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The city in dialogue

Introduction, summary and recommendations

Barbara Kosiol, Gary Lawrence, Reinhard Sellnow and Andreas von Zadow

Dialogue as a pre-requisite for sustainable urban development

Towns and communities constitute the basic unit of local government in a democratic state. This is the level at which citizens come into direct contact with the state and the authorities in conducting their everyday affairs. It is the level at which they encounter democracy at first hand. How stable the democratic political system is, the degree to which it is accepted and hence the prospects for sustainable urban development depend to a very large extent on whether the public's encounter with democracy at the lowest, i.e. local authority, level is a stimulating and satisfactory experience.

Agenda 21 processes in recent years have shown that a sustainable way of life can neither be decreed from the top down, nor can it be brought about by statutory regulations. What is needed is a change in people's attitudes and behaviour. This can only be achieved by persuasion and motivation which, in turn, means that the public must have a right to participation and codetermination.

It is impossible for the public as a whole to be informed about every single local issue, to take part in discussions and help make decisions. The standard practice in a representative democracy, therefore, is to have elections every four to six years in which voters can elect candidates to represent their interests at the local authority level (in the town council, for instance). Those who are elected are then entitled to make decisions - to the best of their knowledge and belief - on behalf and in the interests of the general public.

Participation in political decisions

In practice, there is an increasing degree of dissatisfaction with the decisions taken by elected representatives. In the following section the question is posed whether representative democracy, which is perfectly acceptable as such, might not be supplemented by elements of direct democracy, i.e. direct participation by the public or organised groups of citizens.

- ways in which political interests have traditionally been represented are no longer adequate to cater for the wide variety of interests and demands which exist today;
- certain sections of society, professions and lifestyles are no longer represented in parliaments;
- specific social groups organise their own lobbies and therefore have access to politicians, whereas other groups, which are poorly organised or not organised at all, are denied such access. The interests of one particular group can, therefore, be asserted against the will of the majority;
- professional politicians often live in a closed-off world with their own institutions and information systems. They see no need to have their ear to the ground, to listen to advice or recommendations from the public, or to seek any justification for the policies they pursue;
- members of the public often no longer consider decisions made by politicians to be appropriate or to the general good and do not identify with them. Resistance mobilised as a result ranges from demonstrations to legal proceedings in administrative courts, which hold up planning procedures or bring them to a halt.

Participation and planning: administrative authorities, experts and the public

Knowledge which administrative authorities and internal or external experts can draw on in town planning matters is limited. There is, therefore, every possibility of objectives being pursued which inhabitants do not share and which are unlikely to resolve existing problems, if at all, because no attention has been paid to the detailed local knowledge which members of the public have.

People living in a neighbourhood tend to have more precise knowledge of local problems and their possible solution than experts who do not live in the same neighbourhood and come from quite different social backgrounds. Moreover, local inhabitants have their own set of values and objectives for their lives, their neighbourhood and their city. The knowledge they have is not the kind of knowledge the experts

have. It is rather their own personal vision of the future which - in a democracy - should be incorporated on an equal footing along with other aspects in an overall opinion-forming process.

Experts, on the other hand, can draw on factual knowledge (data, statistics), cognitive knowledge (of correlations, link-ups, consequences and side-effects) and instrumental knowledge (methods, models, plans, procedures), to which members of the public, as non-experts, by definition do not have access. This produces a dilemma because experts wrongly believe that their specialist knowledge enables them to determine which objectives are meaningful and what the future should look like (cp. Lawrence).

If administrative authorities adopt a top-down approach and concern themselves solely with finished plans and projects, dissenting members of the public have no other choice but to demonstrate their opposition and to organise resistance (cp. Paulinova). Attitudes of the authorities themselves prevent inhabitants from being partners and allies which the authorities would prefer and turn these people instead into the enemy, which from their point of view is a regrettable process.

The advantages of dialogue

Call for dialogue with the public stems not just from the unsatisfactory situation outlined above. It also offers distinct advantages for the local authorities:
- public participation enables democratic attitudes and behaviour to be exercised and promotes integration into the city's social systems. This reinforces local democracy in the long term;
- public participation gives politicians and administrators a chance to find out what inhabitants are worried about, what they want and what they propose. Direct contact with the public thus provides them with information and a corrective to their own ideas and opinions;
- political decisions stemming from public participation enjoy much greater legitimacy;
- planning processes can be improved and speeded up (greater efficiency);
- plans reflect real needs to a greater extent and are therefore likely to prove more satisfactory in the longer term;
- people who are not experts often come up with surprisingly simple, new and good solutions;
- resources can be used more effectively and bad planning / investment can be avoided;
- relations between inhabitants, property owners and investors can be improved;
- members of the public can be made aware of problems which the neighbourhood faces and opportunities it has;
- trust and skills are enhanced all round;
- conflicts can be resolved more quickly and better;
- complaints, protests and legal proceedings decline.

Participation procedures

A distinction is made below between formal and informal means of participation. A legal basis exists for formal participation, i.e. for cases in which participation of members of the public or individual groups (e.g. property owners, investors, nature conservation associations) is required by law. Informal participation is not restricted to specific issues or methods; it can be organised as needs dictate. Some conditions are that it should not contravene municipal regulations (municipal code) or overrule existing responsibilities (to take decisions, for instance).

Formal public participation

Essentially, there are two kinds of formal public participation:
- firstly, participation which is a) designed to establish closer relations with the public and be of direct benefit to the politicians and administrators and b) dependent upon their decisions. In this kind of participation the public is 'brought in';
- secondly, participation resulting from independent public initiative and depending on self-generated activities. In this kind of participation members of the public join in 'on their own account'.

Examples of the first kind are:
- public meetings of local authority organisations (town council, committees);
- obligations to inform the public in good time about major planning projects at local authority level;

- question time and opportunities for the public to be heard in public meetings;
- opinion polls;
- involvement of informed members of the public in the work of committees;
- obligations to hold public meetings at specified intervals (e.g. every two years).

Examples of the second kind are:
- public right to submit suggestions and file complaints;
- citizens' initiatives (in council meetings);
- petitions for local referenda (cp. von Kodolitsch).

Examples of the second kind of participation depend on individual initiative of members of the public. A petition can force the council to have certain matters decided by a local referendum. However, this is only possible if signatures required by local government law have been submitted.

A number of *special laws* also contain provisions for public participation which are of relevance at the local political level. These regulations can apply, for instance, to land use planning, planning for building work and urban renewal, pollution control, environmental impact assessments, waste management issues, help for children and adolescents and latterly also local public transport.

Essentially, the aim of these formal means of participation is to *inform* the public about planning intentions and investment projects and to *find out* what the public thinks. Members of the public can make suggestions and voice their reservations, about which the authorities then decide. It is not intended that there should be genuine public *participation* or even cooperation.

There is increasing *dissatisfaction* with these formal means of participation because in practice they frequently reveal the following inadequacies:
- participation often takes no account of target groups and specific interests; it is theoretical in nature (abstract representation in plans which members of the public cannot interpret properly; formulated in specialist language they cannot understand); this means that only very few people are in a position to express their views;
- there is defensive reaction to public interests and proposals;
- inhabitants receive no feedback on the response to their proposals;
- information is often difficult to acquire;
- meetings which are held often contain a great deal of public presentation on the part of the authorities and provide little opportunity for discussion. Communication tends to be one-sided, not geared to an exchange of views and mutual learning;
- meetings are not chaired by a neutral person, but by the authorities, who thus face a conflict of interests when it comes to complaints and attacks.

Informal public participation

Formal means of participation alone are no longer adequate for local government policy. *Informal participation models* aimed at bringing about *genuine public participation* or even *cooperation* have been used to an increasing extent in recent years (cp. Baumann). No restrictions are placed on the extent or nature of such participation, provided it does not contravene responsibilities laid down in the municipal code. Participation of this kind is voluntary and supplementary in character and helps the authorities (town council) in their decision making. It replaces nothing and nobody, and as such does not constitute competition for the established authorities. There is no need for complicated legal frameworks to be drawn up for informal participation procedures. Given good will on all sides, they can begin without delay.

On the one hand, these procedures are weak because they do not incorporate the right to make decisions and can only draft *recommendations*. On the other hand, they are powerful because they hold out the hope that good, sound arguments and the weight of consensus achieved between interest groups will exert considerable persuasive force. There should be a voluntary agreement to the effect that "no political decisions ought to be taken which fly in the face of good argument". This does not interfere with politicians' constitutional right to make decisions freely, but it obliges them - if they choose to ignore recommendations - to explain to the public why these arguments were disregarded. This agreement on how participation results are to be handled is needed if members of the public are to see any sense in

being actively involved on a voluntary basis over a period of days, weeks or even months. Members of the public must sense that involvement is worthwhile, that they will be listened to and that arguments and ideas they put forward will enable them to exert an influence (cp. Nisblé).

The following are examples of informal types of participation:
- municipal forums;
- round tables;
- public expert reports / planning units;
- future search workshops;
- future search conferences;
- open space conferences;
- Planning for Real;
- future prospects workshops;
- mediation.

Which participation is appropriate to which particular issue must be decided on a case-by-case basis. The part of this publication entitled Models in Practice is designed to be of assistance in this respect. Baumann's overview describes, amongst other things, selection criteria; outlines at the beginning of each article emphasise the key points in the selection made; and practical examples provide a good illustration of participation in practice and how various kinds of participation intertwine.

Participants in informal participation models

When mention is made of 'the public' in the context of participation, it does not generally refer to the tens of thousands of private, non-organised citizens living in a city. Indeed, it would certainly be extremely difficult in organisational terms to arrange communication and feedback between tens of thousands of people. Schemes involving direct democracy are also not ideal when it comes to communication with the planning authorities because
- selection of participants is purely arbitrary and can thus be controlled and misused from outside;
- persons involved cannot ensure their continued presence over comparatively long periods of time;
- stages in the work process and intermediate results can never be concluded if new participants call them into question;
- there is a lack of authorised persons for the authorities to contact;
- 'grassroots' democratic systems are too cumbersome to provide the requisite input for planning authorities.

The models/kinds of participation referred to above are generally designed for between 20 and 70 people or, in some exceptional cases, such as future prospects workshops (cp. von Zadow) or open space conferences, for several hundred. Clearly, only a very small percentage of a city's inhabitants can take part. Hence, great care must be taken in selecting participants in order to avoid any subsequent claims of manipulation. The method usually chosen is to include representatives reflecting the interests of those affected by the issue at stake (cp. Sellnow; Hannemann). The selection process must be both transparent and acceptable. Ways also need to be found to communicate outcomes of the participation procedures to the non-participant general public and to ensure opportunities for feedback.

Pre-requisites and success

If all these different kinds of participation are to function properly, there must be clarification in advance of the basic conditions, perceptions, roles, objectives, organisational issues, neutral chairmanship, processes, rights and obligations, rules etc., since nothing can be taken for granted. This working basis must be accepted by all concerned. If that is the case, positive communication between partners is possible; this can lead to effective participation on the part of members of the public (defining problems, setting targets, proposing measures) and in some cases to negotiations, balancing interests, achieving consensus and cooperation in implementing what has been agreed on.

Every form of public participation requires financial, personnel and other resources. Willingness to make the requisite investment here often depends on the anticipated 'success'. It is of the utmost importance to ensure clarity beforehand about how 'success' in participation is subsequently to be measured. This involves establishing *who* will be allowed to determine whether a procedure was successful, *when* success

can be ascertained and *which objectives* are to be achieved. Success criteria should not be based on whether one side or the other has been able to assert its point of view, but rather on whether it has proved possible to fulfil the above-mentioned criteria and quality requirements to the greatest extent possible (cp. check list of criteria for successful participation procedures).

Parties involved in dialogue and how they see themselves

New forms of dialogue at the local level require all the participants to develop both a changed understanding of themselves and a new 'attitude' to one another, as well as new capacities and social skills in the way they deal with one another, in short a transformed 'culture of debate'. However, there will only be changed behaviour conducive to greater public participation if all those involved can see the sense and benefit of such a change for themselves (or their interest group) as well as for the city and the local community.

The way key players in town planning (politicians, administrators, NGOs, the business sector) see themselves will be most readily apparent in the section on Public participation from various points of view. The recommendations drafted in collaboration with participants in workshops and this project are directed primarily to these actors.

A new form of public-private partnership. The power triangle has been transformed into a power parallelogram. The traditional closed loop of investors, officials and politicians has thus been broken apart and now extends to include the public and all those persons affected by decisions (cp. Zunke).

Politicians

In people's general understanding of democracy, politicians are invested with power to make decisions for a limited period of time on the public's behalf so that public matters can be conducted in the general interest. Models of participation which do not interfere with constitutional tasks and decision making or other responsibilities provide politicians with additional information, ensure that models are accepted at an early stage and so *help politicians to form their own opinions and make the requisite decisions*. It is advantageous for politicians not just to be informed of the outcome of participation processes, but also to be directly involved themselves. They then have access to information at first hand and are familiar with negotiation or other processes which are required to bring about consensus and cooperation in informal procedures, in particular.

Administrators, authorities and experts

One of the tasks authorities have is to prepare decisions to be taken by politicians and to act as a constant source of assistance to town planners who put decisions taken by politicians into practice. The detailed local knowledge of members of the public involved in the new participation models enhances information available to experts. This then enables experts to gain acceptance for their plans at an early stage. Participation procedures also help to resolve dilemmas between experts and non-experts referred to above. Moreover, participation can n reduce the time needed to put plans into practice, because opposition and legal proceedings tend to be reduced or avoided altogether.

NGOs

Non-governmental organisations representing the interests of the public concerning urban development and environmental issues tend to combine their demands for sustainable development with a plea for participatory democracy. In the past they have often encountered difficulties in obtaining the necessary information and in being taken seriously as recognised partners in talks.

Their influence has increased, however, as a result of the greater level of expertise they can now draw on. More and more qualified specialists are now members of NGOs and often have access to their own analysis and research facilities. As a result organisations are in a better position to cooperate on a broad level. However, NGOs have to be clear in their minds as to their own limitations. They help to form public

opinion but they do not participate in decision making. Nonetheless, NGOs are in a position to exert influence by means of good arguments and ultimately to assert their point of view.

In terms of transfer of know-how, training courses and availability of experts, NGOs are now perhaps the most important service partner for local authorities seeking to raise the level of public involvement.

Private sector

Given the objectives it pursues, the commercial, business or private sector has an ambivalent attitude to public participation (cp. Pauen). The sector has a fundamental interest in a stable, well-functioning community environment but is wary of increased risks, because there are limitations on the extent to which outcomes of public discussion and participation can be forecast and controlled. Results may run counter to sectoral interests in private projects, problems may arise in gaining acceptance and permission for large-scale or complex projects, project development time frames may have to be extended, and the project itself might be put at risk because its objectives may become transparent to competitors in the market.

On the other hand, the private sector does not overlook opportunities provided by public participation procedures in terms of better knowledge and evaluation of the conditions applying to a particular location. This may prove beneficial in marketing terms, minimise areas of conflict, obviate planning errors, reduce investment risks and make a major contribution to commercial optimisation of a project or urban development scheme.

Neutral chairmanship

Placing responsibility for the conduct of public participation procedures in the hands of neutral third parties has paid dividends. A chairman's task is to ensure a fair and proper dialogue, i.e. to be responsible for the *process* but not for *content*. This enables participants and representatives of various interests to concentrate on their respective positions (cp. Sellnow; Lüth, Pinkepank and Walker). There is now a separate professional category of chair persons, moderators or mediators with special qualifications and skills who are able to structure a dialogue properly, to steer clear of pitfalls involved in communication and to prevent misunderstandings from occurring. Among the essential qualifications of a good chair person are:
- openness and impartiality towards all those involved in the procedure and the arguments put forward; neutrality towards, and personal independence of, local political parties, majority groupings in the local council and views of the authorities;
- reliability in keeping to agreements, maintaining confidentiality, adhering to agreed rules, forms and general conditions;
- ability to create transparency in arguments, positions and interests by means of clarification, analysis and disclosure;
- presentation of the methods used, objectives to be achieved and steps to be taken.

Forms of dialogue

A planned dialogue requires certain *forms* and *structures*. There are no ready-made 'recipes' for the required time and effort to be invested which will apply at all times and in all places. On the contrary, forms used have to be tailor-made for the respective issue and need to take due account of the municipal potential. A distinction is made below between forms of dialogue for *one-off actions* and forms of dialogue for *permanent institutions* in public participation.

Three elements normally have to be taken into account when plans are being drawn up for new forms of dialogue between politicians, administrators, the private sector and citizens' action or other interest groups:
- *transparency*: it is essential that there should be clarity about everything from the framework conditions to objectives, responsibilities, modes of decision making, implementation of results etc.;
- *chaos*: the great variety of differing groups and initiatives and elements of unpredictability they bring to bear almost inevitably produce a certain degree of chaos, since not all participants are as well organised as administrative authorities, for instance. This may be seen as negative and threatening but

is not necessarily the case; it is quite possible to adopt a relaxed attitude when confronted by chaos, to adapt to it and regard it as being part and parcel of a process of social renewal;

- *patience*: if attention is focussed too much on the outcome rather than on the process (cp. Rauwerda), a feeling of impatience may arise, particularly if there is excessive pressure to achieve and implement results. It should be borne in mind that it takes a lot of staying power to re-establish contacts and re-build trust which have been undermined, as well as cautiously to explore and try out methods of cooperation. Setbacks are always possible, too (e.g. in matters of trust). All this requires patience, particularly at the outset. Later on, once the requisite positive experience has been gathered, it may be easier to move ahead at a faster pace.

One-off actions

One-off actions involving public participation are generally occasioned by an issue which is limited in terms of time and space. Perhaps

- a traffic model is being sought for the municipality which requires the support of as many people as possible;
- controversy is raging about the route to be taken by a by-pass;
- a location has to be found for a waste disposal site;
- a school is to be closed;
- an old established neighbourhood is to be redeveloped.

In all these and similar cases, use can be made of forms of participation such as municipal forums, round tables, citizens' expert reports / planning units, future search workshops, future search conferences, open-space conferences, Planning for Real, future prospects workshops and mediation. They are described in detail in this publication either as a method or in the form of a practical example (see section on Models in practice).

Permanent institutions

Attempts to generate a new culture of debate in municipalities and introducing elements of direct democracy as a source of aid and support for representative democracy may also lead to the establishment of *permanent institutions*, for which there are various organisational forms:

- a *municipal institution* set up by the local authority to bring together the representatives of a wide variety of interests around one table; participants meet at regular intervals to advise the city on long-term urban development issues or matters of acute concern (e.g. urban forum, cp. Flicke);
- commissioning *specialist institutions* by the authorities (e.g. S.T.E.R.N, the redevelopment agency , cp. Hannemann), tasked to organise and implement public participation on a certain issue (e.g. urban renewal) and in a limited area (e.g. a certain neighbourhood) over a period of several years;
- *a public-private community facility*, in which the municipality is joined on an equal footing by private and public institutions (e.g. the business sector, trade unions, architects, university, press etc.) and all agree to finance the facility together; the forum will then engage in independent discussion with the public on urban planning matters and bring about improvements by expressing criticism and ideas;
- *private institutions* set up by interested members of the public and groups (e.g. Wedding Municipal Forum, cp. Rennert; Wedding Traffic Forum, cp. Kollatz);
- *municipal institutions* may also serve as a point of contact for dialogue in a city (e.g. OKiDS Centre for Social Dialogue, cp. City of Warsaw, Herbst).

Situation in central and eastern countries (CEEC) - problems and prospects or opportunities

'East' - 'West': differences and common ground

Public involvement or dialogue in cities in the western and eastern parts of Europe have been introduced or strengthened for the same basic reasons. They have comparable tasks and objectives with a view to sustainable urban development and a common need to establish informal participation procedures.

The urgent need for such procedures is a result of non-functioning democratic processes which enables interests of a particular group to be asserted against the will of the majority (cp. Zunke). Municipalities the world over face the same difficulties in fulfilling the objectives of Local Agenda 21 (LA 21), in which participatory processes play a key role.

The need for a change in paradigms, on which Lawrence focuses in his section, confronts politicians in west and east with a new approach vis-à-vis the role they are called upon to play. In its construction, he says, LA 21 makes clear through its call for involvement, empowerment and devolution of power that planning is primarily a political activity which relies on formal knowledge and planning techniques. Most rational planning models assume the opposite: that planning is primarily technical with political consequences. With this shift in emphasis, customary relationships between planners and the planning profession, between the public and politicians change significantly.

The situation is not essentially the same in CEEC. "Without regard to any particular governance system, bureaucracies have a tendency to hold power close" (Lawrence). However, municipalities in these countries lack practical experience of democracy on which their opposite numbers in western European countries can build, although, as Schroedter points out, "people outside the Union are well aware of the lack of democracy within the EU".

There can be no doubt, however, that socialist state doctrines have had a lasting impact on attitudes and value systems of citizens in former Eastern bloc countries, as is readily apparent from the city reports (see section on Approaches in central European metropolises) and individual discussions with local players. Mention need only be made of the former centralist approach to politics, rigid hierarchical structures behind the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' the policy of secrecy which ran completely counter to any sort of transparency; punishable passing on information; systematic suppression of personal responsibilities and entrepreneurship.

This, by no means complete, list of key aspects of everyday political practice under state socialism highlights the huge contrast with today's values and calls being voiced for participation, joint determination, individual initiative and democratisation. Everywhere it is possible to see and feel the gap between those who yearned for such freedom, and are now impatient to exploit the opportunities it provides - and those who cling to remnants of the former system, whether due to fear of losing something or because they cannot distance themselves from that system.

Warsaw, for instance, has experienced setting up OKiDS, a Centre for Social Dialogue, which brings together the municipality, administrative authorities and politicians. Participants are fully aware that information and propaganda lie cheek by jowl. And yet it is quite easy to produce something like 'blended' reports (cp. Dziekonski).

This conflict can be found in varying degrees in every town or city in CEEC. The difficulties encountered as a result in introducing public participation models are explicitly mentioned by cities and are briefly described below. They serve as the basis for the recommendations which follow, drafted by participants during the city in dialogue workshops and project.

Old structures - new structures

The continued existence of very marked *centralisation* and all-powerful *administrative bureaucracies* gives people feelings of impotence regarding their ability to change matters. These can be seen as part of the main causes for low levels of interest and involvement in matters of public concern. There is no tradition of democratic participation at local level, so the concept is seen as alien and difficult to put into practice.

There is still a very strong attitude of passive expectation that the 'state' will look after everything. Moreover, there is very deep-seated fear of being once more duped by propaganda. If there is interest, it tends to be more in major political or other figures rather than specific issues. At best there is involvement by members of university staffs and independent experts.

Generally speaking, local authorities need a great deal of time to adjust to requirements made of EU member states. There is often low public confidence in political parties and central governments, due to

high levels of corruption, economic ruin and destruction of educational, social and national health structures.

Many new structures have been established in recent years, but there are still considerable inadequacies in decision making and communication processes within these formal structures.

Municipal organisation and responsibilities

Organisational structures and responsibilities in CEEC can make participation at local level difficult. Several areas of activity of local importance (preventive health care, education, energy, water and waste disposal, for instance) may be controlled at national level; in these cases there is no opportunity for local authorities to intervene. In some cases, national legislation envisages public discussions at municipal level which local authorities are obliged to organise, without the local authorities being able to exercise any influence at all on the issues concerned. Some districts are autonomous and have their own legal status and council, which makes cooperation with municipal or city-wide authorities extremely difficult.

Players and dialogue in practice

The atmosphere among those involved in dialogue is often tense. There is very little communication between individual groups - in some cases even between the various administrative departments. "Everywhere one encounters lack of knowledge or will to engage in dialogue between different target groups. Rather than unite their efforts, they prefer to go on fighting each other" (Dziekonski).

Politicians, frequently working hand in hand with administrative authorities and experts, make the decisions which are often based on economic interests. Decisions are then passed down from top to bottom and all activity which members of the public can undertake, since they are not involved at any stage, is to protest and resist. This often prompts NGOs to embrace a strategy of grass-roots opposition, which is designed to oppose and fight official plans but does not offer any constructive alternatives.

NGOs do not know enough about information flows and decision making processes in political and administrative spheres. They are ill-equipped for dialogue and are frequently brought in too late. NGOs have incomplete knowledge, they scarcely talk to one another and often fight one another rather than pool their efforts. They frequently show signs of the NIMBY ('not in my backyard') syndrome. On the other hand, there are networks which cooperate at national and international level; they offer training courses for participation schemes (cp. Perneczki), about which, however, far too little is known.

Information which NGOs receive from administrative authorities either comes too late, or not at all, or is far from adequate. There tends to be little or no response to NGO proposals on the part of authorities. NGO experience has been that there is vigorous public protest against projects in the early stages but little willingness to become involved in the long term or to help find solutions.

Participation procedures are largely based on legal provisions, but informal procedures are often unknown. In some areas there are no active NGOs, which means that some interests are not represented at all and there are no partners with whom to engage in dialogue.

'Language' barriers between experts and members of the public are extreme. There is insufficient experience of a constructive culture of debate in which those representing competing interests try to find mutually acceptable solutions. Ideological arguments need to be replaced by two-way communication in the interests of the project in question.

Lack of resources

Participation calls for experts and training. In the communication infrastructure sector, as in other areas, progress cannot be made without the requisite investment. Given budget restraints, however, this field is liable to endure cost cutting. Insufficient personnel, material and financial resources are often made available for participation procedures. Generally speaking, public participation was and is not budgeted for.

Yet time and money spent on achieving a consensus, integrating forms of cooperation and PR work in the interests of quality assurance would ensure handsome dividends (Lawrence). Planning delays caused by long drawn-out legal disputes and bad decisions in traffic or town planning, for instance, can cost huge amounts of money in the future and poison the climate in the municipality for decades (cp. Paulinova).

Prospects

"It's not possible" is an example of a typical comment to be heard from past experience in larger cities in central and eastern Europe. But when people are presented with practical examples derived from other towns or cities they feel inspired to launch pilot projects, too. This is an example of a possible encouraging scenario for introducing dialogue in cities. Commitment on the part of individuals or groups is needed to overcome existing problems and tread new paths.

Informal forms of participation are particularly suitable in this respect. They require no complicated legal basis and can be set up immediately, given good will on all sides. Moreover, they are an excellent means of exploiting to the full the potential for action and intervention at the local level.

Examples in the section on Approaches in central European metropolises show, despite all the problems, where new approaches lie: in formal modes of participation, which in some cases are practised with a great deal of energy and commitment, and go well beyond what is prescribed by law, and in informal procedures.

To cite one example: in Warsaw, dialogue has become a regular part of life in the city. OKiDS, the Centre for Social Dialogue and Public Consultation, has institutionalised communication between those involved in town planning and, since it is directly subordinated to the city mayor, it receives the necessary political support.

In addition, networks are being set up; pilot schemes are being launched with the help of funding programmes; international exchange of experience is being sought and used to put ideas and projects into practice (as in OKiDS in Warsaw).

Legal frameworks are being established, even though it has to be accepted that CEEC have legal and cultural histories which are quite different to those in western countries. "Word-by-word implanting of the text of any given directive into their legal systems would lead nowhere" (Fulop). Transfer of legal regulations and incorporation into law take time to trickle down from the top to the bottom of the state pyramid. Practical 'dialogue in cities' must be able to come to grips with this transition stage, in which local municipal regulations are only slowly keeping pace with integration of legal and organisational arrangements which apply in EU member states.

The role of the European Union

Another important player with regard to public involvement in CEEC, and one capable of systematically advancing the participation process, is the European Union.

Like the World Bank and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the EU can use funding programmes to support exchange of experiences, initiate pilot schemes and make public participation a lasting feature of town planning. This is most frequently described as 'capacity building'.

In the framework of EU expansion, it can make stipulations concerning introduction and implementation of public participation at municipal level and thus support the subsidiarity principle at the same time. This is one aspect which gives rise to criticism, however. Introductory strategies and negotiations for integrating CEEC applying to join the EU are not considered by these countries to be very encouraging. This integration process, which excludes any regional or local representations as well as the general public, is being pursued by the EU and national governments in a way that runs completely counter to formulated objectives of greater transparency, subsidiarity and greater democratisation.

There is need for direct contact and partnership between local communities and EU partners or opposite numbers in order to enhance public participation processes. Use of national governmental structures in transmitting EU programmes, actions and funds produces negative results. EU programmes and funds are put to inappropriate uses as the EU currently only engages in dialogue with governmental structures and organisations, which have no real interest in, and provide no stimulus for, changes needed for integration

into Europe. However, changes can only be made with the help of effective participation at local level because this is the 'real life' level for citizens, this is the level for motivation and commitment. The principle of 'thinking globally, acting locally' must be firmly promoted by the EU as part of direct pre-accession activities and of funding between European capital cities in members states and in central and eastern European countries.

Recommendations

These recommendations were elaborated in the course of the project by participants in two workshops. They were assembled in accordance with five main consensus criteria, and with particular reference to the exceptional circumstances in CEEC. They show in which ways individual groups of actors – the politicians, administrators or officials, NGOs, the private sector, the EU – can specifically support the growth of a participatory style of planning in these countries.

Participant Consensus 1: advance participatory democracy in central and eastern Europe

While representing towns, cities or communities with unique histories, traditions, circumstances and goals, the participants embraced a shared commitment to securing a better economic, environmental and social present and future. All believed that achieving this goal depends on creating stronger and more vital local democracies. Vital democracies, it was agreed, are not possible without better public information, public education and real opportunities to participate in decisions that will shape the future.

The participants also recognised that, given the uniqueness of their pasts and the perspectives shaped by that past, the democracies created by their societies will share basic principles but will very likely have unique forms and characteristics.

Participant Consensus 1 has to do with basic principles and responsibilities embraced by participants as the foundation for improvement and change. These are identified by participant group.

Politicians should:

- encourage creation of civic and institutional cultures that recognise timely and accurate public information and public involvement as fundamental and necessary components of any truly democratic system;
- encourage creation of civic and institutional cultures that are more open to changes in views, intentions, approaches, priorities and plans based upon what is learned through public involvement and participation;
- incorporate effective public involvement laws, rules and practices at every level of decision making - from problem identification to evaluation and monitoring;
- create a supportive legal and regulatory framework that will guarantee public right to know about and participate in shaping the decisions that have consequence for their lives;
- assume, once key decisions are made, an obligation to communicate with the public on what was decided and why one course of action was preferred over alternatives.

Political parties should:

- adopt positions and describe intended actions with regard to promoting and securing the rights of individuals to participate in shaping governmental decisions; assume responsibility for communicating with the public.

Local government administrators or officials should:

- develop and implement strategies, including strategies for basic educational systems, to reinforce democratic principles of individual rights and responsibilities for all society's stakeholders, including children and young people;
- undertake institutional reforms which increase programmatic and operational transparency with regard to roles, responsibilities and resources, including public information resources;

- adopt requirements that project budgets, regardless of funding source, should include resources for public information and participation;
- institute reward/pay systems which reward those who increase timely and effective exchange of information with the public and who incorporate public participation and partnerships with non-governmental organisations into their programme and project designs;
- adopt and implement communication strategies based upon public needs rather than on institutional/professional preferences.

NGOs should:

- create and distribute information and undertake educational strategies regarding programmatic and societal costs and benefits of effective public information and involvement activities, including examples of effective, ineffective and non-existent public participation processes as practised by government institutions;
- work to develop cross-sectoral coalitions of NGOs and interest groups to promote political, institutional and general societal benefits which flow from a better informed and more actively engaged public.

The EU and/or national governments should:

- make public participation a pre-requisite for funding local initiatives, including PHARE/ISPA funding;
- incorporate public participation requirements into national legal systems;
- ratify the Aarhus Convention.

The private sector should:

- begin discussions with government regarding definitions of and expectations for corporate responsibility with respect to better public information and greater public involvement.

Participant Consensus 2: increase in education, training and development of more effective tools is necessary

Participants recognised that the desirable outcomes outlined in consensus 1 will not easily be achieved. There are many known barriers to the desired changes and most certainly new barriers will be discovered along the way. Some of the known barriers are: non-existent or ineffective training on how to involve constructively the variety of different groups seeking opportunities for engagement in public processes ; inaccurate and/or inaccessible data and information; reliance on ineffective communication channels and mechanisms. Consensus 2 focuses upon those activities necessary to overcome known and emergent barriers.

Politicians should:

- adopt policies requiring staff training in communication, facilitation and process management and allocate the resources necessary to support such training.

Local government administrators should:

- using community input, develop programmes, structures, strategies and feedback mechanisms to increase communication and information sharing between and among agencies, organisations and communities;
- provide for staff training on public participation tools and techniques.

NGOs should:

- create information and training programmes, provide training for local politicians and administrators on tools, techniques, costs and benefits of greater and more effective public involvement efforts;
- develop training programmes for NGOs and community organisations on how to build partnerships more effectively with local authorities with a view towards better communication and information access;
- undertake campaigns and marketing strategies on public rights and responsibilities with regard to involvement;

- through research and development, provide new and better models for 'government with public' interaction and decision making.

The EU and/or national governments should:

- create programmes and requirements which stimulate public participation in CEE towns and cities, including activities such as training programmes, best practice databases, 'twinning' activities to implement public participation in EU/CEE municipal partnerships and development of centres of excellence in public participation in each CEE country.

Participant Consensus 3: Improvement in the amount, form and timeliness of information is necessary

Consensus 3 parallels and occasionally overlaps recommendations developed in the second Consensus. While consensus 2 focuses primarily on skills, structures and opportunities for information and involvement, consensus 3 focuses on quantitative and qualitative issues regarding information to be exchanged in successful public involvement efforts. For democratisation in towns and cities of central and eastern Europe, this is one of the key issues.

In these communities' not too recent past, certainly within the experience of most adults, public information was often tailored to meet propaganda objectives and secrecy was a paradigm of organisational culture. This past has resulted in a deep-seated mistrust between public organs of information and their intended audiences. The central ingredient of any successful public information and involvement activity is public and government trust that the information they are both working with is as accurate and as unbiased as possible. Consensus 3 is about improving access to and accuracy of the principal currency of democracy, which is information.

Politicians should:

- supplement formal public processes with regular, informal and transparent dialogue and interaction with their constituents through which a local politician informs and is informed by the public on matters of mutual concern;
- use a variety of communication tools in order to reach as many people as possible and evaluate the effectiveness of each tool;
- conduct public business in scheduled and publicised open public forums, including forums within communities and neighbourhoods.

Local government administrators or officials should:

- supplement formal public processes with regular, informal and transparent dialogue and interaction with inhabitants through which local government administrators inform and are informed by the public on matters of mutual concern;
- inform people about issues and opportunities for input/influence early in a process and through local preferred sources of information, which may include television, radio, print, the Internet, posting information where people gather and/or other resources;
- give feedback and inform people how their contributions are affecting the decision making process;
- ensure, through contract and tender requirements and processes, that private enterprise acting as an agent of government meets the same transparency requirements as the government concerned.

NGOs should:

- assist in the process of informal dialogue by inviting political and administrative personnel to NGO meetings;
- commit themselves to the same standards of information quality and communication as they expect from local authorities;
- support local administrative authorities by providing positive arguments for greater public participation and recommending tools and techniques;
- monitor the performance of public participation processes;

- collaborate with local authorities in monitoring, documenting and evaluating the outcomes of public participation processes;
- develop long-term informal working relationships with local authority personnel.

The EU and/or national governments should:

- create a database on public participation programmes, methods, tools, techniques and technology to aid public participation;
- adopt the strategic EIA directive and make it obligatory in accession countries.

Participant Consensus 4: Resources currently available for public information and involvement need to be used more effectively and, in most cases, increased

There is no doubt that good research, development of effective communication tools and improving relationships between people and their institutions can seem expensive, particularly in view of other compelling priorities. Often unrecognised, however, are the direct and indirect costs associated with the absence of public involvement. There is evidence that for many planning and implementation activities when investment in information and participation is not made, costs associated with delay, litigation and loss of public confidence and trust in government are significant not only for the current activity but all future activities as well. The costs of not making appropriate investments may be harder to quantify than direct financial outlays in the budget, but they are nevertheless real. Having faith in the value of involvement does not, however, obviate the need for monitoring and evaluation which are necessary to ensure the best possible return on investment in information and process. Costs and efficiency do matter both for institutions and the public.

It is highly probable that even with maximum efficiency there are now too few resources available on a general or project basis to develop better information tools and techniques. Consensus 4 has to do with achieving better with what we have and placing more substantial investment in making local democracy work. Towards that end:

Politicians should:

- allocate more resources to support general and project specific information and involvement;
- make better and equitable use of existing community assets and opportunities, like NGOs and public media, as a means toward better and more cost effective dialogue and exchange.

Local government administrators/officials should:

- include the cost of public involvement as an essential cost in project budgeting, regardless of funding source;
- make sure that resources available (time, money, personnel) are sufficient for the task involved;
- provide funding to NGOs so they can hire their own experts.

NGOs should:

- provide information about possible sources of financial support for public involvement processes (foundations, grants etc.);
- develop collaborative information and involvement strategies within the NGO field;

The EU and/or national governments should:

- finance and support public investigation and public involvement.

The private sector should:

- provide training for local politicians, administrators and NGOs on how real estate markets work, how development is financed and how developers make decisions on what to build, where to build and when to build;
- build into their development processes requirements for their own public outreach and communication strategies to enhance public sector efforts.

Participant Consensus 5: New and better tools in support of public information and involvement need to be developed and made broadly available

Participants agreed that effective public involvement does not happen without specific intent, accessible tools and effective strategies. This is particularly true in central and eastern Europe where open discussion on public matters was forbidden for at least 50 years and there is no history of engagement.
It is very difficult for them to become societies where it is the norm, rather the exception, that information flows broadly, decisions are made transparently and the public has a respected role in shaping decisions. Success here requires clarity and agreement on mutual rights and responsibilities, education, trial and error and the availability of good tools which fit within local cultures, histories, experiences and circumstances.

In the other points of consensus, participants addressed the need for intent, obligations, responsibilities, structure and resources. Translation of any or all of these into change towards better functioning local democracies requires the existence and accessibility of the best possible tools. Consensus 5 is about the quality and availability of the best tools. Towards that end, the group recommends:

Politicians should:

- work with other politicians, local government, NGOs and the private sector, participate in development, utilisation and monitoring of public participation tools and techniques;
- set a positive example by making all legislative meetings, including committee meetings, open to the public;
- differentiate their local area by marketing democratic initiatives and successes to peers and the media.

Local government administrators/officials should:

- try a wide range of participation models, tools and techniques, learn the advantages and disadvantages of each within their local area's specific circumstances;
- set a positive example by encouraging greater openness among staff and holding meetings relevant to particular groups within these societies.

NGOs should:

- create handbooks on participation design and processes;
- produce and make available contact information (names, addresses, phone numbers etc. for people living in the neighbourhood) to assist organisers in public involvement campaigns;
- demonstrate new tools and methods regarding information access and public involvement;
- approach newly elected officials and discuss with them the mutual advantages of helping to create a positive image of, and working relationship with, NGOs.

The EU and/or national governments should:

- set positive examples in their own practice;
- encourage and support exchange of information regarding effective participation models through existing publications;
- add public involvement as a topic at all major European conferences;
- publicly recognise local government organisations which are attaining national and EU objectives through effective public involvement;
- establish a recognition/award programme which acknowledges individual and team excellence in public participation utilisation and innovation among elected officials, government administrators and the private sector.

The private sector should:

- provide handbooks and training for local politicians, administrators and NGOs on how real estate markets work, how development is financed and how developers make decisions on what to build, where to build and when to build.