

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING APPROACHES



WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Public involvement has received greater significance recently, since people are better informed and more aware of their situation and about their environment which brings forth their interest to participate in decision making and planning. This contains a certain potential for conflicts, as for example the traditional ways of thinking and acting of the planning authority, which are set on to have their planning practice untouched by 'non-experts'. On the other hand, the public's opinion and their views on certain issues contains also a potential for positive inputs on urban development options which might be useful in the planning and decision making process.

Therefore, people's participation being restricted to their legal frame should be reconsidered and thought over to tap their full potential and avoid conflicts after all. It is important to add, that there are some valuable examples of sustainable planning, especially on neighbourhood scale or district scale, which showed successfully how to co-operate between the stakeholders (see case examples below).

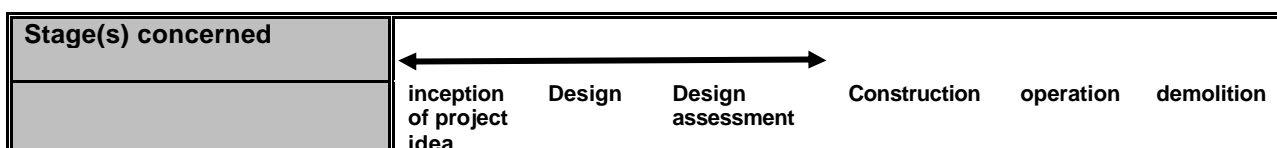
- Setting a structure and distribute roles and tasks to learn and benefit from each other: An interactive process is supposed to lead to a maturing and learning process for all involved. The learning organisation is an attractive concept because many realise that learning from each other can lead to more quality and hence a better process. It is important to give every actor enough 'space' in the process.

There are also initiatives on the European level, such as the SEA-Directive which follows the idea to include various stake holder groups, including the public, at the very beginning when plans for new programmes or plans a re set up. That would mean to include all the responsible persons from the municipality and from other organisations and interest groups to develop a appropriate SEA-procedure that would allow to evaluate the various plans and programmes in the urban context.

TIME AND SPACE SCALES' CHARACTERISTICS?

The above context lines out that the spatial frame varies in different selected projects due to slightly different spatial functions and physical interactions and interpersonal relationships taking place. Therefore a direct transferability of good practice wont apply possibly, whereas such examples might be very suitable to use them as “handbook” for creating a local specialty. A notion towards spatial or functional units might be a solution for the above described limitations and circumstances.

The time scales in this respect play a vital role, as decision making in almost all cases seems to face time constraints. Hence, such limitations are passed on to the stakeholders and might result in less co-operation overall.



| Scale investigated | Component | Building | Neighbourhood | City | Region |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|----------|--------|
| | X | x | x | X | |

CONFLICTING AREAS?

Providing or establishing a proper basis for communication between stakeholders is needed to achieve joint agreements between interests. Participatory processes may be supported by methodological approaches. Successful applications of such knowledge about supportive methods and tools has been identified from case studies.

A change of well-rehearsed procedures is often one of the major reasons why there is a hesitant attitude for new approaches in planning and decision making, or the will to try new forms of participation. Two issues need to be mentioned in this context: First, tools in use need not necessarily be replaced by new ones, rather their potential being updated should be considered. Second, any decision making procedure should be reconsidered if it is appropriately set in relation to its “working environment” or if it should be amended according with the new situation.

CASE STUDIE(S) LINKED TO THIS ISSUE?

There are several case studies which address such situations – a few are listed here:

- Application of integrated environmental guidelines for neighbourhood development in Nijmegen (The Netherlands),
- Llandarcy Urban Village (UK),
- Lyon Confluence major urban development (France),
- Pedestrian Master Plan for the city of Liège (Belgium),
- The Royal Theatre "La Monnaie" (Belgium),
- Regeneration Project for a Historical Quarter in the town centre (Bulgaria), Open Space Planning(Austria),
- Urban Green space differentiated Management (France).

WHAT COULD BE ENHANCED TO IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY?

- objectives and the contents of planned activities need to be defined by all stakeholder groups
- make sure that the local people are involved as valuable contributors
- practical applications as incentives - the transition from plan to implementation is important to keep the interest for a planned project

- define a number of measures that can be implemented at once and lead towards the wanted results

How can these "solutions"/improvement be developed?

It seems important to define sustainability to everybody's consent, including the public and their major concerns about sustainable development. In order to keep initiatives alive and also because people's understanding for a subject increases if they can follow practical applications where they might be included in form of project collaborators.

An exemplified concept of sustainability on district level has been based on such issues as liveability (people), environment (planet) and economy (profit). Not only quantifiable criteria but also qualitative measures need to be considered for determining the sustainability performance of a certain area. It could bring an advantage for a greater participation of local actors, hence a more efficient decision-making process and a greater commitment by all stakeholders to participate and to implement proposed measures/actions.