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**Public Participation in
Local Agenda 21:
A Review of Traditional and
Innovative Tools**

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL AGENDA 21: A REVIEW OF TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE TOOLS

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I BACKGROUND

Awareness and support for sustainable development have seen a rapid increase over recent years. There are many definitions of sustainable development, some of which are listed in Table 1. The definitions presented below were selected to illustrate the diversity of meanings. For example, the Pezzey definition is focused on the economy, in contrast to Hart's definition which focuses on quality of life. Furthermore, they represent the range of definitions in terms of 'weak' and 'strong' sustainability.

| Source | Definition |
|----------------------|---|
| G. Brundtland (1986) | To provide for the needs of the present generation without compromising the abilities of future generations to meet their needs |
| J. Coomer (1979) | [The] sustainable society is one that lives within the self-perpetuating limits of its environment. That society...is not a 'no-growth' society...It is, rather, a society that recognises the limits of growth...[and] looks for alternative ways of growing |
| J. Pezzey (1989) | Our standard definition of sustainable development will be non-declining per capita utility- because of its self-evident appeal as a criterion for intergenerational equity |
| D. Pearce (1987) | The sustainability criterion requires that the condition necessary for equal access to the resource base be met for each generation |
| M. Hart (2000) | Sustainability is related to the quality of life in a community -- whether the economic, social and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, present and future |
| R. Allen (1980) | Sustainable development- development that is likely to achieve lasting satisfaction of human needs and improvement of the quality of human life |

Table 1: Some definitions of Sustainable Development

Although there are many definitions, the general principles underlying the concept are generally agreed upon. These can be summarised as follows:

- *Equity*; both intergenerational (i.e. allowing equal opportunities for future generations) and intragenerational (i.e. reducing the gap between rich and poor of current generations)
- *Long-term planning*; planning is frequently carried out to coincide with short-term political agendas. Sustainable development implies taking into consideration the long-term impacts of current policies

- *Integration* of the environment, economy and society. Traditionally these are viewed as separate entities, however the links and feed-backs of these components with one another is fundamental to sustainability

While it is a commonly adopted objective, there is no simple way of creating a sustainable society. A world summit was organised in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to discuss how sustainable development may be achieved on a global basis. The Summit dramatically increased awareness surrounding the concept of sustainable development, and an important product was a document entitled “*Agenda 21: A Blueprint for Sustainable Development*”. This 300 page document describes a global action plan for sustainable development.

It places particular emphasis on the importance of action at the local level. Chapter 28 of the document, “*Local authorities’ initiatives in support of Agenda 21*”, states that

“because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling objectives(...)Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organisations and private enterprises and adopt a “local agenda 21”. Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic, community, business and industrial organisations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies”

Local Agenda 21 describes an action plan created by a community striving towards sustainable development. Ideally, it is established by communication and collaboration between all sectors of society, including minority groups, who develop consensus on a common vision for the future of their community, and decide upon the most effective and appropriate means of realising this vision.

In many local communities primary importance is given by decision-makers to economic growth, which often results in detrimental effects to the environment. This is illustrated by the fact that GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is the most commonly used indicator of the state of development of a country. Development based mainly on GDP is likely to be unsustainable, in other words it cannot continue indefinitely because the environment, upon which economic activities are ultimately dependent, is not able to support such pressures in the long-term. In addition, economic growth may increase social exclusion. This is because environmental and social costs are externalised in GDP, and therefore if it is used as a measure of progress, social and environmental degradation will not be accounted for and may therefore occur at the expense of economic progress.

There are many degrees at which public participation and communication can take place, which are discussed in more detail in Section II/2, and various methods of interaction between stakeholders. Local authorities therefore have many choices to make in deciding upon how to enhance public participation in their community. At present, there is no single 'best practice' nor is any single method likely to be successful in all communities.

There is a considerable amount of guidance on techniques to encourage public participation, for example by the Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation. Furthermore, case studies on communities which have used these techniques are also widely available, such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI, 2000). What does not appear to be readily available however is a concise discussion of a range of tools together with an analysis of their relative strengths and weaknesses. Such a discussion would help communities learn from each others experience.

II AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to systematically examine a number of techniques used to encourage community participation, based as far as possible on practical experience derived from case studies, and draw some general conclusions regarding commonly encountered barriers to public participation.

The paper is divided into five main sections. Part III is a general introduction to the importance of community participation in the context of Local Agenda 21. Parts IV and V are in-depth analyses of various traditional and innovative participation tools respectively. The former refers to tools which have been used on a relatively frequent basis, the latter to relatively new tools. Part VI draws some general conclusions from the study.

III COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL AGENDA 21

III/1 The importance of public participation in policy-making

It is useful to begin with a brief explanation of the meaning of ‘public participation’: the underlying idea is to involve citizens in making decisions which will ultimately affect their lives. There is an array of terminology commonly used to describe this concept, and the expression used in each case is largely dependent on the degree of participation between the community (or ‘stakeholders’) and the decision-makers. In this paper the expressions ‘public participation’ and ‘community participation’ are used in a general manner to encompass the full range of levels. The term ‘stakeholder’ represents the wider community, including citizens, the private sector, interest groups, minority groups and any other groups who have a ‘stake’ in the community. This term will be used interchangeably with ‘community’, ‘citizens’ and ‘public’. A community can be thought of in terms of a limited geographical area in which people live, work and/ or visit.

Community participation in decision-making and planning is not a new concept. In fact it has long been used in some communities as a way for governments to avoid public outcry over their decisions. Without such

communication “*the way the public frame an issue and the way decision makers attempt to manage the situation lead to fiasco*” (Kasemir *et al.*, 2000). There are many examples to support this point of view; Kasemir chose the Brent Spar oil platform case and the discussions surrounding the issues of biotechnology. Without going into detail, it is sufficient here to say that in neither case did decision-makers assess public opinion, and both cases lead to intense public opposition. Two general lessons may be drawn from these experiences (Kasemir *et al.*, 2000):

1. Public opinion is not influenced by the provision of information alone
2. Policy decisions must take into consideration issues which may be important to the public, it is not enough to base them purely on ‘objective’ scientific research

The public generally include a much broader range of factors in their assessment of issues compared to the more ‘scientific’ and ‘logical’ mode of thinking of policy-makers and scientists. Therefore, views must be balanced between the two, often highly divergent, opinions and perceptions of policy-makers and stakeholders.

Public participation is not only important to gain public support in decision-making. It is also a democratic question: citizens have the right and responsibility to influence decisions that will affect their quality of life. Furthermore, stakeholders have local knowledge and ideas which are vital for decision-makers to arrive at the best policy decisions. In other words public participation can be thought of as a ‘mutual learning’ process between stakeholders and decision-makers.

Although the concept of public participation in terms of environmental issues is not new, it was officially recognised during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio do Janeiro, 1992. Since

then its importance and extent of implementation have increased significantly.

II/2 Levels of public participation

The interaction between stakeholders and policy-makers can occur at many 'levels'. A level of participation refers to the degree of interaction between decision-makers and groups of society. This can range from provision of information to 'community empowerment'. The most appropriate level of participation depends on many factors, such as the history and culture of the community in question and the aim of the communication.

Figure 1 below illustrates some of the levels of public participation.

| Control | Participant's action | Examples |
|-------------|-------------------------|--|
| <i>High</i> | Has control | Organisation asks community to identify the problem and make all key decisions on goals and means. Willing to help community at each step to accomplish goals. |
| | Has delegated authority | Organisation identifies and presents a problem to the community. Defines limits and asks community to make a series of decisions which can be embodied in a plan which it will accept. |
| | Plans jointly | Organisation presents tentative plan subject to change and open to change from those affected. Expects to change plan at least slightly and perhaps more subsequently. |
| | Is consulted | Organisation tries to promote a plan. Seeks to develop support to facilitate acceptance or give sanction to plan so that administrative compliance can be expected. |
| | Receives information | Organisation makes plan and announces it. Community is convened for informational purposes. Compliance is expected. |
| <i>Low</i> | None | Community told nothing |

Fig. 1: A ladder of community participation: degree of participation, participant's action and illustrative modes for achieving it (WHO, 1999)

The above ladder is a useful way of summarising various degrees of public participation. However in a general context, it should be remembered that since a greater level of interaction within a community (i.e. a 'higher' point on the ladder) is not always best for a given community, the ladder should not necessarily be viewed as a ranking system.

II/3 The Importance of Public Participation in Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 takes place at a relatively low level of decision-making, and therefore provides a useful opportunity for interaction. In this context it can be said that in general, the greater the level of interaction between stakeholders the better. Communities can benefit from exchanges of local and scientific knowledge, as well as from the fact that the community will be more likely to actively encourage sustainable development and make the necessary changes to their lifestyles if they are part of the decision-making process.

The importance of public participation in general policy-making has already been discussed. This section briefly describes the benefits of involving the wider community in Local Agenda 21.

It was concluded in the Third European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns (Hannover 2000) that there is a necessity for increased public participation at the local level because “*decentralisation and local decision-making is indispensable for a more efficient implementation of local sustainability and for ensuring long-lasting effects*”.

On a more practical level, there are two basic, inter-linked, reasons for which community leaders may initiate a public participation process in the context of Local Agenda 21:

1. *To create, implement and follow-up a community action plan.* This includes reaching consensus between stakeholders on a community vision, deciding upon the most effective means of achieving this vision (i.e. how this vision should be reached and who should take action) and making and changing policies in line with the realisation of this vision.
2. *To select and make use of a set of local sustainability indicators.* An indicator is something which “*translates data and statistics into succinct*

information that can be readily understood and used by several groups of people including scientists, administrators, politicians and citizens with a wide range of interests” (OECD). It is more than simply a number or statistic as it gives an indication of how a particular issue is changing over time. The concept of indicators is not new: the traditional economic indicator of GDP has been used for a long time to represent the ‘economic development’ of a country. More recently the benefits of sustainability indicators (i.e. indicators which measure progress towards sustainable development) have been recognised. Indicators are important for a community to highlight where the problems are, and for decision-makers to be able to target policies towards sustainable development, and/ or towards the community common vision.

Although some general guidelines and indicators which are relevant to all communities exist, the indicators chosen for a particular community should reflect issues that residents consider to be important. In order to know what these issues are a public participation process is necessary.

In summary, community participation is important in the context of sustainable development to create a community vision, to measure progress towards this vision and more generally to provide citizens with a sense of ownership of their community and to help policy-makers benefit from local knowledge and experience to make better decisions. Participation is important in all stages of the process, right from the start and continuing indefinitely throughout the implementation, follow-up and evaluation. The tools discussed in Parts III and IV are a selection of some that may be used for this purpose.

IV TRADITIONAL TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Tools for community participation may be categorised in a number of ways. In this paper, techniques have been separated into innovative and traditional techniques as this allows those techniques which are more 'experimental' to be distinguished from those which are better established and tested.

There is no precise distinction between traditional and innovative techniques. In general, the former (discussed in this section) refers to those which have been used on a relatively frequent basis, although not necessarily in the context of sustainable development alone, but in any situation that requires interaction between various sectors of the community. There is therefore a relatively large amount of information on the strengths and weaknesses of these methodologies based on practical experience. Innovative techniques (Part IV) are newer and have not yet been widely used. Some of these are highly innovative and rely on the latest technologies, others are a new approach to an existing method.

In this section, some of the more common traditional techniques which have been applied in the context of Local Agenda 21 are discussed. Where appropriate, an analysis is based on case studies. As far as possible, the order of the techniques presented below represents a 'climb' up the 'ladder' (Section II/2). Within each section, the strengths and weaknesses of a number of tools are discussed based as far as possible on case study analyses. The tools discussed have been selected such that a broad range of techniques are covered.

At the present time, the majority of case study material which forms the basis of this paper originates from relatively few countries, and this text necessarily reflects that situation.

IV/1 Partnerships

In general terms, a partnership is a group of people united with a specific aim, such as a group of stakeholders with a common goal. However in this section the term partnership is used with a more specific meaning, that is a community organisation which promotes public involvement in economic, social and environmental issues. It is a non-profit organisation (i.e. any profits raised are invested into community issues) working at a very local level. The number of partnerships has grown significantly over the past 20 years (Young, 1996), and the importance of these in Local Agenda 21 was emphasised at the Rio Summit.

In Europe there are three types of partnerships (Young, 1996) classified according to their legal basis: co-ops, mutuals and associations/ foundations. These are generally initiated by members of a community searching for equity rather than exploitation.

For example, a commonly encountered type of partnership is a food co-operative. This is basically a group of people who buy food together to save money through bulk buying and to have more control over the quality of the food they eat. Coops have benefits beyond the food itself: they illustrate the connections between social equity, the environment and fair trade amongst other issues to the members, and this inter-connectedness is the basis of sustainability (WHO, 1999). Raising education and awareness is important so that people are in a position to make informed decisions concerning their community.

Partnerships constitute what is known as a 'bottom up' approach to sustainable development. This means that it is local people, rather than the government, who are initiating the process. Although they may not appear to fit directly into the category of tools for public participation, which is the focus of this paper, they are in fact an important mechanism for stakeholder

empowerment. They are not a tool which can be applied by decision-makers for communication purposes, however they should be strongly encouraged.

Box 1.1: Clayton Brook Food Co-operative

The Clayton Brook Food Co-operative (UK) was founded in 1996 by a group of women who had gained motivation and confidence through a community campaign against a motorway development (WHO, 1999).

IV/2 Consultation documents

Consultation documents are usually made available to the public in order for policy-makers to obtain feedback on a new proposal. If advertised properly, for example through direct mailings and advertising, this may be a useful way of reaching a large number of stakeholders in a relatively low-cost manner. People have time to think carefully about their response and discuss it with others. However some people may not feel happy writing a response due to a lack of confidence in their ability to do so.

A weakness of consultation documents is that they are an impersonal means of communication. A lack of contact may reduce stakeholder interest concerning the issue. Furthermore the use of consultation documents is a time-consuming process, as sufficient time is required to obtain and analyse feedback.

Consultation documents may be useful for some purposes due to their ability to reach a large number of people. An indirect benefit is that individuals who take the time to respond to the document may be pin-pointed as those who may be interested in taking part in other events. But it must be remembered that used in isolation, consultation documents do not provide for dialogue, but simply for a one-off consultation on a particular topic. Therefore unless used as part of a combination of tools they may only be appropriate if the objective of the communication is relevant to the ‘bottom end of the ladder’ (Section II/2).

IV/3 Questionnaires/ Interviews

Questionnaires and interviews are a useful way of ascertaining public opinion on certain issues. The tools are discussed together in this section as they generally share the same strengths and weaknesses. Both are relatively cheap tools which have the ability to reach a large number of people. Furthermore they can make use of existing communication channels or physical facilities within a community, such as local papers or public spaces.

A questionnaire differs from an interview in that whilst in the former the respondent usually completes the questions him/ herself, in the latter an interviewer will ask the questions. Interview questions are more in-depth discussion type questions, whereas questionnaires are generally limited to simple 'yes/no' or scoring type questions.

Questionnaires/ interviews can only be effective if the design and structure are planned with care. Questions must be clear and unambiguous, and the questionnaire/ interview must be an appropriate length (i.e. 10-15 minutes) such that it covers all necessary points, but does not lose the respondent's attention. The aim and the target group must be clearly defined to avoid, as is too often the case, a set of results that are not of any use.

Questionnaires/ interviews can be a useful way of reaching a large number of people in a relatively low-cost manner. As illustrated in Box 1.2, personal contact (i.e. between interviewer and interviewee) can enhance interest and enthusiasm on an issue. The positive effect of personal contact on interest in stakeholder issues is apparent with other techniques, for example the Workbook method (Section IV/1.3).

However questionnaires and interviews are not always able to reach the wider community, nor do they provide a particularly in-depth assessment of opinions. Questionnaires can only reach a sample population, and care must be taken to ensure that this is representative of the entire population. Various

techniques exist to structure the sampling methodology, for example random or stratified random sampling, however it may still be difficult to reach certain groups.

If designed and executed with care, questionnaire/ interviews may be a useful way of ascertaining public opinion on an issue in a relatively low-cost manner. However both tools are towards the bottom end of the ladder as they are limited in scope for dialogue or discussion, and should therefore be used in combination with other tools if ‘participation’ rather than ‘consultation’ is the ultimate aim.

Box 1.2: Merton Questionnaire

A questionnaire was carried out in Merton (UK) in 1995 in order to gain an understanding of the issues important to workers and residents in the area (Local Government Management Board, 1995). The questionnaire was presented at an interactive ‘Green Fair’ in the local library, distributed in the (free) council paper and was sent to 900 voluntary, community, tenant and resident organisations. Despite these efforts to reach a large number of residents, the response rate was poor: only 514 responses in total, of which 206 were responses to the questionnaire in the paper, 259 from the Green Fair and 49 from organisations. It is evident that the interactive display was the most effective channel to reach people.

Box 1.3: Citizens Satisfaction Survey

The UNCHS (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements) has developed a Citizens satisfaction survey as part of the Urban Indicators Programme (UNCHS, 2000). This is used to assess how satisfied citizens are with the aspects addressed by the Habitat Agenda (i.e. access to housing and basic services, transport and mobility, education and learning, health and safety, social inclusion, gender equality, air and water quality, waste management, employment and income, information and communication, participation and civic engagement, and in the local government itself). Based on this a ‘Report Card’ is produced ranking satisfaction in relation to these issues. The tool is useful for governments to determine whether official data representing trends is in agreement with citizens’ perspective of these issues. A structured questionnaire such as this one is useful as results may be compared between locations so that communities may learn from each other. Furthermore it is useful as a bench mark for communities to monitor local trends.

Box 1.4: LITMUS Questionnaire

A problem frequently encountered with interviews is that some sectors of the community may not be represented in the selection of respondents. The LITMUS (Local Indicators to Measure Urban Sustainability) project (LITMUS, 2000) overcame this problem: LITMUS is “*an action research project, which has developed and monitored local indicators for measuring urban sustainability (LITMUS) for two regeneration areas in the London Borough of Southwark*” funded by the EU LIFE programme. An extensive survey was carried out as part of this project in which 722 residents were asked in face-to-face questionnaires to determine the baseline conditions for the state of the environment. In order to try and reach sectors of the community not normally reached, “*the survey team was made up of local residents, with local knowledge, who were able to gain access to recipients who would not normally participate in traditional surveys carried out by outside agencies, and in this circumstance it also was seen as an opportunity to introduce the LITMUS Project to residents in the local area.*” This was found to be a useful way of reaching the wider community.

IV/4 Open house

An open house is a display of information, typically staffed by policy-makers and/ or other stakeholders. Usually set in an informal and personal atmosphere, such an event can encourage people to express their views and have in-depth, one-to-one discussions.

The choice of location to host an open house is of great importance. To increase the chance of success, it should be organised in a convenient and well-frequented place.

Open houses may be a useful way of reaching a large number of people and of providing an opportunity for discussion. However in certain situations the personal atmosphere may be a negative aspect in that people are no longer ‘anonymous’, and may therefore feel inhibited in expressing their views. Furthermore as with many techniques there is the danger that some groups are unlikely to attend and be represented. This is unavoidable to a certain extent, but should be minimised by careful planning and advertising.

The 'height' on the 'ladder' of an open house depends very much on the way it is organised, and the scope for interaction at each event. If well-organised and well-staffed, it can provide a good opportunity for discussion and contact.

Box 1.5: LITMUS Open House

The LITMUS (Local Indicators To Monitor Urban Sustainability) Project (LITMUS, 2000) in Southwark, UK made use of the yearly Southwark Show, an event including games, music and stalls. As well as a display of information, LITMUS provided 'leaves' cut from paper, on which people were asked to write their name and address (for a prize draw) and quality of life issues. Each 'leaf' was then attached to a 'tree'. A total of 181 'leaves' were attached. Envelopes with pre-paid postage were also provided for adults who felt that a tree was inappropriate. This is a fun and innovative way of allowing people to voice their opinions, and is useful in that it makes use of an existing, well-attended event.

Box 1.6: Hertfordshire Road Show

The Hertfordshire road show (UK) consists of a green truck which circulates round festivals (Hertfordshire, 2000) providing information on how to lead a greener lifestyle.

IV/5 Round Table/ Citizens Task Force

A Round Table (or Citizens Task Force) is a group of people who have been carefully selected such that they represent target stakeholders, for example environmental groups, minority groups, the private sector and local government. There are various ways of organising a Round Table. They generally consist of around 20 people (this number is considered to be sufficient to allow representation of various stakeholders, but is not so large that it becomes difficult to manage or reach consensus). The group may either meet at fixed intervals (e.g. once a month), or may be ready to be consulted upon by the local government when an issue needs to be discussed.

The name Round Table is derived from the fact that during a meeting, all partners are considered to be equal and often literally sit around a table to represent this equality. The ultimate goal of a meeting is to reach consensus amongst stakeholders. The meeting is usually chaired by someone who is impartial to the discussion, and who has the ability to maintain structure and organisation throughout the event.

Round Tables originated in Canada. The benefits of bringing together representatives of a number of sectors on an equal basis has since been recognised and the tool has been used in a number of places. For example the UK Local Government Management Board set up a Round Table which has since been used to establish guidelines for sustainable development in a number of areas, including community participation and greening of the local economy (Manchester City Council, 1995).

As illustrated in Box 1.7, it must be remembered that most people voluntarily give up their extra time to be involved in LA21, and careful planning must ensure that people are not made to feel that they are wasting their time nor that the demands are too heavy. A useful way of avoiding this problem is to set fixed terms for members so that they have a clear idea of how much time will be required of them, and if they do decide to give up the position they should notify the group to allow time to find a replacement member.

An important aspect to consider for each meeting is whether it should be open to the public and press (ORTEE, 1995). A Round Table is designed to discuss public opinion and it could therefore be argued that it should be open to the public. However the presence of non-members may make members feel restricted in giving their opinions. Therefore a solution could be to hold a closed meeting but ensure that the proceedings and results are subsequently disseminated.

Provided the meetings are well-organised and the group is representative, a Round Table can be a useful way of reaching community consensus on certain issues. It encourages conversation, debate and creativity between stakeholders, and is therefore a tool which is relatively ‘high’ on the ladder. However it must be remembered that whilst members represent their ‘group’, they cannot speak for everyone and other tools should be used to provide a voice for non-members.

Box 1.7: Hamilton-Wentworth Citizens Task Force

In 1990, an 18 member Citizens Task Force was created in Hamilton-Wentworth, Canada to “*explore, in cooperation with its fellow citizens, the concept of sustainable development as a basis for the review of all Regional policy initiatives*” (ICLEI, 2000). The group had six specific tasks:

1. *“to develop a precise definition of what sustainable development means to Hamilton-Wentworth, to be used in developing an overall vision for the Region;*
2. *to develop a community vision to guide further development in Hamilton-Wentworth based on the principles of sustainable development;*
3. *to establish a public outreach programme to increase awareness of the concept of sustainable development and to act as a vehicle for feedback on potential goals, objectives and policies for the Region;*
4. *to provide input as to how the concept of sustainable development could be turned in practical applications through Regional initiatives;*
5. *to demonstrate and articulate in detail the usefulness of the sustainable development concept in review of the Region’s long terms planning policies; and,*
6. *to provide direction to staff and the Economic Development and Planning Committee, who would be using the concept to guide their review of the Region’s Economic Strategy and Official Plan.*

Each member was selected carefully to ensure that the group was representative of the target sectors, and on the basis that each individual was broad-minded, without which consensus, the ultimate goal of all meetings, would probably never be met. The group met with over 1000 citizens in two and a half years, and used a number of methods (e.g. workshops and newsletters) to reach and interact with the community. The Task Force was therefore considered a success. However problems were encountered due to the time demand on members, which resulted in several members leaving the group.

IV/6 Local advisory groups/ Focus groups

A local advisory/ focus group is similar to a Round Table, but differs in the fact that it is typically organised to address a specific issue, and is not usually a permanent body. Such groups are established in order to create a forum for various groups of a community to discuss the issue in question. These groups are often useful in distancing the issue from the local government. In doing so Local Advisory Groups/ Focus Groups provide a useful opportunity for consensus-building, and are particularly important in situations where stakeholders have little trust in the local government.

The case study in Box 1.8 illustrates that in certain situations an advisory group can be a valuable way of bringing stakeholders together, distancing a project from the local government and providing an opportunity for debate and discussion. However for this to be effective it must be ensured that all relevant stakeholders are represented, and that the group has clear and realistic targets.

Box 1.8: Hertfordshire Advisory Group

An advisory group was set up in Hertfordshire (UK) in September (Hertfordshire City Council, 1994). The group was established by sending invitations to participate in the group to 50 organisations. A major task for the advisory group was to select a set of local indicators. A series of four meetings was held, from which a number of general conclusions were drawn. For example, the first meeting was held at the County Hall *“and came across very much as a County Council Project. It was evident that to overcome this all future meetings should be held at an independent venue, have an independent chair and should not be in presentational style but more informal, participative and round table”*. The next meetings were in accordance with this and this *“helped change the perception of the project from being a County Council one to one of the Advisory Group”*. Furthermore, the group made use of the wide variety of backgrounds of members, and by commenting on the draft County Council report, made it more acceptable to the public.

A problem encountered during the process was that not all representatives could attend all four meetings. Although *“every effort was made following each meeting to report back not only to those who were able to attend but also to those who could not”*, a lack of attendance by some members caused a significant loss in the value of the meetings. A further problem was the limited time available for the project, which meant that there was no time to provide members with information prior to the meetings, and as a result some had little or no background to the project and/ or sustainability issues in general.

A positive aspect of the group was that they worked closely with the media, and three distinct benefits were found (Local Government Management Board, 1995):

1. The media is an important tool in raising awareness and encouraging participation
2. Media representatives have a deep insight into issues that catch a community's attention and that are important to citizens
3. Media representatives should have the ability to present detailed, technical information to the public in a manner that is comprehensible and will keep attention

IV/7 Public meeting/ seminar

A public meeting is one which is open to all interested individuals. It is usually structured around one or more presentations, and the 'audience' may then ask questions and initiate a discussion. A public seminar is similar, the main difference being that the 'audience' in the former all become participants in the latter. The two are discussed together here as although a meeting is focused more on the provision of information and a seminar on dialogue, both are public events with the objective of reaching as many people as possible. Both seminars and meetings can be a useful way of bringing together a large number of people interested in a topic.

Boxes 1.9 and 1.10 illustrate the potential value of public meetings/ seminars: they are useful ways of bringing a large number of people together and of initiating creativity and discussion. However it is not enough to simply organise a meeting, but careful planning and adequate advertising are essential. Even if this is the case there may still not be a good turn out, and/ or participants may not be representative of the community. A skilled and impartial facilitator must be present to avoid the possibility that a few individuals dominate the event rather than allowing input from a greater number of people. By careful planning and organisation it is possible to minimise these problems.

Box 1.9: Preston Borough Council Public Seminar

Preston Borough Council, UK, (WHO, 2000) organised a public seminar on "Beyond Health for all and Local Agenda 21" in July 1995. This seminar was seen as the "*catalyst to give the project initial impetus*". Rather than the Borough running the seminar, an external facilitator was chosen to distance the process from local politics. The seminar was a success as consensus was reached in recognition of the need to integrate health and environmental policy. It is thought the success was due to careful organisation and planning, which gave not only the seminar itself but the whole public participation process a positive and enthusiastic start.

Box 1.10: Horsens Public Meeting

A public meeting to discuss Health for all and Local Agenda 21 was also held in Horsens, Denmark in 1996 (WHO, 2000). Despite extensive advertising on the radio, in local papers and via a special handout, attendance was poor. Therefore although many ideas and around 1000 proposals were put forward, these were not representative of the ideas of the community as a whole. Furthermore it became impossible to adequately consider all of these proposals within the 3-4 months allocated for this task.

IV/8 Workshop

A workshop is usually a well-structured event, with the goal of bringing stakeholders together to discuss an issue, and ultimately reach consensus. In general, around 20 people are invited to attend a workshop, and it is important that these people represent the target stakeholder groups. If this is the case, and a skilled facilitator is present to structure the workshop, a workshop can be a good opportunity to initiate creativity and stimulate extensive discussion.

As with Round Tables, public seminars, and any other traditional type of meeting, many of the potential problems related to a workshop are organisational and result from a lack of representation of the target groups, or from the lack of a clear structure and aim to the meeting. This may lead participants to feel they have wasted their time and to be unwilling to cooperate in future events. In addition there is the danger that a few individuals will be dominant and restrict others in expressing their views (although the presence of a skilled facilitator should deal with this problem).

If well-organised and well-attended, a workshop can be a useful public participation exercise. However workshops are generally only open to invited individuals, therefore as with a number of other techniques, they should be used in combination with other tools which have the ability to reach a greater number of people.

Box 1.11: Horsens Workshop

In Horsens, Denmark a public seminar (see Box 1.10) was organised, however problems were encountered in trying to manage the large number of proposals put forward during the meeting. To deal with this problem a series of workshops were organised in which working groups could deal with particular themes, making the process much more manageable and effective.

Box 1.12: LITMUS Workshop

Two workshops were organised as part of the LITMUS project in 1999 (LITMUS, 2000). *“The purpose of these two workshops was to present the findings of the LITMUS public participation process (awareness raising and consultation phase) and to start to select LITMUS indicators. About 1200 invitations were sent or given to community members and 200 posters used for promotion. It can be assumed that all individuals and organisations, who had participated in LITMUS to date, received an invitation. Yet each workshop was attended by only 10 to 15 people (either local residents or representatives of organisations). This illustrates the difficulty in encouraging people to attend public meetings. There may be many reasons for this, for example negative past experiences or lack of trust in the local government.*

IV/1.9 Planning for Real®

Planning for real is *“an eye-catching, ‘hands-on’ method which people use to sort out what needs to be done to improve their neighbourhood”* (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, 2000). The tool was first used in Scotland in 1977 as an alternative to public meetings, as these were commonly unproductive. The tool has since been used in over 100 locations all over the world.

Planning for Real basically involves building a 3D model of a community by its residents. Option cards are provided by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF) which can be arranged and re-arranged so that people may explore and discuss new possibilities and ways of changing the community.

The tool is flexible and can be applied to various situations and locations; in fact a “Development Planning for Real” has been created for use in developing countries. Another advantage is that it provides a practical way of thinking about a community in an anonymous manner, such that a person may place an option card and may still change their mind as often as they like, unlike in a public meeting where once an opinion is voiced it is very difficult for an individual to go back on it.

Despite potential barriers such as lack of time, Planning for Real is useful as a practical tool to empower communities and include groups commonly excluded from decision-making, spanning across all ages and social groups. Residents frequently feel it is more useful than a meeting in which ‘experts’ tend to dominate, and language barriers create problems. Instead, partnerships are built and residents take the lead in decisions concerning their community.

Box 1.13: Meadow Well Estate Planning for Real
The use of the technique has been rewarding in many cases. For example, Meadow Well estate (UK) was well known for its riots in 1991 (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, 2000). In 1994 a Planning for Real process was initiated to involve local teenagers (a group commonly excluded, but the cause of violence in the area) to create partnerships with the local council and to improve living conditions in the area. To give an indication of its value, there was a significant improvement in safety following its implementation, and there were no reported incidents of theft or vandalism in the neighbourhood during the first year of the project.

Box 1.14: Redditch Planning for Real

Planning for Real was also used in Redditch (UK) to communicate specifically with 13-26 year olds (focussing on 13-19 year olds) (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, 2000). The model was circulated around secondary schools and in the town centre, and was commented upon by over 1000 young people. Barriers between young people and workers were broken down as conversations developed, and people were generally excited and enthusiastic about the project. However, a significant problem encountered was the lack of time designated for the project. As a consequence of this the project was mainly led by adults, and there was little follow-up to the project with young people.

V INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES

Innovative techniques are, by definition, 'experimental' and have seldom been tested and applied to date. Therefore, unlike in the case of traditional techniques, analysis is based more strongly on theoretical considerations.

Rather than discussing 'tools', as was done in the section on traditional techniques, this section is organised according to various approaches. In others words this section is divided into various 'categories' of methodologies. Within each of these approaches a number of specific techniques are selected and discussed. Since innovative techniques are newer and less developed, treating them in this way simplifies the range of approaches. The approaches considered are: those which constitute an innovative approach to a traditional method, interactive software packages, community internet sites and some innovative approaches which do not fall into any of these categories.

V/1 Innovative approaches to traditional techniques

This section outlines three tools which are based on a traditional approach, but have been modified to become ‘innovative’.

V/1.1 Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit

The first technique, the *Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit*, (McKeown, 2000) (ESD) is a set of guidelines for education on sustainable development. The guidelines are intended to be valuable for both formal institutions such as schools and informal educational bodies, such as NGOs and ecology centres. The toolkit was created in response to Chapter 36 of the Blueprint for Sustainable Development, “*Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training*”. The toolkit is designed to be flexible with the intention that it can be adapted to all levels and methods of education across the world. Although designed specifically for educational purposes, this has indirect implications for public participation as an informed public are in a better position to make decisions concerning their community and livelihoods. Furthermore, community participation is enhanced in its implementation, as can be seen in the Box 2.1. This highlights the benefits an application of the ESD can have in a community in terms of bringing various sectors of the community to work together and in empowering the public.

Box 2.1: Toronto Board of Education's Education for Sustainable Development

The Toronto Board of Education adopted the ESD toolkit to plan a new curriculum for 4 to 15 year old school children. A community consultation process was initiated to discuss the content of the new programme. Focus groups were set up, and corporate workers were encouraged to interact with school teachers and parents in particular. The project was successful as numerous sectors of the community worked together to form a common vision and reach consensus on the new curriculum.

V/1.2 European Awareness Scenario Workshop

A second example of a traditional method which has been adapted in an innovative manner is the European Awareness Scenario Workshop.

As discussed in the 'traditional techniques' section, workshops are a method commonly used to involve stakeholders in local development and planning issues. They provide an ideal setting for bringing together various groups of society and exchanging ideas and concerns, or to create a common vision for the future of the community.

There are a number of ways of organising a workshop, depending on its particular aim and target group. DG XIII of the European Commission has developed a particular workshop structure known as a *European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW)*. Originally created by the Danish Board of Technology, the methodology has been adapted within the European Commission's *Innovation and SMEs Programme*, in the FLEXIMODO consortium. The basic aim of the workshop is to bring four groups of society together (policy-makers, business people, residents and technologists) in order to increase awareness on how an individual may influence the future of his/ her local environment. A further aim is to create a common vision for the community and to generate ideas on how and by whom this vision may be realised.

EASWs have been used in 15 EU countries and have generally been productive. The method has also been adopted by the Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign.

A EASW is a useful tool to enable a community to create a Local Agenda 21 Action Plan. It provides a structured environment in which four stakeholder groups are brought together, and provided an experienced facilitator is present and the participants are committed, it can be a useful way of determining a common vision concerning the future of their community and of deciding upon how this vision may be achieved.

As with any technique, there are a number of potential drawbacks, most of which are problematic for all workshops and are not specifically limited to the EASW structure.

First of all, the workshop must be well-organised, in a suitable venue, and representatives of each of the above-mentioned groups must be present. The importance of adequate representation of all stakeholders is well illustrated in Box 2.3.

A further obstacle is that even in the presence of an experienced facilitator, there are cases in which consensus might not be reached, which may hinder the remaining sessions of the workshop. This problem can be minimised to a certain extent by the careful selection of participants who are believed to be open-minded.

Box 2.2: Structure of a European Awareness Scenario Workshop

The FLEXIMODO consortium have ensured flexibility in the guidelines in terms of different working styles in Northern and Southern Europe, organisation of a one or two day session depending on time constraints and provision of a base set of scenarios which may be adapted to local conditions, and may be presented with a choice of visual aids.

Usually around 30 participants are invited to the workshop. Four pre-defined scenarios of family life in the year 2010 are presented to the participants. Each scenario should represent one of the possibilities represented in Figure 1 below, in terms of who will decide on the community vision, and how this vision will be achieved:

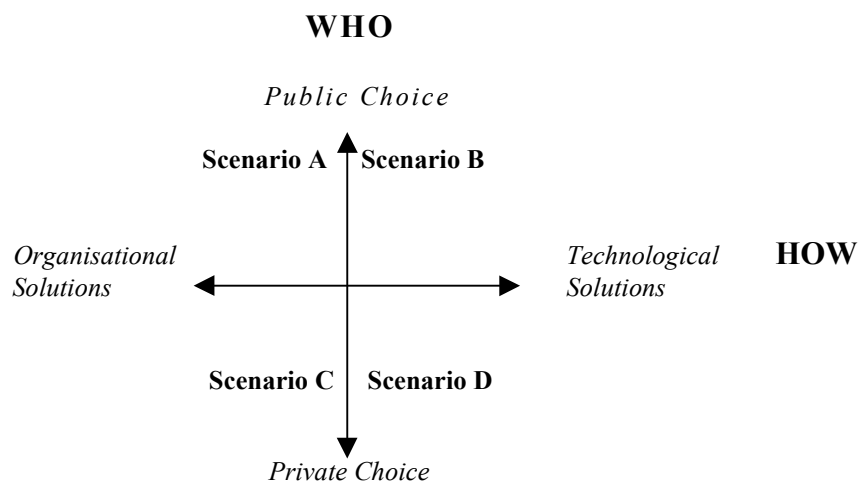


Fig. 1: EASW Scenarios (Fleximodo, 2000)

The scenarios are important in order to provide a basis for discussion and to initiate thinking and creativity. The four groups (policy-makers, business people, residents and technologists) remain separate in the first part of the workshop to discuss their vision of the community based on these scenarios amongst themselves. All groups then convene to share the main aspects of their vision and to find a 'common ground' or 'consensus'. Following this the workshop is split into four new groups (each of which should ideally represent a balance of the stakeholder categories) and ways of achieving this common vision (i.e. how and by who) are discussed. After a final meeting and discussion session of all participants, each individual is given a certain number of votes which he/ she may allocate to one or more of the proposals based on which the most popular strategy(s) may be determined.

Box 2.3: European Scenario Workshop in Venice

A EASW was organised on the Island of San Servolo, Venice in 1999. Although the workshop was considered to be an overall success, a major problem was the absence of members of the local government (they had been called to an emergency meeting). Not only did this result in an incomplete discussion, but also to the concern that the outcome of the workshop would not be acted upon.

A second difficulty encountered during this workshop was dissatisfaction with the voting system used to determine the 'best' proposal. Only 14 participants attended the final session of the workshop and as a result the voting system was generally felt to be inadequate since a single person could influence the entire outcome of the workshop.

V/1.3 The Workbook Method

The final technique in this section is the workbook method. Originally designed as a communication tool between citizens and planners, the workbook method has been adapted to encourage participation in Local Agenda 21. The underlying idea is to develop an iterative process in which a 'workbook' is created and revised as comments and input are submitted.

The application of the workbook method for the Local Agenda 21 process in Sundsvall (Box 2.4) provides a particularly interesting case study since the method was used in two regions of the City, the Bosvedjan and Indal, with very different outcomes.

Box 2.4: Sundsvall Workbook Method

The workbook method was used in the Bosvedjan (around 1033 households) and Indal (around 800 households) districts of the Sundsvall region in Sweden (ICLEI, 2000). A questionnaire was delivered to all households in both areas asking residents how they would like to change their living environment. The information in the questionnaires was compiled by a working committee to produce 'Workbook 1' for each area.

This workbook has been distributed to residents in Bosvedjan (but not yet in Indal at the time of writing), and comments were collated to produce workbook 2. Workbook 3 will be created based on the work carried out by action groups formed in response to workbook 2. This final workbook will be sent to the local government.

Public participation in Bosvedjan was encouraging, however in Indal the public appeared largely disinterested. This is thought to be due a number of reasons. Important factors are thought to include the fact that there is a strong sense of community in Bosvedjan, a high level of awareness of environmental issues and the fact that there was more direct contact with residents during the distribution of leaflets, encouraging interest and participation in the process. It can therefore be concluded that the success of the workbook method is highly dependent on the nature of the community. A further drawback is that it is a relatively time-consuming process, and stakeholders may lose enthusiasm if they don't see immediate action and results.

V/2 Sustainable Community Internet Networks

Many communities have developed web-pages specifically focused on sustainability, providing information on local issues, news on community events, and in some cases online discussion forums, questionnaires and participative 'games'. These may be designed to get people thinking about particular issues, to obtain feedback on which issues are important to the public, or even as part of the selection process for community sustainability indicators.

Two examples have been selected from many community internet sites and are presented in boxes 2.5 and 2.6. Most sites do allow for feedback in the form of emails. Furthermore, online discussion forums and other interactive tools do exist, however are currently used in a restricted way. Therefore it appears

that whilst the internet is of great importance in terms of information provision, possibilities for interaction amongst users is relatively limited.

Box 2.5: Santa Monica Public Electronic Network

The Santa Monica Public Electronic Network (PEN) (California, USA) is a particularly good example of a community internet network. This provides an online interface between decision-makers and citizens (PEN, 2000). The site is not limited to sustainability, but covers many issues that may be relevant to the community, such as government, information for tourists and for businesses. Unlike many other community internet sites, PEN allows for online communication between the public and the government, for example by means of online conferences and feedback forms.

Box 2.6: Sustainable Wellington Net

The Sustainable Wellington Net (New Zealand) (Sustainable Wellington Net, 2000) site contains a lot of information on 'green lifestyles', both generally and with local advice, for example on where to buy environmentally-friendly products and on corporate ethics. A particular feature of this site is the 'Green Map', which includes information on environmentally and ecologically significant local sites (see below for more information on Green Maps). However, although there is clear information on how to get involved in campaigns, mailing lists, etc, there is no opportunity for online interaction between users.

V/3 Interactive Software Packages

In addition to online sustainable community sites, a number of software packages exist in order to simulate future scenarios of environmental, economic and/ or social conditions based on various 'policy options', ranging from business as usual to more sustainable options. The basic aim of such packages is to promote public education and/ or interaction between user groups.

A considerable amount of research and effort is being focused on interactive scenario tools. One of the main challenges in the development of these is

where and how to strike the balance between simplicity (in order that the model runs quickly and is user-friendly) and accuracy of the scenarios.

Box 2.7: QUEST

A notable example of an interactive scenario tool is QUEST (Quite Useful Ecosystem Scenario Tool), *“an innovative tool that facilitates debate and discussion among a variety of stakeholders about regional sustainability”* (Quest, 2000). This was developed by the Sustainable Development Research Institute (SDRI, 2000) at the University of British Columbia, Canada and Envisions Sustainability Tools (Quest, 2000). The tool is in a game format and may be used by experts and non-experts alike. Originally designed for the Georgia Basin, Canada, QUEST is an interactive modelling tool which can be adapted to highlight the significant issues of any region, allowing users to make policy decisions and view the environmental, social and economic consequences of their decisions. In doing so, not only is QUEST an educational tool encouraging users to think about sustainability issues, but is also useful as a tool for community participation due to its ability to promote communication between decision-makers, scientists and the public. QUEST can currently only be used in workshop settings, however there are plans to make it available on the internet.

Communities in New Zealand, Malaysia and the UK have adapted QUEST to their local situation and have built upon the original model. An example of this is the RISA project (Regional Interactive Sustainability Atlas) at the University of Manchester.

Box 2.8: Environmental Simulation Centre

An interactive scenario tool designed primarily to enhance public participation in the Local Agenda 21 process has been developed by the Environmental Simulation Center at the New School for Social Research, New York (Environmental Simulation Centre, 1996). By using powerful simulation techniques, the software can be used to *“simulate highly realistic images and experiences of hypothetical situations and projects, such as alterations to historic districts, proposed skyscrapers, new parklands, neighbourhood plans, zoning amendments, and proposed transportation schemes. Viewers can “walk” or even “drive” through simulated cities and towns and experience projects as if it they were built, allowing a close assessment of the project’s merits and failings”*. The software is designed to involve *“architects, community groups, planners, government agencies, and preservationists”*. Although the tool in itself does not provide for interaction between these groups, the underlying philosophy is that an informed public are in a better position to participate in decision-making, therefore scenario modelling may have important impacts on the decision-making process.

Box 2.9: INDEX

INDEX is a decision support tool created by Criterion (an “*urban planning firm specializing in sustainable community development*”) with four main purposes (Criterion, 2000): data management, public involvement, scenario analysis and indicator tracking. It is based on a series of GIS (Geographical Information System) models which “*simulate growth scenarios and measure the environmental performance of alternative plans*”. It is designed as a simple, user-friendly tool, applicable in a number of situations selected to help answer a range of sustainability-related questions, for example whether development decisions are making the community more or less sustainable. There are a number of outputs when the model is run, including indicator values for a number of scenarios and a comparison of scenarios.

V/4 Other innovative approaches

In addition to community internet sites and interactive scenario tools, a number of other innovative methods exist designed to involve local communities in the sustainability process.

The above examples provide an idea of the type of work being initiated in relation to innovative participation methods. As for community internet sites and interactive scenario tools, these rely on computer technology.

Box 2.10: The Green Map Scheme

The Green Map scheme (Green Map, 2000) involves community groups of all ages and backgrounds in order to create a ‘Green Map’ which “*illuminates the inter-connections between society, nature and the built environment, help residents discover great ways to get involved in conserving and restoring the urban ecology as well as locate green transportation, businesses, educational programs, gardening opportunities and information resources to use in their daily life*”. The map is created based on local knowledge and experiences of the community combined with the input of the Mapmakers. The map is then used by the community and visitors to the community for their information, which in turn provides continuous input and feedback into the map.

Box 2.11: ULYSSES

ULYSSES (Urban LivesYles SuSustainability and integrated Environmental aSessment) “*is a European research project on public participation in Integrated Assessment*” (Ulysses, 2000). The aim of this project is to integrate lay and expert knowledge by creating an interface between focus groups and computer models.

VI DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the following sections traditional and innovative techniques are considered separately before the general discussion. Finally, some broad conclusions are drawn.

VI/1 Discussion of Traditional Techniques

The following table summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional techniques discussed in this paper. It has been constructed based on the discussions throughout this paper, and as such represents the basis of the conclusions on traditional techniques.

| Degree of Collaboration | | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">▲ Low</p> <p style="text-align: center;">▼ High</p> | <i>Partnerships</i> | Illustrate connections between social equity and the environment | Not a 'tool' that can be applied to a community, but must be initiated by stakeholders themselves |
| | <i>Consultation Documents</i> | Low cost Allows time for people to think carefully about responses Can pinpoint interested people for future events | Impersonal means of communication One-off communication, does not allow for dialogue |
| | <i>Questionnaires/ Interviews</i> | Low cost, and can make use of existing communication channels Useful for gaining overview of public opinion | Difficult to ensure representative sample of population Limited scope for dialogue and discussion |
| | <i>Open House</i> | Informal and personal atmosphere may encourage in-depth discussions Can reach large number of people | Some groups unlikely to attend Some may feel inhibited in expressing views due to distinctive atmosphere |
| | <i>Round Table/ Citizens Task Force</i> | Encourages discussion, debate and creativity All participants equal | No voice for non-members |
| | <i>Local Advisory Group/ Focus Group</i> | Distances the issue from the local government | Must ensure representation of stakeholders No voice for non-members |
| | <i>Public Meeting/ Seminar</i> | Can bring together large number of diversity of stakeholders | Risk of poor attendance Good facilitation essential |
| | <i>Workshop</i> | Initiate creativity and discussion | Must ensure representation of stakeholders and good facilitation |
| | <i>Planning for Real</i> | Flexible and practical tool Overcomes language barriers | Time-consuming |

Table 2: Summary of Traditional Methods

Many traditional tools rely on some form of personal contact between stakeholders and policy-makers. As a result there are fixed times during which people may communicate, and these times may not be convenient for everyone. Whether events are scheduled during the daytime or evening, weekend or weekday, there will always be some people unable to attend. Furthermore in most communities there are those people who attend events, but there is also a large proportion who are never present. This may be due to a number of reasons, for example a lack of trust in the local government, the feeling that there will be no follow-up to the meeting or simply to a lack of interest in the topic.

Although face to face contact may exclude some groups of society, the advantage is that for those who do interact, enthusiasm is usually increased (if the process is carried out effectively) and discussions are more efficient.

A major advantage of traditional techniques is that they are, by definition, tools which have been widely used and tested. As a result the tools have had more time to evolve and develop, and there is more information available for communities to understand the ‘dos’ and ‘do nots’ of each technique.

VI/2 Discussion of Innovative Techniques

The innovative approaches discussed in Section IV are summarised in Table 3. It is difficult to place these approaches on the ‘ladder of participation’ as the degree of interaction varies greatly according to the individual technique.

By definition, innovative tools are generally in too early a stage to discuss their strengths and weaknesses based on actual experience. Whilst the non-technology based approaches generally share the same strengths and weaknesses as traditional approaches, there are a number of general points that should be considered in terms of ‘technology-based’ approaches.

More and more people are becoming computer-literate and have access to computers and the internet. Computers provide an effective way of reaching large numbers of people, and of allowing communication between people both spatially and temporally. The use of computers and the internet is also increasing rapidly in developing countries. Fair trade internet communities are being built and producers are coming together and making use of the internet (Roy, 1999). Furthermore computers have strong graphic capabilities, and visual tools are generally more effective than words alone in transmitting a message.

However it must be remembered that not everyone has access to computers, therefore any computer based tool will exclude part of the population. Care

must be taken to ensure these people are reached in other ways, either by using other tools and/ or by having computer workshops in which people are invited to use the tools and guidance is provided.

Furthermore, the benefits of face to face contact in generating enthusiasm on an issue were illustrated in the traditional techniques. Many innovative techniques do not allow for contact between stakeholders, unless held in a group setting, and this may have an adverse effect on the participation process unless used in combination with other, more personal, techniques.

| | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Innovative approaches to traditional approaches | Building on previous experience | Most rely on contact, and may be difficult for some people to attend |
| Sustainable Community Internet Networks | Varying degrees of interaction | Not everyone has access to the internet |
| Interactive Software Packages | Visual tools Initiate thinking | Finding balance between simplicity and complexity |
| Other Innovative Approaches | Visual tools | Not everyone has access |

Table 3: Summary of Innovative Approaches

In summary, traditional techniques have been tested and adjusted over time and therefore each specific methodology has had more time and experience to progress. However most of these techniques require that participants are present at the same time and in the same place. Although this has benefits in terms of increasing enthusiasm, it does limit accessibility to the process. Innovative techniques frequently overcome this problem by creating virtual meetings on both temporally and spatially diverse scales.

VI/3 General Discussion

As was concluded in the Third European Conference on European Sustainable Cities and Towns (Hannover, 2000), *“public participation remains problematic. Many cities and towns experienced public participation as strengthening their action, since it ensures broad public involvement and support. Some reported improved co-operation with local NGOs. In other cities and towns public participation was yet not well developed because of mistrust of NGOs, a lack of appropriate legislation, and a lack of experience from the part of the local government administration.”*

This illustrates that whilst there have been significant efforts to improve public participation over recent years, in many communities there is a long way to go before real community empowerment is obtained. The reason for this may be due to a lack of effort and commitment, or to an unsuccessful participation process. Tools to encourage public participation have been discussed and analysed in Parts III and IV. In the analysis of case studies of individual tools it is important to bear in mind that most tools are used in combination with others. Public opinion and enthusiasm are largely influenced by the participation process as a whole, and not solely by a single tool.

This paper considers the fact that individual techniques are influenced by the entire process, whilst attempting to provide an objective analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of individual tools. Whilst there are a number of strengths and weaknesses particular to each tool, it was found that all tools, both innovative and traditional, are subject to a number of common barriers. These are discussed below:

Major practical barriers include *time* and *money*. Some tools are more demanding on time, others on money, but it is almost always true to say that at least one if not both of these factors will restrict the public participation process. Although little can be done to increase resources, it should be

ensured that efficient use is made of those resources available. Furthermore innovative techniques frequently save time and money, for example by reaching out to a large number of people without the costs and time necessary if each individual had to be contacted individually.

It was discovered during the LITMUS project (LITMUS, 2000) that “*attempts to explain sustainability to individuals and groups were largely unsuccessful; local people did not have the time or sufficient interest to grasp the concept of sustainability.*” This illustrates another frequently encountered barrier, that of differences in language between stakeholders. For example the jargon used by a politician will be very different to that used by a scientist, which will differ from that used by a school-teacher. Therefore it is essential that common ground is developed so that discussions are not hindered by this. LITMUS also concluded that “*utilising the term 'quality of life', although not synonymous with sustainability, was found to be more readily understood by the local community and proved a useful substitute in facilitating discussion of sustainability issues.*” (LITMUS, 2000). This indicates that a participation process is likely to be more successful if simple terminology is used, and that the use of words which people can understand and relate to, and which people may feel are more relevant to their own lives is likely to increase enthusiasm.

A further difficulty common to all techniques is that whilst a public participation process may be initiated with good-will and intentions, these may quickly be lost as barriers are encountered and the time and effort required for the process to be successful become frustrating. When progress is slow there is often the temptation to allow experts and active community members to take over the process, however this must be avoided. Public participation requires patience and commitment, and in order for this to be achieved it is essential that stakeholders are convinced there will be adequate follow-up. In other words people need to be convinced that participation is not a one-off consultation, but the beginning of a continual feed-back process

in which policy-makers will take action and stakeholders will continue to communicate. People must not be put off by the fact that the process may be slow and results are not achieved immediately. This may be of particular relevance in communities in which public participation is a relatively new concept.

Trust may also constitute an important barrier in the participation process: the less trust stakeholders have in the local government, the less likely they are to actively participate in communication with them. As has been mentioned there are ways of minimising this problem, for example by establishing local advisory groups to distance the process from the local government.

A final point is that it may be tempting to try and enhance participation by using existing community groups, such as religious or environmental groups. Making use of such existing communication channels may be effective in reaching a larger number of people with less resources and effort. However these groups generally consist of more 'active' members of society who have themselves chosen to become involved in a group. It is therefore important that significant effort is made to reach the wider community, in other words those parts which are traditionally under-represented in decision-making, which by their very nature these are the sections of society which will be the most difficult to reach.

VI/4 Conclusions

The relative importance of each of the barriers to public participation methodologies outlined above is dependent on the community in question. As a result there is no single tool or combination of tools which constitutes the 'best practice' for public participation. In fact "*no method is 'good' or 'bad' in its own right. Most are as good as the creativity and style of the people choosing them and using them*" (LGMB, 1995).

In order to develop a plan for community participation, community leaders must first of all set clear goals and targets for the participation process. The local situation should be assessed in an attempt to foresee potential problems and groups which might be more difficult to reach. Once this has been done the strengths and weaknesses of each tool should be considered in the context of specific characteristics of the community in question, and a plan of action formulated consisting of the combination of tools which are thought to be most appropriate under those circumstances. Since *“different approaches suit different people, always develop a mixed programme”* (LGMB, 1995).

Although there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ methodology to enhance public participation, it is important that a continuous learning process be developed such that as much as possible is drawn from past experience. In this way repetition of mistakes can be avoided and successful processes may be built upon. The value of networks (such as the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign) should therefore be recognised. As was stated in the Third European Conference in Sustainable Cities and Towns (Hanover 2000) *“exchange of experience is required. Many local authorities have different experiences with different management tools and/or evaluation or monitoring systems. It is important now to exchange and disseminate those experiences”*. By drawing on past experience, tailor-made programmes may be established for each community according to their size, density, local problems and history.

Furthermore by drawing on past experience, selection criteria for assessing whether a particular tool is likely to be successful in a given place can then begin to be developed. As yet methodologies and approaches can only be assessed on a general basis, for example in terms of efficiency of resource use, ability to reach the wider community and scope for conflict resolution. However the development of a systematic method for analysing the applicability of approaches to a particular situation would be extremely useful.

Finally, it can be said that recognition of the importance of community participation has increased significantly since the Rio Summit (1992). However there is still scope for considerable improvement. It has been seen that public participation is important for the development and maintenance of healthy and sustainable communities and it is therefore necessary that there is communication both within and between communities. This paper has illustrated that this may require considerable patience, but it is a goal well worth the time, effort and money.

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