

Participation Strategy

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Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

*“Each party shall make appropriate practical and/or other provisions for **the public to participate** during the preparation of plans and programmes relating to the environment, within a **transparent and fair** framework, having provided **the necessary information** to the public”.*

(UNECE Convention, 2001, Article 7)

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What do we mean by ‘participation’?

- ‘Participation’ has become a watchword for professionals and policy makers
- It means different things to different people
- Its different interpretations are based on different political standings
- Its different interpretations lead to different participation techniques

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Arnstein’s ‘Ladder’ of Public Participation

Citizen control Delegate power Partnership	1. Citizen power
Placation Consultation Information	2. Tokenism
Therapy Manipulation	3. Non-participation

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Pre-1960s: Non-Participation

- Representative democracy as the primary device for public to voice their views
- Planning proposals were presented to the public as a *fait accompli*



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The 1960s: Rising demand for wider participation

- Davidoff, 1965: *Advocacy Planning*
- Arnstein, 1969: *Ladder of Public Participation*
- Skeffington Report, 1969: *People and Plan*



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Post-1960s

- In theory, participation has become embedded in the planning process, but
- In practice, public involvement has remained limited to statutory, dry, official and poorly attended consultation exercises
- Technocratic style of planning inquiries has alienated the less experienced people
- The desire to speed up the planning process has sidelined the need for meaningful participation

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Public Participation Matters!

- Increasing multiplicity and complexity of lifestyles and interests
- Inadequacy of the traditional democratic institutions to keep abreast of diversities
- Decline of confidence and trust in governments
- The need to re-engage people in decision-making
- The need for 'democratising democracy'

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Environmental Democracy and the 'Risk Society'

- Environmental consequences of development cut across the spatial, temporal and social boundaries
- Environmental decision-making involves high levels of risk and uncertainty



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Deliberative Processes

- There is a need for deliberative processes which draw on all forms of knowledge including expert and experiential knowledge



Critical Questions

- How do we measure the effectiveness of a specific public participation exercise?
- How can we distinguish between 'good' participation and 'bad' one?

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How much participation is desirable?

- Depends on how much democracy is desirable
- Depends on the model of democracy to which the society aspires

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Democratic Elitism

- Democracy as competition between political elites for the support of the public at large
- Between elections, citizens have little part to play
- A technocratic view of democracy
- 'Experts know best' approach
- Participation as a way of legitimising controversial decisions

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Participatory Democracy

- Is characterised by direct citizen involvement
- Considers participation as part of the ends, i.e. self-development of individuals
- Promotes continuous interaction between citizens and the state
- Avoids techniques that perpetuate the distinction between 'lay people' & 'experts'
- Aims to build capacity

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Participatory Democracy

- Aims to build social capital
- Engages people not just as periodic voters but also as **active citizens**



Pre-requisites for capacity building

- Sensitivity to particular history, aspiration and circumstances of particular community
- Trust and confidence-building
- Clarity and transparency in decision-making processes

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Key dimensions of a participation strategy

1. What is the subject?
2. What is the purpose of participation?
3. Who is the public?
4. At what stage in decision-making process should the public be involved?
5. What is open to influence?
6. How much resources are available?

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1. What is the subject of discussion?

- What level of technical knowledge and support is needed to make participation a meaningful exercise?
- Time scale and tangibility of the outcome
- Who defines the issues and controls the agenda?

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2. What is the purpose of participation?

- Is it a mere formality to be done as quickly as possible?
- Is it a way of legitimising decisions already taken?
- Is it to educate people?
- Is it part of a continuous dialogue to reach better, more informed decisions?
- Is it about power-sharing?

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3. Who is the 'public'?

- Is it a single community or a multitude of different interests?
- Who are the targeted communities and what are their needs and aspirations?
- Is the chosen participation technique appropriate for the targeted community?
- Will the 'silent voices' of the 'non-joiners' be heard?

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4. At what stage in decision-making process should the public be involved?

- Timing has implications for the outcomes
- End-of-pipe participation prevents constructive discussions
 - Do people's inputs link to the actions on the ground?
 - Is one episode part of a longer dialogue?
- Participation at formative stages can save time at formal public inquiries

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5. What is open to influence?

- What is open for discussion?
- What is beyond participants' influence?
- Misleading people about these will lead to cynicism
- Participants should be made fully aware of the scope of their influence, at the beginning.

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6. How much resources are available?

- The scope and extent of public participation is always confined to what is feasible within the available resources
- 'Front-loading' will pay off at the end

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‘Community Involvement’ in the new planning system

- Engaging the public in policy processes has remained a persistent concern for planners
- A renewed emphasis on the need for better ‘community involvement’ in planning processes in the UK
- Could it be achieved along faster decision-making processes?

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Conclusion

- The sustainability agenda not only requires a re-thinking of the *outcomes* of the decisions made.
- It also requires a re-visiting of the *processes* through which they are made.

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