

NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY
RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC)

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT TOOLS: CRITERIA FOR CHOICE AND EVALUATION

Proceedings of a Topical Session at the 4th meeting of the NEA Forum on Stakeholder Confidence

May 22, 2003

Environmental governance today implies public participation. Beyond informing affected publics, consulting, dialoguing and/or deliberating with stakeholders about decisions constitute good practice and may be legally required. The OECD NEA Forum on Stakeholder Confidence Topical Session on Stakeholder Involvement Tools addresses the questions raised by institutions: When is stakeholder involvement a good choice? How can it be achieved? How should it be planned? How to evaluate a dialogue exercise? How does stakeholder involvement fit into representative democracy? The full text of four topical presentations (including a detailed account of the Danish Consensus Conference model) is provided. In a summary analysis, these presentations are placed against a background of public participation research, to highlight goals for both the process and the outcomes of stakeholder involvement in decision making.

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FOREWORD

The **Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC)** was created under a mandate from the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency's Radioactive Waste Management Committee (RWMC) to facilitate the sharing of international experience in addressing the societal dimension of radioactive waste management. It explores means of ensuring an effective dialogue with the public, and considers ways to strengthen confidence in decision-making processes. NEA member countries nominate participants. The FSC today includes representatives of national regulators, implementing agencies, policy makers, and R&D scientists from 15 OECD countries and two international organisations. Each has experience in and/or responsibility for stakeholder interaction.

The Forum was launched in August 2000, in Paris, with an international workshop. This addressed a variety of topics ranging from stakeholder identity, evolutions in participatory democracy, and trust in the institutional framework, to the role of open dialogue in all aspects of radioactive waste management.

The FSC now convenes a series of alternating regular meetings and workshops. The latter combine visits to local communities, and highly interactive discussions between FSC delegates and host country stakeholders to analyse and compare experience. Thematic rapporteurs, invited by the NEA Secretariat, give feedback to the workshop participants from their own disciplinary perspective. Two workshops have been held to date, in Finland and in Canada, and one will take place in Belgium in November 2003.

The NEA publishes the proceedings of all FSC Workshops. They may be consulted on line¹ or ordered from the OECD.

The 4th regular FSC meeting held in Paris in May 2003 included a topical session on **Stakeholder involvement tools: Criteria for choice and evaluation**. The session was framed by these questions:

- How to decide which of the various dialogue tools fits your process, decision phase, and desired outcomes?
- How to evaluate whether your dialogue process has been successful or not?
- What can be expected, what should practitioners watch out for when applying some of the more commonly used tools?

These Topical Session Proceedings include:

- a) a short summary of the topical presentations, and of the discussion they sparked within the FSC;

¹. [<http://www.nea.fr/html/rwm/fsc.html>]

- b) an analysis by the session rapporteur placing the expert presentations and floor discussions in perspective;
- c) documents provided by each speaker.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forum on Stakeholder Confidence expresses its gratitude to Ms. Saida Engström for chairing the topical session, and to Dr. Anna Vári for acting as rapporteur. Thanks are due as well to Ms. Ida-Elisabeth Andersen, Ms. Elizabeth Atherton, Dr. Sybille van den Hove, and Mr. Christian Vergez for their presentations to the topical session.

The short summary was prepared by Claire Mays and Claudio Pescatore of the NEA Secretariat.

SHORT SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

NEA Secretariat

Dr. Sybille van den Hove, Visiting Professor at the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (Autonomous University of Barcelona) opened the session with an overview of theoretical, legal and substantive justifications for public participation in environmental governance. She argues that the typical physical characteristics of environmental issues (complexity, uncertainty, large temporal and spatial scales, and irreversibility) pose challenges to traditional decision making frameworks. Needed are dynamic, integrative processes that can deliver innovative, flexible and adjustable solutions. In response to this need, there has been rapid development in the last decade of participatory approaches. These are institutional settings where members of the public and/or stakeholders of different types are brought together to participate more or less directly, and more or less formally, in some stage of the decision-making process. Van den Hove examined stakeholder participation in terms of expected effects: substantive, procedural, and contextual. The temptation exists to seek the "right" approach that will deliver the "right" policy action; however, practitioners should be alert to the problem dimensions that are "left aside" as soon as one particular approach is selected and achieved.

In discussion, FSC members asked whether radioactive waste issues are rightly classed under "irreversibility", given that radioactive waste becomes less toxic over a longer or shorter time span. Van den Hove pointed out that radioactive waste is just one element in an overall ecological system whose equilibrium is affected by a range of issues or physical characteristics or events (e.g., climate change, introduction of genetically modified organisms, etc.). A primary aim in ecology is to preserve the resilience of the system. Decision-making can respond to this aim by focussing on process rather than outputs only: it is desirable to keep a range of action possibilities open so that some can be favoured, or left behind, as new information becomes available. Stakeholder involvement corresponds to this approach by improving the information base; broad participation may even compensate to some degree the unavoidable absence of future generations in today's reflection or negotiation. A full consensus on preferred values will never be reached (whereas consensus on actions is an achievable goal); decision processes and outcomes therefore at the least may seek to preserve co-existing value systems.

Ida-Elisabeth Andersen, Project Manager at the Danish Board of Technology, presented experience with national consultations. The Board is mandated to perform independent technology assessment and to support public debate by communicating assessment results to Parliament, other political decision makers and the Danish population. This mandate is achieved by building bridges between citizens, experts and politicians. The Board's innovative participatory tools take into account that society, social and ethical values frame technology-related decisions, while technology itself places its stamp on society. Participatory technology assessment (PTA) produces new or "other" knowledge, matches a democratic ideal, and facilitates implementation of better decisions. Anderson focussed her talk on the contribution of consensus conferences to address technology introduction issues. In the national consensus conference, panel members are lay citizens who formulate opinions, views and recommendations, as if they spoke for the whole society or the common good. They play

the role of policy makers who are advised by a group of experts. (A locally oriented method is the scenario workshop. This brings together representatives of societal groupings like policy makers, business representatives, technical experts and residents who are considered experts in crucial local experience and knowledge.) Andersen reviewed criteria for retaining a PTA approach and practical aspects of its organisation.

Discussion bore on assuring the legitimacy of the consensus conference technique. Crucial elements are framing or choice of topic, and organiser.

Andersen cited conferences conducted outside Denmark which are seen as “failures” by the research community. The feeling was that citizen participants were manipulated during the process. A literature search by the NEA Secretariat after the topical session identified the fundamental issue underlying the assessment of failure, i.e., *the way the conference topic is framed will constrain the ability of participants to make a balanced assessment of the issues*². The FSC asked whether the consensus conference is appropriate in cases typified by a tension between national interest and local burden. This scale issue can be addressed, according to Andersen, through *focussing the conference deliberations themselves on framing*, i.e., on finding a frame that can balance the different national and local levels affected by the technology under consideration.

The organiser of the exercise should be perceived as a neutral party. While universities or science museums can fill the role, in most European countries a parliamentary board of technology assessment is present and can act as organiser. This does not guarantee legitimacy, however: elected national representatives may question the need for another level of public participation in decision, or see the consensus conference as betraying a lack of confidence in traditional representative democracy. Conflict could arise between standard setting by traditional authorities, and standards demanded by a conference report. Andersen affirmed that the Danish Board promises only to deliver assessment results to Parliament (as well as other political decision makers and the public): only parliamentarians have the legitimacy to create law. Policy makers polled in Denmark characterised the conference format as a unique way to learn what people think. Overall, there was consensus within the FSC that the greatest goal is that citizens be well informed, since RWM decision making is an issue of democracy as well as a technical one.

Elizabeth Atherton, Decision Analyst, UK Nirex Limited, presented RISCUM-II work on criteria for evaluating dialogue processes. Clear aims and objectives will aid in planning a process, and can be used to evaluate it. The participants in a dialogue may have different views about its goals and so the planning and evaluation should involve these persons in order to come to a shared understanding. Evaluation criteria can relate to pragmatic issues (how the dialogue meetings were organised, how they unfolded) or address the outcomes of the dialogue process (what decisions were made about policy or practice, what actual changes occurred). Proposed evaluation criteria include: transparency, legitimacy, equality of access, ability to speak, deliberative environment, openness of framing, generation of new meanings; inclusive knowledge elicited; acceptable/useable outcomes; improved trust and understanding; development of sense of shared responsibility. Evaluation will incur a cost in terms of time and money, but will help practitioners to be able to develop processes that

². For example, a Publiforum on electricity and society was broadly framed and allowed citizens to examine and weigh options in the goal of sustainable long-term production of energy. In contrast, a Citizens' Conference on gene technology in the food sector largely ignored other means of food production; because the expert informers focussed on the issue of private vs. public research there was little deliberation on the larger economic and political factors influencing GMO food issues (Mirenowicz, J., 2001, “The Danish consensus conference model in Switzerland and France: On the importance of framing the issue”, *PLA Notes*, Vol. 40, February, pp. 57-60).

meet the needs of those who participate, and improve the way that we try to engage people in the debate.

Discussion highlighted the critical role of the facilitator in dialogue processes. Participant evaluations prefer an independent and neutral facilitator, capable of helping a consultation group to bond and ensuring that all can speak out. Participants appreciate that the organising party can be present then to listen and react, but not to dominate the proceedings. (The facilitator's role should be well established in advance, to single out issues on which he or she has latitude, and those that should be referred back to the organisers.) The facilitator, it is seen, also provides balance between the "extreme" or "vested" interests public stakeholders perceive in ecologists or business respectively—and which should be put on the table along with other points of view during the dialogue. FSC discussion led to the idea that consultation can reveal different interests which then go "on the market"; public stakeholders need time to weigh the different interests, and probably do have this opportunity in the decades-long societal deliberation process around radioactive waste.

Christian Vergez, Principal Administrator at the OECD Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development, outlined a framework for evaluation at the level of government. A study on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making found that evaluation was often overlooked. A new study was therefore undertaken to review experience and identify the major evaluation components that should be taken into consideration when planning a governmental participatory exercise. Evaluation may bear on the utility, feasibility, and perceived legitimacy of a participatory approach. It should also address legal and ethical questions on the property and use of information gained. Evaluation itself can be participatory, and should be performed and reported very shortly after the completion of the consultation. For a national process, typically three to four weeks are needed for preparation (which may be concurrent with other planning and with the consultation itself), 6-8 weeks for implementation, and 4-5 weeks for analysis in view of report. Vergez estimated that the costs of governmental public consultations are distributed in this manner: 40% to implementation, 30% to evaluation, and 30% to dissemination of the results of the exercise.

The issues of tension between traditional representative government and inclusive participation were again examined in discussion. Vergez pointed out that PUMA is mandated by governments and conducts its studies from the governmental standpoint; it is seen as legitimate to support instituted decision makers by promoting more direct relations of exchange between government and citizens. The outcome can be better informed government, and moreover, better informed citizens; each can contribute to wiser governance of issues like those of radioactive waste management.

Evaluation of consultation exercises helps to uncover whether public participation did or did not, in fact, influence policy outcomes. A key necessity is to carefully inform participants at the outset just what sort of use will be made of their input. (In particular, ongoing partnership between a government agency and a given public requires a clear definition of roles on each side, e.g., "You will give continuing input and I will give you information; your role as stakeholders is to help prepare a decision, which my institution alone can make".) PUMA has prepared ten guiding principles in a policy brief on good government-citizen relationships; these can be applied to the evaluation phase.

Anna Vári, of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology, acted as session rapporteur. She analysed the topical presentations by placing them against a background of research on public participation. Choosing stakeholder involvement tools is part of a larger planning process in which not just methods, but context and goals also must be considered. Because a large number of factors are at play, selecting the right combination of methods remains an art rather than a science. Vári then suggested a matrix for understanding the broad range of evaluation criteria that were

mentioned by the speakers. She showed that participation exercises can be evaluated on criteria relating both to process and to outcome. Furthermore, the evaluation can target a macro (societal) level as well as a micro level (focussed on the exercise itself).

At the end of the topical session, it was decided that the FSC should pursue further the questions of choice and evaluation of stakeholder involvement tools. Future work will take the form of a desk study, benefiting from the large literature on these subjects and from the experience FSC members themselves may input.

PLACING THE TOPICAL SESSION ON STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT TOOLS PERSPECTIVE:

RAPPORTEUR'S ANALYSIS

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Introduction

The topical session was planned to discuss the following questions:

- How to decide which of the various dialogue tools fits your process, decision phase, and desired outcomes?
- How to evaluate whether your dialogue process has been successful or not?
- What can be expected, what should practitioners watch out for when applying some of the more commonly-used tools?

This report summarises the responses given to the above questions by session contributors, and compares them with some general findings in public participation research.

Selecting tools for stakeholder dialogues

A number of tools and techniques have been developed and applied for stakeholder dialogues in environmentally-related decisions. Selecting the tools and techniques to be used in a particular setting is, however, only one step in a larger planning process (see Table 1).

There have been several attempts to develop guidelines for facilitating the choice of adequate stakeholder dialogue tools/techniques for various types of decisions, in a variety of settings (e.g., Bleiker and Bleiker, 1995; Creighton *et al.*, 1998; Creighton, 2000; Europta 2000). Proposed selection criteria include, but are not restricted to the following:

- the purpose of public involvement (information, consultation, participation)
- the level of the decision (local, regional, national, cross-national)
- the phase of the decision making process (problem definition, identification of alternative solutions, evaluation of consequences, choice of a preferred solution)

³. Saida Engström of SKB, who facilitated the topical session, and the NEA Secretariat also contributed to the Discussion section of this report.

- the number of stakeholders (individuals, groups, organisations) to be involved
- the cultural, ethnic, social, and educational background, the motivation and competence of the stakeholders
- the probable level of controversy, etc.

Table 1

Stages of public participation planning (Creighton, 2000, p. 153)

Decision analysis

- Clarifying the decision being made
- Specifying the decision making steps and schedule
- Deciding whether you need public involvement, and for what purpose

Public participation planning

- Specifying what you need to accomplish with the public at each step of the decision making process
- Identifying the stakeholders – internal and external
- Identifying techniques to be used at each step in the process, taking into account the needs of various diverse populations
- Linking the techniques in an integrated plan

Implementation planning

- Planning the implementation of individual public participation activities, e.g., developing a workshop agenda, venue, presentations, etc.

The Danish Board of Technology has used the following checklist for designing participatory technology assessment (PTA) (Andersen, 2003):

- How many people should be involved?
- Which kind of social actors should be involved?
- Which objectives are you going for?
- Which kind of contributions do you want from participants?
- Which scale is the PTA working on: e.g. local, national, European, global?
- Which role will communication, dialogue, facilitation play in the process?

In spite of the impressive number of public participation handbooks and guidelines, due to the large number of factors to be taken into account, and the special sensitivity of dialogue tools to the social and cultural contexts, the selection of an appropriate combination of tools remains an art, rather than science.

Evaluating stakeholder dialogues

There is an agreement among theoreticians and practitioners on the importance of evaluating the success of stakeholder dialogues (Frewer and Rowe, 2002; Vergez, 2003; OECD PUMA, forthcoming). A number of qualitative and quantitative social science methods (e.g., interview, focus

group, structured survey, participatory observation) can be used to measure the effectiveness of participation exercises. It has been suggested that the choice of the appropriate evaluation methods should be based on the goals of evaluation (e.g., accountability, decision support, documentation of experiences, discovering unexpected effects), the object of evaluation (e.g., information provision, consultation, public participation, using electronic tools), as well as practical issues of timing and budget (Vergez, 2003; OECD PUMA, forthcoming).

Several difficulties are faced when trying to define general criteria of effectiveness. For example, the expectations of various stakeholders may significantly differ from each other and from those of the decision makers or the sponsors of the process (Frewer and Rowe, 2002). As a way out of this dilemma, it is proposed that defining the main goals of a dialogue, as well as its evaluation, should be a participatory process itself (Vergez, 2003; OECD PUMA, forthcoming). As Atherton (2003) points out:

Good practice in designing dialogue processes has highlighted the need to set clear aims and objectives for the dialogue and use these to help to design the process itself. The people participating in dialogue processes may have different aims that they would like the process to achieve, these could be quite different from those held by the people organising the dialogue and will impact on the participants' views of the success of the process. It may be useful to develop the aims of the dialogue process and the criteria for evaluating it with the people who will be participating in it. This could help to build a shared understanding of what the dialogue process is trying to achieve. Evaluation criteria could be developed from the aims of the dialogue process itself and used to determine whether the process achieved its original aims. This in turn can be used to identify lessons that can be learned and ways in which improvements can be made to the design of the dialogue processes. (p.)

The goals of stakeholder dialogue: theoretical issues

While practitioners suggest that debates related to the goals and evaluation criteria of dialogue processes be settled by negotiations between the affected parties, social scientists have made attempts to establish a theoretical background for evaluation. Renn *et al.* (1995) classify relevant social theories into *macro- and micro-level theories*. Macro-level theories study society as a whole while micro-level theories explain society through individuals.

One possible categorisation of macro-level theories divides them into *consensus theories and conflict theories*. According to Renn *et al.* (1995, p. 4) “consensus theories put forth that society is maintained through shared opinions about norms and values” and according to such theories “social order is based on tacit agreement, and changes emerge through gradual evolution⁴”. Consensus theories assume that „participation provides society with a means for social change to occur gradually through public involvement in decisions”. Conflict theories, on the other hand, suggest that „ruling groups impose their values upon others and that there is no collective agreement on values. Social order ... is maintained only through patterns of domination, and change is something that comes suddenly” (Renn *et al.*, 1995, p. 4). In this perspective, “participation is a means to facilitate conflict and power redistribution” (Renn *et al.*, 1995, p. 5).

⁴. Van den Hove (2003, p. 3) also emphasizes the importance of coexistence and coordination: “Life in society can be described as the inevitable and dynamic construction of coexistence. In other words, some degree of coordination is unavoidable.”

Micro-level theories focus on the interaction of individuals. For example, Renn *et al.* (1995) suggest that Habermas' *theory of society* provide the normative foundations for a micro-level evaluation framework of public participation. The most important element of Habermas' theory is the definition of an unconstrained model of discourse, in which values and norms are discussed and agreed upon in a coercion-free setting. Renn *et al.* (1995) have operationalised and widely used the criteria proposed by Habermas for a *fair and competent discourse*.

Evaluation criteria for public participation exercises put forth by the papers at the topical session indicate that in current practice both macro- and micro-level approaches, as well as consensus- and conflict orientations coexist. Both macro- and micro-level approaches may focus on participation *processes* or the *outcomes* of such processes. In the following, illustrative examples for macro- and micro-level process- and outcome criteria proposed by session contributors are introduced.

Macro-level evaluation criteria

Macro-level process criteria are related to societal processes, taking place in the wider context of the decision, - e.g., strengthening social consensus, bringing divergent views and latent conflicts to the surface, - which are facilitated or triggered by a participation exercise. For example, Andersen (2003) hints at *conflict theories* by suggesting that public participation should “make citizens aware that the future development of technology may be based also on their visions and proposals and not only needs to be proceeding out of their control”, and public participation processes should “try to compensate for social inequality with respect to decision making”. She also suggests that public participation be evaluated as a “democratic tool for societal changes to be in accordance with the wishes of the citizens”.

Macro-level outcome criteria are associated with the impacts of a participatory decision process on the wider social context. Such criteria have been proposed by van den Hove (2003) as “changes in the perception and conceptualisation of the social context”, “modification in traditional power relations and conflicts”, “reinforcement of democratic practices and citizens' involvement in public domains”, and “increased confidence of actors in institutions”. The above criteria reflect a *mix of consensus and conflict orientation*.

Micro-level evaluation criteria

Micro-level process criteria are related to specific characteristics of a '*fair and competent*' discourse. Table 2, 3, and 4 include examples for such criteria, as proposed by session contributors.

Table 2

Micro-level process criteria seen in the van den Hove(2003) evaluation approach

Competence

- improvement of the quality of the informational basis of decision processes, and better use of information
- construction of a more open domain of choice for the decision

Fairness

- better conflict management
- increased legitimacy of the decision process

Table 3**Micro-level process criteria seen in the Andersen (2003) evaluation approach***Competence*

- experts/policy makers get access to non-experts' knowledge, experience, viewpoints etc.
- non-experts get access to existing knowledge

Fairness

- inclusion: non-experts become active and listened-to in science and policy debate
- interactivity and openness: citizens get a chance to influence "the agenda" and structure the options

Table 4**Micro-level process criteria seen in the Atherton (2003) evaluation approach***Competence*

- new ideas/ways forward are elicited
- "best knowledge" is elicited
- knowledge is inclusive of expert, lay and critical domains
- "sound science" is elicited
- truth/fact claims are challenged and verified or otherwise, assumptions and uncertainties are identified
- new meanings and understandings are generated
- active sense making occurs
- reflexivity is induced

Fairness

- transparency of the process and content of decision making
- framing is open to redefinition by the participants
- participants are not bound by the disciplining nature of the event
- discourse equality of access (being able to speak) and of providing an environment in which participants are willing to defend claims
- deliberative production of views and positions
- appropriate resources (including information and time) are available to all participants in order that they have the ability to participate
- inclusiveness of all relevant/appropriate entities
- representative of different views and groups of stakeholders
- capture by inappropriate interest groups is avoided

Micro-level outcome criteria are related to the results of a competent and fair discourse. For example, *van den Hove* (2003) emphasises the *substantive quality of decisions* and the *level of stakeholder acceptance* as the most important micro-level outcome criteria:

A participatory approach can enhance the substantive quality of decisions by leading to choices which are more pertinent from an environmental point of view or from an economic point of view. It may also lead to choices which are more pertinent from the technical point of view, or to choices which are socially more acceptable than choices emerging from a non-participatory top down decision process for instance. (p.)

Atherton (2003) suggests a comprehensive list of micro-level outcome criteria, including the dimensions of *social learning, decision quality, and stakeholder acceptance* (Table 5).

Table 5**Micro-level outcome criteria seen in the Atherton (2003) evaluation approach***Social learning*

- participants learn
- project initiators develop insight into a range of values
- increasing responsiveness and growing ability to listen meaningfully to participants
- capacity building
- a clearer definition of the issues at stake is achieved
- alternative values are articulated

Quality of results

- outcome is well supported by evidence and/or argument
- results are justifiable with reference to legitimate process
- results are usable by institutions

Stakeholder acceptance

- producing more acceptable/less contentious policies/strategies/plans
- developing sense of shared responsibility for problem and acceptability of solution
- developing sense of the common good
- interest and engagement of participants
- improves understanding between participants
- improves trust between participants
- reduction of conflict

It was emphasised that in addition to criteria derived from the goals of public involvement, additional criteria evaluating the decision making process from other management perspectives should also be applied. Such criteria include, for example, cost-effectiveness, feasibility, and accountability (van den Hove, 2003; Atherton, 2003). An interesting meta-criterion, namely the “*creation of new knowledge: adding something to our understanding of the dynamics of social systems and driving forces*” has also been suggested (Andersen, 2003).

Expectations and dangers

It has been repeatedly pointed out by both researchers and practitioners that stakeholder involvement is not a panacea, which can resolve all difficulties emerging in a problem situation. For example, *van den Hove* (2003) claimed:

Whatever the sought after effects in the design and implementation of a given participatory approach, the potential occurrence of unintended side effects should never to be disregarded. Any participatory approach has limitations and shortcomings. (p.)

She also propounded the difficulties lying in the simultaneous application of consensus- and conflict-oriented approaches (*van den Hove*, 2003):

Typically, participatory approaches are rather to be understood as a combination of consensus-oriented processes in the pursuit of a common interest and compromise-oriented negotiation processes aiming at the adjustment of particular interests ... Ignoring the negotiation dimension of participatory approaches can lead to their manipulation by the more powerful actors ... (p.)

Workshop participants raised doubts about the effectiveness of one-time participation exercises. This issue has been addressed by public participation theoreticians and practitioners. For example, *Langton* (2000) claims:

Public participation, as sponsored by government institutions today, is more often than not marginal, episodic, unimaginative, and self-serving. One reason this is so is that participation initiatives frequently have a public relations orientation that seeks to control, influence, and manipulate. This gives public participation a bad name. (p. 130).

As a response to this problem, he suggests that a long-term relationship-building approach be followed:

*For what has been imagined here is a fully integrated and interactive public organization that routinely, if not virtually, interacts with the community, collaborates with others in the process, and benefits continuously from public contributions. Within such an organization, public participation is a way of life rather than an occasional activity. It is essential rather than peripheral (*Langton*, 2000, p. 143).*

Discussion

Following the topical presentations, the discussion raised the question of whether public participation, all aspects considered, will make the task of waste management better or easier. It was argued by most that although public participation will not guarantee an automatic success of the waste management programme, without it decision makers likely will be heading for tremendous difficulties. The public will not be contented by information only, but demands to be involved in the decision making process.

It was also pointed out that the public may have demands, but at the same time, people are not always willing or able to devote the time and effort true involvement would entail. Very strong motivation is needed to participate in a complex deliberation process that includes learning about or analysing a wide range of technical and non-technical issues, as well as gradually working out solutions or plans that are acceptable to all parties. Accomplishing such participation is an even more significant effort when it is a "spare time", unpaid occupation. Under these conditions, the persons who attend all consultation meetings tend to be the ones who feel strongly against the project and who may not be open to the type of dialogue that decision makers would like to engage with them. As in other risk management and political situations, it is the very definition of "what is at risk", and "what should be done about it" that is brought to the fore. All these facts were recognised as significant challenges to the participation process.

According to session participants, however, there are no alternatives or shortcuts to public involvement as a tool to make the decision making process in RWM transparent and acceptable. Most

agreed that efforts should be allocated to using various tools of stakeholder involvement to keep the public interested in interacting with decision makers over time as well as to facilitate their participation. It was also agreed that the local political culture and the history of nuclear industry in a specific country are important factors in the choices to be made in order to establish an effective dialogue.

Finally, some workshop participants emphasised the possible tension between public involvement and the decision making mechanisms of representative democracy. Others argued that the tools of direct and representative democracy should be complementary rather than competing. It was recognised, however, that a thorough discussion on the role of public participation in representative democracies would have exceeded the time constraints of the session⁵.

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⁵. Such a debate, centring around the elitist (liberal) and egalitarian interpretations of democracy, has been going on among social and political scientists for decades (Renn *et al.*, 1995).

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**PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE:
THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS AND PRACTICAL EFFECTS**

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A context of rapid institutional uptake of participation

Participatory approaches are institutional settings in which members of the public and/or stakeholders of different types are brought together to participate more or less directly, and more or less formally, in some stage of a decision-making process. Stakeholders are deemed to be of different types if, for a given issue, they hold different worldviews, and act on the basis of different rationales.⁶ Hence, participation refers to the involvement in the decision-making process of persons external to the formal politico-administrative circle. Participatory approaches include traditional participation processes of our democratic institutions, but also all sorts of processes which bring together public actors, civil society stakeholders (such as business actors, NGOs, trade unions, consumer groups, scientists, etc.) and/or individual citizens.

Participatory approaches have been increasingly advocated as effective decision-making processes to address complex environment and sustainable development issues. Since the milestone inclusion of participation in Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration, institutional uptake of participation has been tremendous. The European Union provides a good illustration of this trend. Here participation is recognised as a central element for general governance, as illustrated by the White Paper on Governance in which participation appears as one of the five “*principles of good governance*” – together with openness, accountability, effectiveness and coherence (European Commission 2001). In the environmental domain, the 1993 Fifth Environment Action Programme (European Communities 1993) introduced the notion of participation. But in its successor – the 2002 Sixth Environment Action Programme – participatory environmental governance has been fully taken on board through systematic inclusion (European Communities 2002). In parallel, participation is directly integrated in an increasing number of Community legal instruments such as the Water Framework Directive (European Communities 2000). The ground-breaking 1998 Aarhus Convention of the UN Economic Commission for Europe aims at guaranteeing “rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters” (UNECE 1998).

⁶. Callon and Rip use the expression ‘*hybrid forum*’ to refer to interactions between actors of the scientific and technical sphere, the socio-political and economic sphere, and the regulatory sphere. The term ‘*hybrid*’ indicates that “*actors, the problems that they formulate, and the resources that they invest are heterogeneous*”. (Callon, M. & Rip, A. 1992, our translation).

Characteristics of environmental issues and type of decision-making processes needed

A key justification for the rapid development of participatory approaches for environment and sustainable development governance stems from the characteristics of environmental issues. Environmental issues – and radioactive waste disposal is a good example here – typically present four important *physical* characteristics: complexity, uncertainty, large temporal and spatial scales, and irreversibility. All these physical characteristics of environmental processes have consequences on what can be called the *social characteristics* of environmental issues. These include: social complexity and conflicts of interests, transversality, diffuse responsibilities and impacts, no clear division between micro- and macro-levels, and short-term costs of dealing with the issue associated with benefits which might occur only in the long-term. In turn, these physical and social characteristics determine the type of problem-solving processes needed to tackle environmental issues (see Table 1). It appears that the problem-solving processes best suited to confront global environmental issues will be dynamic processes of capacity-building,

- aiming at innovative, flexible and adjustable answers;
- allowing for the progressive integration of information as it becomes available, and of different value judgements and logics;
- involving various actors from different backgrounds and levels.

In promoting more democratic practices, these processes additionally should supersede traditional politics and allow co-ordination across different policy areas. It is deemed that participatory approaches have the potential to meet these problem-solving requirements (van den Hove 2000a)⁷.

Table 1: **Environmental issues characteristics and consequent problem-solving requirements.**

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES CHARACTERISTICS	CONSEQUENT PROBLEM-SOLVING REQUIREMENTS
Complexity	Complex and/or innovative answers
Conflicts of interests	Conflict resolution processes
Dynamic aspects	Dynamic processes
Uncertainty	Flexible and adjustable answers
Reducible uncertainty	Progressive integration of information
Irreducible uncertainty	Integration of different value judgements and logics
Diffused responsibilities and impacts	Involvement of the many different actors
No clear division between micro and macro levels	Involvement of actors from different levels
Long time-span, immediate costs and long-term benefits	Involvement of concerned actors
Long time-span and large space-scale	Depart from traditional short-sighted politics while remaining democratic
Irreversibility	Proactive approaches
Transversality	Co-ordination across policy areas and integration into multiple sectors

⁷. The prospects for public participation on nuclear risks are discussed in: O'Connor & van den Hove (2001).

At the ontological level, the inherent ecological and societal complexity of environmental issues has important consequences regarding the conflict resolution processes that can be called upon. Complexity goes hand in hand with indeterminacy and irreversibility, which lie at the heart of our understanding of natural systems, and *a fortiori* of human systems. Physicists have shown how in some physical systems it is neither our limited capacity of observation nor our limited computational power that forces us to abandon (the ‘ideal’ of) determinism and accept the existence of indeterminacy, but rather the very nature of the system (see e.g., Prigogine 1996). Hence indeterminacy is not the sign of the limitations of our knowledge capacity and of our approximations, it is a fundamental trait of our relationship to reality. As a consequence, there will always remain an irreducible uncertainty in our predictions concerning the future evolution of complex natural and social systems – including in particular the evolution of socioeconomic systems in their inter-relation with ecological systems. This also suggests that there will always coexist a plurality of representations of a given system. That is, our knowledge – including the knowledge we refer to and develop in decision making processes – is necessarily plural and irreducible to a unique representation. Hence any knowledge is knowledge *from a certain standpoint* and standpoints can be different. We are faced with the existence of an irreducible plurality of standpoints.

It would not matter much if this irreducible plurality of standpoints existed among beings who have no need nor obligation to interact in any way with each other (say a Martian and an inhabitant of some planet in a distant galaxy). But because human beings all share a single planet and live in societies, the problem of coexistence of people having potentially irreducible standpoints becomes central. Life in society can be described as the inevitable and dynamic construction of coexistence. In other words, some degree of coordination is unavoidable.

In a context of inevitable coexistence, one has two options. One may simply ignore – or even negate – this plurality in an attempt to secure the hegemony of a particular vision of the world. This amounts to rejecting the plurality, without however demonstrating that it does not exist. The other option is to accept this state of affairs and attempt some form of exchange of knowledge on which to build societal coexistence. Hence communication becomes central. But not just any form of communication can do the job. What is needed is communication that takes place within an interactive process of participation bringing together those holding the different standpoints. Hence participation emerges as a consequence of the acknowledgement of an irreducible plurality of standpoints stemming from the complex nature of the issues at hand and the necessity of living together on the same planet.⁸

Participatory approaches as an answer?

The participation of a wide range of actors in the problem-solving process —in all or some of its different phases —answers *in principle* several of the requirements listed in Table 1 above.

Looking for extended participation is the most obvious way of involving actors in a decision-making process. It can potentially guarantee a higher degree of legitimacy to the decisions taken since a wider range of social forces will have been allowed to influence the process instead of simply being imposed a decision “from above”.

Participation of different actors provides a potential answer to the quest for a dynamic process. Actors can join the process as issues evolve and as the interests they represent become

⁸. Clearly the argument holds for any complex issue, not only environmental ones. Environmental issues are especially emblematic and highly pressing, in particular due to the strong conjunction of uncertainty and irreversibility that characterises many of them.

affected. Moreover, participation during the implementation and the control steps can allow for direct feedback on the evolution of the situation. Combined with the flow of new information, this participant feedback will improve the adjustment phase, hence favouring more flexible and adjustable answers.

A participatory process can also be an answer to the problem of information and knowledge, which goes hand in hand with many environmental issues. Uncertainty is prevalent – and sometimes here to stay; information is incomplete, knowledge is multiple. Science cannot pretend anymore to control and provide all relevant information and knowledge (Funtowicz & Ravetz 1993). Including different actors in the problem solving process, and in particular during the identification and analysis steps, is a way to allow for better information processing for at least two reasons. First, even if complete information did exist, it is unlikely that one actor could possess the whole of this information. A participatory process allows the pooling of information. Moreover, inclusive practices may facilitate the progressive integration of new information as it becomes available. Second, a more comprehensive understanding of the issue is potentially reached, including different perspectives of scientific, social, cultural and ethical nature. This of course provided the practical organisation of the communicative process allows for the articulation of these different and irreducible standpoints.

Underlying the different types of information that different actors may bring in a participatory process are different and irreducible value judgements and logics. As pointed out by Holland *et al.* (1996): *“Insistence on plurality of legitimate standpoints usually leads to advocacy of some form of deliberative institutions within which the weight of different reasons that appeal to incommensurable values for and against different options can be considered. However any such model of the rational resolving of value disputes needs to recognise that a consensus may not always be found. Value disputes are also about conflicts of interests and the distribution of power: hence, modes of resolving disputes through negotiation will also be required.”* And possibilities exist here since a lack of consensus on values does not always mean a deadlock. An agreement on a course of action might still be reachable, even when values remain irreconcilable (Dryzek, 1990). As for the different logics, they can be dealt with in a properly designed participatory process through 'discursive rationality' (Habermas 1986), which allows for the exercise of reason about normative judgements: interests, goals, values, and problem definitions.

As we have seen, the risk of irreversibility of environmental damages calls for preventive and pro-active approaches. Addressing a problem in a preventive way, before its negative effects can be sensed, or sometimes even before there is any scientific agreement on the existence of the problem, poses a challenge to policy-makers. Inducing changes in behaviour and imposing costs today on individuals who might never directly share the benefits, either because these will only appear way after their death, or because the “only” benefit is to have avoided a contested catastrophe, is no easy task. The participation of a wide range of concerned actors in the problem-solving process, because it confers a higher legitimacy content to the decisions taken, and because it can take into account different knowledge, values, and logics, is more likely than traditional processes to permit the design of more preventive and pro-active approaches. Additionally, because many problems are of a totally new kind, one can imagine that an open process is more likely to engender an innovative type of answer.

The need for co-ordination across policy areas and integration of environmental action into multiple sectors of society calls for the participation in the problem-solving process of representatives of sectorial interests – in particular representatives of industry. Because they possess unique knowledge about their field of activity, these representatives cannot be excluded from any step of the process. To integrate these actors in an open participatory process, involving public authorities and other actors as well, can guarantee a higher quality of the basis of information used in the decision-

making process. It also allows the range of interests to exert pressure in order to avoid the problems being defined too narrowly or simply dropped.

Another requirement stemming from the characteristics of environmental issues is that of going beyond traditional short-term politics. One option is to involve in the policy-design process actors who are not bound by electoral constraints. As Blowers (1997, p. 860) puts it: “Unconstrained by the necessity for electoral support and unconfined by territorial limitations, actors within this zone [of “sub-politics” or civil society] are relatively free to develop ideas and seek to influence the society at large as well as to mobilise support for particular issues and policies.”

A participatory process with wide representation of actors can in principle improve the mobilisation of individuals and groups as they gain a greater sense of shared responsibility by becoming part of the problem-solving process, and as more legitimacy is attached to the process itself. This can help to render the chosen solution more effective by ensuring some degree of commitment to its implementation, for instance, through compliance with the rules set up during the policy process.

It appears therefore that participatory processes may answer the specific problem-solving requirements imposed by environmental issue characteristics. It is clear however that no single participatory process can answer all the above decision-making requirements, for all issue areas. Moreover, and central to the reflection on the implementation of participatory approaches, questions emerge as to their formalisation, their institutionalisation, and their articulation with existing democratic rules. So the challenge, as every practitioner knows, lies in the practical design and organisation of a participatory problem-solving process.

Exploring participatory approaches based on their expected effects

As of today, and in the context of this rapid institutional uptake, numerous participatory settings have been designed, implemented and analysed in various contexts. In the field of environment and sustainable development they are manifold. They include: focus groups, citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, co-operative discourse, dialogue groups, stakeholder workshops, participatory expert workshops, reflection forums, deliberative interviews, voluntary agreements, eco-audits, policy simulation exercises, deliberative foresights, concerted environmental management, mediation, regulatory negotiation, consultative forums, deliberative conflict resolution processes, environmental negotiations, etc.

A way to explore the diversity of participatory approaches and to contribute to selecting appropriate participatory approaches for a given purpose is to reflect on their anticipated effects (van den Hove 2001). These effects relate to different dimensions of the decision-making process. One can identify three broad categories of effects (see Table 2).

Often the effects that are sought first when implementing participatory processes are those related to the quality of results. Those *substantive effects* (which may also be called consequential) are probably the most obvious since the quality of a decision-making process will be judged primarily by the quality of its outputs in terms of dealing with the problem. Substantive quality may however be gauged against a series of different criteria: environmental, economic, technological, or social. A participatory approach can enhance the substantive quality of decisions by leading to choices that are more pertinent from an environmental point of view or from an economic point of view. It may also lead to choices which are more pertinent from the technological point of view, or to choices which are socially more acceptable than choices emerging from a non-participatory top down decision process

for instance. The first 3 criteria are closely linked, for instance a choice is technologically appropriate only in a given economic context.

Beyond their substantive effects, participatory approaches implemented in the environmental domain also do affect the decision process itself. These *procedural effects* include: improvement of the quality of the informational basis of decision processes, better information use, construction of a more open domain of choice for the decision, more dynamic processes, better conflict management, increased legitimacy of the decision process, better cost- and time-effectiveness of the process, and the possibility for less organized interests to increase their power of influence.⁹

Finally, *contextual effects* are those effects that do not directly relate to the issue at hand but rather apply to the information systems around the decision-making process and to the social context in which it takes place. Contextual effects and procedural effects correspond to two different levels of the same thing. The decision processes under consideration in sustainable development governance are on-going dynamic processes in a bidirectional relation with the social context in which they occur: they transform this context and the context in turn transforms the decision processes. The distinction between the two categories of effects corresponds to the range of impact: procedural effects impact directly on a particular decision process, while contextual effects are indirect and influence the wider social context in which multiple decision processes occur concomitantly. Contextual effects include: better information of stakeholders and/or the public, improvement of strategic capacity of decision-makers, changes in the perception and conceptualization of the social context, modification in traditional power relations and conflicts, reinforcement of democratic practices and citizens' involvement in public domains, increased confidence of actors in institutions.

Table 2: **Potential effects of participatory approaches**

Category	
Substantive effects	more pertinent choices from the environmental point of view
	more pertinent choices from the economic point of view
	more pertinent choices from the technical point of view
	more socially acceptable choices
Procedural effects	improvement of the quality of the informational basis of decision processes and better use of information
	construction of a more open domain of choice for the decision
	more dynamic processes
	better conflict management
	increased legitimacy of the decision process
	improvement of the effectiveness of the process in terms of costs and time
	improvement of the power of influence of less organized interests
Contextual effects	better information of stakeholders and/or the public
	improvement of strategic capacity of decision-makers
	changes in the perception and conceptualization of the social context
	modification in traditional power relations and conflicts
	reinforcement of democratic practices and citizens' involvement in public domains
	increased confidence of actors in institutions

⁹. These procedural effects are prevalent in the problem-solving requirements presented in Table 1.

Whatever the effects sought in the design and implementation of a given participatory approach, the potential occurrence of unintended side effects should never be disregarded. Any participatory approach has limitation and shortcomings. These are often not intrinsic properties of particular settings but rather correspond to situations where the chosen approach is not adapted to the context. Because “real life” decision situations are each unique, each problem requires the implementation of a specific and appropriate decision process. While past experiences do constitute an important source of inspiration, any participatory setting will need to be specifically adapted to the context. Otherwise a participatory approach can even lead to counterproductive situations such as the complete stall of the decision process (van den Hove 2000b). There are also both limits and dangers to categorising participatory approaches in terms of their effects, a topic which we will briefly explore in the next section.

Remembering the irreducible dimensions of environmental issues

Although we believe it can prove useful to the practitioner wishing to design and implement a “real life” participatory approach addressing an environmental issue, the type of analysis presented in the previous section may be dangerously misleading. It can give the false impression that one can unequivocally associate types of participatory processes with types of environmental issues. In this manner, the theoretical specificity of environmental issues tends to be occluded in order to promote a more classical methodology where each issue is supposed to be treated with its associated “right” process in order to reach the “right” policy action. But whatever the combination of scientific, participatory and policy-making processes under consideration, there will always remain a number of dimensions which are left aside (e.g., some dimensions of complexity, incommensurability, conflicts, etc.). These “left-aside” dimensions must be remembered and given attention by the policy-maker. For example, the expanding discourse on participation tends to develop into a discourse on consensus, where the unavoidable conflicts tend to be occluded. But not all conflicts can be resolved, as values remain plural. Typically, participatory approaches rather are to be understood as a combination of consensus-oriented processes in the pursuit of a common interest and compromise-oriented negotiation processes aiming at the adjustment of particular interests (van den Hove, 2003). Ignoring the negotiation dimension of participatory approaches can lead to their manipulation by the more powerful actors and impede their legitimacy and effectiveness as learning processes to resolve complex environmental issues beyond the interest of the more powerful actor. This example illustrates the need to continuously recognise, assess and deal with the “left-aside” dimensions of participatory approaches and to look for ways to address them. In other words, we have to face the inherent limitations of decision processes and their resulting decisions. This requires a change of attitude towards decision-making, as well as a radical change in communication, where one does not only communicate on solutions but also – and even primarily – on problems.

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EXPERIENCE WITH NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS IN DENMARK

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Citizens' participation in technology assessment at the Danish Board of Technology

In the late 1980s, when the Danish Board of Technology started its work, technology assessment was conceived almost solely as an expert activity. Parliamentary technology assessment was done by experts in different technical fields and sometimes also by experts in social or human sciences. Their reports and presentations were communicated to policy makers and used to make rules and regulations about technology. The most prominent example was the work carried out by OTA for the American Congress in the period 1970 to 1996¹⁰.

The Danish Board of Technology has, since it was established in 1986, experimented with and developed several participatory methodologies, which allow ordinary citizens to be involved in technology assessment. According to the law (no. 375, June 14th 1995) that governs the work of the Board, this work has two main purposes¹¹:

- to initiate independent technology assessment by carrying out investigations and comprehensive assessments on the possibilities and consequences of technology for society and the citizens;
- to further and support a public debate on technology by communicating the results to Parliament, other political decision makers and the Danish population.

As a solution to carrying out this difficult double role with a small budget, the DBT launched the idea and the ideal to build bridges between citizens, experts and politicians. Bridge building to promote debate and dialogue, where both experts' and citizens' knowledge and experience has an important role, is seen as a main ingredient to get a more qualified and enlightened public debate, instead of a debate characterised by unarticulated fear for or unconditional acceptance of new technology. Furthermore, results of the dialogues are being communicated to the Parliament to serve democratic decision making along with the advice of experts.

Behind this idea of connecting technology assessment and societal and political debate lies a broad conception of technology and its interference with society as a mutual relationship, where society and social and ethical values are framing technology. At the same time technology is putting its stamp on society. In other words technology and society (or science and politics) are intertwined and difficult to set apart. This becomes clear when talking about the use of technology (and science)

¹⁰. OTA, Office of Technology Assessment, was established at the US Congress in the early 1970s and terminated in 1996.

¹¹. See Annex 1 for more information on the Danish Board as an institution.

in society, e.g. discussing for whom a certain technology is useful or who may be affected by the benefits or the costs of a certain development. It can also be noted here that the term societal development or even “progress” very often is identical (in people’s mind) with technological development.

New knowledge base for agenda setting and decision making

With this basic assumption it becomes important to find out how to involve knowledge, experience and interests and value input from concerned or affected citizens in technology assessment. This is required in order to get a new and better knowledge base for decision making and support a decision making which can get social acceptance.

The development of methods in the Danish Board of Technology is very much a search for arenas for new communications, where negotiations and reconciliation of conflicting claims can take place, and where there is room for the development of new visions and proposals for solutions. Debate is regarded as the fundamental democratic tool for societal change to be in accordance with the wishes of the citizens.

Focus of the technology assessment must be on technology’s opportunities for and impact on citizens (as individuals and social groups) and society, e.g., on environment, democracy, health, occupation, education etc. The objective is to clarify concepts, goals and tools, as well as dilemmas and conflicts. Technology assessment may identify joint views, conflicts and options as the first step to finding a solution.

This does not mean that scientific experts become unemployed or have nothing to do in the Board’s projects. On the contrary the DBT draws upon the best available expertise – in the widest sense of the word – and often across professions, sectors and interests. This ensures that many elements and different values are represented in the assessments. The activities of the Board are not research in the traditional sense of the word. Nevertheless, the Board employs and disseminates research results, as a basis for its assessments. Furthermore it has to be stressed that in these bridge building processes, new knowledge is created and a voice is given to knowledge, experience and ideas, which are already there, but may seldom be heard.

Who are the participants, and how are they selected?

Citizens may have many roles. Most of us are consumers, residents and workers, some are shop owners, business representatives or experts. In the various bridge building methods the roles assigned to citizens by DBA may be of different nature dependent on what the tasks of the participants are. The “cleanest” of these roles is the role as a citizen: a person with the political rights and obligations of all members of a society and therefore with a certain amount of responsibility and influence in relation to political decision making.

In the **consensus conference** (see Annex 2) the lay panel members are conceived as citizens and as lay people confronted with a group of experts. They are members of society, who get the opportunity to formulate opinions, views and recommendations, as if they spoke for the whole society or the common good. In fact they play the role of policy makers who are advised by a group of experts.

In the **scenario workshop** (see Annex 3) the citizens are a group of actors among other groups. The experience and visions of all the actors contribute to the proposals and action plans resulting from the workshop. All participating groups, such as policy makers, business representatives,

technical experts and residents, contribute to the debate with their knowledge and experience about local activities. They can all be seen as experts, because local experience and knowledge is a crucial factor in this locally oriented method.

The selection of participants is different in these projects. In the Danish Board of Technology we use two different types of approach for selecting participants. One is using local or professional networks to find the participants we need. In the scenario workshop and other workshop methods we select participants by networking. The criteria both for the selection of local communities and for the selection of groups of participants vary dependent on the issue under consideration.

The approach used for consensus conferences and other methods, where the participants are basically citizens, is based on a semi-random selection. We ask for a random sample of e.g. 2000 people from the Danish Statistical Bureau (or the municipal statistical office). We send all these people a letter of invitation to take part in a consensus conference on a certain issue. Furthermore we inform them about the conditions in terms of the time and engagement they will have to devote for it, and that we do not allow participants who have a professional interest in the issue. Those who are interested to become a member of the lay panel will return a letter and tell about themselves and their interest. These letters are then used for selecting a lay people's panel, which is as diverse as possible in terms of gender, age, occupational and educational background and geographical distribution.

What is going on when citizens participate?

With a reference to the analytical framework of the Europta project (see Annex 4) it can be said that citizens' participation in the Danish Board of Technology involves a cognitive, a normative as well as a pragmatic dimension¹².

The cognitive dimension is about knowledge and new or other knowledge and understanding:

- social learning : bring people together who do not usually engage in dialogue and debate;
- clarify that in some cases experts cannot provide the needed knowledge or certainty;
- experts/ policy makers get access to non-experts' knowledge, experience, viewpoints etc.;
- creation of new knowledge: adding something to our understanding of the dynamics of social systems and driving forces;
- non-experts get access to existing knowledge.

Almost all the citizens' participation methods imply that information about the topic at hand is communicated to and discussed with participants. For example, the scenario workshop uses different scenarios and a baseline scenario to give insight into present needs and problems, available technology and possible future changes. It also creates new knowledge through the process. Basically, in this case, new knowledge is about the participants' perception of barriers to urban ecology, about their visions for the future and about their proposals and ideas to realise these visions.

¹². See Joss & Bellucci, 2002.

The normative dimension is about democratic ideals and norm setting elements:

- make citizens aware that the future development of technology may be based also on their visions and proposals and not only needs to be proceeding out of their control;
- new way to hear “the voice of the people”, supplement other ways;
- inclusion: non-experts become active and listened-to in science and policy debates;
- try to compensate for social inequality with respect to decision making;
- interactivity and openness: citizens get a chance to influence “the agenda” and structure the options.

This dimension has to do with the democratic ideals of our society according to which certain procedures or mechanisms should be used to compensate social inequality with respect to decision making. Participative methods offer a new way to hear “the voice of the people”. We see this as a supplement to well-established, well-known ways, such as elections, referenda and opinion polls. These established ways show us the will of the people regarding a well-structured set of alternatives. The citizens’ participation methods in most cases cannot claim to express the voice of the **whole** people, but they offer an opportunity for citizens to present their ideas and opinions in a more open way, where they have a chance to influence and structure the options. This is important, because society is full of people – experts, technocrats and politicians – who have time and resources to set the agenda for public debate on technology. If these methods are able to counterbalance this, even just a little, this is a very important advantage seen from a democratic point of view¹³.

Furthermore most of the methods bring people together who do not usually engage in dialogue, even if they live in the same place. This is a precondition for breaking down “stereotyped images”, which can sometimes be an obstacle to finding solutions. There are very often such elements of social learning in the participatory processes, and this represents a special added value for democracy.

The pragmatic or instrumentalist dimension is about implementation of decisions:

- can contribute to decisions and decision making in fields, where there is lack of knowledge and/or certainty or where future changes depend on the participation of many citizens;
- a democratic tool for societal changes to be in accordance with the wishes of the citizens.

With the involvement of more knowledge and the values and interests of both experts, citizens and maybe other stakeholders it is assumed that citizens' participation processes can contribute to more robust and more socially acceptable solutions. The input may take the form of recommendations for new rules and regulations or the form of ideas and proposals for action steps. In the scenario workshop the topic is formulated as a problem, an issue both global and local, which cannot be solved without the participation of local people. The workshop is designed to find solutions, technical or other tools to the problems. The results can be used to make better, more co-ordinated and longer-term solutions to problems with many actors and technologies involved.

¹³. See Andersen and Jæger (1999), p. 338.

Decisive criteria for using PTA

Choice of method is a question related to both substance and purposes. In general the choice to use PTA depends on which kind of knowledge and other input you need to get better decisions or decision making, i.e., which kind of results you need: who are going to use them, and for what purposes.

Referring back to the points mentioned above you can say that participation is meaningful when:

- it leads to better-informed and more creative decision-making;
- it results in more public acceptance, less litigation, fewer delays, and more effective implementation;
- it promotes social learning;
- it promotes **a more open and integrated government;**
- it promotes **democracy.**

This is “in general”. When it comes to designing a PTA process for a specific case in a specific context with a specific objective there are many more questions to be answered

- how many people should be involved;
- which kind of social actors should be involved;
- which objectives are you going for (instrumental, normative, cognitive);
- which kind of contributions do you want from participants;
- which scale is the PTA working on: e.g. local, national, European, global;
- which role will communication, dialogue, facilitation play in the process?

In the DBT we have a whole “tool box” to help us design PTA processes for specific cases and sometimes we have to invent new tools.

Most important critical factors

- Independence
- Transparency

These two factors should underlie and be discussed through every phase of PTA project planning and organisation.

Why is citizens’ participation useful and necessary in modern society?

As the development of technology proceeds and still seems to accelerate, societies are confronted with a continuous stream of new technological opportunities – and maybe risks and threats. We, as societies, citizens and politicians are confronted with challenges to decide whether we want to use all the opportunities and for what purposes. But:

- How can we decide, if all the new opportunities offered by technology are also desirable?

- Who should decide?
- Which questions should be asked?
- Which criteria should be used?

These are questions with which policy makers and researchers are confronted with every day, and which cannot easily be answered. In fact the questions are about political goals and agenda setting, about ethical and subjective considerations, in short, about where we, as societies, are heading in our development, and which tools we find acceptable and useful to get there.

This is where the need for citizens' participation enters the scene in modern society. Citizens' participation allows us to see technology assessment as it is: a process with many technical, as well as political and normative questions to be answered. It allows politicians and experts to listen – and gives a possibility for citizens to be heard.

Ideally, technology assessment should be seen as a process, where ordinary citizens, who are concerned and will have to live with the decisions taken, are the ones who ask the questions. These questions are to be answered by experts in order that the citizens be able to assess the usefulness of a certain development, before a decision is made by the politicians.

This is what citizens' participation in technology assessment is about. And therefore it is very positive that there now seems to be a great interest for these methods, which try to install such procedures, although still at a modest scale.

References

- Andersen, I.-E. and Jæger, B. (1999): “Danish Participatory Models – Scenario Workshops and Consensus Conferences: towards more democratic decision-making”. *Science and Public Policy*, October.
- S. Joss and S. Bellucci (eds), *Participatory Technology Assessment, European Perspectives*, Center for the Study of Democracy, Westminster University, 2002.

*Annex I***THE DANISH BOARD OF TECHNOLOGY: THE INSTITUTION**

The DBT was first set up by Parliament in 1986 and worked under temporarily laws until 1995, when the institution was made permanent. The Board is independent, financed by the state and related to the Ministry of Research. The DBT comprises a Board of Governors (10 members and a chairman), a Board of Representatives (50 members) and a secretariat. The Minister of Research appoints the chairman and three members of the Board of Governors. The other members are appointed by the Minister on recommendations from a number of societal organisations, from trade unions and employers organisations, over local authorities to adult education and research councils. The Board of Representatives serves as a Forum for open debate on issues related to technology assessments, as a source for topics that the Board can take up, as a source for feedback and as a network for the secretariat. Most members are appointed by organisations. In the secretariat there are 15 staffers of whom 10 are academics, director and project managers. The annual budget is 13.5 M Dkr – or 1,8 M Euro.

According to the law the DBT has three main tasks:

- to follow technological development;
- to carry out independent assessments on possibilities and consequences of technology for society and the citizens;
- to communicate the results to Parliament, other decision makers and to the Danish population and advise Parliament and the government.

The DBT applies different methods for technology assessment, for instance:

- expert analyses;
- stakeholder/expert interaction and assessment;
- citizens' assessment of technology;
- enlightenment and debate activities (“folkeoplysning”).

Once a year the Board of Governor selects the issues for next year's work plan from a large number of proposals. For 2002-2003 this resulted in the following work plan (project design or method is mentioned in brackets after each issue):

Projects : 2002 – 2003



- - The aging population: (Parliamentary Future Panel)
 - Small technologies: (local Future Workshops)
 - Vulnerability of IT infrastructures (Expert Group: public conference)
 - Technology and globalization: (Expert Group: public conference)
 - Sustainable growth - How?: (Citizens' Hearings – 3 local)
 - Testing our genes: (Consensus Conference)
 - Hearing on stem cells: (Parliamentary Hearing)
 - Electronic patient journal: (adapted Consensus Conference)
 - How can we assign value to the environment? (Consensus Conference)
 - Genemodification and the Third World (Expert Group: workshops)
 - Hydrogen in an unremitting energy system (Expert Group: conference)

In addition to the work plan the DBT each year conducts about 5 expert hearings on issues commissioned by a Parliamentary Committee.

The Board publishes a range of reports, books, newsletters and pamphlets and subsidises local debate activities on the issues being addressed by the Board.

*Annex 2***METHODS FOR PARTICIPATION: THE CONSENSUS CONFERENCE¹⁴**

A consensus conference is a public meeting that allows ordinary citizens to be involved in technology assessment. The conference is a dialogue between experts and citizens. It is open to the public and the media. In Denmark it takes place in the Parliament building.

A citizen panel plays the leading role. The panel consists of a demographically diverse group of concerned citizens and contains about 14 people, who are introduced to the topic by a professional facilitator. The citizen panel sets the agenda by formulating the questions to be answered by an expert panel at the conference. The panel has two weekends for the preparation.

A balanced expert panel is selected in a way that ensures that essentially opposing views and professional conflicts can emerge and be discussed at the conference. Good experts are not only knowledgeable but also open-minded and good communicators with an overview of their field.

On the first day of the conference, the experts present their answers to the questions from the citizen panel. The following morning is for clarifying questions and discussions between the panels. The rest of the second day and the third day the citizen panel will produce a final document, presenting their findings, conclusions and recommendations. Consensus on attitudes and recommendations is achieved through open discussion. Thus the final document is an expression of the extent to which the citizens panel can reach consensus.

On the morning of the fourth day the citizens' panel reads the final document to the experts and the audience, including the press.

The consensus conference method over the years has been used for about 30 different issues in the Danish Board of Technology and has been adapted for use in many countries in and outside Europe.

¹⁴. See Andersen and Jæger, op.cit. For general information about the consensus conference and other DBT methods see the board's website [www.tekno.dk] (go for "English" and for "methods").

*Annex 3***METHODS FOR PARTICIPATION: THE SCENARIO WORKSHOP**

In 1992 the DBT launched a project on Urban Ecology in order to develop a common understanding of urban ecology, to identify barriers to urban ecology, to develop a new mode for cooperation, and to find solutions to the barriers for a sustainable urban development. Its basic assumption was that sustainable, long-term solutions could only be found by involving the actors in the field, because the problem had so many aspects connected to different actors:

- Many types of technology (technical experts).
- Different types of knowledge (residents, NGOs, experts).
- A broad spectrum of laws and rules from different authorities (policy makers, politicians, administrators at central and local level).
- Various places and levels of action and several possible solutions (business, banking/investment, energy and water suppliers, residents, municipalities, and research).

The methodology developed for this purpose by the Danish Board of Technology was the Scenario Workshop.

A scenario workshop is a local meeting where scenarios are used to stimulate vision making and dialogue between policy makers, experts, business and concerned citizens. It is a method of technology assessment in which the workshop participants carry out the assessments and develop visions and proposals for technological needs and possibilities¹⁵. It was developed as a new method, because there seemed to be no known method specialised to explore different possible future technological strategies and at the same time make the actors cooperate in the direction of the strategy chosen.

Four local communities were chosen in which activities of urban ecology had already been going on. The selection of 20-25 participants was made in each of the four municipalities. 5-7 persons from each of four local actor groups (experts, residents, politicians, and business sector) were selected. In general the search for local participants was made through networking (co-nomination).

¹⁵. Andersen, I-E., L.D. Nielsen, M. Elle and O. Danielsen "The scenario workshop in technology assessment", paper presented at The Third European Congress on Technology Assessment, DBT, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1992.

Four scenarios were developed as input to a first round of workshops. The four scenarios were described qualitatively, as their purpose was to show alternative pictures of every day life in future households ("a day in the life of the Hansen family in 2010"). The questions treated in the scenarios were:

- How are energy provision, water supply, wastewater and solid waste management to be arranged in the future? How should technology be used to solve problems related to sustainable urban living? Will advanced technology be used or will there be a focus on simpler technology solutions?
- Who will take care of and be responsible for the solutions required for sustainable urban living? Will users and local residents mainly undertake solutions and activities? Will investments and innovation by the private sector be the driving force? Or, will public authorities, in regulations and large infrastructures, find the solutions?

The workshop process involved eight workshops with 90 participants in four local communities. The participants were recruited from four role groups: policy makers, experts, residents, and business sector. Each participant took part in two workshops.

The workshop process had three principal steps:

1. To comment and criticise the scenarios by pointing out barriers to realizing the four scenarios
2. To develop the participants' own visions and proposals
3. To develop local plans of action

A facilitator guided the process. Different techniques could be employed by the facilitator to accomplish good dialogue and the production of results in the form of identification of barriers, visions and proposals for action.

After the workshop phase a report was written, and a national plan of action was developed as a preparation for the public presentation of the project results. The results, visions, and ideas were locally produced and mainly had a local perspective, though national problems and solutions were found too. A cross-wise analysis of the locally produced results was necessary, in order to transform them into a product fit for national policy making. The project team and planning group did the transformation.

This method could also be used for stakeholder participation on "sustainable energy futures".

You can find material, scenarios, manual, etc. through EASW, European Awareness Scenario Workshop, at [<http://www.cordis.lu/easw/home.html>].

Annex 4

**EUROPTA: EUROPEAN PARTICIPATORY TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT.
PARTICIPATORY METHODS IN TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT
AND TECHNOLOGY DECISION-MAKING.**

From March 1998 to December 1999 a European multinational research project was carried out on the issues of participatory technology assessment. The project “Participatory Methods in Technology Assessment and Technology Decision-making (EUROPTA) received funding from the European Commission (Directorate General XII) under the Fourth Framework Programme.

The project was co-ordinated by the DBT (Denmark) and included the Institute of Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, ITA (Austria), the Institute of Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis of Karlsruhe Research Centre, TAB (Germany), the Rathenau Institute (Netherlands), the University of Westminster (U.K.) and the Swiss TA programme at the Swiss Science Council (Switzerland).

The general purpose of the project was to collect, compare and analyse some of the projects and processes of participatory technology assessment, which have taken place in Europe since around 1986.

A Report and Appendix: Europta Case-Studies, with 16 case studies from 6 countries, are available at the site [www.tekno.dk] (go for “English”, for “Methods” and for “Publications”).

See also the book published by the Europta team: S. Joss and S. Bellucci (eds) (2002) *Participatory Technology Assessment, European Perspectives*, Center for the Study of Democracy, Westminster University.

The Introduction, describing the Europta project, may be read at [http://www.wmin.ac.uk/csd/PTAintroduction.pdf]

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR DIALOGUE PROCESSES: KEY FINDINGS FROM RISCOS II

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Introduction

As part of Work Package 4 in RISCOS II¹⁶ work was undertaken on evaluation criteria for determining the success of dialogue processes. This note outlines the key findings of that work. Full reports of the work (Hunt *et al.*, 2001; Hunt, 2001) are available.

Dialogue processes are often evaluated after they have been undertaken to identify lessons that can be learned about what worked well and what could be improved in future processes. Good practice in designing dialogue processes has highlighted the need to set clear aims and objectives for the dialogue and use these to help to design the process itself. The people participating in dialogue processes may have different aims that they would like the process to achieve; these could be quite different from those held by the people organising the dialogue and will impact on the participants' views of the success of the process.

It may be useful to develop the aims of the dialogue process and the criteria for evaluating it with the people who will be participating in it. This could help to build a shared understanding of what the dialogue process is trying to achieve. Evaluation criteria could be developed from the aims of the dialogue process itself and used to determine whether the process achieved its original aims. This in turn can be used to identify lessons that can be learned and ways in which improvements can be made to the design of the dialogue processes.

The criteria that are appropriate for a particular dialogue process will to a certain extent depend upon the aim and objectives of the dialogue and who is to be involved. The relative importance of different evaluation criteria may vary depending on the aims too. Therefore the criteria outlined in the following section may not be applicable in all situations and it will be up to those developing the dialogue processes to decide (with input from the participants) which criteria are most applicable.

¹⁶. RISCOS II is a joint European project funded by the EC under the 5th Framework. Work Package 4 has been undertaken by a consortium of partners from the United Kingdom (UK Nirex Limited, the Environment Agency, Galson Sciences Limited and Lancaster University).

Evaluation Criteria

The people involved in the RISCUM II project discussed and developed evaluation criteria that they felt were important for dialogue processes, in particular the dialogue processes that were being developed as part of Work Package 4. A longer list of criteria that were identified is included in Annex 1.

Some of the criteria could be used while the process is being undertaken and rely on close observation of the running of the dialogue process and the discussions that take place. Other criteria can only be assessed after the event has taken place. Although questionnaires can also be used to quantitatively assess some criteria, it is not possible to quantitatively assess all of them. Pre and post event interviews can give an insight into how people perceived the process, any impact it had on their views and can assess the qualitative criteria. Assessing criteria will incur a cost both in terms of time and money, therefore it is important to understand what benefit will be gained from evaluating the dialogue process against the criteria selected and how the evaluation will be used.

Criteria can be used to evaluate how well the process itself ran for example:

- Was the venue appropriate (in terms of location, facilities, refreshments)?
- How useful was the pre-meeting information? (was it clear and easy to understand)
- Did people find the format of the meeting appropriate?
- How good was the facilitation and/or chairing of the event?
- Were any presentations appropriate and understandable?
- Was everyone who wanted to participate able to do so? (both in terms of attending and contributing to the discussion)

These criteria can be evaluated using a post event questionnaire. They can then be used to help to design future processes and avoid mistakes that have been made. If people are invited to attend the dialogue process but decline it might be useful to follow up why they did not attend to see if there are any lessons that can be learned for the future.

The criteria outlined in the following sections are particularly relevant to dialogue processes that aim to encourage deliberation and the development of stakeholders' views through participation in the dialogue process.

Transparency ensures that participants fully understand who is conducting the processes, and who is sponsoring them, what the results of the processes will be used for, and what the dialogue process' relationship is with decision-making and other processes. There must also be understanding of the relationship between the people conducting and sponsoring the process. This transparency is not just essential for participants, but for the wider public as well. If decisions are to be made on the basis of process results, the public has to be able to see that the results were arrived at fairly. This criterion can be evaluated by using post event questionnaires or interviews.

Legitimacy follows on from transparency. If action is taken by agencies on the basis of results from dialogue processes, it will not be considered legitimate unless the processes themselves were conducted in as transparent a manner as possible. However, the process itself also needs to be judged as legitimate, by the participants as well as wider audiences. Legitimacy is often judged in terms of who is conducting the process. An independent body may be considered to be more unbiased than the agency sponsoring the consultation. A further consideration often raised by lay participants is

the issue of the extent to which agencies respond visibly to the results of consultation. This is generally considered to be the “lynch pin” or central element of the legitimacy of the consultation – has it had an effect on decisions? This criterion can be evaluated by using post event questionnaires or interviews.

Equality of access means the ability to participate in the process. To be able to participate people need to know that the dialogue process is taking place and this in turn requires good publicity of the event and consideration of when the event should take place to enable people to attend. To encourage people to participate in events may require active recruitment. This criterion could be evaluated by recording who attended an event and/or asking attendees how easy it was to attend.

"Being able to speak" refers to equality of opportunities to speak and providing a space where participants feel that their views are valued and that they can express them without fear of harassment or ridicule. Facilitators are often invaluable for enabling the ability to speak. This criterion can be assessed using post-event questionnaires or interviews.

A deliberative environment means creating the space where participants feel able to express their views. However, deliberation also entails consideration of the matters raised, and a development and movement from existing positions and views. Rather than presuming that people have fixed positions (which are then articulated in consultative processes), a deliberative approach assumes that people can and will engage with arguments and that the process itself enables a dynamic construction of the issues, rather than these being pre-existing. Thus, discussion, on an equal footing, between the participants is essential to enabling deliberation. Facilitators can help to encourage deliberation. This criterion can be measured using pre and post-event questionnaires to record people’s views and any changes in them and can also be analysed by evaluating the discussions that take place during the dialogue.

Openness of framing the key to this criterion is that the processes chosen do not predetermine the way in which the issue to be discussed is viewed. All processes require some level of information provision. However, it is possible for that information to be presented in a way which jeopardises the openness of framing as little as possible. The openness of the framing of a problem can be restrained by the decision making process which the dialogue is part of. This criterion can be evaluated by looking at how open the framing of the dialogue topic is and what issues are raised during the dialogue.

Developing insight into range of issues, new meanings are generated. It is important that the design of dialogue processes allow participants to listen to, and understand, a range of different points of view. This gives the broadest possible picture. Once people have taken on board the knowledge and experience of others it is possible for them to generate new meanings, or to view the issues in a new and different light. This criterion can be evaluated using questionnaires to determine what insights people have gained from participating in the dialogue process and analysing how the discussion progresses.

Inclusive and “best” knowledge elicited this criterion requires an approach that elicits the knowledge of the various participants, and which encourages the critical assessment of the available knowledge. This criterion can be evaluated by analysing the information that is shared during the dialogue process and how much each attendee participates in the dialogue.

Producing acceptable/tolerable and useable outcomes/decisions. How acceptable outcomes are can be assessed by using questionnaires and talking to participants after the dialogue. The tolerability of outcomes may take time to establish and may depend on the steps taken after the

dialogue process is completed. The usefulness of the outcomes can be determined by evaluating how easy it is to feed them into the wider decision making process or by analysing the wider implications of the dialogue, for example the relationships that are developed through it.

Improvement of trust and understanding between participants building relationships takes time and short dialogue processes may not provide enough time for this to happen. Understanding between participants can be enhanced by encouraging deliberation and reflection during the dialogue process. This criterion can be evaluated using post event questionnaires.

Developing a sense of shared responsibility and common good. Thinking in terms of the common good, or what is best for society as a whole, is in direct opposition to thinking in terms of individual or localised interests. It implies a shared responsibility, rather than an allocation of responsibility to specific groups (such as regulators, or waste producers). The development of a sense of shared responsibility and the common good can be encouraged by using processes where people do not act solely as individuals, are not in situations where they feel it necessary to defend individual, or local interests, and where they are explicitly asked to address issues within the framework of the common good, rather than being formulated into competing groups. This criterion can be evaluated by analysing the outputs of the dialogue process.

Summary

In order to continue the development of dialogue processes it is important to evaluate and learn from the experience of engaging with stakeholders. Criteria can be developed to evaluate how successful a process has been, these can range from very practical criteria relating to how well the process worked or be linked to more subjective criteria developed from the aims of the dialogue process itself.

Evaluation will incur a cost in terms of time and money, but will help practitioners to be able to develop processes that meet the needs of those who participate and improve the way that we try to engage people in the debate.

References

Hunt, J., Day, K. and Kemp, R. (2001) Stakeholder Dialogue: Experience and Analysis. *RISCOM II Deliverable 4.1* (March) [<http://www.karinta-konsult.se/RISCOM.htm>]

Hunt, J. (2001) Designing Dialogue. *RISCOM II Deliverable 4.5* (July) [<http://www.karinta-konsult.se/RISCOM.htm>]

*Annex I***EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR DIALOGUE PROCESSES
AS DEVELOPED BY RISCUM II***Process*

- Transparency of the process and content of decision making
- Formal and transparent accountability of decision makers; participants are also held accountable by themselves and others
- Framing is open to redefinition by the participants
- Participants are not bound by the disciplining nature of the event
- Discourse equality of access (being able to speak) and providing an environment in which participants are willing to defend claims
- Deliberative production of views and positions
- Appropriate resources (including information and time) are available to all participants in order that they have the ability to participate
- Improves understanding between participants/avoids misperceptions of each other becoming embedded
- Inclusiveness of all relevant/appropriate entities
- Representative of different views and groups of stakeholders
- Capture by inappropriate interest groups is avoided

Framing

- Project initiators develop insight into a range of values
- A clearer definition of the issues at stake is achieved
- Alternative values are articulated

Results/outcomes

- Initiators meet objectives
- Results are usable by institutions
- Results are justifiable with reference to legitimate process and procedural legitimacy is achieved in the view of participants
- Producing more acceptable/less contentious policies/strategies/plans

Knowledge

- New ideas/ways forward are elicited
- “Best knowledge” is elicited
- Knowledge is inclusive of expert, lay and critical domains
- “Sound science” is elicited

- Outcome is well supported by evidence and/or argument
- Truth/fact claims are challenged and verified or otherwise, assumptions and uncertainties are identified
- New meanings and understandings are generated
- Active sense making occurs
- Participants learn
- Reflexivity is induced

Efficiency

- The expenditure is worthwhile and intangible benefits are recognised (cost-effectiveness)
- The benefits could not have been obtained for less cost (participants time being recognised as a cost)
- Capacity building

Relationships

- Increasing responsiveness and growing ability to listen meaningfully to participants
- Improves trust between participants
- Reduction of conflict
- Interest and engagement of participants
- Motivating

Generating new meanings

- Developing sense of shared responsibility for problem and acceptability of solution (ownership)
- Developing sense of the common good

EVALUATING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EXERCISES – PUMA FINDINGS

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In recent years, government-citizen relations has become a high-profile issue. At the national level, a vocal and active citizenry are increasingly prepared to take to the streets in protest and have adopted new tools—notably Internet—to promote their ideas and influence decision makers. Once confined to the national level, mobilisation by citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) has recently begun to target international policy-making and the multilateral institutions that implement decisions made by governments.

These events are only the tip of the iceberg in the wider sphere of government-citizen relations. At all levels of government, citizens and their associations are playing a growing role in providing input to decision makers, shaping policies for the future and the delivery of key services. As these new relationships have evolved and matured, governments increasingly recognise their reliance upon the active contribution of citizens in making better decisions and achieving policy objectives. Strengthening government-citizen relations thus may be seen as a sound investment in tapping new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources for implementation.

A programme of work was undertaken under the auspices of the PUMA (Public Management Project) Working Group on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections during 1999-2000. Two comparative surveys were conducted among 23 OECD member countries and the European Union, and eight in-depth country cases were performed; the results were discussed in five meetings and published as [OECD PUMA, 2001a].

While the benefits of engaging citizens in policy-making may be considerable, governments should not underestimate the risks associated with poorly designed and inadequate measures for information, consultation and active participation. They may seek to inform, consult and encourage active participation by citizens in order to enhance the quality, credibility and legitimacy of their policy decisions. However the opposite effect may be achieved if citizens discover that their efforts to be informed, provide feedback and actively participate are ignored or have no impact at all on the decisions reached. To reduce the risk of rapid disillusionment and further erosion of citizens' trust, governments must ensure that:

- *Information* is complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and understand.
- *Consultation* is conducted with clear goals and according to unambiguous rules which clearly state the limits of the exercise and government's obligation to account for the use made of citizens' input.

¹⁷. Prepared by the NEA Secretariat based on topical session notes, OECD PUMA, 2001 and OECD Observer, 2003.

- *Participation* provides sufficient time and flexibility to allow for the emergence of new ideas and proposals on the part of citizens and a mechanism for their integration into government's policy-making process.

The achievement of any or all of these goals is a matter for evaluation. Yet the comparative study performed by PUMA found that evaluation was often overlooked. There is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy which OECD Member countries invest in strengthening government-citizen connections and their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures and their impact on public policy-making. No Member country currently conducts a systematic evaluation of efforts to enhance access to information, citizen feedback, consultation and active participation—although all those participating in the PUMA surveys expressed an interest in improving their capacity for evaluation.

A subproject was therefore undertaken to review experience and identify the major evaluation components that should be taken into consideration when planning a governmental participatory exercise. Project findings can be summarised in the form of a checklist (see Annex 1).

A concrete example was obtained in the area of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) or “online” consultation and engagement of stakeholders. As governments increasing support the development of ICTs like websites offering information and interactive abilities, there is a corresponding need to know whether online engagement meets both citizens' and governments' objectives (OECD Observer, 2003). Annex 2 provides a sample set of issues that may be explored in planning and conducting evaluation.

Evaluation may bear on the utility, feasibility, and perceived legitimacy of a participatory approach and should also address legal and ethical questions on the property and use of information gained. Evaluation itself can be participatory, and should be performed and reported very shortly after the completion of the consultation. For a national process, typically three to four weeks are needed for preparation (which may be concurrent with other planning and with the consultation itself), 6-8 weeks for implementation, and 4-5 weeks for analysis in view of report. The estimated costs of governmental public consultations are distributed in this manner: 40% to implementation, 30% to evaluation, and 30% to dissemination of the results of the exercise.

Guiding principles developed for information, consultation and public participation overall (OECD PUMA, 2001b) may be applied to the evaluation phase in particular.

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OECD Observer (2003) Engaging citizens online for better policy-making. *Policy Brief*, March. Paris: OECD.

*Annex 1***EVALUATING INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:
A CHECKLIST OF KEY QUESTIONS DEVELOPED BY OECD/PUMA**

What is the **object** of evaluation?

- Information provision
- Consultation
- Public participation
- The use of electronic tools

What is the **purpose** of the evaluation?

- To find out whether objectives were reached? (i.e., control)
- To adjust the process under evaluation? (i.e., management)
- To document experiences? (i.e., learning)

Who **commissions** the evaluation?

- The government service directly concerned
- Other government services (e.g., internal audit unit, evaluation unit)
- External oversight bodies (e.g., parliament, supreme audit institution)
- Others (e.g., civil society organisations, think tanks)

What **methods** are used?

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Observation
- Reviews of documentation

If **participatory evaluation** is used, how is it conducted?

- Participation in formulating questions
- Participation in answering questions
- Participation in using the results

How is the evaluation **organised**?

- How much will the evaluation cost?
- How long will it take?
- Who receives the evaluation results? (e.g., only the commissioning body; the public)

How are evaluation results **communicated and used**?

- Is there a communication strategy?
- Which communication channels can be used?
- How much will it cost to disseminate the results of the evaluation?
- Are the evaluation results used? How?

Does a **policy** on evaluation of citizen engagement exist?

- Do general guidelines for evaluation exist within the government?
- Are specific guidelines for evaluating citizen engagement being developed?
- How is capacity for evaluation being built within government? (e.g., recruitment, training, partnerships)

Annex 2

ISSUES FOR THE EVALUATION OF ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Evaluation issue	How to address the issue
1. Was the e-consultation process conducted in line with best practice?	Ask stakeholders if they are satisfied with the process. Assess whether adequate resources are in place to conduct the consultation. Check whether process followed best practice guidelines. Assess whether the choice of an online tool was appropriate for the consultation.
2. Were the consultation objectives and what was expected of the citizens made clear?	Ask stakeholders if they understand what is being asked. Assess whether the participants' contributions are appropriate.
3. Did the consultation reach the target audience?	Assess the adequacy of the promotion of the e-consultation. Identify who and where potential participants are, in terms of demographic and geographic characteristics.
4. Was the information provided appropriate and relevant?	Assess how easily the participants can access the information. Assess whether the participants' contributions were informed by it.
5. Were the contributions informed and appropriate?	Assess to what extent the contributions address the consultation issue. Assess how easily the participants can access contributions from others. Classify contributions according to whether they provide information, ask questions or make suggestions. Assess to what depth contributions respond to other contributions.
6. Was feedback provided both during and after the consultation?	Assess whether questions are answered by government during the consultation. Assess the extent to which the government feedback relates to the contributions.
7. Was there an impact on policy content?	Check to what extent a change of policy is possible given the stage in the decision-making the consultation occurred. Assess to what extent contributions are reflected in the revised or newly formulated policy.

OECD Observer (2003) Engaging citizens online for better policy-making. *Policy Brief*, March. Paris: OECD

APPENDIX: PROGRAMME OF THE TOPICAL SESSION

22 May 2003

111 Stakeholder involvement tools: Criteria for choice and evaluation (Topical session)

Chair: Saida Engström

Rapporteur: Anna Vári

Outstanding questions in the FSC imply the need to make a systematic examination of stakeholder involvement tools.

- How to decide which of the various dialogue tools fits your process, decision phase, and desired outcomes?
- How to evaluate whether your dialogue process has been successful or not?
- What can be expected, what should practitioners watch out for when applying some of the more commonly-used tools?

As for other topical sessions, the intention is to document it, and to introduce the lessons learnt in the FSC “Outcome Document”.

11a. A review of the existing tools for national or local consultation – Choosing a tool on the basis of phase and of expected effects

Sybille van den Hove (ICTA, U. Autònoma, Barcelona)

11b. Experience with consultation in Denmark

Ida-Elisabeth Andersen (Project Manager, The Danish Board of Technology)

Break

11c. Evaluating public participation techniques – Criterion-based approach

Elizabeth Atherton (UK Nirex Limited)

11d. Evaluating public participation exercises–PUMA guidelines

Christian Vergez (OECD – PUMA)

Facilitated discussion

Chair

11e. Stocktaking

Rapporteur