



VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Exchange Visit to Vara (SE)

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General feedback report

Colofon/Project coordination

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Website of the project (this document is published on this website)
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1. Composition of the feedback team

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2. Key questions of Vara

1. How do we integrate all the ideas that the villagers have into one coherent vision, and not one project today and another one tomorrow?

Owner of the question: Both Vara municipality and the villagers

Background:

All the local development groups and villagers in Vara municipality have so many great ideas on how to develop their village. The problem is, how to they, with the help of the municipality, channel all these great ideas in to a VDP?

Several villages have written what we call a “village plan”, which is a shorter, less comprehensive, version of a VDP. Now that we ask them to form a plan for the whole village, and it’s surroundings, they have a problem with formulating the ideas into a more comprehensive plan. Coming up with ideas is easy, it’s answering questions like: “Who is going to implement the idea? Who is paying? When, where and how is the implementation taking place?” which is more difficult...

How do we, as a municipality, help the villagers to form their plans? And what should the villagers bear in mind when trying to write the VDP?

2. How do we get the villagers, local development groups, local associations and the local business life to take their responsibility in implementing the VDP’s?

Owner of the question: Vara municipality

Background:

Historically, the local development groups has written their “village plans” and then turned them over to the municipality as a “wish list”, to be implemented by the municipality. How do we get the villagers, and others, to take their responsibility in the implementation process? The municipality believes that it is now only their responsibility to implement plans, but also the people that have written the plan. A joint implementation is a good foundation for a sustainable development. So what do we do?

3. What different methods can be used to write a VDP, since all villages have different starting-points?

Owner of the question: The villagers

Background:

What different techniques are there for writing a VDP? The villages in Vara municipality are so different in size, population, history and public service, that it is hard to find one method that fits all? When are focus groups good? Open meetings? Surveys?

4. How do we get the local politicians and civil servants working with planning to change their work methods to integrate VDP’s in the planning process?

Owner of the question: The villagers

Background:

There is a concern among the villagers about the politicians and civil servants working with planning, not taking the VDP’s seriously. How to we get the people at the municipality to really consider the VDP’s in the planning process? How do we involve them, so that all the work is not in vain?

3. Feedback of the VDP-feedback team on the questions posed by Vara

A. General observations

Before answering the questions of Vara in detail, we would like to highlight a few 'red lines' in our observations. In fact, they give direction to the answers on the key-questions.

Democracy

First of all, we wish to highlight that we tremendously appreciate the effort of the municipality of Vara to engage with issues of democracy in such an explicit manner. Especially, we highly value the effort to generate a framework within which the Village Development Plans feed into the Comprehensive Plans of the municipality, in a structural way.

Engagement of entrepreneurs and villagers

Secondly, we are impressed by the capacity of local entrepreneurs to engage in village work, and, vice versa, of the villagers to enthruse local business to collaborate. The hotel in Kvånum and the sportshal in Vedum are excellent examples, appealing to an international, European audience. Especially we value the vision of local entrepreneurs that creating good living conditions have direct and positive repercussions for their ability to attract both customers and qualified personnel. The awareness of the concerned businesses has led to an increased sense of responsibility, fairly paired to awareness amongst the villagers to allow for the businesses to thrive. It seems that where businesses and local development groups join hands, there is greater possibility that the VDP's will work.

Landscape

Thirdly, we were amazed that in almost all villages some kind of industrial / entrepreneurial activity was taking place, without the landscape being molested. The dominant use of wood as a building material, as well as the red paint is probably very supportive in this. Living and working seems to blend into the landscape rather smoothly; while this is not a self evident case in our own countries.

Courageous image building on culture

And fourthly, the newly built concert hall in the urban fringe of the village of Vara, is an outstanding example of a courageous government undertaking to create added value for the area with an impact way beyond its borders. The concert hall, integrating a restaurant, a secondary school and a library, is a multifunctional building of high order, a 'Kulturhus' of another dimension.

We acknowledge the fact that Vara municipality is willing to take Village Development Planning as a learning exercise. We feel invited to generate some general observations on how to improve your efforts. So here are our suggestions.

Diversity of villages demands a diversity of approaches

We noticed that there is quite a diversity in the way villages engage in Village Development Planning. It seems that the approach Vara has adopted is not differentiated enough to deal with this diversity. The situation in Kvånum and Vedum demands a different approach than the situation in Håkantorp. Where Kvånum and Vedum seem to have a strong local development group, with direct links to Vara municipality and the local enterprises (e.g. one of the drivers of the local development group in Kvånum is a member of the community council; the group is

furthermore supported by a 'Plus' employee, a state paid worker), this is not the case in Håkantorp. See our observations under key question 3 for more details.

The village of Vara and the other villages

Secondly, we sensed a kind of 'centre-periphery' feeling within the municipality, with on the one hand, the village of Vara, and on the other the smaller villages around it: 'we have to generate all by ourselves and with business money, and they (Vara) use tax money'. Of course, time was too short to judge if this impression was correct all together, we know by experience that reality is often different. Yet, even intuitive as it may seem, it gives us a ground for an observation. While perfectly understandable from a helicopter perspective to centralize some services, like the concert hall, in Vara itself, from the point of view of the smaller villages, more directed attention seems in need for these smaller villages. Often it means the generation of small and tangible results: e.g. providing means and materials to sustain a weekly children meeting in Håkantorp. These small steps are very important to increase people's participation, pride and sense of responsibility. One of us put it like this: 'as politicians, *you have to go all the way*, both regarding the big projects, as well as regarding the small ones'.

An inspiring vision for the municipality

Thirdly, it seems as if the villages cannot 'buy-in' completely into Vara's vision for the future. The goal of growing from 16.000 to 17.000 inhabitants seems neither challenging nor inspiring enough. We would suggest to make the vision more explicit, more inclusive, and loaded with identity: 'by the year 2015, we are a vibrant municipality, proud of its resources (natural, human, cultural: i.e. is your identity), in which the qualities and resources of both the small villages and larger centres are recognized, appreciated and stimulated, embedded in a well-kept and attractive landscape, with an excellent environment for living and business'. Something like this. It seems to us that the goal of growing towards 17.000 inhabitants will logically follow from such vision. Important seems to be also that if a growth of population is desired, villages should be made shareholder of these goals, and be given the responsibility or opportunity to accommodate for a percentage of this growth. This also explains the overall vision of the municipality on its development: where do we want new inhabitants to reside? Where the industry? Social services? Where should it be quiet?

Focus on identity of the villages

Fourthly, and following from the previous one: it seems that the village development plans that are now being prepared focus too much on objects and singular issues (a bath lake, a hotel, a sports hall etc), while they are not embedded in a wider perspective on the development of village. At least we were not able to sense this wider perspective. Similar to what we observed regarding the municipal vision, a greater effort should be taken to make explicit what kind of village inhabitants would like to live in. Can you think of a symbol that represents the village? Can you make explicit the specific sense of place of a village? This identity provides a framework for the more targeted projects and actions, and binds them together. See for more details our observations under key question 1.

Capacity building and co-ownership

Fifthly, and bringing some of the previous points together, we sense a need for capacity building for both municipality and local development groups. As regards municipality, it may include issues of networking amongst different departments. At present, the VDP's are conducted by a general administrative department but apparently with not enough linkages with and through other departments. Enhanced links with other departments are not only useful for agenda setting, but also ensure

the best use of available expertise throughout the municipality, like planners, landscape architects etc. For the village it may involve leadership issues as 'how do I inspire other villagers to join hands with me', 'how do I engage successfully with the municipality', or 'how do we make the best use of the professionals that live in our village'. Lastly, it seems that the village development groups of the different villages in Vara municipality could help each other a lot in strengthening each others capacity and effectivity. As we see it, a key issue of capacity building seems to be to create *co-ownership*, among the municipality and with the villages. See for more details our observations under key questions 2, 3 and 4.

B.- Direct answers to the key questions

The following observations are derived from the computerized brainstorm session on Tuesday May 23rd, 2007

1. How do we integrate all the ideas that the villagers have into one coherent vision, and not one project today and another one tomorrow?

Make explicit the sense of place / identity of a village

Beyond generating ideas for a better future, a reflection is needed on current and future identity of each village. This identity works as an umbrella, that makes it easier to group and prioritise the different ideas, and at the same time generates the glue between them.

Various methods are available to make this identity explicit. An interesting method is simply to ask villagers to first collect and second choose a symbol that conveys their attachment to and aspirations with the village. In this way, people start to create a shared meaning of place. We feel that the description of the identity, and hence a general description of the vision of the village should be an integral part of the format the municipality provides the villages that aim to develop an VDP.

NB: point of attention: ensure that everyone understands what a vision is.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Create an Identity - Get people working together on creating a shared meaning of place
- Ensure that everyone understands what a vision is.

Sort and prioritise ideas well

Sorting out ideas and prioritising them is very important, not everyone's personal idea for the village and municipality can be met. Sort the ideas that are listed in the VDPs well, according to themes. Then: at what level should the issues be addressed? By whom? What ideas can we realize ourselves? What ideas can we influence other authorities to work on, and what ideas do we need help from the municipality with?. There will be competing visions and ideas, so you must have an agreed process for reaching agreement - e.g.: agree that vision will be by consensus of the majority rather than insisting that everybody agree: just ask - can you live with this?

You can use various methods like ranking or ask the help of an external facilitator who is neutral to assist in the prioritisation process. Make sure, that the process is clear and fair, this avoids problems. It will also help if you make clear agreements on how the results are being documented and by whom.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Make a list and discuss what ideas we shall work with. Sort the ideas to different levels. What ideas can we realize ourselves, what ideas can we influence other authorities to do, and what ideas do we need help from the municipality with. Then process with the villagers to get the vision that everybody can stand for.
- Prioritise the issues from the discussions and surveys held within the village and surrounding areas. Do this by either voting for top issues or use an external facilitator to assist the community to rate and decide what is most important.
- Decide on series of steps to reach priorities: e.g.: who prepares the drafts, how do people comment on them - who summaries these into visions?
- Decide on steps for how agreement is reached - there will be competing visions so must be process for reaching agreement - e.g.: agree that vision will be by consensus of the majority rather than insisting that everybody agree: just ask - can you live with this?
- The steering group collects all the ideas, sorts them out and involves people in prioritizing them. Then go back to the groups, who have worked with the questions, discuss the different visions and compile it to one vision

Link with the wider agenda – formulate the wider agenda also in terms of an identity rich vision

We feel that if you want the projects deriving from the VDPs to contribute to Vara's vision, one needs to look into the common sense of place/identity of the villages belonging to the whole of Vara Municipality. If the identity is not clear or not acknowledged by most villagers, the vision will not be seen as 'our vision' by the villagers and only as the 'municipalities' vision'. This leads to less participation and sense of belonging, and a higher potential of delivering wish lists. Therefore, we advise to ensure everybody knows the vision of the whole municipality agrees and feels acknowledged in this vision. It would be good if the municipality could explain to the inhabitants that no project or issue is too small to be dealt with, they will all contribute in some way to the vision of the entire municipality.

When the municipal's vision is indeed made explicit and shared, it will become a lot easier to weigh the individual VDP's against the "master" vision. It will help when the municipal vision contains easily identifiable sections to which the villagers can relate (such as education, elderly care, infrastructure, landscape, housing etc). It is even thinkable to expand the currently used template for VDP's, incorporating sections also present in the Comprehensive Plan. This will make it easier for the planners to integrate the VDPs into the Comprehensive Plan for the whole municipality.

Points of attention:

Make clear, in any case, the position and responsibilities of the local municipality (they are the starters of the process in Vara). In order to avoid false expectations, give information about expected processes, the availability of money for support and implementation, and about the topics to be covered. This provides the villagers with a framework, within which they can start to work.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- The villagers has to be aware of the vision for the whole municipality and work from there and create their own vision knowing that it is important for their village but also for the whole municipality and work down from that to very detailed plans - and no item is too small.
- The municipality must form a vision before considering the incoming lists from the villages. This vision should be divided into demands and wishes. If a demand cannot be met, it should be dropped all together. Wishes should be prioritized. This vision will of course cover the whole municipality and include issues like economy, timeframes and such considerations. Each wish should be formulated in such way that they are measurable. If not, no one will know when the goal is achieved. When visions are received from the villages, they will be weighted individually against the "master" vision in such a way that the priorities are kept in mind.
- Structure the themes to be worked out in the village following the general themes / responsibilities of the Municipality e.g.: education issues, older persons, infrastructure - may be useful to have a common template used in each village. This template could relate to the sections in the Comprehensive Plan for example.

Use graphic material (maps) to visualize the integration between different ideas and projects

We advise to use graphic materials, like maps. These enable a better understanding of the integration between different ideas and projects at the level of the entire municipality. Maybe inhabitants of Vedum will discover a similar project in Hakantorp for example, so they could start cooperating instead of feeling the only ones in the municipality dealing with this project.

Additional observations: tools for generating visions and creating options for villagers to 'buy in'

The observations below are directly copied from our computer-aided brainstorming list. (with only limited editing).

- Ensure that each village has a representative umbrella/Steering Group
- Establish a parish newsletter
- For a more comprehensive plan the LEADER-network or Municipality needs to provide direct assistance to the village groups in preparing the text and plan. For example: provide maps to the community and a service to prepare maps, provide necessary technical information, assistance in editing or copying drafts or meeting the costs of this, provide copy of draft VDP on their internet site or email services, provide assistance in organising meetings or facilitating workshops etc.. In general: provide practical assistance and support on the technical aspects of doing the plan, and let the community 'lead' on the content.
- Give more help in villages that can't arrange this by themselves; for example a cooperated project with the students/pupils of the school (interviews with inhabitants) by students (see also answer on key question 3b)
- Look/search for common challenges/problems and start first to solve a few of these.
- 1. Make clear the position and responsibilities of the local municipality (they are the starters of the process). Give information about processes which they want at start
 2. Information about the starting position (in terms of goals and money, subjects) of the local municipality, about which this is all about and about this is not all about (no false expectations);
 3. The turn is to the villagers: within this framework: what are there wishes and priorities;
 4. Name responsibilities and who does what;
 5. Group the wishes in themes and match with the goals of the local community after this process of adaptation;
 6. Costs and implementation scheme

2. How do we get the villagers, local development groups, local associations and the local business life to take their responsibility in implementing the VDP's?

Create co-ownership of ideas, projects, and vision of the future

When trying to involve all stakeholders when implementing the VDP's, it is most important to create co-ownership of ideas, projects and visions of the future. When villagers see the ideas, projects and vision of the future as 'ours' instead of 'theirs' they are willing to cooperate and to help implement or lead the VDP's. In this process it is important to ensure that there is ample room for discussion, everyone should feel that their opinion is heard and dealt with properly. *The adagium is: keep in mind that no idea is too small!*

It helps to involve parties from the beginning or at early stage of agreeing actions. In this way, the community, business and authorities can comment on what action they could undertake or what actions they could provide resources for.

Besides co-ownership, co-funding is also a way to achieve high participation when implementing the VDP's. Even inhabitants that do not support with money can be included in co-funding by putting in hours, for example.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- If the VDP is really based on own ideas and wishes (of all these people) it should be 'easier', and also nicer, for them to take their own responsibility.
- Inviting the mentioned parties to form an opinion at an early stage. Ensure that all parties are confident they can forward own opinion. Make room for all groups to debate the issues with each other across group boundaries. Give timely and regular feed-back to the groups.
- Have them involved in developing the plan
- Organise co-funding with all partners contributing something
- Invite all stakeholders onto the Umbrella/Steering Group
- Ensure geographic representation.
- Priorities are dependant of the willingness of people and business associations
- The villagers have to prioritise the ideas and the wishes, and have responsibilities assigned. In order to have a maximum number of people feeling a sense of responsibility, the VDP should not only provide 'a general way forward', but have a level of detail that allows people to recognize themselves.– no issue is too small to get in there. Remember to have resources and opportunities in it. It has to be a whole picture of the village. An example can be the playground in Håkantorp - who is responsible, who is looking after it on a daily basis - where comes the money from.

Support with facilities:

It is also very important that the process is supported with facilities of different kinds. For example, the LDG's could be supported with (technical) expertise, how to implement a certain project, or how to write the VDP for example. But the support should not only entail more practical matters, good communication is a 'must' in ensuring responsibility when implementing. At all times the followed process should be (made) clear and everyone should know what to do and how their action will contribute to the VDP and the municipality as a whole.

The municipality should show that both villagers, municipal and political representatives are involved in the process, you are doing it together! Do not forget that is a nice thing to make life in the villages better, keep a positive attitude towards the VDP's and the process to establish one.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Have punctual meetings
- Have social outing/Ensure that the experience is enjoyable for all
- Ensure that municipal and political representatives are involved in the process
- Try to ensure that their concerns are addressed in the process
- Identify priorities and put in place budget, project teams, resource to deliver some in the short term so that you have a positive result to encourage those involved.

- Local groups must be clear what they are considered responsible for and why.
- Provide technical support to agreed project e.g.: can the local authority provide an engineer to advise in short term to get something going then step back and let community proceed.
- Hotel project is a good example in Kvanum of joint responsibility and funding - local authority responded in positive way to private and community proposals.
- Provide process money
- Communication, show the will of the local government;
- Information (evaluations in between also about small results) in local newspapers and so on, open evening

Create tangible requests for participation of businesses

If you wish to include the local business in the VDP process, you have to create a tangible request for participation. No vague thing such as: 'can you support us making the plan?' Instead: 'please finance the meetings (coffee, tea) of the village' or 'Can your company support with this sum of money?' or "can your group provide the paint for the community centre we want to paint?'

Make also as clear as possible how the local business will profit from joining the VDP process and the implementation of the VDP. This will make businesses less reluctant to participate.

Translating the VDP into a clear cost and implementation scheme also helps local businesses to identify options they would want to contribute to.

3. What different methods can be used to write a VDP, since all villages have different starting-points?

Having seen the situation in Vedum, Kvånum, Håkantorp and Arantorp, we felt that we should split this question into an advise for strong groups and an advise for somewhat weaker groups, If you are asking for specific methods, different ones could be used for different groups. So here are our answers, firstly with regards to strong Local development groups and secondly with regards to weaker LDGs.

For strong local groups:

Maintain focus, review inclusiveness of the approach and update content

Although some Local Development Groups are already viewed as strong groups, they can still learn from each other, and improve their skills. Being a strong group does not mean the villagers do not need any help, assistance or compliments during or after the VDP process.

It would be good to check whether the strong group really represents all issues in the community and that the group is open to all ideas coming from the municipality and new members. That is meant with *inclusiveness*. If this is not the case: work on it! Moreover, it could be a good idea to encourage the development of sub-groups to take on specific sections of the plan or particular issues, to gain depth and *focus* per theme. These subgroups need to get responsibilities and encouragement to share their findings with other subgroups. This will lead to a larger involvement and sense of responsibility among the group members and will increase the success of the VDP and the projects.

Thirdly, a VDP in fact is never ended. Its *content* should be *reviewed* periodically, to see whether the action points are covered appropriately, or that new items have emerged. Both municipality and local groups should be aware of that.

See below also for some process ideas on how to ensure inclusiveness while conducting meetings.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Ensure that they retain a strong focus
- Provide a framework which outlines the main stages of the process
- Encourage development of sub-groups to take on specific sections of the plan or particular issues
- Ensure that sub-groups are given responsibilities
- Help ensure that the local group shares its knowledge with other groups
- The group may have succeeded in particular areas but check to ensure it is representative of all issues in the community and that it has a system for seeking new members and ideas for the plan,
- In Kvånum they are in the end of the process and they maybe only need some help to get the plan in a form where it will be comparable with the others. But the Kvånum group should end it with a big village meeting where the plan can be presented and agreed by the villagers in order to ensure that the plan is accepted by the whole village, so that everybody can work with it.

- ***Some ideas for conducting meetings increasing inclusiveness***
Invite the entire village to an open meeting and brainstorm in small groups about the VDP. Additionally you may ask for written statements (anonymous) - post-it tags could be used. In this way everyone get a good and fair chance to comment. Conclusions should be distributed in written form to all people who were not able to join the meeting, so that the common idea is shared and approved of by most inhabitants.
One of us suggests to use the future workshops method as a general approach towards village development planning:
 - Start with a pep talk, that means that everyone generates ideas,
 - make priority and working groups, that are dedicated to doing some work with the different jobs in the working groups and
 - get together in a certain amount of time (1-3 months)
 - make a resource mapping of the local area in the same period
 - have people outside the village to facilitate the process

Make sure that the experience of the strong groups inspire others – (including municipality)!

We would also like to suggest to the municipality to document the strong group's success thoroughly and promote it among other areas and groups to serve as input in future VDPs (either inside or outside Vara Municipality).

Therefore it would be good to promote them as a best practice example for other local groups. This acknowledges and rewards their effort and achievements. So, ask the strong LDG's to advise other groups. Try to develop a kind of peer-review among the local groups, giving mutual feedback. Ask e.g. the Kvånum group to talk with the people of Håkantorp. At the same time, make clear at all times what the LDG can expect from the municipality and what the municipality in its turn expects from the LDG.

Lastly, strong local development groups can lead to strong and challenging plans; mostly there is more energy and more private plans, interests and wishes behind it. A strong local group hence demands a strong government as a partner. Be an equal partner! That may imply that also the municipality needs to review its development plans and vision, and make it more robust. Sometimes a stronger formalisation of the process (structure and frame) will be necessary, especially when opposite interests emerge.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- 1. Although it's a 'strong' LDG they still need attention and compliments
- 2. Use them (in a positive way) as an example for the other groups.
- 3. Ask for their help/consulting/advise how to work in other villages
- 4. Be clear about what they could expect from the municipality
- Document its success and promote it among other areas and investigate what factors contributed to making it a strong group and include this history as part of the plan.

For weaker groups

First research the reason for the weakness of a LDG: should you either kick ass – or hold hands?

Some investigation is needed to assess the reason for weak local development. This assessment is used to select the most yielding approach. What exactly is the problem why the group is weak? Maybe there is a misunderstanding about the tasks and responsibilities of being a LDG? Maybe there is a problem within the group? Is it a leadership issue? This needs to be sorted out in order to find a possible solution in making the LDG perform better and the VDP implemented in the villages. Both partners have to be clear about their expectations and their responsibilities. A special effort needs to be made to explain the goals and especially the rewards of establishing a VDP.

Once the issues are known, both municipality and local groups should look into the way action should be taken. Should the municipality 'kick ass' (*come on guys, get your self together and don't complain*)? Or should it 'hold hands'? It may be the case that the group needs an outside stimulus to work with, someone who is new, un-prejudiced and neutral that can help the group get started and into the right direction. Maybe some villagers from other local groups that are successful. Or a co-operated projects with students, to conduct a survey in the village.

In any case, try - as a municipality - to remain constructive and positive at all times. Local tensions may exist, but should be dealt with with care. Volunteers always do their utmost best, even when unsuccessful, dropping out of the most enthusiastic people should be avoided.

Lastly, whatever external involvement is taking place to support local groups, personal engagement is a prerequisite.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- In these cases one has to kick ass - or hold hands
- Some investigation is needed to assess the reason for weak local development. This assessment is used to select the most yielding approach. Make special effort to explain the goals and rewards of forming a VDP. The rest of the process should follow the same paths as for stronger local groups.
- Ask why the group is weak - is it lack of experience, confidence, leadership, time, trust among members of the community members - and respond to this. Group may need an outside stimulus to start work
- Much attention for the approach of the groups, beware of local tensions (which are probably there). Chance of drop out!!
- Approach some key figures and ask them about the strategy of approach the local society. In one case you can conduct an inquiry, brought around by the local group personally and collected personally by the small group. Every situation asks for its own approach. Key question for weak areas: what experience the people as there real problem, show they everything?
- 100 % openness about information, wishes, role of the local government,
- Be vulnerable to get vulnerability, talk on the same level.
- Personal approach, not external involvement
- Provide assistance to villages that cannot analyse their issues / problems by themselves: for example a cooperated project with the students/pupils of the school (interviews with inhabitants by students).

Then develop action

Once the reason for weakness is known, the focus should be on developing the group, not the plan. First the group issues should be dealt with, otherwise a (good, workable) VDP will never be compiled. Once the group issues are sorted out, some basic actions need to be taken as a kick off. Groups that need a little more stimulation from the municipality could benefit from the provision of facilitation services from external sources to help prepare reports, give advise on structures and advise on sample projects. Map skills in the village, build capacities by targeted training.

It is very important to generate a general pride in the village, one could organise a local family or historic day for example, this helps people getting to know each other, create a sense of belonging and enthusiasm. Moreover, during this day, possible future projects could be looked into that help development of the identity of the village. By doing this inventory during a local day, everybody can agree on the project and villagers get a larger sense of responsibility to participate in future projects.

During the VDP preparation process it would be good to fund some small projects, to demonstrate what results can be achieved from VDPs and other local projects. Make sure that a large part of the villages benefit from these small projects, so that they are enthusiast to bring the VDP a step further together. Moreover, everyone should be aware that no project is too small, sometimes small projects generate large results, also the other way around, be positive about small positive results, every step forward is a step forward, remain happy and stimulating, do not give up!

Groups that experience some start up problems often feel that they need someone to listen to their problems, you could organise a village walk, inviting both villagers as politicians as civil servants and talk with each other, get to know each other and the village. Construct a cooperative feeling. Look/search for common challenges/problems and start first to solve a few of these. Give the group a little more time in preparing the plan and provide some practical assistance as well. Ensure that the timeframe is adequate and adhered to if necessary. Help develop leadership and support such persons.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- If the group is considered weak then the focus should be on developing the group not the plan. If using the plan as a tool to develop the group then additional assistance is required: Provide facilitation services, external resources to prepare reports, advice on structures, and advice on sample projects. Generate pride in the place - a local family day a local history day celebration of some sort (e.g. older people and school children documenting the local village history at school)- let people get to know each other.
- Create a sense of 'possibility'. Tips:
 - Fund small projects during the time period that plan is being prepared to demonstrate that results can be achieved eg: project that all can see
 - More stimulation and starting with concrete results in the beginning.
 - More compliments.
 - To give help (of someone outside the municipality) by working out the VDP (the 'paperplan').
 - Help/advise/talking with other local groups from the other villages.
 - Suggestions of people of your own village.
 - 'Village Walks' with people from the village, together with 'decision makers'
- The village with the weaker development group needs the resource mapping and the future workshops (fremtids-verkstad) like described in the other question (3a) but maybe with more support from the facilitators (neutral) outside the village
- Carry out capacity building exercises in the community. Provide external mentoring for the process. Conduct a pre-development audit of skills in the community. Provide extra encouragement and support from Municipality. Help focus on some key projects such as creating a sense of identity. Have support for provision of popular project/cause. Ensure that the framework is well explained and modified as needed. Ensure that the timeframe is adequate and adhered to. Help develop leadership and support such persons. Ensure adequate financial supports
- Hold a meeting in the village where staff of municipality attend to hear all the issues - include range of workers engineers, teachers, elected councillors etc. This should be like an extended village walk where group is weak they need someone to listen to problems first of all. Give group more time to prepare the plan and practical assistance to do it i.e.: fund someone else to undertake a local survey and present results.
- Use the same methods as you do with strong LDG but add more support and help from other LDG, the municipality and others. Have patient and not giving up. Be happy for small positive results. Encourage each other.
- The same method for all but in the weaker or smaller villages you have to start with a mobilisation of the local power and give some more starting help - but from professionals outside the municipality. But the way it should be the same - it is just a little longer in villages where people are not so active yet. You have to have a formalised process in order to use it in an ongoing process with making VDP's and reviewing VDP's

4. How do we get the local politicians and civil servants working with planning to change their work methods to integrate VDP's in the planning process?

Involve them

First of all, involve them. Higher involvement generates higher understanding and therefore higher appreciation. Communication needs to be improved and started early in the process. A LDG could invite civil servants and local politicians who feel/are responsible for that village to attend the village walks and ask for their input. Ask them to comment on the draft of the VDP. Try to let them participate in the steering group. Ensure that everybody has a shared understanding of the process.

Next to these more practical tips, it would be a great effort if you could convince the municipality board to announce that VDP must be considered in preparing formal plans as they are building stones in the execution plans. Maybe this could be formalised in local law.

What should remain clear at all times is the shared responsibility, it is a joined process, not something only the municipality executes or is only done by the villagers. Plans are means not goals.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- 1. Communicate with each other in an early stadium by: -Village Walks-each village has their own politician who is/feel responsible- the same for civil servants- a 'concept-VDP' that is the subject for a meeting together with all the people in the village/politician/civil servant who is responsible 2. Feedback to each other about: - the situation- things which are changing.
- 2) be aware of when they are making a review of the comprehensive plan and the deep comprehensive plan
- Ensure that they have a shared understanding of the process
- Involve planning department and officials and local politicians in the process - attending village meetings or invite them to comment on draft VDPs, or take part on the Steering Group. Convince the management of the organisation that its important and prepare policy on it so that VDPs must be considered in preparing formal plans
- The board of the municipality should make the promise / pronouncement that the VDP are serious building-stones in their execution plans. Maybe formalize this by local law. This can be done at the beginning of the reigning period or every year. You could formalize this.
- Stimulate, as the municipal Executive Board, co-creative civil servants in stead of civil servants that only 'test' and 'control' what inhabitants do. Plans are means not goals.
- Make sure that the making and reviewing of VDP's is worked into the process of planning in general and that the local politicians also are a part in the process. They have to be acquainted with the plans and they have to make it clear to the villages that the VDP not necessarily is fulfilled by the municipality. But it is allowed for the villages to think big thoughts and make big plans. The VDP must have some long term visions.
- It is necessary that the VDP's are reviewed perhaps every second or third year. The village walks could be changed so that it could be a visit in the villages with the purpose to review the plan and make new agreements and solutions.

Seduce them:

Besides the importance of involvement, the villages should not forget to 'seduce' the municipality a bit more, make yourself important as a village, by inviting well known persons to speak for you. Explain why it is necessary that it would be of great help if the municipality would invest in creating a VDP, why the policy of the municipality would be helped by it, what solution of the politicians would be helped by it. Guard a positive attitude, when organising a village meeting and inviting local politicians and civil servants, try to avoid complaining and ensure everybody understands that this particular village meeting is not meant to raise individual complaints. The meeting should not be too formal and needs to be well structured. Also think about timing, organise the village meeting just before the planners or politicians are going to adjust

the comprehensive plans. This increases the chance that the VDP is actually integrated in the comprehensive plan. If you would wait too long or do it too early, the VDP can either not be integrated anymore, or the planners and politicians have forgotten about it.

The process of establishing a VDP and the plan itself needs to be convincing and attractive, ensure that the VDPs are written with good language and structure and include maps, pictures and graphs for visual explanation.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Make serious work and invite the planners and the politicians to the village for a "working" day
- Don't give up! Involve "important" people for political pressure!
- Have them visit other areas where such projects have been successful (in SE and abroad!). Carry out audit of skills. Develop clear responsibilities. Develop Programme Group for projects where politicians / civil servants are members along with chairpersons of the local development groups. Ensure that they attend local umbrella/steering group meetings. Create a shared understanding of the type of place they would like to be associated with. Establish good communication structures
- Ensure VPDs are clear well structured documents which officials can actually relate to and understand
- As part of preparing plan have public information workshops in the village where officials and elected members attend and present what their role is, their plans budgets etc.. Make this a positive meeting not place to raise individual complaints so that it is not a threat to the politicians or the staff. Important to have this well structured and not too formal.
- Cultural problem: shift the attention from procedures to questions of what you want with your community in the future / content
- Maybe reorganization. Make problem or region oriented clusters in stead of expertise oriented departments
- "Working-day" with local groups and members of the council. On programme - presentation of the VDP and a discussion with two views: one from the local view and one from the whole municipality.
- It is important to have good timing to get the VPD in the political process.

Create pressure (press, actions etc)

Besides inviting well known persons to speak for the village, the pressure can also be increased (in a positive way) by involving the (local) press, make sure that every time something of interest happens in your village, the press knows about it, make press announcements, send news to websites, invite the television etc. It generates a very positive image of your village when your village is widely known, within Vara municipality, but even outside municipality borders. Next to press actions, pressure can also be executed by demonstrating benefits to local people, politicians and civil servants prepare presentations or Q&A sessions. Ensure everybody has heard of your village and even better, try to ensure everybody has a positive image of your village. See e.g. the success of the Dutch Better Baentel project.

Ideas generated at brainstorm:

- Promote the positive benefits and value of local ideas and contributions - use local press, make regular presentations to elected councillors, demonstrate benefits,
- It is very important for the development of the villages that you use all the medias to get the villages and their efforts known to a wider public. Newspapers - radio-tv- internet every media.
- It is our general impression this is not a problem or issue in the case of Vara municipality. VDP are under the guidelines of the politicians. Civil servant will follow these guidelines. Politicians in turn are voted by the people in the municipality. Thus, all citizens must have an interest in village development. There may be cases of conflict, and if such is the case, we refer to the visions mentioned in question 1. "The Red Thread". There may to suggestions for a local development that would be in conflict with overlaying laws and in such cases the consequences must be carefully explained.
- Assumption: there is a participative story / plan about which there is little op-position, the story is clear, concrete and so on. There are project or projects can easily be derived.