

What ecommunity is about

The development of modern society is often considered to be in opposition to the environmental health and well being of natural ecosystems. Due to growing complexity of society and its spatial representation in utilisation of rural and especially urban space, the understanding of the whole system has become increasingly difficult. The understanding of environment has undergone changes in accordance to the development of environmental management methodology and practices as well as in land use and development planning. Both in spatial planning of rural communities but even more in urban settlements the importance of combined and comprehensive analysis of environmental as well as social and cultural aspect are of great importance. This has lead to the argument whether the term environment would have to be understood in narrow understanding as a physical phenomenon or does it have wider understanding including both social and cultural aspects. Regardless of the actual outcome of the debate the issue shows clearly the practical need to more comprehensive approach of environmental management practice. Therefore, the practices and tools which not only describe, but also provide

- Interdisciplinarity to understanding of environment and its processes
- Link to the practical applications in society (eg. Spatial planning, environmental management)
- Better understanding and involvement of general public to provide favourable conditions to the decisionmaking and application of more sustainable ways in development of society

E-community serves as a link between adequate environmental info and decisionmaking. The uniqueness and innovation of E-community is in well ordered environmental information in online-ready GIS system as well as in well ordered spatial planning public process management module. The crucial benefit of the system lies in the fact that environmental info and development ideas are in the same spatial frame to be weighed and analysed in various steps of public planning process and decision-making. Through the participatory spatial planning process the citizens start to adhere the principles of environmental management and how different decisions affect their lives in direct ways.

Environmental challenges in and around Narva are made more visible and can be highlighted in a decision-making process. The eCommunity tool makes information on environment and urban development available not only to the citizens of Narva but also to interested organizations and persons internationally. This can promote the interest on issues of local development and environmental management to increase investments or to attract tourism in Narva. If the experience with the tool is positive, the same tool could also be used in urban decision-making and environmental management in other cities across Europe.

Sustainable development is an underlying principle for the project, as it brings together environmental issues with social and economic aspects, as well as institutional aspects. In order to sustain the viability of eco-systems, development must not degrade or deplete them to such an extent that they are unable to function effectively. If we are concerned about sustainable development, the attention needs to be focused on the role and contribution of cities.

The eCommunity system is designed to create the following impacts on environmental sustainability: It will enhance the reduction of transactions carried out over distances (it is possible to communicate via internet, in the near future documents about city development can be obtained via internet too) which can lead to traffic reduction, reduction of storage

space in archives and less fragmentation of the documents. Environmental data can be surveyed and stored in one place, which facilitates a quantitative analysis tremendously. The role for eCommunity in that context is: to improve communication and information exchange between Municipality and the citizens. Information sharing and knowledge sharing enables a better management of scarce resources.

When the idea to make an e-Community system was formulated, following problems were considered to be relevant:

- 1) Common document administration system (Amfora) of Narva Municipality was not functioning and therefore there was a big lack of information between the municipality departments and too much information was delivered only on the paper
- 2) The vertical communication caused no efficient delivering via heads of the departments for other employees
- 3) Delivering information about Narva for tourists and investors was difficult.
- 4) There was a serious lack of attractive visual information about city planning
- 5) The communication between the Narva municipality and inhabitants was quite weak
- 6) The development priorities of the Narva city were not well formulated and prioritized, there was lack of knowledge for the project development

The system contains different maps, like base 2D and 3D maps are simple maps of Narva and GIS maps. The maps can be seen as a guidebook of Narva that gives a user a complete overview of hotels, restaurants, hospital, cinemas etc; or for more practical meaning, for example the air pollution maps, electricity lines etc. Innovative 3D maps of Narva allow system users to walk through the city and see the present town and planned buildings in their actual size. The maps are being constantly uploaded as the situation in town changes

All in all it can be said that the eCommunity project's goal is to promote sustainable and democratic urban planning by using opportunities offered by modern information technologies and the Internet. The project will apply innovative web-based software solutions to make available information on the town spatial planning and development to the town citizens as well as to interested organizations and persons internationally in order to promote involvement of public into making decisions on the issues of local development and to increase investments into the economy of the Narva municipality. It is hoped that the project will demonstrate use of the system as a tool for urban planning and environmental management.