisioning process, and after analysing the area in which such a “SMART Community” lives, i.e., their problems and characteristics, the envisioning process began and was developed in the phases previously described:

a) *Analysis and measurement of the level of sharing of the fundamental concept of sustainable development.*

Participants were first asked their level of agreement with the statement used internationally to define the concept of sustainable development. The question, aimed at measuring opinions with the Likert scale shown before, was formulated as such:

*“To what extent do you think that the application of the Bruntland’s definition<sup>1</sup> of sustainable development as the one that “meets need of the present without surfacing the abilities of future generations to meet theirs” can really lead an improvement of the social conditions?”.*

The results are reported in the table that follows:

Table 2. Level of appreciation and sharing of the official definition of sustainable development

Organization	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	L	AVR.
Score	3	3	5	5	3	5	2	4	5	4	<b>3,8</b>

The results show how the organizations are not completely in agreement with the definition of sustainable development used at the international level.

More specifically, all the organizations declared to appreciate the attention paid to future generations as a strong point in the definition.

In an open dialogue on sustainable development, when defining a vision presented as a point of reference for continued action on behalf of the organizations making part of a “SMART Community”, the consideration of resources, processes, and interested subjects constituted an important starting point for the clearest definition possible of a realizable and engaging vision.

The following ameliorative definition of the concept of sustainable development was then produced, substituting the word *sustainable* with *responsible and integrated*:

*From sustainable to responsible and integrated development*

*Responsible and integrated development is “a dynamic process that envisions, plans and provides a system of economic, social, ecological, cultural and even spiritual values for present and future generations”. Moreover, a responsible and integrated development includes a wide and aware citizen participation in preserving the natural and cultural heritage values.*

<sup>1</sup> “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” - <http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html>.

b) *Identification of a vision that is already widespread and recognized internationally in the field of sustainable development education (ESD).*

The vision in question was the same as that formalized by the organization that manages US National Parks in their ambitious objective “to build a citizenship committed to preserving its heritage and its home on the earth”.

c) *Measuring the level of vision sharing in letter b) among the organizations that constitute the working group.*

Participants in the envisioning process were asked the following question:

“The United States National Park Service formalized for the 21st century an ambitious long term vision on ‘raising awareness on sustainable development’: ‘to build a citizenship committed to preserving its heritage and its home on the earth’. To what extent do you agree with this vision?”.

The following evaluations were expressed:

Table 3. Level of sharing of the international recognized vision

Organization	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	L	AVR.
Score	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	3	5	4,5

The results collected indicate on average how important it is for these organizations to feel in harmony with the internationally recognized vision proposed by the US National Park Service. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 5, the average is 4.50.

This type of data allows the numerical representation of an attitude and an inclination regarding a really intangible variable, like the vision.

d) *Discussion and brainstorming on the results of phases a) and c).*

Hickman and Silva<sup>1</sup> identify the ability to recognize the vision as an essential part of the envisioning process. Once they recognized a vision’s ability to become a “good” vision, that is, appearing audacious while being perceived as realizable<sup>2</sup> at the same time, participants in the working group expressed their alignment with it and were seen to be very inclined to define a vision that could serve as a starting point; especially they were ready to direct their efforts towards creating a new vision that was also audacious, realizable, and concrete.

e) *Identification of a communal vision by each single member.*

Beforehand, by invitation of the moderator, the organizations individually expressed their own ideas of a vision based on their own inclinations regarding the numerous fields of application. This was done in the setting of a wider project directed at information, education, and awareness of sustainable, “SMART” development.

<sup>1</sup> Hickman C. & Silva M. (1986), *Creating Excellence: Managing Corporate Culture, Strategy and Change in the New Age*, New York: New American Library.

<sup>2</sup> Collins J. & Porras J. (1991), *Organizational vision and visionary organizations*, *California Management Review*, fall, pp. 30 – 52.

In a brainstorming session, participants presented their own visions. A summary table follows:

Table 4. Visions of single participants

Organization	Proposed visions
A & B	The future of mountain areas is the protection of culture and knowledge of territories and populations, and so the development will become sustainable as well as lifestyles and vocations.
C	Improved education at all levels and in all its forms as a vital tool for addressing all problems relevant for mountain sustainable development, in particular to improve living environment for the local population and diversify ecological, cultural and economic potentials of SEE region.
D	Making popular together the unique nature of the mountains of South East Europe as an attractive, preferred and prosperous region, promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life in the mountain regions of SEE.
E	Mountain areas would be calm regions, with well structured and creative architectural, infrastructural and IT/high tech solutions and renewable innovations.
F	Increased knowledge on the particularities and values that are characteristic to the mountain area and responsibility for the implemented actions regarding the management objectives of a certain zone.
G	Awareness of target group on Sustainable Development issues and on specific SEE mountains areas values will increase and lead to improving the quality of live in mountain regions.
H	Education on sustainable development needs not only to thematize environmental issues, but also has to discover and strengthen the soft skills of all affected persons in order to secure a respectful dealing with each other and their environment.
I	The South East Europe Green Mountain Areas ( $\delta$ SEEGMA) provide a perfect example for practicing a convenient, prolific, sustainable lifestyle.
L	The development of sustainable consciences and the adoption of a sustainable "lifestyle". The realization that the sustainable development is the only right way for future development, especially for the sensitive areas.

f) *Dialogue regarding visions expressed by members of the community.*

Every member's awareness of the others' visions enabled the entire group to understand past, present, and future decisions. This allowed each collaborator to act independently, but in a manner consistent with the essence of the entire organization's decision<sup>1</sup>. Communication, in fact, allowed collaborators to become promoters and contextual recipients of the vision, which allowed for true sharing<sup>2</sup>.

g-h) *Vote-based expression of individual opinions on other partners' visions and joint analysis of the votes.*

In the voting procedure, partners chose another partner's vision and highlighted the concept that, in their opinion, was most important in connection with the chosen vision.

<sup>1</sup>Amason A. (1996), *Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: resolving a paradox for TMT's*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 39 (1), pp. 123 – 148.

<sup>2</sup> Senge P. (2006), *op. cit.*

Table 5. Vote assigned to single visions and key words evidenced by each single participant

Organization	Vision voted	Key words evidenced
A	G	Awareness
B	G	Awareness
C	H	Soft skills
D	G	Raising awareness
E	H	Wide perspective and Complexity
F	H	Enthusiasm. Local people, Motivation
G	F	Knowledge based, Responsibility
H	F	Increasing knowledge, Responsibility
I	F	Responsibility, Skills, Values, Preservation, Knowledge

i, l) *Draft text of the vision statement.*

The compilation of a vision statement, which followed the communication and sharing of personal visions phase, made up for the lack of a well-defined leader within the community who could instil a feeling of attachment to the vision in a capable and charismatic way<sup>1</sup>.

Such a phase therefore allowed a “document” to be drafted – the vision statement – that derived from both the personal visions of each member and, at the same time, a new declaration of the future desired by the community as a whole.

Therefore, making explicit the vision represents an important step in the envisioning process because, considering the different nature of the members of the community and the “experimental” process, the tangibility of the output makes the process and its result more open to revision and more easily useable by the constituents so that it can become an inspiring message directed at collaborators<sup>2</sup>.

m) *Elaboration of the final vision statement.*

At the end of the envisioning process, the objective of the process was reached, that is, the elaboration of a vision shared on the network level, which is reported as such:

*The vision for raising awareness is that in the SEE GM Areas a skilled, responsible and proud community continuously strengthens its knowledge about the peculiarities, potentialities and values related to its living territory, developing a sustainable consciousness, preserving the nature and improving the quality of life.*

We reiterate not only how important it is that an organization works to draft a vision, but especially how defining a process, and therefore a model, a practice to follow, can be innovative. The elaboration, drafting, and sharing of a vision can become a factor shared by all entities forming the organization and promoted by everyone equally.

<sup>1</sup> Sosik J. & Dinger S. (2007), *Relationship between leadership style and vision content: the moderating role of need for social approval, self-monitoring and need for social power*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, pp. 134 – 153.

<sup>2</sup> Berson Y., Shamir B., Avolio B. & Popper M. (2001), *op. cit.*, in which Berson uses the term “followers” to indicated collaborators.

n) *Identifying BHAGs.*

For the case study, in relation to the entire vision, Working Group 3, composed of organizations within the project, established four basic strategic objectives:

- 1) Take care of natural resources,
- 2) Hold traditional values and knowledge in high esteem,
- 3) Use innovative ideas to strive for mutual well-being in their diversified and fragile habitats, and
- 4) Increase the knowledge and, compatibly with a sustainable philosophy and life style, the popularity of the SEE mountain areas<sup>1</sup>.

### **3 Research Perspective**

The method applied highlights the importance of providing a network as well as a “SMART Community” with its own realistic, stimulating, and audacious vision, so that it can become a the reference point and the source of strategies, even for those sometimes unpopular strategies of sustainable development.

Imposing a formal envisioning process makes it possible to draft a vision statement in which all network or community participants become active actors, and which therefore is not presented to them with a top-down approach.

In large organizational realities, where the contribution of individuals are sometimes relegated to the mere execution of practices and the resolution of occasional problems, and where the diversity of interests can also be very large, the process of creating a vision certainly constitutes a challenge, but also a strategic competence and a source of competitive advantage.

Providing a model of the envisioning process, as described in the considerations above, could therefore represent an important instrument aiming at developing strategic, shared objectives that intend to promote sustainable, responsible, and integrated development thanks to the simultaneous creation of value.

### **4 Limits and Challenges**

The limits of the proposed approach can primarily be traced back to the nature of the research method chosen, in particular to the risks inherent in the qualitative research. The subjectivity of the data collected, which cannot strictly be generalized, can also be seen, however, as a resource because descriptive research also produces an inexhaustible mass of incentives and data that cannot be replaced<sup>2</sup>.

As a matter of fact, qualitative research entails limits in itself, but at the same time, it is an important instrument for revealing and measuring variables that cannot be completely investigated quantitatively.

---

<sup>1</sup> Marzo D., Niccolini F. & Plotino M. (2012), “Green Mountain” – A sustainable development model for Green Mountain Areas – Working Group 3, Information, Training and Awareness Raising in Mountain Regions of South East Europe, Final Report.

<sup>2</sup> Gallino L., (1978), *Dizionario di sociologia*, Torino: UTET; ristampa riveduta. 1988.

The choice of the organization sample could constitute at the same time another limit and strength of the approach. In the case of a working group that already exists due to a project started, such as SEE GM, the organizations already involved in the project are directed towards common mission, even considering the possibility that the vision exists but may not be explicit. In any case, making a vision explicit means that it is better understood and normally better implemented<sup>1</sup>.

The differences in cultural backgrounds of the representatives of the different involved organizations also represented simultaneously a difficulty and an opportunity.

Another limit has been represented by the non-homogeneous, and in some cases absent, knowledge of the concept of “vision” among the representatives, even if in conceiving a vision, “the expertise of an artisan, not a technician, is needed<sup>2</sup>”. It is therefore not necessary that the people coming together to draft a vision statement, be experts in the concept of a vision. Technicians follow a series of instructions; they are not pushed to “create” something that goes beyond the commands received. As per Hickman and Silva (1986), artisans have an idea of what should be obtained from their work: they use tools and material to give shape to the product always keeping the aspect and the effect of their work in mind. The challenge in the envisioning process is therefore to make beginners progress, so they can become technicians who can then instil an artisan’s passion in themselves and in the organization<sup>3</sup>.

The figure of a leader, central in the activation and in the guiding of the envisioning process, may not be so easily replicable. The question that arises deals with the need for such a figure within the envisioning process. Is it therefore reasonable to consider an envisioning process that is realized and is able to produce the same results despite the absence of a leader or a mediator? This question opens the door to another line of research.

The result obtained led to a validation of the initial envisioning process. The use of the proposed methodology made possible, in fact, to create, compile, and make explicit a vision with an increasing level of participation of all members of the organizations in the process.

Nevertheless, considering the sum of the individual participation in drafting the inter-organizational vision as a level of sharing is still not completely correct.

An important challenge, still to be gathered, therefore deals with understanding how and in what way the level of vision sharing within an organization can be expressed. A more difficult challenge is to make an envisioning process that has true sharing and commitment to a vision as an expected result even partially replicable. This is especially important in interorganizational realities, like SMART communities, in which the dedication and willingness to spend time and energy on reaching the objectives constitutes the essence itself of the organizational efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Senge (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Hickman C. & Silva M. (1986), *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Hickman C. & Silva M. (1986), *op. cit.*



## References

- Amason A. (1996), *Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: resolving a paradox for TMT's*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 39 (1), pp. 123 – 148.
- Berson Y., Shamir B., Avolio B. & Popper M. (2001), *The relationship between vision strength, leadership style and context*, *The Leadership quarterly*, 12, pp. 53 – 73.
- Borgatti S. P. & Foster P. C. (2003), *The network paradigm in organizational research: a review and typology*, *Journal of Management*, 29 (6), pp. 991 – 1003.
- Clancy K. & Krieg P. (2001), *Counterintuitive Marketing: Achieving Great Results Using Common Sense*. New York: The Free Press.
- Collins J. & Porras J. (1991), *Organizational vision and visionary organizations*, *California Management Review*, fall, pp. 30 – 52.
- Collins J. & Porras J. (1996), *Building your company's vision*, *Harvard Business Review*, sep/oct 96, vol. 74, Issue 5, pp. 65 – 77.
- Corbetta P. (2003), *La ricerca sociale: metodologia e tecniche. Vol. III. Le tecniche qualitative*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Gallino L. (1978), *Dizionario di sociologia*, Torino: UTET; ristampa riveduta. 1988.
- Hambrick D. (1997), *Corporate coherence and the top management team*, *Strategy and Leadership*, 25, pp. 24 – 30.
- Hickman C. & Silva M. (1986), *Creating Excellence: Managing Corporate Culture, Strategy and Change in the New Age*. New York: New American Library.
- Kanter R. M. & Litow S. S. (2009), *Informed and interconnected: a manifesto for smarter cities*, Harvard Business School General Unit Working Paper, 09 – 141.
- Katzenbach J. (1997), *The myth of the top management team*, *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 75, pp. 83 – 93.
- Kotter J. P. (1995), *Leading change – Why transformation efforts fail*, *Harvard Business Review*, 73 (2), pp. 59 – 67.
- Kouzes J. M. & Posner B. Z. (2009), *To lead, create a shared vision*, *Harvard Business Review*, January, pp. 20 – 21.
- Marzo D., Niccolini F. & Plotino M. (2012), *“Green Mountain” – A sustainable development model for Green Mountain Areas – Working Group 3, Information, Training and Awareness Raising in Mountain Regions of South East Europe*, Final Report.
- Niccolini F. (2008), *Responsabilità sociale e competenze organizzative distintive*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS.
- Nonaka I. & Takeuchi H. (1995), *The knowledge-creating company. How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Oswald S. L., Mossholder K. W. & Harris S. G. (1994), *Vision salience and strategic involvement: implications for psychological attachment to organization and job*, *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 477 – 489.
- Pearce C. & Ensley M. (2004), *A reciprocal and longitudinal investigation of the innovation process: the central role of shared vision in product and process innovation teams (PPITs)*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, pp. 259 – 278.
- “Reorienting education towards sustainable development”, United Nations, Division for Sustainable Development, Agenda 21, Chapter IV, Section 36.3.
- Senge P. (2006), *The Fifth Discipline. The art & practice of the learning organization* New York: Doubleday/Currency.
- Sosik J. & Dinger S. (2007), *Relationship between leadership style and vision content: the moderating role of need for social approval, self-monitoring and need for social power*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, pp. 134 – 153.
- Swap W., Leonard D., Shields M. & Abrams L. (2001), *Using mentoring and storytelling to transfer knowledge in the workplace*, *Journal of Management Information Systems* Vol. 18, No 1, pp. 95 – 114.

Thoms P. & Greenberger D. (1995), *Training business leader to create positive organizational visions of the future: is it success full?*, Academy of Management Best Papers Proceedings, Madison: Omnipress.

Tsai W. & Ghoshal S. (1998), *Social capital and value creation: the role of intrafirm network*, *The Academy Of Management Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 464 – 476.

United Nations, Division for sustainable Development (1992), *Reorienting education towards sustainable development*, Rio de Janeiro, Agenda 21, Chapter IV, Section 36.3.

Westley F. & Mintzberg H. (1989), *Visionary leadership and strategic management*, *Strategic Management Journal*, 10, pp. 17 - 32.

[http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about\\_see/programme\\_presentation/index](http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about_see/programme_presentation/index)

[http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/projects/approved\\_projects/?id=123](http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/projects/approved_projects/?id=123)

<http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html>.