Public Involvement Frameworks to foster the integration of citizens and stakeholders in urban decision making: experiences from the EU Research Project TRANSPLUS

Carlo SESSA
Institute of Studies for the Integration of Systems (ISIS) - Roma
1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will illustrate the main results concerning public participation in land use and transport planning in Europe, stemming from the comparative research undertaken by the project TRANSPLUS – TRANSPORT Planning, Land Use and Sustainability.

The project has been funded by the European Commission under the “City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage” key action, which is one of the four key actions under the research program Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development. TRANSPLUS is also part of the Land Use and Transport Research (LUTR) cluster, a group of inter-related research projects funded by the European Commission under the same programme (ARTISTS, CITY FREIGHT, ECOCITY, ISHTAR, PROMPT, PROPOLIS, PROSPECTS, SUTRA and SCATTER).

The project, coordinated by ISIS, has involved other 18 research and planning institutions in Europe, from UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Malta.

The mission of TRANSPLUS was to identify best practices in the organisation of land use and transport (LUT) policies in order to reduce car dependency in European cities and regions and promote economic, social and environmental improvement.

The findings are based on comparative research and analysis of a number of case studies of cities and regions in Europe: Vienna in Austria; the Brussels Capital and “Flemish Diamond” regions in Belgium; Aalborg in Denmark; Helsinki in Finland; Nantes and Orleans in France; Cologne, Dresden, Munster and Tubingen in Germany; Brescia and Rome in Italy; La Valletta (Malta); Warsaw and “Tri-city” in Poland; Evora and Lisbon in Portugal, Bucharest and Ploiesti in Romania; Barcelona and Bilbao in Spain; Bratislava in Slovakia; Amsterdam and Groningen in the Netherlands; Bristol, Merseyside and Croydon in the United Kingdom.

More information and the reports produced by TRANSPLUS (20 deliverables available) can be found at www.transplus.net
2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN LAND USE AND TRANSPORT PLANNING

Participation and communication issues are becoming more and more important in the field of public policies and, in particular, in land use and transport (LUT) planning. Since citizens and stakeholders are affected by or can influence decisions, thus it is crucial to consider them during all the stages of the planning process.

There are various forms of public engagement in planning, in a range that goes from “public participation processes” led by the planning authority and entailing different level of citizens and stakeholders involvement to truly “participatory planning”. The latter encompasses a spectrum of practices whose common denominator is the engagement of a diversity of groups and interests in the process of preparing and implementing a plan, with a supporting but not necessarily leading role of public planners.

Within the TRANSPLUS case studies, a considerable variety of participation and communication instruments were found to have been applied in a very wide range of plans, projects and programs.

The TRANSPLUS case study analysis identified the following purposes and in some cases observed impacts of public engagement that are especially relevant for LUT planning:

- improving the quality of resulting plans and their effective implementation;
- developing a common basis (guidelines) for following action programs;
- avoiding and/or solving conflicts;
- raising awareness and encouraging changes in behaviour; and
- initiating learning processes and social empowerment of the participants.

While the first three purposes mainly have an impact on the quality and efficiency of LUT planning, the focus of the last two points is on raising the awareness and empower the actors involved. Public engagement is supposed to initiate learning processes within which all participants have to prove to be able to learn and change. As a result, they do not only get the chance to express their needs but also gain an insight into the complexity of LUT planning measures and the achievement of sustainability goals.

A well-conceived and well-implemented public involvement program can bring major benefits to the policy process and lead to better decision outcomes. But the authorities promoting communication and participation processes must be well aware of the objectives they pursue and the impacts they expect. At this regard, it is important to synthesise the main pros and cons that can be assigned to LUT planning with and without participation processes.
Table 1 – Advantages and Disadvantages of Participation and Non-Participation Processes in LUT Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Non-Participation</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• low costs</td>
<td>• strong understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• relatively quick</td>
<td>• strong commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• clear leadership of the process</td>
<td>• increased acceptability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• raises few conflicts</td>
<td>• increased credibility of authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can be done with routine procedures</td>
<td>• more transparency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• generates few expectations</td>
<td>• more equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• easy management</td>
<td>• direct influence of stakeholders on decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• enables high distribution/ coverage</td>
<td>• stronger identification with a policy/ project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• good very first step to get the attention for a policy/ project</td>
<td>• integration of end-users in development and design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>limited understanding of objectives by the public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• limited understanding of objectives by the public</td>
<td>• higher costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• limited commitment to implement</td>
<td>• slower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• weak process for development</td>
<td>• leadership problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• missing of important elements</td>
<td>• difficult management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• risk of ‘information overload’</td>
<td>• generation of conflicts and difficulties in reaching consensus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• generation of fatigue in actors</td>
<td>• decreasing of credibility of authorities in case of failure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• decreasing of credibility of authorities in case of failure</td>
<td>• risk of increased inequity if only groups participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the empirical evidence from the TRANSPLUS case studies, the benefits of promoting participation in LUT planning processes overcome the drawbacks that could be foreseen. The development of citizen’s ideas, the greater opening and transparency of the processes are major advantages. The main aspects drawbacks are related with the delays caused by the time consuming public engagement process. Nevertheless, consultation and participation are now becoming more widespread and expected as part of normal procedures in planning, development and implementation of integrated projects.

As every communication and participation exercise must be brought in line with the specific situation (e.g. size of municipality, communication structures being already established, etc.), it is not possible to give a
general guidance indicating how to proceed within concrete exercises. However, some general insights about how to behave to achieve a successful public involvement are:

- within each participation and communication exercise, it is crucial to first think about what the basic objectives and issues of public involvement are. To avoid misunderstanding and later disappointment, preconditions must be known before involving stakeholders and the limits of communication activities must be clearly shown to the participants in the beginning.

- It is important to clarify who is supposed to be participating. The citizen does not exist but citizens are not equal and have different conditions to participate according to social position, knowledge, experience in using communication tools and so on. To organise communication processes fairly, these inequalities must be answered with corresponding “unequal” communication opportunities. Attention must be drawn to the accessibility and comprehensibility of the information.

- These aspects have a main influence on how the communication process is organised and which methods are used. Therefore, after it is clear what the communication exercise is about and who should be reached, a corresponding communication concept must be developed in which single methods fit in an organisational and chronological frame; this strategy must be integrated in the overall planning process from an early stage. A plan is recommended indicating how the communication is organised with internal (administrations and political responsible) as well as external target groups (citizens, interest groups and organisations), how communication is organised with the media and who is responsible for each task.

Thus, before designing and implementing a participation process it is of major importance to identify the different groups to be involved in LUT planning.

The so-called stakeholders can be defined as anyone (person, group or institution) that is affected by, or can influence any decision or action in the field of LUT planning. The following scheme presents a general overview of the relevant stakeholders concerned with land use and transport policies.

Figure 1 – Relevant Actors and Stakeholders in LUT Policies
3. FINDINGS FROM THE TRANSPLUS CASE STUDIES

In the majority of the TRANSPLUS case studies, the initiative to start a participatory process was led by the public authority responsible for planning tasks. Thus, “public participation” is more widespread than truly “participatory planning”.

Although public participation is widely endorsed as an essential component of integrated and sustainable policies, there is little consensus on its exact meaning and on how to achieve it, as participation has different meanings for different people. Formal and informal types of participation as well as the stages when they should be applied vary considerably. The former are based on a legal background and often ‘blamed’ to focus too much on already drafted plans, without giving to the people any more substantial insight in the planning process and choices. However, a positive trend was observed towards more informal participation processes in which people are involved from earlier stages on, allowing more active input from and discussion processes with the larger public. These informal processes are not compulsory but they make part of a certain political culture of a country.

In order to systematise the different practices of public participation surveyed by TRANSPLUS, three basic levels of citizen engagement/influence on policy-making have been identified:

1. **Information**: a one-way flow from authorities to citizens that can target a high number of citizens. Techniques include public announcements, publication/presentation of planning documents, newsletters and leaflets, information and public awareness campaigns, and presentations about projects and plans.

2. **Consultation**: a two-way process with the opportunity for citizens and other private partners to react to proposals, discuss ideas, options and views. The public is involved in decision-making but the responsibility for final decisions rests with the authority. Techniques include key issues surveys, public assemblies, and public discussions.

3. **Active participation**: this is featured by a multi-lateral information and decision flow with an active participation of all actors in the final output, and in the most extreme form even in the decision making process. In contrast to the previous categories, there is no one central planning authority and in more extreme forms of participative processes no central decision-making authority. The participants have to agree on a plan/program that is developed in a collaborative process. Techniques include workshops, work groups and referenda.

As it concerns the first level of engagement, that is information, legal and policy basis in terms of access to information are already consolidated in the majority of Western European countries. Various kinds of information in planning processes are compulsory and include:

- Information of parties being involved/affected by the planning process and the project (e.g. public announcements);
- Publication/presentation of planning documents in a public building, for instance in the town hall;
- Transparent administration: citizens are allowed to read relevant documents.

Besides, informal information processes can include all kinds of public relations that aim at informing citizens, target groups, decision-makers about urban and transport planning projects, such as:

- Information in media, announcements, exhibitions, leaflets about a project planned;
• information campaigns/ events to support the information given in media and announcement;
• campaigns to targeted groups: direct information of single people/ target groups about a project planned and their possibilities to participate in this project;
• tailored campaigns: direct information of citizens about the public transport network, mobility advice and so on;
• public awareness campaigns: raise general awareness for mobility, environment, urban planning and so on as a basis for further communication;
• presentations about projects and objectives in urban and transport planning.

As it concerns the second level of engagement, that is consultation, in the majority of European countries, the legal and institutional contexts for consultation are still under development and consultation has only recently been recognised as an essential element in policy making. Only in a few countries (such as the UK and the Nordic countries), public consultation and citizen feedback are part of a long-established practice (though often with informal rules). However, almost all planning systems incorporate some mechanisms for direct consultation with the public over and above the normal representative political process, although their effectiveness is debatable. Table 2 below provides an overview of the current frameworks for consultation in the different countries, focusing in the periods before and after the design and announcement of plans and proposals.

Table 2 Formal requirements for consultation in EU countries
(Source: EU compendium of spatial planning, with updates from TRANSPLUS partners)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Before proposals</th>
<th>After publication of authority’s proposals</th>
<th>Use of public hearings and enquires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>The public must be informed of intentions to prepare plans and possibility of consultation.</td>
<td>Plan is made available for public inspection and all citizens have a right to make statements on the plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Some plans are subject to pre-draft consultation with public.</td>
<td>Consultation with public on all draft plans for 30 days - citizens have a right to file objections.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>The public are informed of the major issues and are encouraged to submit ideas and proposals. This pre consultation stage must last a minimum of 8 weeks.</td>
<td>Consultation for 8 weeks with the public which have the opportunity to object. Further consultation is undertaken if the plan is modified significantly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Consultation on the first draft for three weeks with right to object</td>
<td>Further consultation and right to object when plan goes to council for approval.</td>
<td>Hearings after consultation on first draft and second hearing after decision on plan by municipal board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation for one month on draft after the approval by public bodies and communes. Public have opportunity to object.</td>
<td>Detailed plans are usually subject to public enquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Before proposals</td>
<td>After publication of authority’s proposals</td>
<td>Use of public hearings and enquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>The public are informed and may contribute to setting aims for the plan.</td>
<td>Consultation for 1 month when objections can be made. If the draft of urban land use plan is changed after display, it has to be displayed again and the period can be reduced to 2 weeks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Consultation for 30 days when public can object.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherland s</td>
<td>The public may be informed but this is not mandatory.</td>
<td>Consultation for 4 weeks on draft plan and opportunity to object.</td>
<td>Objectors may request a hearing to explain their objection in person to the municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Consultation for at least 30 days on draft plan and opportunity to object.</td>
<td>No enquiries held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The public is involved but this is not mandatory. Initial consultation for 30 days on first draft plan “calling for suggestions” for changes.</td>
<td>Consultation for one month and opportunity to object. A second period of consultation is held if major changes are made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Wide public consultation on initial proposals is the norm</td>
<td>Consultation for 3 or 12 weeks depending on the type of the plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>The public may be informed and consulted prior to proposals coming forward. There is a mandatory publicity and consultation stage usually based on the first draft proposals.</td>
<td>Consultation for 6 weeks on the plan and opportunity to object. A further period of 6 weeks for objections if major changes are made after the enquiry.</td>
<td>Enquiry is held unless all objectors agree that it is not necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formal consultation mechanisms used in the different European countries include:

- public assemblies: discussion of issues of high public importance, for instance, large-scale projects like redevelopment of an industrial area, building of a new district, new transport concept, new master plans or its revisions;
- question time for citizens: representatives of city administrations offer a special question time to answer questions of citizens, for instance about impacts of a project on their quality of life, environment and so on;
- advocacy planning: ‘neutral’ planners are responsible to represent people and target groups which are not able to involve themselves actively in planning processes;
citizens’ representatives in mainly Scandinavian countries or the Netherlands: official representatives of citizens, which are part of the city administration. They are the contact person for citizens without relation to a special project.

In addition, there are a number of informal processes associated with the above more formal approaches, including:

- advice/ communication agencies;
- marketing campaigns linked to the introduction of new public transport systems, cycling, walking or car-sharing services;
- public awareness campaigns and/ or education campaigns in schools about mobility, environmentally friendly behaviour;
- communication supported by the internet (e.g. web-sites for a special project including the possibility to discuss the project and ask questions about it).

Finally, as it concerns the third level of public engagement, that is active participation, this is obviously more innovative and usually less formalised that the other two stages of involvement. Formal process are more common in land use planning, where citizens may be involved through:

- public discussion of the land-use plan – citizens are encouraged/ asked to formulate their concerns and requests and representatives of administrations have to react to these requests and concerns;
- presentation of the land-use plan in a public place for inspection by citizens – citizens are asked to formulate written requests and concerns to the city administration.

Other stakeholders like authorities and representatives of public issues must be involved in the land-use planning process, too. In some case citizens are also encouraged to participate in drafting transport development plans, such as in the development of Local Transport Plans in the UK.

Besides, a large number of possibilities of informal active participation in planning processes have been identified, such as:

- planning cells – random selection of citizens that are encouraged to solve tasks in the field of planning and development in teamwork;
- active involvement of target groups with special needs in planning processes, for instance the involvement of inhabitants, children and youth in the design of open spaces, involvement of cyclists in planning cycle-paths and cycle-networks;
- innovative techniques include ‘Children’s Parliaments’, which promote youth education and learning of how the decision making process concretely works;
- workshops which try to develop visions for the “City of Tomorrow” or which revolve around a concrete project of urban planning;
- co-operative workshops which are useful to develop a project, which will, for instance be realised in a public-private-partnership (e.g. partners formulate their ideas about the project as well as its realisation);
- “Planning for Real” as technique whereby members of the public are actively involved in (re)designing their local land uses, sometimes in the form of a three-dimensional model;
- Local Agenda 21 processes trying to involve as many citizens and stakeholders as possible in campaigns promoting awareness for environmental tasks as well as changing everyday behaviour towards sustainable development;
● Round Table including discussion between different groups, which are involved and affected by a project planned;
● Mediation where a neutral party tries to solve conflicts between partners and which is oriented towards an agreement on how to go on with the project;
● forum which focuses on long term strategies and in which discussions in the field of urban planning take place;
● local partnerships which – in contrast to public-private-partnership – are not based on profit but on the creation of win-win-situations;
● creation of residents’ groups and networks invited to participate in planning processes/projects whenever relevant for their area;
● focus groups being group discussions that gather together people from similar backgrounds/experiences and usually ‘focus’ on a particular area of interest.

The following Table 3 summarise the specific mechanisms of public engagement found in the TRANSPLUS case studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Processes and methods adopted in TRANSPLUS cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aalborg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents/Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion/Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public inquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excursions/visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops/forums/debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted actions/involvement of specific panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting from this first broad scan, a more in depth analysis was undertaken of the following participatory practices:

● The Aalborg ‘Better City’ Debate in Denmark
● The Barcelona 1st Socio-economic Transport Plan 2000 and the project "Delmo@cracia" in Spain
The Bristol Local Transport Plan 2000 in UK

The Brussels Neighbourhood Contracts and the ROM-project for the Gent Canal Zone in Belgium

The Groningen Local Traffic Plan 1997 in the Netherlands

The Helsinki Metropolitan Visions 2020 in Finland

The Merseyside Local Transport Plan 2000 and the work of the Merseytravel Community Links and Access Team in UK

The Rome laboratori di quartiere in Italy

The redeveloped of the district Tübingen Südstadt/ Französisches Viertel and the Tübingen Leitbildprozess in Germany.

TRANSPLUS Deliverable 5 contains a complete description of these examples, while in the following we summarise the main findings:

Who takes the initiative: in the majority of the TRANSPLUS case studies, the initiative to start a participatory process was led by the authority. However, is some cases a shift towards earlier and more active involvement in the planning process has been noted, although the city administrations always take the lead. The adoption of more active approaches is contributing to enhance and reinforce the role of the governments as enablers for continuous improvement. Besides, there are notable experiences of engagement of more young people in certain actions, which are expected to contribute to the formation of a new culture of participation that in following decades may result in more active citizenship.

Stages where participation is more visible: public engagement is still mainly visible during the planning phases, although a shift towards the involvement of citizens and stakeholders during the implementation and monitoring/evaluation stages is becoming more frequent.

Target groups: several cases reported stepwise participation procedures, starting from wide information campaigns and being more focused on key stakeholders at later stages. Whenever formal processes are applied the categories of users to be involved are specified. However, in almost all analysed cases, actions were orientated towards all citizens and stakeholders in the catchment area of the policies being developed.

Principal methods and techniques: a wide range of participatory processes and methods were identified. Cities in general opt for large information campaigns to initiate processes. Distribution of publications and documents anticipating consultation and public inquiries are frequently mentioned. The use of the internet for promoting discussions and seeking for feedback is becoming also frequent, though the target groups of this tool represent still a small percentage. General and focused surveys were presented in several cities. Workshops, debates and forums assume a special role in the generation of ideas and in the promotion of vision settings. However, while the range of engagement methods used is wide, the use of more formal negotiation and mediation\footnote{Mediation may be defined as a voluntary, non binding, without prejudice, private dispute resolution process in which a neutral person help parties try to reach a negotiated settlement. It is rarely used in the public arena. Negotiation is a process of reaching consensus by exchanging information, bargaining and compromise that goes on between two or more parties with some shared interests and some conflicting interest. This is more easily found in the context of public dispute resolution processes. An outstanding example is the “service conference” in Italy.} processes is still rare.
Principal advantages and disadvantages identified: in general the benefits of promoting the participation in the cases analysed overcome the drawbacks that could be foreseen. In fact, the development of citizen’s ideas, the greater opening and transparency of the processes were indicated as major advantages. Also the contribution to ensure ownership of the developments is positively referred to. The main aspects indicated as less positive are related with the delays caused by a too poorly focused and time consuming participation process.

Legal enforcement and cultural traditions: while there are strict and detailed regulations on the right and access to information, there are few or no legal and institutional frameworks stipulating public participation besides the ones on the Environmental Impact Assessments. This is mainly true at national level but does not mean that participation does not take place. In fact, the different cases here presented illustrate quite well the opposite, i.e. that besides of what is normally imposed, a large number of cities adopt innovative and involving practices.

4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FRAMEWORKS

There are many factors that can contribute to understand local characteristics and help to design effective public involvement in land use and transport planning and implementation processes, including:

- historic context of the territory under concern, including the culture of decision-making;
- nature, content and complexity of policy questions or issues involved;
- identity and position of stakeholders involved (target groups);
- power relations among actors that can influence the planning process;
- time frame (long, medium, short) of the planning- or decision-making process;
- geographical scale and/or policy level of the policy issues at stake.

Taking into account this multiplicity of factors, TRANSPLUS recommends to foster three types of so-named Public Involvement Frameworks, i.e. the “basic framework for enduring participation” aiming to build trust and changing the culture and practice of planning, implementation and evaluation of policies, the “short-term framework for planning at the neighbourhood or district level”, and the “short-term framework for planning at the city or sub-regional level”. These are illustrated in turn in the following sections.

4.1. The basic framework for enduring participation

In Europe as well as in the US the public are less involved by the mechanisms of representative democracy than was the case a generation ago. The low turn-out for local elections is an obvious indicator. Yet there is also recurring concern that places are “threatened” by urban growth and development, and there is often a reaction when new proposals are announced. The main power of the planning authority has been the capacity to refuse planning permission or to impose conditions. Apparently, the current system is very “consultative” but despite that, too often fails to engage communities in substantial decisions about their future. If a new system is to work, existing mind-sets will need to be challenged; new skills of listening, communicating and mediating will need to be developed and shared between public servants, citizens and stakeholders. Such a deep change in culture will need a sustained commitment over time, backed by a strong and continuous political will. This is what the “basic framework for enduring participation” described here wish to provide, besides the short-term participatory planning schemes required when specific new developments may lead to significant conflicts (the “short-term” frameworks discussed in the following sections).
Indeed, a ‘basic framework’ is proposed in order to establish a **continuous dialogue between authorities and their citizens** on issues that are not necessarily linked to any concrete planning process. Another objective of such a basic process is to increase intellectual, social and political capital within the groups of society that are too little ‘equipped’ to influence policy-making in concrete decision-making processes.

‘Organising’ and ‘empowering’ citizens, especially the weaker target groups, is not the task of the administrations or planners responsible for LUT anyway. With ‘organising’ and ‘empowering’, we mean that ‘ordinary’ citizens or specific target groups are brought together and supported to get a better understanding of the forces influencing their lives, and the possibilities they have to influence these forces.

**Practical Example – Merseytravel’s Community Links and Access Team**

In 1995, Merseytravel, the Merseyside Passenger Executive, established the **Community Links and Access Team (CL&AT)** to involve local people in transport issues. This team works with many organisations to improve local PT access and find solutions for the travel problems and needs from Merseyside inhabitants.

Merseytravel’s officers consider that the communication was possible thanks to the installed Panels. They are the mode through which local citizens can express their views, and it seems to work. Personal safety, bus routes and bus stops are the topics that raise more interest. Merseytravel officers therefore have a good understanding of what people want, but are trying to get across the implementation issues.

There have been reports stating a high level of satisfaction among the Forum/Panel’s members; people feel that their voice is being heard and acted upon. Regarding the translation of this mechanism into policy formulation, thanks to the Forum discussions the policy officers are always in touch with the views and needs of local people. Thus, Merseytravel uses the forums/panels for gathering views on large-scale plans and schemes, covering local examples as well as the whole Merseyside.

4.2. **The short-term framework at the neighbourhood or district level**

To discuss plans or programs with all relevant groups of stakeholders seems manageable when planning for a limited area, such as neighbourhood renewal projects, or plans for mobility policies for limited areas. The three following points must be stressed:

- a preparatory phase preceding the planning process is a valuable and consequent way to proceed;
- setting up the ‘right’ structure for the project can help this kind of participatory approach to work well;
- the conduction of the public involvement process must be carefully managed.

As concerns the preparatory phase, the most critical problems existing within the neighbourhood must be previously checked by consulting the available/ relevant interest groups and, when possible, by using ‘local community forums’. This kind of approach will provide valuable inputs for the tuning of the set of stakeholders and of the set of problems, as also as to define more exactly what will be done in the participatory project.

The proper structure for the participatory project is to be set up whenever no formal structure was defined beforehand. Here, different possibilities exist and the choice will depend on the level of preparation of the
ordinary citizens, the availability of communication channels to these citizens as well as the authorities’ acceptance of private stakeholders taking part in the decision-making process.

Finally, the fact should be taken into account that the more ‘space’ that is given to what can be discussed, the stronger is the need to define the ‘rules of the game’. Apart from a clear division of tasks and roles, also the process needs to be agreed. Consequently, a clear process plan is required indicating which kinds of steps and (intermediate) decisions have to be taken at which point, how decisions are taken on future steps, on the content and so on (but providing adequate flexibility). A moderator should be able to guide the discussion and ensure a focus on matters that can be influenced rather than issues that are pre-determined or impractical. Consensus building should be intended as a preferable way to choose between options, notwithstanding that final decisions remain almost always the task of the elected representatives.

Practical Example – Brussels Neighbourhood Contracts

The Neighbourhood Contract (NC) is an instrument of the Brussels Capital Region for urban neighbourhood’s development projects. It is interesting that in NC some guarantees for active public involvement are incorporated. In some municipalities (e.g. Schaerbeek and Sint-Joost-ten-Node) involvement has been taken beyond the formal obligations.

The Region selects the areas, budgets, scope of the projects and the financial contribution. Then the municipality has nine months for the elaboration of the program proposal. This proposal is subject to advice from the NC’s Local Commission for Integrated Development CLDI and then needs to be approved by the local council. In the preparatory phase, the municipality identifies the priority measures for the program, to allocate the budget.

The NC’s have been designed to insure the financing. The CLDI is actively involved in decision-making on the implementation programs. However, the authorities maintain the right for a final judgement. Overall, the NC’s guarantee a rather far going obligation for public consultation (CLDI, neighbourhood meetings, public inquiries) and guarantees the availability of budget for the implementation.

4.3. The short-term framework at the city or sub-regional level

In planning processes covering larger areas, the organisation of the residents and other local stakeholders will be much more complicated, although not impossible. The purpose of the exercise may be less tangible to the participants whilst the outcome may also be less easy to appreciate. Factors of success to gain public involvement at this level are:

- selection of set of problems tuned to the set of participants;
- clear mandate to achieve results, possibly incorporating responsible persons into the committee (if any), and the availability of finances;
- consensus building around the final decision-making in the hands of the elected representatives;
- conscious process and communication management as well as support by expert quality managers for the creation of integrated proposals from the diversity of inputs usually available;
- organising connectivity internally and with the larger groups not directly represented in the central project committee.
Altogether, the aspect of building up networks between local stakeholders’ forums is even more important in strategic city-wide planning processes than at the neighbourhood level. Existent reliable networks of residents should be used or activated in short periods. In several TRANSPLUS case studies different measures/approaches were combined in order to reach as many different groups as possible:

- **Increasing importance of mass information and consultation.** This approach provides a variety of possibilities to incorporate results from consultation that focuses on as many responses as possible or on bringing in more diversity (surveys written and by telephone, local radio phone-in debates). Interesting is also the use of the Citizens Panel to check the representative character of mass consultation results.

**Practical Example – Barcelona Citizens Network BCNet**

The City Council of Barcelona has incorporated new information technologies to offer citizens the most convenient system to access to the Government. On this basis, Barcelona +DELMOCR@CIA is an experimental project to renew citizens’ interest in the city, especially targeted to the young generation. It promotes their participation through digital communication, active or passive. This means that for each topic several levels of participation are available, from voting for an specific option, contributing with suggestions, or even discussing with other citizens, with experts or with the municipal officers.

+DELMOCR@CIA is not aimed at replacing the traditional democratic procedures but instead it aims at completing and improving the direct participation of citizens.

- **Organising mediated participation.** It becomes difficult to integrate the large variety of organisations active in the area into the central commission/committee where the plan is developed. There is the need to create a small, selected group of the ‘most representative’ organisations to be included in the committee (if any). Other organisations need to be involved in other ways; through regular consultation incorporated in the mass consultation efforts, or through the creation of sounding boards with organisations’ representatives.

**Practical Example – The Helsinki Metropolitan Area in the Future – PKS 2020**

The PKS 2020 project was set into motion to promote co-operation in land-use planning and to produce information and material for use in urban strategic decision-making.

Futurology Workshop was a forum of interaction where stakeholders and citizens were invited to participate. The number of participants was small, mainly educated middle class, middle-aged, while the young were in clear minority. The Workshop was divided into eight workshop groups, meeting three times to discuss the items scheduled.

The aim of the first meeting (“critique stage”) was to imagine a good future vision of the region. Thus, participants selected two to five regional key problems through voting. The second meeting (“imaginative stage”) concerned present problems. Participants had to find positive solutions to transform the problem into an ideal vision of the future. In the third meeting (“the realisation stage”) the groups had to create visions and proposals, e.g. find the means to turn their vision of the future into reality.

Altogether, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Council (YTV) received plenty of positive responses, as a pioneer in the use of new kinds of interaction.
• Planning through discussion with/among individual citizens/stakeholders. The organisation of such discussions is another possibility, without expecting that these individuals are backed-up by organised groups or forums. It is important in this approach to pay attention to the diversity of participants and possibilities for all of them to influence discussions effectively. It is also critical to incorporate the voice of those groups in the society that are less likely to take part in such ‘public debates’, for example by incorporating people who work closely with the ‘less voluble’ people in social neighbourhood work and so on.

### Practical Example – ROM-Project Gent Canal Zone

In the ROM-Project in Gent, different elements influenced the decision to actively collaborate or not. Environmentalists organisations were invited to take part in the Steering Committee, but their collaboration was very little active. Knowing that, environmentalists were developing successful strategies, but in other areas. However, like the attitude is now changing, the informal arena of ROM is reformed into a formal arena with a continuous advising task to the Flemish Government.

5. CONCLUSIONS: PARTICIPATORY PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The title of this conclusive section is the same of a very recent research undertaken from the UK perspective, whose conclusions are similar to those of TRANSPLUS, where the perspective was European wide (UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Participatory Planning for Sustainable Communities, 2003).

There is a quest for a radical shift in planning mentality, from traditional to participatory planning. This is a set of processes through which diverse groups and interest engage together in reaching for a consensus on a plan and its implementation. Planners, councilors, developers, community organisations, heritage and enterprise organisations—all need to be involved in this process. Participatory planning can be initiated by any of the parties and the forms it will take and the timetables are likely to be negotiated and agreed amongst participants. The process is rooted in the recognition that society is pluralist and there are legitimate conflicts of interest that have to be addressed by the application of consensus-building methods (ODPM, 2003).

This shift has numerous implications that must be taken into account to achieve successful public engagement. In particular, the following conclusions and recommendations stem both from the mentioned study and the analysis of TRANSPLUS case studies:

- The major reasons for adopting participatory approaches in planning are the presence of competing or multiple interests in an issue, place, or resource utilisation, and the fact that existing frameworks of authority over planning and/or conflict resolution are too complex or unclear—with more than one government agency having jurisdiction on issues/plans that are multi-scalar and cross administrative boundaries. Some metropolitan level governance is present and has an interest, but rarely do they have enough formal authority to mandate anything. Additionally, the normal state of affairs in Europe (as in the US) is that authority over land management, land use, transport, urban management and service delivery has been parcelled out into “issue specific” governmental agencies. Thus the need for negotiation between a plethora of agencies is increasing.
The participatory planning process should be planned, managed and properly resourced. This will mainly be the responsibility of local government, but national governments will need to recognise through the funding settlements to local authorities that a planning system that fully engages people in shaping the future of their communities and local economies is going to cost more than the present planning system. Indeed, a more participatory approach is likely to require more resources for the early stages of planning, but it offers the prospect of sounder and stronger plans, which will attract less challenge through the appeal system, and thereby save resources later in the planning process. This is the same philosophy underlying Total Quality Management in the private business sector: participatory planning is not a mean of saving on local authority budgets, rather it is a way of delivering better quality and achieve a more sustainable use of resources.

Considering openly the results of participation is crucial to stimulate the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders: although formal guarantees are not possible since final decision-making will be in the hands of elected representatives, there should be some minimal guarantees that authorities will seriously and openly consider (not necessarily follow!) the results of participation. This may avoid later disappointment of the stakeholders. It is also necessary to determine the role of the actors involved in advance.

Elected members are themselves important stakeholders, and some cases show that they may play a key role in making participatory planning. For instance in the POP Plan (the acronym in Dutch for Provincial Plan for the Environs) of Groningen, the process was driven by politicians and by civil servants in a very well-resourced exercise, with the assistance also of professional planners, and an effective engagement of citizens and stakeholders (in particular one target group was the secondary school pupils, who were encouraged to develop their own plans). The politicians often played an important mediation role, particularly when disputes arose in public meetings. There was no attempt to involve independent third parties as mediators.

In several cases the main tension to emerge through an extensive process of engagement and negotiation was that between economic development and conservation of the landscape and cultural heritage. Very often people want to see unemployment reduced but also has strong feelings about the need to protect the environment and landscape.

The regional scale of spatial planning is the more appropriate to initiate and foster innovative and enduring approaches involving the public and a range of stakeholders. For instance, this was done in the Groningen Province in the north of the Netherlands with the POP plan, seeking to integrate at the regional scale four previously separate plans that deal with land use, environment, waste management and transport. More in general, there is in Europe a new interest in making spatial strategies at the sub-national level. However, there is almost never a single statutory administrative body covering the metropolitan area or region, and possessing a full range of executive powers. Therefore, strategic planning involves negotiation and cooperation between existing institutions, as well as a need to be open and responsive to community inputs. Planning needs to be about integration not about separation – integration between public and private investment in an area, between different scales of government and between different agencies.

The evolution of planner’s role in the participatory planning approach supports the contention that planners need to both be trained adequately in communication, negotiation and mediation skills, but also that they need to see planning as an essential component of governance and not only a specialised, more technical function. By the same token, also professionals external to city administrations would need to develop similar skills. Indeed, where conflicting aspirations between planning and other institutions and agencies with sectoral responsibilities threaten to
block agreement, independent persons such as academics can play a valuable role as informal mediators in efforts to find consensus.

- **Implementation and monitoring** is too often neglected in the existing public participation experiences, mostly limited to participation in the elaboration of plans. Thus, there is the need to build continuing cooperation and inclusion into the process of implementation (e.g. through use of incentives to assist in implementation), and ensure that there is monitoring that commitments are being delivered.

- Providing a ‘starting document’ can facilitate public involvement during the planning process: as public involvement must not be an end in itself but should result in visible impacts, a starting document should be worked out containing a clear description of the process, the goals and the means available as well as of the responsibilities and tasks within the project. Apart from a clear project structure and indication of instruments used, a realistic time schedule and solid financial resources for all activities planned are crucial. Such a work plan would have to contain a clear indication of process financing (finances for communication measures, for studies, for implementation and so on) indicating how much is available from which fund.

- Avoiding ‘consultation fatigue’ is a key-factor for the success of participatory approaches: participation opportunities must focus on subjects that are of interest and importance to the stakeholders. Thus, the scope and items have influence on the success of participation exercises as well. If expectations of participants are not met, this may cause disappointment and prevent persons from future participation. Moreover, no participation process should be initiated without checking what can be taken from previous or parallel participation exercises. By this, synergy effects can be used and resources saved.

- ‘Capacity-building’ is a pre-condition to tackle with social exclusion in planning processes: as not all citizens are equally prepared and skilled to take part in ‘active involvement’, they should be backed up by processes preparing them for such engagement. Those skills can be developed within single capacity-building training projects and supporting measures. Additionally, to organise communication processes fairly, these inequalities must be answered with corresponding “unequal” communication opportunities. Here, attention must be drawn particularly to the accessibility and the comprehensibility of the information. Traditional public participation has often failed to do this. Participatory planning instead must be built around diversity, conflicting interests and the need to listen to the voices of marginalized groups.

**SOURCES**

TRANSPLUS Deliverable D5 – *Promoting the integration of citizens and stakeholders in urban decision making* – 2003 (available at [www.transplus.net](http://www.transplus.net))
