

Strategic Group on Participation



Worksheets on participation, No. 1-6

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Content

- > Worksheets on participation No. 1: Checklists on preconditions and quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere..... 5
- > Worksheets on participation No. 2: The benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents. 9
- > Worksheets on participation No. 3: Limits of and obstacles to participation; the possible misuse of participation processes 15
- > Worksheets on participation No. 4: Recommendations for statements in public participation processes..... 24
- > Worksheets on participation No. 5: Reaching decisions in participation processes..... 33
- > Worksheets on participation No. 6: Coping with expectations in participation processes 39

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Worksheets on participation, No. 1

Checklists on preconditions and quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere

This checklist is intended for initiators of participation processes (authorities, project promoters, ordinary citizens, process facilitators, NGOs etc.). It is meant to help them to ensure the success of the participation process in question by checking the relevant preconditions **in advance**.

Crosses in the columns on the right indicate which preconditions should be fulfilled:

- > for informatory participation processes (i),
- > for comment-centred consultative participation processes (c),
- > for decision-influencing participation processes (d), (covering cooperative, mediative and empowerment processes)

(x) = applies only to full-blown processes, not to one-off events

Checklist on preconditions for participation processes in the public sphere

Preconditions for participation processes		i	c	d
Participants				
<input type="checkbox"/>	All relevant interest groups are represented around the negotiating table in balanced proportions.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gender Mainstreaming requirements are taken into account in selecting group members (e.g. parity between women and men in each subgroup).		x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preliminary talks are held with groups and individuals about their understanding of the process and their role in it.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	At the preliminary talks possible benefits of participation are explained.		(x)	x
Commitment by the decision-makers				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The politicians and administrators should be sounded out, and their support ensured if possible.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The initiators do their best to obtain a firm commitment from decision-makers "downstream" from the participation process that these will take the results of the process into account and will provide reasons for their decisions, particularly where these run counter to the results.		x	x
Results				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Everyone involved is aware what scope for influence and action the participants have.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	It has been clarified/agreed who decides what during/after the process (what powers of decision are located where).	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	All participants are aware whether the results will be binding or not.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The participants are aware what will be done with the results of the process.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The outcome of the process is open – there is scope for action.		x	x
Time				
<input type="checkbox"/>	A clearly defined and adequate timeframe exists.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Some flexibility to accommodate unexpected contingencies during the process timewise is ensured.		(x)	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	It has been ensured that the time demands to be made on all participants, particularly on voluntary participants, can be estimated and are acceptable.		x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The stakeholders are brought into the decision-making process early enough for the scope available for action to be utilized.		x	x
Money				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate funding is ensured.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rules exist for financial requirements and for distributing funds.		x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Civic activity receives recognition, either financial or of some other kind.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	A contingency fund to cope with unexpected events (e.g. additional meetings, experts' reports etc.) during the process is budgeted.		x	x
Other resources and information				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The resources that ensure a "level playing-field" (temporary redistribution of power) during the process (e.g. information, money) will be provided.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	All participants receive sufficient information about the content and course of the process.	x	x	x

Preconditions for participation processes		i	k	m
Managing the process				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional advisers have been commissioned.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	An independent, competent process management has been commissioned.		(x)	x
Process design				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The design of the event/process is adapted to the specific issue and to the funds available.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Formal and informal processes are aligned (e.g. interfaces to politicians have been clarified).	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	In the case of processes that benefit from public interest, efforts are made to generate such interest (public relations, etc.).	x	x	x
Clarifications in advance				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The organizational framework (e.g. distribution of roles, setting and location for the participants' meetings, etc.) has been clarified.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The initial state of affairs has been analysed.	x	x	x

Checklist on quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere

Good participation processes satisfy the following quality criteria. This should be ensured particularly by the process management (mediators, process facilitators).

Quality criteria		i	k	m
Process management				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The process is steered by a professional process management.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process and content are the subject of continual reflection and supervision.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Care is taken that a variety of methods are employed within the process.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Care is taken that activity proceeds smoothly and continuously.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The course of the process is well organized (timetable, rooms for meetings, records of meetings, etc.).	x	x	x
Treatment of information and knowledge				
<input type="checkbox"/>	If necessary additional expertise is made available, so that decisions can be taken on a sound basis.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	All information relevant to the process is made available to the participants in good time.	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The course of the process is documented clearly and fully (minutes of meetings, interim reports, etc.).	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	A measure of flexibility as regards the framework and the issue to be negotiated should be built into the process.		(x)	x

	Quality criteria	i	k	m
	Rules / interaction			
<input type="checkbox"/>	The process management see to it that procedural rules, agreements about the sequence of events, roles, the participants' rights and obligations, and the decision procedure(s) within the process (consensus decisions, majority decisions, etc.) are clear.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The process management agrees rules about group culture with the participants: fair behaviour toward one another and the knowledge acquired during the process, open atmosphere.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	All opinions are listened to and discussed in the process.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Room is given to differing claims, contributions and perspectives within the process.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	During the process all participants' roles are perfectly clear (e.g. who speaks on whose behalf with what powers).	x	x	x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mutual trust should be strengthened, so that the results become more binding.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Care is taken that the composition of the group does not keep changing, and that any new participants are integrated satisfactorily.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The ratio of time invested to benefits obtained is acceptable for all participants.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details of what resources are used but not paid for are made available.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The distribution of funds is made visible.			x
	Communicating and implementing the results			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Robust structures should be set up for implementing the results and monitoring progress in this respect.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	All participants commit themselves to the outcome being presented as a collective achievement.			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	A collective agreement is made about how to communicate the decision (the results).			x
<input type="checkbox"/>	The course of the process is continually communicated to the outside world along agreed lines.	(x)	(x)	x

Worksheets on participation, No. 2

The benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents

The following overview is intended for persons who initiate or take part in participation processes (authorities, project promoters, ordinary citizens, process facilitators, NGOs, representatives of interest groups etc.). It identifies the benefits available to various groups of agents from participation processes. Where different agents benefit in the same way, this is indicated separately for each group of agents.

As a result, each group can form a complete picture of the benefits it can gain; at the same time the overview facilitates the formation of “benefit coalitions“. Participation processes can benefit all the participants in different ways, depending on their individual role. Ordinary citizens who take part in participation processes benefit because their needs and interests can be taken into account more effectively. As a rule, they are „local experts“ with detailed knowledge of specific problems in their surroundings. In many cases they also have concrete ideas for solving these problems. When various agents’ knowledge and perspectives are tapped in planning processes, creative solutions generally result, that are also durable, because they have been developed on a broad basis and – above all – have the support of those affected. Persons able to have a say in planning processes are more likely to feel they share responsibility for community affairs; participation also helps to resolve conflicts of interest between different groups. All in all, local democracy gains and people are more willing to collaborate where participation is involved – and this benefits politicians and administrators: not only is the content of decisions improved, but they are easier to understand and more generally accepted, which means that the results can be implemented faster – something that the whole community benefits from.

We distinguish between formal and informal participation processes, which differ as regards intensity of participation (possibilities) and scope for action.

In **formal processes** legal regulations prescribe who is entitled to take part, what rights they have and how binding the decision is. Examples are: approval procedures for plant or for means of communication, and land-use planning procedures, e.g. in the case of zoning plans or regional programmes. An environmental audit, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) as per the relevant EU Directive, or a project assessment as regards nature conservation also belong in the category of formal procedures. The participants’ scope for action (as laid down by law) can range from the mere right to be informed

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different benefit depending
on the individual role

>>
formal forms of
participation

and to express a point of view all the way to the right to file applications and objections. In Austria the strongest position in formal procedures is known as “party status”; it provides extensive rights to information and to having a say, plus the right to appeal to a higher authority against decisions. The course of formal procedures is also regulated by law, e.g. by time limits for expressing points of view or filing objections. The authorities / the bodies responsible for overseeing land use are bound to take such points of view into account in their decisions. At the end of a formal procedure an authority has usually published a decision (e.g. in the form of an official notification, a zoning plan or programme), and again legal regulations prescribe how this is to be implemented.

Formal processes are laid down by statute; examples are:

- > Processes to approve projects or to prepare legislature
- > Regional planning processes to draw up land-use plans
- > Processes to draw up regional development strategies or sectoral programs (e.g. transport plans)
- > Strategic Environmental Audits for plans and programs.

Informal processes are all those not laid down by statute; examples are:

- > Participatory processes to develop policies, strategies or plans of action
- > Local/regional development processes (e.g. Local Agenda 21 processes)
- > Processes to deal with conflicts, such as mediation processes or Round Tables.

Informal forms of participation do not “run on rails” in this way; they can be structured to suit the particular circumstances applying – this is up to the persons involved. They are purely voluntary; the central principle is to tackle an assignment together, generally with the aim of reaching and implementing a consensus solution. Those involved usually agree together who can take part, how the assignment is to be tackled and what procedural rules should apply. Informal participation can take many different, flexible forms: Agenda 21,

Round Table, Future Workshop, Future Conference, mediation and so on. Depending on the form in question, arrangements vary about how binding the results of the process will be as regards implementation. The solutions put forward may simply be recommendations for a body taking political decisions, or they may be passed as a binding programme and taken over as they stand. In mediation processes the collective solution reached is normally cast in the form of an agreement enforceable by law.

Basically, informal participation processes should not be viewed as substitutes for or as competing with formal procedures; rather, they can supplement these, e.g. in a preparatory phase, or be employed in fields where formal procedures play no part whatever. For instance, a strategic environmental

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informal forms of
participation

assessment can incorporate some form of cooperative participation (such as a Round Table), even though this is not strictly required by law. In some cases formal procedures and informal processes may be interleaved; the Austrian statute on environmental audits allows for the official audit procedure to be interrupted (if all parties agree) so that a mediation process can be conducted.

The following table outlines the benefits available from participation. As informal processes can yield additional benefits or other kinds of benefit in many cases, the aspects of special relevance to informal processes are shown in **green** (in a monochrome printout in **grey**).

Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards their own activities/ position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New approaches to a solution (innovative ideas) for existing problems may emerge - Active citizens who organize themselves may take over individual communal tasks - Decisions are supported by the participants' wider knowledge base, and thus better prepared - Political decisions can be legitimized more easily and accepted more readily - DConfidence in political decisions is strengthened - People identify more closely with their community/region or village/town 	<p>... as regards their own activities/ position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New approaches to a solution (innovative ideas) for existing problems may emerge - Active citizens who organize themselves may take over individual communal tasks - Decisions are supported by the participants' wider knowledge base, and thus better prepared - It becomes easier to weigh up and reconcile diverging interests - As official procedures tend to go faster (fewer objections filed, fewer subsequent complaints), administration is simplified overall - Misgivings and complaints can be dealt with at an earlier stage 	<p>... as regards their own activities/ position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own values/ideas/interests can be tabled and acted on - They can have a say in projects, plans, programmes and policies - Decisions affecting them and their quality of life can be influenced and jointly shaped - The chance to organize themselves can be utilized to create new scope for action - Active citizenship is recognized and welcomed 	<p>... as regards their own activities/ position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own values/ideas/interests can be tabled and acted on - It is possible to have a say in projects, plans, programmes and policies - The organization can gain in status and influence 	<p>... as regards their own activities/ position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The results of official approval procedures are accepted more widely - Entrepreneurial risk is diminished, legal security is increased - The chances of projects being realized sooner improve, as fewer objections are filed and there are fewer subsequent complaints

Note: aspects shown in **green** (in a monochrome printout in **grey**) apply particularly to informal processes

Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interests and needs of the various segments of society become more visible - The pressure of expectations, and the extent of lobbying for special interests, can both be diminished - A framework for resolving conflicts is created, diverging interests can be reconciled - A culture of participation, local democracy, cooperation and dialogue with the citizenry is promoted - Communication with the citizenry and the flow of information are both improved - Marginal groups can be integrated in the community 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interests and needs of the various segments of society become more visible - The pressure of expectations, and the extent of lobbying for special interests, can both be diminished - A framework for resolving conflicts is created, diverging interests can be reconciled - A culture of participation, local democracy, cooperation and dialogue with the citizenry is promoted - Communication with the citizenry and the flow of information are both improved - Political pressure can be reduced - Topics that go beyond classical administrative tasks can be discussed 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning sites and platforms for confidently expressing one's interests are created - The results of official approval procedures are accepted more widely - People understand better how politics and the administration work - A culture of selforganization and selfdetermination is promoted - Topics that go beyond classical administrative tasks can be discussed 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A chance is provided to table interests - A stock of mutual trust (for future cooperation) can accumulate 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Longer-lasting solutions (with fewer court cases) can be achieved - Relations with stakeholder groups within the company can be improved (evidence of dialogue and consensus capability) - The company may become better integrated in the community/region it is based in - More understanding for other interests develops - A basis of trust for future cooperation (including confidence in a firm's products and services) can develop

Note: aspects shown in **green** (in a monochrome printout in **grey**) apply particularly to informal processes

Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible - More insight develops into the decision-making process 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible - More insight develops into the decision-making process 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases
<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The closer one is in touch with ordinary people, the better for one's image - One is more closely identified with the community/region or village/town 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The process of building trust can be encouraged - Impulses for a client-oriented administration can be provided 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - "Experts on everyday life" can experience how their special knowledge is valued 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - One's competence and distinctive image can become more visible to members of one's own organization 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The company's image can be improved

Note: aspects shown in **green** (in a monochrome printout in **grey**) apply particularly to informal processes

Worksheets on participation, No. 3

Limits of and obstacles to participation; the possible misuse of participation processes

The following overview is intended for persons who initiate or wish to take part in participation processes (administrators, project promoters, politicians, ordinary citizens, process facilitators, NGOs, representatives of interest groups etc.). It is intended to show where the limits of participation processes lie and what possible obstacles may be lying in wait during the process or even at the preparatory stage. It is also meant to increase alertness toward the risk of participation processes being misused.

The overall aim is to improve the chance of a given process going well, by pointing out possible dangers in connexion with selecting the level of involvement for the project in question (for instance), with designing the process in detail or with the necessary preconditions. But it is also important to correct any misguided or exaggerated expectations, which could otherwise lead to participation processes being called into question generally as decision-making instruments. The questions at the end of most sections are meant to remind the reader of the key aspects that need bearing in mind when participation processes are being planned and implemented. You will also find tips on making a success of participation processes in Worksheet No. 1 “Checklists on preconditions and quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere”.

One or two concepts briefly explained:

As used in this text, the word “Stakeholder” covers both ordinary citizens and representatives of diverse interest groups and initiatives. It applies both to those actually or potentially affected by a project or a plan and to those wishing to play an active part because they are interested in changing and improving their surroundings.

The word “process” refers to a development, a sequence of steps following logically one from another or of interleaved events. Here the concept of a participation process implies people taking an active share in shaping social life. That can extend from working together on individual projects or plans all the way to taking part in the development of policies.

Limits of participation processes

Participation processes can make an important contribution to improved and more comprehensible decision-making in the area of projects, plans and the shaping of policy in the public sphere. All the same, participation processes have their limits – they are not “magic wands” to be used to solve problems in any and every situation. Two kinds of limit are involved: methodical – not every method is suitable for every participation process and/or for every type of problem – and contextual – certain elements of the situation may restrict the possibilities of utilizing participation processes.

Participation processes are impeded, ...

... if those (potentially) affected and interested fail to take part:

Whether participation processes succeed largely depends on whether those affected are willing to take part. If significant groups of those (potentially) affected and interested refuse to take part in a process, or wish to drop out of an ongoing process, or are not open enough to express their own interests and needs, there is a risk that participation will fail.

The reason(s) may be:

- > People are afraid of being “pocketed”.
- > People see other routes as more promising as regards getting their own way.
- > People do not anticipate any (personal) benefit from participation.
- > There is a shortage of resources (time, information, money etc.).
- > Channels of communication and people’s ability to express themselves are inadequate.
- > People have already had off-putting experience of participation.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Have those (potentially) affected and interested been or are they being informed about the participation process adequately and comprehensibly?
- > Is the communication setup transparent and designed for dialogue?
- > Are those (potentially) affected and interested actually in a position to take part and have a say in the process?

¹ Here the expression „stakeholders“ covers both individual citizens and representatives of interest groups and initiatives. The expression „stakeholders and those interested“ refers both to those actually or potentially affected by a project or plan and to people motivated to get involved by their interest in changing and improving the surroundings they live in.

... if politicians do not identify with / support the process:

Participation processes require a political framework that does in fact permit ordinary citizens to have a say, and that ensures that the results of the process are handled in line with the agreement made. Participation processes run into difficulties if the politicians fail to support them, or ignore or even boycott them. If the politicians take no serious account of the results, or if they take a decision that runs counter to the recommendations from the participation process, without giving reasons for this, those affected may come to see participation purely as political window-dressing. People may then be much less willing to take part in participation processes in future.

The reason(s) why politicians do not identify with / support the process may be:

- > Politicians are afraid that their scope for action and decision may be restricted.
- > The outcome of the participation process conflicts with the politicians' general approach.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Are the politicians willing to support the participation process without reservation or prejudice?
- > Are the politicians willing to provide the necessary resources (funding, infrastructure)?
- > Are the politicians genuinely willing to respect the solutions worked out, to take them into account or to implement them? This means that (other things being equal) the results of the process are to be implemented in full: should this not be possible, contrary decisions are to be presented in a transparent way and to be backed by reasons.

... if there is no scope for action / organization:

At the start of a process it must be made clear to what extent all those involved can exert influence / have a say / jointly decide, and how much scope the process has. If only marginal issues are left to be discussed, because key decisions on the central questions have been taken in advance, there is not much point in participation.

Participation processes may be pointless if:

- > those involved are confronted with faits accomplis.
- > key decisions have already been taken..

Important question to reflect on:

- > Have the participants a genuine opportunity of achieving something?

... if statutory standards and limits (e.g. in the social or ecological field) are disregarded:

It is not possible to disregard statutory standards (such as environmental standards) or to attempt to renegotiate these (say) in the course of a mediation process. On the other hand it is perfectly possible to make voluntary agreements about tighter limits or additional measures (e.g. erecting noise barriers where no statutory requirement exists). Then again, it is also possible to make revising existing standards and limits, or laying down new ones, the subject of participation processes; consensus conferences or consultation procedures are very suitable methods in such cases.

... if social asymmetries persist throughout the process:

Because of differences in their resources (time, money, personality) not everyone and not all segments of the population are equally able to take part in a participation process. But invitations to join in participation processes should appeal to citizens in all walks of life, and encourage them to stand up for their own interests and take part in decision-making. If this broad appeal does not materialize, there is a risk of the process in question being seen as elitist.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Is the participation process organized so that all segments of the population are in a position to take part?
- > Have specific efforts been made to reach, invite and support segments of the population who have difficulty in articulating their interests?

... if there is a permanent stalemate:

Situations in which incompatible positions, arguments and/or values confront one another can exist at the start of a participation process or develop in the course of the process. They diminish the scope for action by making it harder (or impossible) to reach agreement on collective, consensus solutions by means of negotiation.

The reason(s) for a permanent stalemate may be:

- > Some of those involved feel that a participation process would weaken their own position.
- > Some of those involved doubt that participation process would lead to a solution acceptable to everyone, so they simply defend their own position tooth and nail.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Has it been made clear at the start of the process that its success depends on everyone involved being willing to reach a consensus?
- > Has an attempt been made to initiate a shift in perspective, i.e. have those involved been encouraged to put themselves in other people's place, so as to understand them better?

Obstacles to participation processes

There are various possible obstacles that may make it harder to prepare and conduct a participation process, or may jeopardize the whole enterprise. Worksheet No. 1 is concerned with preconditions and quality criteria for participation processes. Obstacles may arise if these preconditions and quality criteria are disregarded.

Obstacles to participation processes arise ...

... if the process is inadequately prepared:

In-depth preparation is essential if the process is to succeed. If too little time and thought is invested in preparing the process, lack of clarity – or inconsistencies – may put a strain on the entire course of the process. Along with process design, deciding who is involved when and how, and arranging timescale and funding, selecting a method or methods also has a crucial influence. No participation method is a patent remedy guaranteeing success; which method is appropriate in a particular case must be decided with an eye to the specific project.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Which is the right method for the problem on hand?
- > What criteria must a suitable process design satisfy? How can it be customized for the process in question?
- > How can those (potentially) affected and interested be informed in a balanced and comprehensive way in advance? Who are the stakeholders?
- > What needs to be clarified, and what agreements need to be made, at the start of the process?
- > How can a constructive style of discourse and respectful treatment of one another be established as norms within the process?

... if the focus of the process is unclear:

For a participation process to succeed, its content and focus must be clear. Obstacles arise if the scope of participation is not staked out before the process gets under way: what is the issue, what decisions have already been taken, what decisions can still be influenced, etc. In development processes, e.g. within the framework of Agenda 21, it is not always clearly defined what is up for discussion and what is not; here an ongoing dialogue with politicians and/or administrators is necessary to stake out these boundaries.

Possible obstacles:

- > The assignment and/or the central issues in the participation process have not been made sufficiently clear.
- > The scope of the process has been left too vague, and the rules applying are imprecise.
- > An issue or topic is being discussed that the participants have no influence on (though they are unaware of this).

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Is it sufficiently clear / has it been made sufficiently clear (repeatedly) in the course of the process what its scope and content are?
- > How open-ended is the process as regards its outcome?
- > Have clear agreements been made about the sequence of events, procedural rules and scope for decisions?
- > Have the goals of the process been discussed openly and in sufficient detail?

... if an unsuitable level is selected for application:

Participation involves selecting a level of application (local, regional, national, EU level). Careful thought should be given to the question of which issue / which concern can be tackled best at which level – whether, for instance, it makes sense to carry out a regional opinion poll in connexion with erecting a cycle track in one particular community.

Important question to reflect on:

- > Which level should discussion take place / a decision be reached at?

... if many of those (potentially) affected and interested are not reached:

There are all sorts of reasons why many people do not join in participation processes. Maybe the information provided has not been properly prepared, or people feel the issues presented are nothing to do with them, or they are hindered by circumstances, or resources are not available.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > What groups are affected?
- > Do all those (potentially) affected and interested know that a participation process is taking place?
- > Is the information available in a form comprehensible to all groups of people (potentially) affected and interested, particularly to migrants?
- > Could there be barriers to access for individual groups? If so, how can they be eliminated?
- > How can the groups be kept open during the process? What can be done to prevent closed structures (“cabals”) developing that scare new arrivals away?

...if it is not clear what will happen to the results:

In every participation process the question of implementing the results that have been worked out collectively plays a key part; the participants' final verdict on the process largely depends on this question. Possible breaches of rules and agreements, and deficits as regards transparency and reliability, are thus among the most serious obstacles to the success of participation processes – and in many cases have a decisive influence on whether the participants will be active again in future in matters of public concern. A key element in this connexion is the politicians' binding pledge to give reasons for any deviation from the results obtained in the course of the participation process. It must be ensured that the results of the process are taken into account when the final decision is taken (e.g. by the local council) and are carefully checked. The public have a right to be informed how and to what extent the results of the process have been taken into account and what arguments the decisions taken are based on. It is helpful if (say) the local council explain in a public statement why they do or do not resolve upon the Local Agenda 21 Plan as a result of the LA 21 process in this form.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Is it clear how binding the results achieved are? How can they be made more binding?
- > Have sufficient funds been budgeted for implementing the results?
- > Has the distribution of political responsibility for implementing the results been taken into account adequately?
- > How can it be ensured that the framework for implementation is not altered after the process has been completed?
- > Have the politicians committed themselves to taking the results into account (i.e. either to adopting them or, if other decisions are taken, to giving intelligible reasons for this in public)?

... if information is missing or is not presented in a comprehensible form:

Some participation processes (e.g. consensus conference, citizen jury) deliberately involve non-specialists in working out a specialized recommendation, even though they lack the necessary background. Particularly in the case of tricky specialized decisions the relevant information needs to be presented in a form intelligible to the participants, and they need an opportunity to acquire the necessary background. If information is not presented in a broadly comprehensible way, it may be much more difficult to reach a result.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > How can complex specialized knowledge be presented so that non-specialists understand it?
- > How can interchange between experts and ordinary citizens be structured as a process of learning from one another?

... if sources of friction interfere with people's working together:

Various factors can put a considerable strain on people's working together in a participation process: for instance, if the flow of communication is not transparent, i.e. if some groups conduct secret negotiations behind the backs of the other participants, or if other people put pressure on participants to behave in a particular way during the process (e.g. by phone lobbying). Again, if the process facilitators are not impartial, or if some participants doubt their impartiality, working together in an atmosphere of trust will be impossible

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Are conditions right for open, trusting communication between all participants?
- > Are the process facilitators impartial (in the sense of not having an interest of their own in the matter, and of performing their task in the same way vis-à-vis all participants).
- > Have procedural rules been agreed that ensure participants treat one another fairly and respectfully, and is care taken that these rules are kept to?

... if expectations are aroused but not fulfilled

If unrealistic expectations of what participation processes can achieve are not corrected in time, disappointment may result, leading to disillusionment with participation processes in general.

Important questions to reflect on:

- > Has the scope available for influence and manoeuvre been presented realistically?
- > Is it clear to all participants how far the results will be binding?
- > Are all participants aware what will be done with the results after the process has been completed.

The risk of participation processes being misused (instrumentalized)

Participation processes yield a variety of benefits (as outlined in Worksheet No. 2 on participation: Benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents). However, there is a risk that participation processes may be misused to push particular interests or a particular result, i.e. instrumentalized.

Participation processes are misused / instrumentalized if ...

- > a single individual or group presents solutions that have been worked out collectively as their own achievement in public,
- > some extraneous idea is presented as if it were part of the solutions that have been worked out collectively,
- > the outcome of the process is presented only selectively and incompletely,
- > the results achieved are not treated in the way agreed,
- > the aim is purely to gain time – to put off a decision seen as unfavourable for a particular group as long as possible,
- > the process is employed as “occupational therapy“ for groups with scanty resources, to effectively put them out of the running.

Worksheets on participation, No. 4

Recommendations for statements in public participation processes

This worksheet is concerned with one way of taking part in public participation processes – the statement. It contains recommendations about when and how statements should be obtained and how they should be handled so as to make the greatest possible contribution to the success of the process. Obtaining statements is also known as consultation (from the Latin *consultatio* inquiry, asking for advice).

What is a statement and what is it for?

A statement is an expression of opinion by a person or a (special-interest) group on suggestions or results at various stages of a process.

Citizens, interest groups and administrative entities affected can table their opinions, wishes and ideas by way of statements. From the statements submitted administrators, planners and applicants for project approval obtain feedback about blueprints or proposals. In this way statements make an important contribution to understanding differing interests and needs, and are an essential factor in reaching a balanced decision.

>>
 Function of
 the statement

Formal processes are prescribed by statute; examples are

- > processes to approve projects or to prepare bills
- > regional planning processes to draw up land use plans
- > processes to draft regional development strategies or sectoral programs (e.g. transport plans)
- > strategic environmental assessment of plans and programs.

Informal processes are any not prescribed by statute, such as:

- > participation processes to develop policies, strategies or plans of action
- > local/regional development processes (e.g. Local Agenda 21 processes) or
- > processes to resolve conflicts, such as mediation processes or round tables.

Statements in formal and informal processes

Public participation via statements is possible both in formal and in informal processes.

In the case of **formal processes** the order of events and the right to make statements are governed by statutes which specify who has this right², deadlines and (as a rule) the form statements are to take.

>>
Formal participation
processes

But even in formal processes there is often a certain amount of leeway in structuring public participation, and this should be exploited as suggested below.

Informal processes can be structured freely, so the form of statement, the sequence of events in consultation and the range of potential participants can be chosen without restriction.

>>
Informal participation
processes

In the case of informal participation processes a wide variety of methods are commonly employed – depending on the type of process (e.g. open space conference, worldcafé, future conference, workshop etc. – cf. www.partizipation.at as regards methods). The participants can present their statements in many different ways, e.g. orally or in writing (on small cards, a flipchart etc.). As a rule statements play a different part in informal processes than they do in formal processes, since in many cases no particular point of view has been put down on paper for participants to comment on – instead, ideas are developed jointly. So in informal processes a statement is often an idea or suggestion, an opinion or point of view that can be tabled in a very straightforward way.

The following recommendations for dealing adequately with statements in public participation processes apply to consultation in both formal and informal processes. They cover the various aspects of a process involving statements, and are meant to help in making proper preparations and thus in carrying consultation to a successful conclusion.

>>
Recommendations for formal
and informal processes

A number of recommendations apply equally to formal and informal processes – the only difference is in the extent to which free structuring is possible. Regardless of the resulting overlap in content, the recommendations are listed separately for formal and informal processes, to allow for readers' specific interest in one or the other category and also to make the text easier to read.

² Both those directly involved in the process and persons with party status have this right, which brings further rights with it, e.g. the right to examine official files, to lodge a formal objection, to be heard and to appeal against decisions.

Consultation in formal processes

Formal processes are largely bound by administrative regulations. None the less they offer some scope for options to promote and assist public participation. In classical approval procedures such scope is relatively limited; at the level of strategic policy decisions and planning processes there is much greater scope.

Phase 1: preparing the consultation process

In advance of a consultation it is necessary to identify the legal requirements to be satisfied and to ascertain how much scope (if any) exists for structuring additional public participation.

>>
Preparing a consultation
process

Aim of the consultation process

Before statements are requested, the administrative entity concerned should define the precise aim of the consultation, i.e. what it is meant to achieve. This aim should be communicated clearly to the participants: e.g. collecting suggestions to be taken into account in drafting a new land use plan.

Subject of the statement

Every statement needs a specific subject. The topics and issues on which a statement is requested should be clearly defined and intelligible.

It must be ensured that all the information and documents needed to base a statement on are available. If there are gaps in the documentation provided, it should be made clear to the recipients when and where the missing documents can be obtained or looked through (internet, department office etc.). It is a good idea to specify an information office for people with queries to contact.

Target group in consultation

In formal processes the target group is usually laid down by law (e.g. neighbours). Some of the participants may have party status (e.g. in approval procedures for certain projects). This status brings with it extensive rights of collaboration, including **the right to submit a formal statement**.

The invitation to submit a statement should include explanations of concepts with legal implications, such as “party status” and “formal objection”³.

³ In approval processes for projects or plans (e.g. in factory licensing and environmental audits) a neighbour forfeits his/her party status if he/she fails within the term specified to lodge a formal objection (a special form of statement in formal processes) to the project or plan awaiting approval. In this case making a statement is a precondition for enjoying extended rights of involvement in the process.

Apart from defining the target group, it is also important to consider how to reach the whole of this group. Provided that options are available, there is much to be said for combining several channels of information, e.g. announcements on an official notice-board and in newspapers, direct mailing, local TV and radio stations, the internet and posters.

Order of events, fixed dates and deadlines

The statute book provides for a variety of regulations concerning the order of events for consultations, for fixed dates and deadlines. In many cases nothing concrete is specified. A common general rule is simply that “adequate” time must be provided. In this case there are no restrictions on the deadline by which the statement must be submitted. Recipients of an invitation to submit a statement will take it more seriously if a sufficient length of time is available for participating. In the case of straightforward processes two to four weeks’ time may well be sufficient; in complicated processes six to twelve weeks are regarded as appropriate. In determining the fixed dates and deadlines due allowance should be made for holiday periods and public holidays⁴.

Form of statement

In formal processes both statements in writing (by letter, fax, e-mail etc.) and oral statements are normal. Oral statements should be taken down in writing.

Phase 2: carrying out the consultation process/invitation to submit a statement

The invitation to submit a statement should explain why statements are being requested, what rights persons submitting statements have and how the statements will be handled. This will make the consultation process much easier to understand, and people are thus more inclined to welcome it. In addition, this information improves the chance of people developing realistic expectations, and makes it easier for the participants to decide whether to submit a statement in the circumstances applying.

>>
Carrying out a
consultation process

⁴ In formal processes where more than 100 participants are expected (large-scale processes as per § 44a Abs. 3 AVG) giving notice is not permissible in the periods 15 July to 25 August and 24 December to 6 January.

What information should the invitation include?

- > Subject and aims of the consultation process
- > Background to and occasion for the consultation
- > List of all persons, entities and organizations invited to make a statement
- > Details of the available documents and of where further documents can be inspected or acquired
- > Deadline for submitting one's statement
- > Information on the form in which the statement is to be submitted, with what details and to which address
- > Name, phone number and E-Mail address of the person provided to deal with queries during the period for submitting statements
- > Details of when and where the statements made can be inspected
- > Details of the further procedure planned after the consultation phase

In formal processes the procedure for inviting statements is normally fixed by law (e.g. by public notice, by publication in a gazette / on the internet, by mail to households or to those with party status etc.). If the way to inform the target group that statements can be submitted is not expressly laid down by statute, or if the law permits alternatives (e.g. public notice or announcement in a newspaper), thought should be given beforehand to the question of how best to reach the respective target groups. The actual invitation should also make it clear which entities, organizations or persons are being invited to submit a statement.

Handling queries during the period for submitting statements

During this period a competent person should be available for people to address queries to.

Acknowledgement of receipt

Receipt of every single statement in writing should (as far as possible) be acknowledged within one week. Ideally an individual acknowledgement is sent to every single entity, organization and person that submits a statement, by the same method as employed for submission (electronically or on paper).

Statements in the course of oral proceedings

Where provision is made for oral proceedings, these serve to obtain statements and formal objections and to discuss these with the experts taking part. The practice of admitting interested persons lacking party status to oral proceedings, so that they can take part in the discussion (provided that the applicant agrees to this), has much to recommend it.

Dealing with and documenting the statements received

All statements received should be examined and checked, demonstrably and completely. In the case of suggestions that must be rejected, the reasons for rejection should be given objectively and comprehensibly, or discussed with those taking part.

To the extent that the legal provisions applying permit, the statements submitted should be made available to all participants (parties). In some cases this is standard practice (e.g. in land use planning).

It is a good idea to document the consultation process in the form of a summary; this makes it clear how the consultation process influenced the final decision.

Information about the final decision

Formal processes lead to a decision by an authority or a local council or provincial administration (e.g. decisions in approval procedures involving building regulations or laws concerning water and waterways; land use plan; waste management plan). Procedural rules lay down how the decision in question is to be communicated. If they leave any leeway, then all the participants should if possible be informed of the final decision – in the interest of transparency and service to the general public.

Consultation in informal processes

Informal processes can be structured freely, so statements in such processes vary considerably in form, tone and effect. They may be a reaction to a point of view expressed in writing or to a particular proposal, but are usually an idea, suggestion or opinion tabled orally or in writing in the course of a joint development process. The recommendations presented here for consultations in informal processes are thus general in nature and need to be made more specific in the context of the respective or methodological setting/process.

Phase 1: preparing the consultation process

Before consultation begins, matters of principle affecting the entire process should be resolved and basic rules laid down.

>>
Preparing a
consultation process

Aim of the consultation process

Within the organization requesting statements agreement should be reached on the actual aim of the process (e.g. gathering new ideas, achieving the necessary conditions for a new approach to be welcomed, boosting awareness of an issue, etc.) and on the consequences involved in obtaining statements.

Subject of the statement

Every statement must have to do with a specific issue or a clearly defined topic that statements are being requested for; the issue/topic should be clearly defined and intelligible. It must be ensured that all the information and documents needed to base a statement on are available. If there are gaps in the documentation provided, it should be made clear to the recipients when and where the missing documents can be obtained or looked through (internet, council offices etc.).

Target group in consultation

In delimiting the target groups care should be taken that as far as possible all stakeholders and interested citizens have the chance to make statements, and that the various different interests are represented in as balanced a way as possible.

Clear roles in process

Before consultation starts, the various roles in the process should be assigned. Who should the statements be addressed to, who deals with them, what responsibilities/obligations are involved, who takes which decisions?

Order of events, fixed dates and deadlines

The more opportunities there are to influence the course of events, the more seriously the recipients will take an invitation to submit a statement; so it makes sense to carry out consultation at the earliest possible stage in the process, before key strategic decisions are taken, and to open as many aspects of the subject as possible to consultation. The invitation to make a statement should therefore include a description of the entire process and identify the stage at which consultation takes place.

Obtaining, tabling and incorporating statements in the joint development process all take time. To ensure “fair play”, the deadline for submission must allow sufficient time, and enough time must be allowed for dealing with the statements received. How much time to provide for submission will depend on the scope and complexity of the suggestion, and may vary between a few days and several weeks. The order of events, the timeframe, key dates and deadlines in a participation process should be made known to all stakeholders and interested citizens right from the start.

Form of statement

In informal processes the choice of whether statements are to be made orally or in writing is open. Statements in informal processes are frequently made orally, for instance in a citizen panel, in a workshop or at a regular meeting (of the local council, a team etc.). To ensure transparency and avoid misunderstandings, oral statements should invariably be taken down in writing.

Phase 2: carrying out the consultation process

Giving notice of the consultation process

Any consultation process should be announced well in advance.

>>
Carrying out a
consultation process

Invitation to make statements

The invitation should make it clear why statements are being obtained and how they will be dealt with. This makes it much easier to understand the process, and thus helps in gaining support for it.

Statements can be invited in various different ways (e.g. by public notice, by publication in a gazette / on the internet, by placing on view, by mail to households or to stakeholders etc.). The best way of reaching the target groups in question should be identified beforehand. It is also advisable to

publish details of which organizations and/or persons are being invited to make statements.

Handling queries during the period for submitting statements

During this period a competent person should be available for people to address queries to.

Acknowledgement of receipt

Receipt of every single statement in writing should (as far as possible) be acknowledged within one week. Ideally an individual acknowledgement is sent to every single entity, organization and person that submits a statement, by the same method as employed for submission (electronically or on paper).

Transparency

To ensure a balanced flow of information and avoid misunderstandings and duplication of effort, it makes sense for all those interested to be able to inspect the statements made. Right from the start it should be made clear how the statements are to be documented and whether/how they will be made available. Where statements are made orally or by means of small cards, a flipchart etc. in the course of development processes, it is often impossible subsequently to identify the originator of whichever idea is then jointly pursued. One possible solution is to introduce “patent rights” in ideas, i.e. to note the originators of all statements made; persons whose ideas gain general acceptance are specially mentioned when the project is presented.

Dealing with and documenting the statements received

All the participants should be informed of who has made statements, how the statements read, which suggestions have been adopted in what way and which could not be adopted (with reasons). It is a good idea to document the consultation process in the form of a summary; this makes it clear how the consultation process influenced the final decision.

Worksheets on participation, No. 5

Reaching decisions in participation processes

How are decisions reached in participation processes? Is one particular way of reaching a decision superior to all others? What effect does the way selected have on the process, and on the type and the quality of the decision and the outcome? These are the questions which this worksheet starts from. The worksheet is addressed to anyone interested in participation. It is meant to

- > heighten awareness of how far-reaching the influence of the decision procedure selected is,
- > present the various different ways of reaching a decision, with their respective advantages and disadvantages,
- > simplify the task of choosing the most suitable procedure for the case in question, and
- > help in preparing decision-reaching in participation processes.

The issue of how decisions are reached is one of the central issues in democracy. In democratic systems, as in public participation processes, important preliminary decisions need to be taken about the overall framework, about the structure of the process and about powers of decision before a start is made on working toward the actual decision at issue. Given that these preliminary decisions influence the process and its outcome, it is well worth giving some thought to the following questions, which should be openly formulated:

- > Who decides who is entitled to decide?
- > Who decides what is to be decided?
- > Who decides how the decision is to be reached?

Ways of reaching a decision ...

... are numerous. Depending on the specific issue, the persons or groups taking part, time, place and other resources needed (e.g. the social and cognitive skills of the participants), various different ways of reaching a decision may be suitable for the actual situation.

The process of reaching a decision always involves a preparatory stage – which may be more or less extensive – and the actual decision.

Three general categories⁵ can be distinguished:

- > Majority decisions
- > Consensus or compromise decisions
- > Decision by lot or other random procedures (actually among the oldest democratic methods of reaching a decision⁶ – not discussed here, though).

The various possible ways of reaching a decision must be clear before their respective advantages and disadvantages can be weighed up and the most suitable method for a particular situation selected. The choice has to be made anew whenever a decision is to be taken. It is therefore possible that various different methods (or some combination of them) are appropriate at successive stages of a decision-making process.

Majority decisions

In parliamentary democracies majority decisions are the norm and generally highly regarded. The underlying assumption here is that the majority can take binding decisions for an entire group or community. In participation processes majority decisions are called for particularly in cases where a choice between alternatives in a given area must be made without delay – a great advantage when definite action is called for. There are various ways of specifying these alternatives to start with: for instance, a person or a committee can be empowered to define them, or they may emerge as the result of previous negotiations between all those involved.

As a rule majority decisions involve choosing between two alternatives at a particular point in time (i.e. yes/no or either/or). But the choice can be between several alternatives instead, to be arranged in order of preference (A ahead of B and C, say). What majority decisions cannot provide is the further development of the issue and/or the modification of alternatives at the moment of decision, even if the problem in question is not dealt with adequately as a result. At votes and elections the participants cannot negotiate or strike bargains with each other – that would require a communicative process. The alternatives to be chosen between can be modified only after the decision has been taken (e.g. so as to take another vote subsequently). By contrast, with consensus or compromise decisions (where the participants communicate with each other in the immediate decision-taking situation) the various possible solutions can be adapted in discussion to take any new insights into account.

⁵ This worksheet is focused on ways of reaching decisions in groups; so it does not cover “authoritarian” decisions taken by a single person empowered to do so.

⁶ In the ancient Athenian democracy political office was assigned by lot; this method was regarded as more democratic than election, because any (male) citizen who satisfied the basic requirements for office had the same chance of being selected.

Majority decisions:

Pro

- > Quick decisions are possible
- > A large number of participants can be accommodated
- > The method can contribute to democratic stability and avoid deadlock
- > The participants do not need the ability to put themselves in other people's shoes

Contra

- > At the time of decision participants cannot negotiate with each other (only beforehand)
- > The wishes of minorities may be ignored
- > Only yes/no or either/or decisions are possible

Majority decisions have another disadvantage: they are reached at the expense of a minority, so they tend to undermine distributive justice. The principle of majority voting can thus deepen the gulf between the majority whose preference carries the day and those whose vote has no effect because they are in the minority. One can compensate for this by means of rules about minimum levels of participation (e.g. a quorum of at least one third of the participants) and about supermajorities (e.g. a two-thirds majority)⁷. Other mechanisms to check majority decisions, such as a veto, have a purely reactive function.

Votes and elections are obvious examples of majority decisions. Some people see majority decisions as a stopgap, or as less democratic than communicative ways of reaching a decision (involving consensus or compromise). In some situations requiring a decision majority voting is the procedure of choice, particularly in cases where a decision is needed without delay even if a large number of people are entitled to share in the decision. Majority voting guarantees that decisions can be reached, and counts as a mainstay and yardstick of stability in a democracy.

Consensus or compromise decisions

Methods of taking decisions aimed at reaching a consensus or compromise necessarily involve a process of communicative negotiation on the way to the decision. The idea is to use methods of promoting an exchange of information and communication between the agents participating so as to give everyone a say and a balanced share of influence, and thus achieve as much distributive justice as possible between majorities and minorities.

⁷ The various forms of proportional representation are also attempts to achieve more distributive justice.

Compromise und Consensus⁸:

Consensus (from Latin *consentire* = agree) is an agreement resulting from a negotiating process. Consensus presupposes that all members of a group agree to a result without (concealed or open) opposition, and that they all see this result as a gain/as positive, without frustration or disappointment. In the search for a consensus not only standpoints, but also the interests and needs behind these are examined. Only if all the participants understand each other's interests and needs can they revise their standpoints and thus become open for new options. The advantage of the consensus approach is that every single voice must be listened to. In many cases, though, this approach requires time-consuming discussions – and individual participants can stymie the process.

A **Compromise** is an agreement reached by each side waiving some of its demands. In some circumstances a compromise may be the preferred solution, e.g. if time and money are in short supply. If the problem in question has been thrashed out to a point where all the participants agree to a joint decision, and are able and willing to give objective reasons for and justify it, even if some measure of dissent remains, this can legitimately be called a “fair and reasonable compromise”. On the other hand, if the compromise adopted results from one side giving way – frequently after prolonged conflict or in the case of unequal opponents – it will turn out to be an “uneasy compromise”, that usually soon breaks down.

Consensus or compromise decisions are feasible only if the participants examine others' interests and needs without prejudice (“looking behind conflicting standpoints”). This presupposes that the participants are able and willing to recognize other people's (including their opponents') points of view as justified and to understand these. This can lead to the people involved in a conflict seeing themselves no longer as opponents, but as ensnared in a shared dilemma that can be resolved only by joint efforts.

Various different methods can be employed to prepare the way to the decision, such as: consensus conference, citizen jury, focus group, future workshop, scenario process or mediation. Within the framework of communicative methods ancillary techniques⁹ can be used to objectify and structure the preparation phase (e.g. assessment procedures, cost-benefit analysis, decision trees/matrices, portfolio analysis, simulation etc.). The decision is reached by all participants agreeing to a solution jointly developed in the communication process (consensually or as a compromise).

Reaching a decision by means of communicative methods has the advantage that the participants can explain, give reasons for and/or justify their standpoints, thus making the interests behind these clear; in the ideal case the preparatory phase and the process of resolving the conflict or solving the problem can then lead on to consensual decisions.

⁸ Adapted from the Wikipedia definition during the Strategic Group's discussions.

⁹ See the methods listed under www.partizipation.at/methods.html

Consensus and compromise decisions:

Pro

- > Different opinions and preferences can be taken into account
- > Both/and and if/then decisions (as opposed to yes/no and either/or decisions) are possible
- > The subject matter can be extended and extra time can be taken
- > Striking a bargain to balance conflicting interests consolidates democracy

Contra

- > The approach works only if the participants have the social and cognitive skills needed for discourse and are capable of adopting a perspective other than their own
- > The preparatory phase consumes a lot of resources

But there are also obvious disadvantages: communicative methods require specific social and cognitive skills and endowment with resources on the part of those involved, and they also take time. It may well be that the amount of time, the financial resources and the skills (willingness to put one's cards on the table, ability to articulate one's interests etc.) needed for a consensus-oriented, dialogue-centred way of reaching a decision are simply not available in a given case. Another point: the consensus or compromise approach arouses expectations¹⁰ which it may be impossible to fulfil¹¹, in which case serious participants in a decision-reaching process will feel frustrated¹². This hazard can be dealt with before a participation process begins, by defining the process framework and informing all participants of it; this will involve answering questions such as "What happens if no consensus or compromise is achieved within the time available?" and "How much scope is there for consensual decisions to make a real difference?"

Summary

In the course of a participation process it may make sense to employ majority voting for some decisions and aim for a consensus or compromise on others – particularly if decisions of differing scope are involved. The respective advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of reaching a decision must be weighed up and the most suitable method for a particular situation selected. Majority decisions are in principle no less democratic than a consensus-oriented, dialogue-centred way of reaching a decision, which may – if expectations are too high, or willingness to reach agreement is missing – fail to produce any result at all.

¹⁰ Cf. Worksheet no. 6, "coping with expectations in participation processes"

¹¹ The so-called "Achilles' heel of democracy", exemplified by the tension between individual interests and the common weal, or between majority and minority interests etc. This means that no decision procedure can sidestep these central paradoxes of democracy and guarantee that the process of reaching a decision will produce a good result.

¹² Cf. Worksheet no. 3, "limits of and obstacles to participation; the possible misuse of participation processes" and no. 6, "coping with expectations in participation processes"

Ways of reaching a decision in practice

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the Vienna Waste Management Plan 2007

To carry out the SEA of the Vienna Waste Management Plan 2007 a team was formed from representatives of the City of Vienna, environmental organizations and outside experts. This team was jointly responsible for drafting the Vienna Waste Management Plan 2007 and for drawing up the environmental report (SEA Round Table).

As regards reaching decisions, the following guiding principle was agreed: “As far as possible the SEA team takes decisions in consensus. Should no agreement be attainable on isolated aspects, the view of the majority and dissenting views and the reasons given for them will be documented. All organizations represented on the SEA team have equal rights. When polls are carried out on individual steps in the course of work, each organization has one vote.”

The central decisions on (for instance) the goals of the Waste Management Plan, the planning alternatives to be investigated, the methods of assessment and finally the planning solution recommended were reached by consensus. Intensive discussion in the SEA workshops led to complete consensus within the SEA team on the overall result. Details (e.g. of the priorities applying to the measures planned) were settled by majority decision.

In the course of the SEA process a large number of major and minor decisions were to be reached by a group of around 25 persons; in this context a combination of consensus and majority decisions worked well.

Mediation process Natura 2000 Verwall

The mediation process in Verwall (in Vorarlberg) was designed to resolve conflicts in connexion with designating a Natura 2000 zone. Over a period of just under one and a half years a team of 33 persons negotiated the basis for a zonal management plan.

The procedural rules for the mediation process specified that decisions were to be reached by consensus. In the course of the process it turned out that not all the various different interests involved could be reconciled. The participants therefore resolved to issue a consensus report at the end of the process, in which the main points agreed were listed – this report ran to 35 pages – and to record in a separate report all the issues on which no agreement was reached during the process.

The fact that the negotiators freed themselves from the constraint of being committed to reach agreement on every single issue was a great relief to all the participants, and made it possible to reach agreement on the bulk of the issues arising. Without a separate report on the unresolved issues it would not have been possible to produce the consensus report.

At the end of the process a monitoring group in which all the special-interest groups concerned are represented was set up. Since then this group has not only monitored progress in implementing the agreements, but has also been instructed to review the report on unresolved issues at the appropriate time and to see whether a consensus is now possible on individual aspects.

Worksheets on participation, No. 6

Coping with expectations in participation processes

Clarifying expectations and avoiding disappointments

Organizing or taking part in a participation process means getting involved in a different way of reaching decisions. Participation is a chance to live democracy in one's own surroundings, but it also makes demands on all those taking part. Frequently expectations that turn out to be unrealistic lead to disappointment and misunderstandings.

This worksheet is meant to help minimize the risk of frustration in participation processes. Such processes need thorough preparation, in order to sort out goals, target groups, content, structure and organization of the process properly¹³. Provided that this information is presented clearly at the start of the process, that binding rules are agreed with those taking part, and that their expectations **are discussed** (“**expectation management**”), many unrealistic expectations can be dispelled in advance and misunderstandings be avoided. The fact is that frustrated expectations can lead to a loss of confidence in the participation process; and once that happens, it is very difficult to re-establish such confidence.

The worksheet is aimed both at those commissioning, preparing and running participation processes and at representatives of groups of stakeholders and ordinary citizens. It describes expectations that may exist among the various different groups of participants, and ways of handling these. The worksheet is intended to encourage one to think over one's own and others' possible expectations, and to aid in developing a realistic picture of what possibilities a participation process opens up, as well as where its limits lie.

What this worksheet provides

The list of expectations discussed here could be extended. Each one is first formulated in a catchy phrase; in the text that follows it is discussed, before – under “Points to ponder” – recommendations for coping with it are presented. These may be aimed at all those involved, or specific groups of participants, or at the facilitators.

Cite as: Strategic Group on Participation (2010): Worksheet No. 6 on Participation, “Coping with expectations in participation processes”, Vienna

¹³ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2003): Worksheet No. 1 on Participation, “checklist on pre-conditions and quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere”, Vienna

The following expectations are discussed in this worksheet:

“A participation process is for implementing my/our ideas 1:1!” 4

“I represent my own interests, public welfare doesn’t matter that much to me.”

“I’m not against this project as such, but it shouldn’t be implemented in my neighbourhood.”

“This issue ought to matter just as much to everyone else as it does to us!” (e.g. a lobbyist’s perspective) 4

“I know exactly what the others think and what they’re going to say.” 5

“In any case there’s no scope for alternatives, so what’s the point of discussing it all?” 5

“I don’t just want to talk about details (e.g. the cycle track), but to help develop a comprehensive solution (e.g. an overall traffic plan for the community).” 6

“I’ve expressed my concerns, now it’s up to the politicians to find a solution – after all, what did I elect them for?” 6

“At the end of a participation process everyone is always on the winning side.”

“Without exception, the result of participation processes is a win-win solution.” 7

“Decisions reached via participation automatically contribute to sustainable development.” 7

“The participation process is fine as a way of giving people something to do – but at the end of the day it’ll be us who actually decide!” 8

“The politicians and civil servants end up doing whatever they like, regardless!”

“They just want to keep us busy!” 9

“I put time and energy into it all and someone else sells the result as theirs.” 10

“If people are interested in the issue, they’ll definitely join in the participation process.”

“Only a handful has come along – obviously people aren’t interested in having a say, even in matters that affect them directly.” 10

“Our grassroots initiative represents the majority, so we can prevent the project being implemented!”

“Here we have the last word!”

“As I represent a club with a wide membership here, my voice carries more weight!” 11

“The longer the discussion goes on, the more likely it is that everyone is happy!”

“A proper discussion takes time.”

“After three meetings we must have a result that can be implemented on the spot.” 11

“The facilitators aren’t neutral – after all, they get paid by one particular organization.”

“The facilitators will come up with the right solution for me.”

“The facilitators are responsible for the result.” 12

Possible expectation:

“A participation process is for implementing my/our ideas 1:1!”

In a participation process all sorts of different people with differing interests and needs meet up. Each participant can table his or her views, ideas, interests and creative suggestions within the framework of the process. Democracy comes alive only as and when the various different interests clash and people discuss this. So enforcing one’s own interests across the board is possible only in exceptional cases. The goal of a participation process is to find a solution which the various different standpoints contribute to and that accommodates the various different needs as well as possible.

Points to ponder:

- > As a civil servant or facilitator you should make it clear right at the start that, with rare exceptions, a participation process cannot fulfil the expectation of enforcing one’s own ideas across the board.
- > As a participant you should be aware that, given the disparity of interests, this expectation can be fulfilled only in exceptional cases.
- > A participation process is an opportunity for dialogue. As a participant in the process you will encounter other points of view and perspectives that may have been unknown to you previously. With the new information your viewpoint (and others’) may develop further or shift.
- > It is important to reach agreement at the start of the process that everyone is willing to listen to the others’ views, and to discuss ways in which disparate views could be brought closer together¹⁴..
- > How decisions are reached also makes a difference¹⁵: If they are reached by negotiating for a consensus, it is pretty likely that the final result will incorporate your view to some extent. If decisions are reached by majority vote, you might be among the participants who were outvoted.

Possible expectations:

“I represent my own interests, public welfare doesn’t matter that much to me.”

“I’m not against this project as such, but it shouldn’t be implemented in my neighbourhood.”

**“This issue ought to matter just as much to everyone else as it does to us!”
(e.g. a lobbyist’s perspective)**

What motivates ordinary citizens or common-interest groups to take part in a participation process varies greatly; however, it is always connected with a personal interest in an issue or in solving a problem. In cooperative processes the participants learn that for a real solution to be possible differing viewpoints need to be harmonized, whether private concerns of individual citizens

¹⁴ For appropriate methods see also: www.partizipation.at/methods.html

¹⁵ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2008): Worksheets on participation, No. 5 „reaching decisions in participation processes“, Vienna.

or public welfare – e.g. the need of peaceful surroundings to live in versus the wish for satisfactory access and a road network without gaps. The dialogue promotes understanding for other interests, and possibly convergence with the viewpoints of other individuals and groups taking part.

Points to ponder:

- > Going back to first principles: individuals' right to belong to a community carries with it a responsibility to contribute to preserving and renewing that same community according to their respective position and abilities. If people succeed in anchoring participation in place as an instrument of well-balanced rights and obligations within a community, conflicts between individual interests and public welfare can be defused to some extent.
- > Your job as a facilitator is to create a space in which it becomes possible to see individual or group interests in relation to other viewpoints tabled in the context of a overarching whole. In the course of the process the important thing is to increase reciprocal understanding for the legitimate interests of all the participants, thus achieving the conditions necessary for joint solutions.

Possible expectation:

“I know exactly what the others think and what they're going to say.”

Rigid opinions about other groups involved (politicians, civil servants, NGOs, business people, ordinary citizens) impede open communication in participation processes. They prevent one from listening attentively to how the others present their views and interests, from recognizing these as legitimate, and from joining in the search for a joint solution without reservations.

Points to ponder:

- > As a facilitator, establish an atmosphere of openness and trust in which all concerns can be tabled on an equal footing and polemics and disparagement have no place. Aim to get everyone taking part to listen to the others and accept their concerns as legitimate.
- > As a participant in such a process, enter into discussion with an open, curious mind. One cannot always size up all the various points of view accurately in advance.

Possible expectation:

“In any case there's no scope for alternatives, so what's the point of discussing it all?”

A participation process needs plenty of scope for (re)shaping things; so anyone launching such a process should check in advance what has already been decided and what options are available as regards searching for a joint solution. If it is clear at the start of the process how much scope is available for (re)shaping things, this will make it much easier for individuals to decide whether they want to take part in the process in the circumstances obtaining.

Points to ponder:

- > As a facilitator, define in advance with those responsible what is up for discussion and what is not.
- > Explain clearly how much scope exists for (re)shaping things, so that potential participants can decide whether they want to take part, and so that no misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations arise among the actual participants.
- > If, before a participation process gets going, the target groups addressed fail to get involved, possibly because there is not enough scope for (re)shaping things, you should, in your capacity as facilitator, think over again together with the client how the offer can be made more attractive.

Possible expectation:

“I don’t just want to talk about details (e.g. the cycle track), but I want to help develop a comprehensive solution (e.g. an overall traffic plan for the community).”

Apart from defining the framework, the goals and the assignment, it is also important that the process boundaries be staked out clearly – for instance, what level the issue to be decided is at and which topics can be discussed, and decisions taken on them, at this level. An agreement could be reached, say, that a particular topic or a higher-level issue should be made the subject of a different participation process. The participants could then decide whether they wanted to take part in the process on that topic.

Points to ponder:

- > Before commissioning a participation process, clarify the topic to be discussed and define/delimit it in a sensible way (if possible together with the participants).
- > As a facilitator, clarify who is authorized to decide a higher-level issue, and how you can make the need for discussion clear to the department concerned and/or pass relevant results connected with a higher-order issue to that department.
- > As a facilitator, provide enough opportunity within the participation process for addressing pent-up needs to discuss things. In cases where the topic has been delimited beforehand, explain what can/cannot meaningfully be discussed/dealt with, and why this boundary has been chosen.

Possible expectation:

“I’ve expressed my concerns, now it’s up to the politicians to find a solution – after all, what did I elect them for?”

In a representative democracy the task of those elected to political office is to represent the citizens’ interests and to incorporate these in political decisions even-handedly. In practice some interests are accommodated to a greater extent, other hardly or not at all. There can be all sorts of reasons for this: how visible these interests are, how influential the relevant lobby is,

how vehemently and obstinately the relevant demands are put forward, etc. Participation processes provide a forum in which one can canvass for one's concerns, find allies and convince others with arguments.

Points to ponder:

- > Politics always involves negotiating between differing interests; only those concerns that are actually tabled and presented in plausible terms can play a part in the negotiations. If you yourself are active on behalf of your concern, the chances that a solution will be found for it improve.
- > Participation processes require commitment and an investment in time from those taking part. At the same time, though, they provide opportunities to influence decisions that affect one's own quality of life.

Possible expectations:

“At the end of a participation process everyone is always on the winning side.”

“Without exception, the result of participation processes is a win-win solution.”

As a rule, successful participation processes deliver durable solutions which fit in with the needs of many of those taking part. But the results of participation processes do not always benefit everyone taking part. However, those forced to put up with disadvantages can, for instance, receive appropriate compensation for these, in which case they will find it easier to agree to the solution in question.

Points to ponder:

- > It is essential to identify the disadvantages clearly by name and not to gloss over them.
- > See to it that compensation for disadvantages is fair, i.e. that those forced to put up with disadvantages receive the best compensation possible, e.g. by means of noise abatement measures, special community services, grants etc.
- > Take care that people who fail to (or are unable to) participate are not saddled with most of the disadvantages.
- > As a facilitator, try to motivate everyone who may be affected by a solution to participate.

Possible expectation:

“Decisions reached via participation automatically contribute to sustainable development.”

Public participation plays an important part in sustainability strategies – after all, these are intended to achieve a balance between economic, social and environmental interests acceptable to all those involved. But this does not automatically mean that decisions prepared via participation will lead to sustainable results. In the reality of participation processes it is all but ruled out that the manifold aspects of sustainable development will be adequately re

presented purely by the various groups taking part. Sustainable development is not just about reconciling environmental, social and economic aspirations with one another, but is also concerned with the needs of future generations – as well as pursuing a global perspective of social justice.

Points to ponder:

- > Encourage all participants to reach a consensus on what the concept of sustainable development implies in the context of the actual issue.
- > Invite people representing all relevant aspects of sustainable development to participate in the process.
- > Discuss conflicts between economic, environmental and social goals, and clarify whether/how these differing interests should/can be taken into account on an equal footing in the participation process.
- > Point out what effects various possible solutions would have on the relevant aspects of sustainable development, and how negative effects can be avoided.
- > If possible, bear in mind what effects the results of the participation process could have on future generations.

Possible expectation:

“The participation process is fine as a way of giving people something to do – but at the end of the day it’ll be us who actually decide!”

This attitude (not unknown among politicians and civil servants) has to do with the issue of what role those taking part have in the process (to what extent they can share in the decision) and who ultimately has the last word on the issue under discussion. If policymakers opt for a participation process, they must be willing to take the results of the process into account when taking their decision. “Taking into account” means that the policymakers give respectful attention to these results and incorporate them in their decision as far as possible. If their decision diverges significantly from the results reached via participation, intelligible reasons for this should be given/communicated in terms of the content of the participation process¹⁶. How smoothly novel, participative ways of reaching decisions mesh in with the traditional forms of representative democracy largely depends on how the interface between the participation process and the policymaking bodies is configured.

¹⁶ See also: „Standards of Public Participation“, adopted by the Austrian Council of Ministers on 2 July 2008), www.partizipation.at/standards_pp.html

Points to ponder:

- > It must be clear from the start both to the organizations funding participation processes and to those taking part how far the results of the process are binding, who ultimately decides, and whether the participants are simply being consulted or are to share in a joint decision. If the participants come to feel that they are not being taken seriously and that the results of the process will not be taken into account in the final decision, their willingness to get involved in anything similar may be permanently impaired (see also the next point).
- > Solutions reached in participation processes can have several advantages for policymakers¹⁷: for instance, the quality of the results and/or the level of acceptance may be higher, planning may be more dependable, etc. In most cases participation processes enhance the material on which to base the decision, but leave the actual decision in the hands of the political entities officially responsible. For the policymakers that often means, that their decisions become more visible, and thus need to be explained intelligibly: the responsibility of the policymaking bodies is then more in the public eye.

Possible expectations:

“The politicians and civil servants end up doing whatever they like, regardless!” / “They just want to keep us busy!”

Some individuals and common-interest groups doubt whether politicians and civil servants actually take the results of participation processes into account. This attitude may be due to negative experience with processes of this kind. To counteract this attitude, which of course inhibits people from taking part in such processes, the best way of generating trust is to present credible opportunities to participate; successful case histories can serve as models here.

Points to ponder:

- > Before initiating a participation process, one should check whether such a process is a suitable tool for the issue in question, whether the necessary resources are available and whether the policymakers are willing to take the results achieved into account (see also the previous expectation).
- > It makes sense for individuals and common-interest groups to consider beforehand whether the offer to participate is attractive enough¹⁸ and whether alternatives preferable to getting involved in a participation process exist.
- > The following questions may be helpful as and when individuals and common-interest groups weigh up whether to take part in a participation process:
 - What exactly do I want to achieve in this process?
 - What are my top-priority aims? What matters less to me?
 - How good are the chances that I can achieve my aims? Who or what could be helpful? Who or what could jeopardize achieving these goals?
 - What are my maximum aims? What are my minimum aims? In which areas could I make (limited) concessions? Where do I have leeway for negotiation?
 - How else can I achieve my aims (other than by taking part in a participation process)?

¹⁷ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2004): Worksheets on participation, No. 2 „benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents“, Vienna

¹⁸ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2003): Worksheets on participation, No. 1 „checklists on preconditions and quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere“, Vienna as well as „Standards of public participation – Recommendations for Good Practice“, April 2008.

Possible expectation:

“I put time and energy into it all and someone else sells the result as theirs.”

In a participation process a large number of people contribute to the result achieved. If these contributions are left unmentioned at the end of the day, and only a few people, for instance politicians and civil servants, are publicly associated with the result achieved, this may annoy many of those involved.

Points to ponder:

- > Participation stands and falls with appreciation and recognition. Politicians and civil servants should publicly recognize and acknowledge the commitment of people who volunteer to take part in participation processes in their spare time: this may involve naming them in public, awarding prizes or privileges, financial compensation, etc.
- > Communication in and around a participation process is a tricky business; arrangements for this should be made at the start of the process. Who communicates details of the process and its results to the outside world, and in what form? It is also a good idea to agree with the policymakers (if possible in writing) how the results of the process are to be handled.

Possible expectations:

“If people are interested in the issue, they’ll definitely join in the participation process.”

“Only a handful people have come along – obviously they are not interested in having a say, even in matters that affect them directly.”

Reluctance to participate may simply be due to lack of interest. In many cases, though, there is something wrong with the general set-up – e.g. the dates of meetings, the scope offered for creativity, or the way the topic has been prepared beforehand. There are a number of obstacles (mainly for migrants, single parents and other disadvantaged groups) to taking an active part in public discussions. For someone to decide to join in a participation process, they need to have enough time, to obtain and understand the relevant information, to feel competent to have a say about the topic in question, etc. Previous mishaps or the feeling that ordinary citizens are completely powerless can also be reasons for not joining in a participation process.

Points to ponder:

- > Is the information about the process easy to understand, and has it reached as many target groups as possible?
- > Does the process timetable take the various time constraints applying to as many potential participants as possible into account?
- > Have arrangements been made so that hard-to-reach groups (see above) can take part too?
- > Is the offer of participation attractive enough? Have the participants enough scope for negotiating and sharing in decisions?
- > In large-scale participation processes the amount of time required can be an obstacle: in contrast to civil servants, ordinary citizens and some lobbyists invest their time and knowledge on an honorary basis. So it is important to acknowledge adequately the time invested free of charge and the specialized knowledge contributed, and to indicate in advance how much time is likely to be needed.

Possible expectations:

“Our grassroots initiative represents the majority, so we can prevent the project being implemented!”

“Here we have the last word!”

“As I represent a club with a wide membership here, my voice carries more weight!”

The question of how to weight votes frequently comes up in participation processes. Neither the rule “one person or organization – one vote” nor the rule “the more members a club has, the more weight the vote of the club’s representative carries” applies automatically. Arrangements about this need to be made at the start of the process, in line with the actual situation. Weighting votes makes more difference to the result in the case of majority voting than in the case of consensual decisions; it is not often employed in participation processes, though.¹⁹

Points to ponder:

- > The decisive factor as regards attaining one’s goal is not the number of people supporting a given proposal, but how convincing the arguments for or against it are – and often the legal framework, too. So it is important to prepare one’s arguments with care and to clarify what is legally possible.
- > As a facilitator, see to it that the various groups can present their interests and views on an equal footing, and that communication takes place on a level playing-field and on an equal footing.

Possible expectations:

“The longer the discussion goes on, the more likely it is that everyone is happy!”

“A proper discussion takes time.”

“After three meetings we must have a result that can be implemented on the spot.”

Discrepancies in people’s expectations about the timescale for the process can be resolved if information is provided about how much time is available. It is a good idea to paint a realistic picture of the time constraints applying to working out a result, and of the political and administrative steps between the end of the process and actual implementation. Sufficient time for discussion makes it easier to understand others’ interests, facilitates convergence between differing points of view, and makes it more likely that a solution with wide support will be found. However, a longer discussion does not always improve the quality of the result. In some cases it makes sense – even if the ideal solution has not been found and agreement seems far off – to terminate

¹⁹ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2008): Worksheets on participation, No. 5 „reaching decisions in participation processes“, Vienna

a long-drawn-out discussion and bring about a decision. If necessary, the decision can be reviewed and modified at a later date; this can even be agreed during the process itself.

Points to ponder:

- > As a facilitator, peg out the framework for the participation process (e.g. time available, budget provided, etc.) and make it clear to all participants what they are getting into and within what framework decisions can/must be reached. Allow some extra time as a precaution.
- > Divide the process into separate phases and steps, and make it clear to the participants which decisions must be taken by a given date and which can be taken later. That makes it easier to understand the process, and gives the participants more confidence in the procedure adopted.
- > Give some thought to the question of exactly how decisions are to be reached²⁰. If you need to make the current situation clear after a period of discussion, you can ask everyone how they feel, or carry out a straw poll.
- > At the start of the discussion settle whether decisions are reached by majority vote, or the decision is delegated to others if a decision based on consensus is not reached within the time envisaged.
- > Make it clear what the consequences will be if no agreement is reached – for instance, that the policymakers may take the result of the process less seriously.
- > If the various interests clash head-on, one possibility is to aim for a consensual solution in the essential points and to list the remaining points (on which no agreement can be reached) in a special document, with the option of coming back to these and going on working on them at a later date. A document of this kind often makes things much easier for the participants, and can open the way to a consensus in other areas.

Possible expectations:

“The facilitators aren’t neutral – after all, they get paid by one particular organization.”

“The facilitators will come up with the right solution for me.”

“The facilitators are responsible for the result.”

Facilitators are responsible for the process, but not for the content of the results. Their task is to assure the quality of how the process is prepared and carried out. They are not responsible for the solution in terms of content – that is what the actual participants generate. Expectations about the facilitators’ role should be sorted out with the client when their remit is specified, and with the participants at the start of the process.

Points to ponder:

- > What exactly is the facilitators’ remit? Does it allow them to mediate and to act neutrally?
- > Who selects the facilitators? Are the common-interest groups taking part involved in the selection?
- > Who commissions and pays the facilitators? Is the funding shared out so that the participants contribute?
- > Has the facilitators’ role been made clear to the participants at the start of the process? Has it been made clear that the participants, not the facilitators, are responsible for the result and/or solution?

²⁰ See also Strategic Group on Participation (2008): Worksheets on participation, No. 5 „reaching decisions in participation processes“, Vienna

Strategic Group on Participation

The Strategic Group on Participation was set up in 2002 by ÖGUT on the initiative of the Austrian Ministry of the Environment; ÖGUT coordinates the Group. The results of debate within the Strategic Group are summarized and published as “Worksheets on Participation“ and aim at facilitating practitioners’ work.

The Strategic Group on Participation is intended to

- > give the notion of „Participation“ clearer contours, develop it further and make it more widely known,
- > promote awareness of participation in the public eye and among decision-makers in politics, the administration and business,
- > work out participation strategies for policies relevant to the environment and sustainability,
- > contribute to sustainable development by promoting participation,
- > promote participation at communal, regional and national level,
- > make concrete “how to” guides available to people with practical interests.

The members of the Strategic Group on Participation are qualified experts on the subject with backgrounds in many different fields. The following experts were members of the group when this worksheet was drafted. For the status quo of membership please visit www.partizipation.at/members.html:

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The Worksheet No. 1 on Participation contains a checklist on preconditions for participation processes and a checklist on quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere.

The Worksheet No. 2 on Participation presents an array of arguments in connexion with the question of what benefits participation provides for which groups of agents.

The Worksheet No. 3 on Participation deals with the limits of and possible obstacles to participation processes, and with the risk of such processes being misused.

The Worksheet No. 4 on Participation contains recommendations for dealing with statements in formal and informal participation processes.

The Worksheet No. 5 on Participation is concerned with ways of reaching decisions in participation processes, and is meant to simplify the task of identifying the most suitable way in a particular case.

The Worksheet No. 6 on Participation discusses possible expectations in participation processes.

Download in German and English: www.partizipation.at

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