

CHAPTER 1

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN

URBAN PLANNING

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a short history of public participation in planning. The history seeks to challenge the profession's view of participation as simply the public processes designed and controlled by planners.

Public participation includes not only the deliberate hearings, but also the role of politicians, civic activists, business leaders, the media, and others in engaging in or forcing public conversation about planning topics. (Goodspeed, 2008)

The idea of an ideal community Participation can be traced back to Jean Jack Rousseau¹. As a reaction to his experience of the urban public of the eighteenth century, Rousseau developed a political philosophy based on the ideal community. In this philosophy, Foucault argues, Rousseau dreams of:

“It was the dream that each individual, whatever position he occupies, might be able to see the whole of the society, that men's hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that the opinion of all reign over each.” (Foucault, 1980)

In the **Rousseau's** dream, we have a society where all people are aware of existing opportunities for effective participation in decision making, they believe participation is worthwhile, and they participate actively in a society that holds that collective decisions bind. In this society, the role of participation is exactly that men “*not law*” should rule, and therefore be ruled by the logic operation of the political situation that they themselves have created. In such situation the role of individual men is automatically precluded. (Pateman, 1970)

“If man is essentially learning, creating and communicating being, the only social organization adequate to his nature is a participatory democracy, in which all of us, as unique individuals, learn, communicate, and control. Any lesser, restrictive system is simply wasteful of our true resources; in

¹ **Jean Jack Rousseau** (1712 – 1778), a major Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer of 18th-century Romanticism. His political philosophy heavily influenced the French Revolution, as well as the American Revolution and the overall development of modern political, sociological and educational thought.

wasting individuals, by shutting them out from effective participation, it is damaging our true common process.” (Williams, 1961)

The notion of participation is about DEMOCRATIZING US “*the human beings*” and not just “*society*” or as **H. Koch**² puts it:

“Even if we succeeded in implementing both political and economic democratization of society, we would not have come much further if we could not democratize man.”

1.2. THE NOTION OF PARTICIPATION

Participation is a widely used notion. It is used in many social contexts, from working life and technological development over urban and regional planning to general politics and everyday situation. Yet, “*Community Participation*” is an intricate expression, as it has no specific definition, limits, boundaries, or established criteria with which it can be measured. It is argued by **Bately** (1996) to be open to speculations and personal interpretations.

“Participation is a broad word, widely used, relating to work place and production, to community development/neighborhood self-help and to government administration.”

Part of the problem arises from the different definitions of what constitutes community participation and, according to **Moser**³, the conflicting purposes of interested agencies, governments, international aid bodies, non-governmental organizations, as well as those of the people of any particular community. The diversity of definitions reflects the ideological range of interpretation of development and the divergent approaches to it.

Moser (1989) argues that contradictions between intentions on paper and the real agenda can become apparent in the practice of community participation.

Mayo (1995) argues that community participation is used also for ideological reasons.

“Community development was also significant ideologically in encouraging favorable institutions and attitudes, and in discouraging those unfavorable ones that might lead to the development of a radical challenge.”

² **Hamilton Koch** (born in May 3, 1940), an American businessman, philanthropist, political activist, and chemical engineer. Known for Philanthropy to cultural and medical institutions; Political advocacy in support of libertarian and conservative causes

³ **Moser, C.**, is an academic specializing in social policy and urban social anthropology. She has researched community participation, looking at the social dimensions of economic reform, the role of human rights, social protection and responses of the urban environment to climate change.

Some authors argue that participation creates satisfaction at the level of the participants, e.g. **Schumacher**⁴ calls participation the “*good work*”, work of the kind that fulfils life both; in the way that it is carried out and by means of what is done and made.

White’s definition of community participation (1982) can be perceived to play an active role in the provision of basic needs, not only to increase self-reliance but also for efficiency of application.

“Such needs as health, education, safer water, and sewage can only, or more efficiently, be provided for through public effort...The role of non-material basic needs, both as an end in their own right, and as a mean to meeting material needs that reduces costs and improve impact, is a crucial aspect of the basic needs approach.”

UNRISED⁵ in 1979 identified the real objective of participation as:

“...to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situation, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.”

This definition assumes that participation involves a certain sharing and transfer of power as local groups deliberately attempt to increase their control over resources. It includes recognition that tension might develop with the state in this case, while trying to promote participation to achieve centrally desired objectives on the grounds of efficiency.

UNCHS (1986) Director’s report stated that it is not in the interest of governments to involve their clients in designing and sharing the responsibility of development efforts. In practical terms, community participation directly benefits agencies because it broadens their resource base in physical, financial and most important human terms.

“Clearly it is not in the interest of governments to involve their clients in designing and creating support programs and in sharing the responsibility for short-term and long-term outcomes of development efforts.

In practical terms, community participation directly benefits agencies such as social welfare departments, planning offices and local housing authorities, because it broadens their resource base in physical, financial and most

⁴ **Ernst Friedrich "Fritz" Schumacher**, (1911 –1977) was an internationally influential economic thinker, statistician and economist in Britain. His ideas became popularized in much of the English-speaking world during the 1970s.

⁵ The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency engaging in multidisciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups.

important human terms...It distributes or shares responsibility for the design, management, and executions of programs and projects.

Through community participation, government, despite limited outlays in per capita support, can assist a far greater number of needy than can be reached by current conventional programs.”

Hamza (1998) argues that from a government’s point of view, participation is mostly seen as an attempt directed from above.

“To orient the actions of people to attain collectively defined goals and values, to achieve system legitimacy and to overcome inherited social cleavages.”

Rakodi and **Schlyter** (1981) also, maintain the governments utilize participation as follows:-

- An instrument legitimizing political control by the ruling party.
- A periodic voting to ensure the accountability of government and perpetuate a “*myth of democracy*”
- A mean by which the regime promotes ideological and development goals.

White (1982) describes “*Community Participation*” according to the world-bank definition to have three corners:

1. Is the involvement of all those affected in decision making about what should be done and how?
2. Is mass contribution to the development effort?
3. Is sharing in the benefits of the program?

To summarize the various definitions of community participation, we can divide them into two categories:

1- As a mean in a Top-Down decision-making process.

Here it is used as a form of mass mobilization to get things done, only to use the community as cheap labor to reduce and to achieve specific development objectives predetermined from the beginning by the state or agencies.

2- As an end in a Bottom-up decision-making process.

Here the final objective is not a product of quantifiable development goal, but considered as a process. The real goal is to increase control over resources and regulations. People take control of their decisions, and are

free to make their contributions in design, construction, management and maintenance of their houses.

1.2.1 Participatory Urban Planning And Design

Rapoport defines urban design as:

“Urban design, or the art of building cities, is the method by which man creates a built environment that fulfils his aspirations and represents his values.” (Rapoport, 1969)

This he does in his own likeness, the Sixteenth-century theorist and architect **John Shute** (1963) likens the city to the human figure:

“A city ought to be like the human body and for this reason it should be full of all that give life to man.”

Accordingly, urban design, like architecture, is a people’s use of an accumulated technological knowledge to control and adapt the environment for social, economic, political and religious requirements.

“It is the method learned and used by a people to solve the total program of requirements for city building.” (Moughtin, 2003)

The city is an element of a people’s spiritual and physical culture and, indeed, it is the one of the highest expressions.

“Central to the study of urban design is the man, his values, aspirations and power or ability to achieve them. The task of the city builder is to understand and express, in built form, the needs and aspirations of the client group.” (Moughtin, 2003)

**How does the city builder design to best serve the community’s needs?
How can he ensure that the end product is culturally acceptable?**

These and other similar questions are important issues for those in the city designing professions. In traditional practice the architect worked for an individual or a small group representing a landing proprietor. However, growth of democracy and mass culture now requires the architect and city builder to recognize a wider client group. This wider group includes the ordinary voter and the general user of the buildings.

“The community inhabiting towns and cities, and therefore the focus of the subject, is complex heterogeneous groups made up of diverse sub-cultures with differing values and aspirations.” (Moughtin, 2003)

As culture can be viewed as filter acting between the outside environment and the receiver, many in this expanded client group do not share the values of the designer group. **Rapoport** (1977) states that,

“Understanding others requires, primarily, an understanding of the limitations of one’s own cultural and personal frame of reference.”

Frequently, it is possible that a wide cultural gap separates the city builder and the new client- the man and woman in the street.

The gap between city designer and client can be bridged when the problem is recognized and its nature defined: When the complexity and heterogeneity of the client group is admitted and when the designer realizes that culture is never static: it is in a constant state of change and to some extent, he or she- the designer- is an agent for those changes.

“Culture is never entirely static; it is in a constant state of change. The world is getting smaller and there is increasing contact between peoples. As a result, cultures are changing. What are more they appearing to be changing at an increasing rate.” (Moughtin, 2003)

However, even when working with people, the designer is not a neutral, objective observer, but a significant factor in the process of culture change. Eventually, an important aspect of the designer’s skill is the development of a menu of techniques for incorporation into the design process.

Nevertheless, all of this sounds very far from the life of the man in the street. How then can the community be involved in the process? At what point? Therefore, do people take part in the design and development process?

Starting the design process from a theoretical foundation and from abstract notions does give to the professional, with his or her long period of education and experience, great advantages over the layperson. However, the layperson, too, has knowledge and experience.

He is expert on his family, its needs and aspirations. This is a highly specialized knowledge about the sort of housing, educational, health care, and recreational facilities the family needs and can afford.

Also, the layperson is well able to extend this personal knowledge and to form accurate ideas about his neighbors’ needs. He is then the expert on the problems of the neighborhood in which he or she lives.

The professional when carrying out surveys into user requirements estimates in crude terms this knowledge, whereas the layperson's knowledge in this field is immediate and first hand.

Moughtin (1970) argues that the ordinary citizen also has ideas about the ways in which these problems can be solved and how to capitalize on any possibilities that exist.

Furthermore, making the most of this wealth of experience requires starting the design process; either by investigating the problem, permitting the community to outline its problems, or by their posing solutions to problems already intimately known to them, then examining these solutions in the light of an evaluation.

“Experiments in Belfast, Nottingham, and Newark confirmed that residents are perfectly capable of organizing their own survey and are also able to generate planning and architectural solutions.” (Moughtin, 1970)

According to **Gibson** (1979), the professional's role, in citizen-participant dominated design, is not defunct. On the contrary, it becomes more delicate and subtle requiring patience and, above all, skills in listening. It also requires of the designer the humility to be able to offer advice only when requested.

“The professionals advice on technical matters is supreme, experience shows that it is well respected by the layperson.”

The layperson can offer solutions only from within, his or her, own experience. The professional can open up a new whole world of experience to the client group through knowledge of many other similar situations.

Sharing this knowledge with the client has always been part of the professional's role; it remains so in the process of participation.

The layperson's knowledge and experience of planning and design matters beyond the immediate neighborhood decreases as does his or her interest. These wider issues, and their implications for the locality, have to be interpreted and made clear to the community by the professional.

If, however, high levels of participation are thought desirable in the planning and design process should give emphasis to a bottom-up order rather than working from the region or city down to the neighborhood and the street.

The higher levels of planning then become an amalgam of small-scale plans coordinated to ensure that higher level services are not inhabited.

1.2.2 Objectives of Public Participations

According To **Jean Jack Rousseau**, Participation has a psychological effect on the participants, ensuring a continuing interrelationship between the workings of institutions and the psychological capabilities of individuals interacting with them.

His theory of participatory democracy⁵ is based on the argument that participation fosters human development, enhances the sense of political efficacy, reduces the sense of estrangement from power centers, nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of an active and knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking an active interest in governmental and managerial affairs.

The theory is an attempt to resolve the antithesis between individuality and sociality:-

“The theory of participatory democracy is built round the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another.

*The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialization, or “**social training**”, for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitude and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself.” (Pateman, 1970)*

The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is, according to **Pateman** (1970), an educational one, including both the psychological aspect and the development of democratic skills and procedures. The education function is important, even if it is not clear. It is not only showing that participation is indeed central to the democratic prospective; it also emphasizes the social and cultural aspect; that democracy does not consist of institutions alone.

Moreover, Planners increasingly find that public participation is fundamental to develop appropriate and effective solutions or community design and planning problems. (Alexander, 1977; Altschuler, 1970; McClure, Byrne and Hurand, 1997; Sanoff, 1978, 1991; Smith, 1993; Towers, 1995)

The benefits of broad-based community involvement in planning are widely documented; they include:

⁵ **Participatory Democracy**, also known as pure democracy and, direct democracy; its more thoroughgoing version in which the people are empowered to exercise power directly through voting on issues with public implications whether they are political, economic, or otherwise. According to the Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, only a direct democracy is a true democracy, because to delegate the people’s power is to alienate it and risk losing control over one’s representative.

- Enhancing the capacity of citizens to cultivate a stronger sense of commitment
- Increasing user satisfaction
- Creating realistic expectations of outcomes
- Building trust

According to **Craig** (1998) organizing public participation in a city can have the following objectives:

- Expands the public's role in defining questions and making decisions in which location or geography have a bearing on the issues addressed.
- Increase public participation in the identification, creation, use and presentation of relevant information in various problem solving contexts; and,
- Enable wider public involvement of stakeholders in planning, dispute resolution and decision-making environment through a computer-based public participation process.

Schuler (1996) argues that in order to be efficient, the characteristics of a public participation process should be:

- Community-based, that is to say that everyone in the whole community/city should be involved;
- Reciprocal, i.e. any potential "consumer of information" should be a producer as well;
- Contribution-based, because forums are based on contributions of participants
- Unrestricted, i.e. anyone can offer his participation
- Accessible and inexpensive, that is to say that the use of the system must be free of charge to everyone;
- Modifiable, because the legislative framework, the planning systems and the software can evolve, and those evolutions must be taken easily into account.

However, although it is now widely understood by people in all sectors of the development industry that such involvement can lead to more appropriate and sustainable development solutions and stronger citizen groups and communities.

"Participatory strategies that rely on empowerment of residents to identify community priorities, plan and undertake interventions and safeguard improvements are keys to defining sustainable development strategies."
(**International Training Program Prospectus**, 1994)

Yet, there is almost universal uncertainty as to the best way of involving local communities in any given situation.

1.3. LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Since the 1960s, the urban planning profession has developed increasingly sophisticated techniques and theories regarding how and why to involve citizens in planning processes. Critics pilloried the effectiveness of citizen participation during the War on Poverty, suggesting a new theoretical approach to participation itself was needed.

Despite the theoretical disagreement about the proper definition and practice of participation, professional literature reflects a consensus a variety of additional techniques can enhance the process and result in more effective and democratic plans. These debates suggest ways planners can craft strategies that take into account social divisions and inequality, and effectively incorporate Internet technology into existing processes.

The ways of citizens are involved in urban planning can vary a lot from countries. Actually, each community needs to devise its own community planning process carefully to suit local conditions. The approach adopted in each case will be different and there is rarely a quick fix solution or blueprint.

“Currently the choice of approach is largely ad hoc, depending on the experience and knowledge of those initiating activity.” (Arnstein, 1969)

The problem of the various degree of involving people in land use planning is very old. **Arnstein** (1969), a former U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (**HUD**) official, published one of the most influential articles on the topic of public participation.

Titled “*A Ladder of Citizen Participation*,” **Arnstein** (1969) proposed the first ladder for public participation with eight steps.

The steps are organized into three levels: nonparticipation (manipulation and therapy), tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), and citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control).

Arnstein described the lack of meaningful participation in policymaking in poor urban communities, and identified “*Citizen Control*” as the proper definition of citizen participation in planning.

This approach discarded any effort where “*Citizens*” were not given full authority. **Arnstein** (1969) observed

“No Model City can meet the criteria of citizen control since final approval power and account-ability rest with the city council.”

This “*ladder*” of participation was a powerful critique of duplicitous participation processes that do not provide citizens with real power. Two characteristics of the critique influenced subsequent debates and the usefulness of the ladder today.

First, the ladder provides few specific strategies. If we are sympathetic to her findings, it offers little guidance for planners seeking to design processes that conform to the standards proposed. The citizen control section describes one approach as giving grants to grassroots organizations, but **Arnstein** concedes full neighborhood self-government seems unlikely in the future. Aside from criticizing the usual methods used by formal planning to incorporate citizen input – public meetings, special committees, etc – she has little to say about how these processes can be improved.

Second, the article provides little to those who might disagree that citizen control should be the proper goal of citizen participation. Her model radically eliminates any role for the rational or technical expertise of planners, and assumes citizen power will result in good planning decisions. Transportation, environmental, and many other types of planners may bristle at any strategy that completely removes them or elected officials from the decision-making process. Indeed, the tension between planning’s technical expertise and democratic aspiration has fueled ongoing debate.

Starting from a previous work made some years before, **Kingston** (1998), has proposed a six-step ladder (**Figure 1.1**) which appears more relevant for our purpose. Among the steps, one can successively find from bottom to top (the lower steps meaning no real public participation):

- Public right to know: in this first level phase, the public has only the possibility to be aware that some planning issue could be of interest;
- Informing the public: here the concerned local authority implements some action plan in order to inform the people; but the people has no possibility to react;
- Public right to object: here the city-dwellers may say yes or no to a project, but have no possibility to react neither to amend it;

- Public participation in defining interests, actors and determining agenda: this is the very first level of participation;
- Public participation in assessing consequences & recommending solutions: now the public is truly involved in analyzing the impacts of possible decisions and can recommend solutions which can be accepted to be implemented;
- Public participation in final decision: this is real participation in the final decision; the decision is not only made by elected officers (city-councilors for instance), but each citizen can vote whether or not to accept the plan.

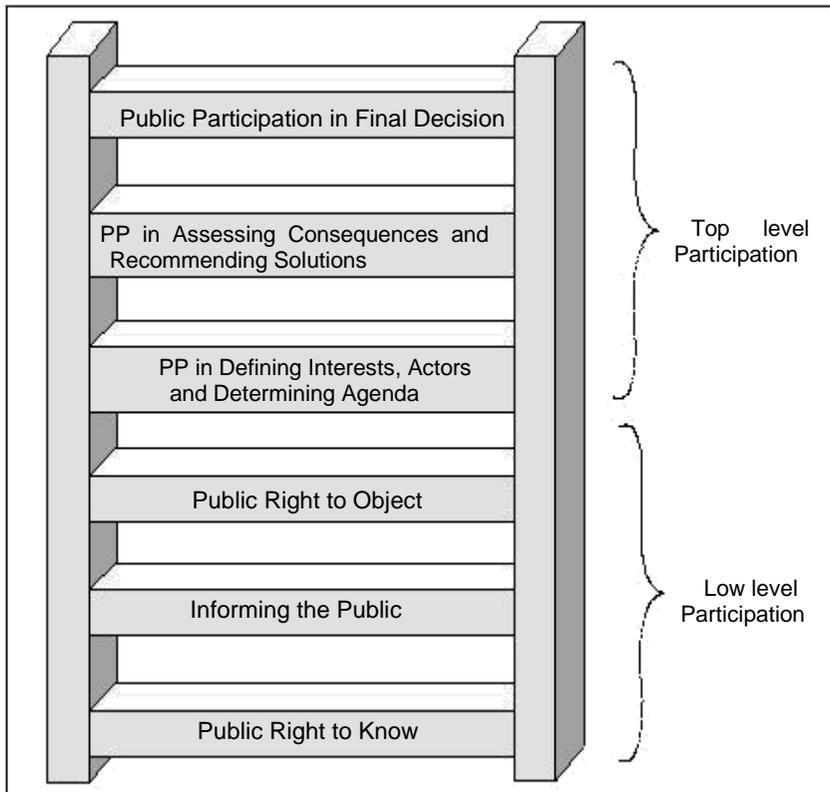


Figure 1.1: The public participation ladder according to Kingston 1998 with modifications

Another way to present the different scales of involving the public in the planning process is shown in **Figure 1.2**. **Nobre** (1999) has established four main degrees of community participation:

To Inform, To Consult, To Discuss, To Share

Autocracy	Technocracy	Democracy	Citizenship
Manipulation	Information	Delegation	Partnership

Figure 1.2: Community Participation Ruler together with the political profile and the proceeding status (**Nobre, 1999**).

Lower levels are one-way procedures as they do not necessary ask for any particular feedback from the community. On the contrary, higher levels of participation require two-way procedures as they imply capturing the public’s reactions and feed the decision-making process with such data.

The idea of planning secretly by far professionals to avoid political or economical local constraints – a common concept from the sixties – is nowadays completely overcome. In contrast "**To Inform**" (the first level **Nobre** is considering) is the minimal proceeding that one organization must provide to assure any operations success, whether a planning or a marketing operation.

The second participation degree is "**To Consult**". It means not just "**To Inform**" but also to collect from some representatives institutions their opinion, by organizing public inquiries and discussion encounters. It can be considered a two-way procedure if and when the planning promoters accept to introduce the inquiries results as an input in their decision-making process.

"**To Discuss**" is somehow accepting "**To Share**" knowledge, but sharing power decision is clearly the highest level of community participation. It is a turning point on this subject as well.

Being able to exert citizenship is as important as the will of the administrations to improve community participation to all urban life issues. According to **Nobre** (1999), some theorists speak about one "*educational city*" to underline how urban fabric is a fertile field to innovative social behaviors.

Yet, the useless of the "*participation ruler*" would not be completed, without crossing it with the "*Proceeding Status*" (the way is information provided and what intends to achieve) and the "*Decisional Political Profile*" (which power fundamentals exerted by what means).

Brody, Godschalk & Burby (2003) proposed in an article a clearer regulation of participation that organizes these themes into five areas. This framework provides a contemporary summary of what form participation should take according to stated professional theories.

1. **Objectives:** provide information to as well as listen to citizens; empower citizens by providing opportunities to influence planning decisions.
2. **Timing:** involve the public early and continuously.
3. **Targets:** seek participation from a broad range of stakeholders.
4. **Techniques:** use a number of techniques to give and receive information from citizens and, in particular, provide opportunities for dialogue.
5. **Information:** provide more information in a clearly understood form, free of distortion and technical jargon.

However, in order to facilitate the active participation of communities with the planning and development of the environment requires a whole range of approaches and a full menu of techniques. These approaches are likely to vary according to local preference, availability of funds, and the values of government officials.

1.4. MECHANISMS OF INVOLVING PEOPLE

Vindasius (1974) (quoted by **Sarjakoski**, 1998) proposed a classification of the type of mechanism to involve people in planning (See **Table 1.1**).

For each of those types, a sort of scale is given trying to evaluate the foci in scope, specificity, and communications and so on.

Type of public involvement mechanism	Descriptive dimensions				
	Focus in scope	Focus in specificity	Degree of two-way communications	Level of public activity required	Agency staff time requirements
Informal local contacts	*	***	***	**	**
Mass media (newspapers, radio, TV)	***	*	*	*	*
Publications	***	**	*	*	**
Surveys, questionnaires	**	***	*	**	**
Workshops	*	***	***	***	***
Advisory committees	*	***	***	**	***
Public hearings	**	*	*	***	**
Public meetings	**	*	**	**	**
Public inquiry	***	*	*	**	**
Special task forces	*	***	***	***	***
Gaming simulation	*	***	***	***	***

Legend: * Low, ** Medium, *** High

Table 1.1: Types of public involvement, according to **Vindasius** (1974)

A vast range of methods is available with different uses and characteristics. An annotated list in alphabetical order of some of the methods now available for involving people in urban design is presented in details later on in appendix 1.

These methods have long been used in public participation and certainly have their remarkable benefits and advantages that have proven efficiency for a long time in this field.

However, there are some technical and financial disadvantages of using them which cannot be ignored for their great effect on the quality and quantity of community participating.

1.5. COMMENTS ON THE TRADITIONAL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

1 Traditional methods of public participation at planning meetings quite often involve a confrontational atmosphere.

This can discourage participation by an often less vocal majority causing public meetings to be dominated by individuals who may have extreme views which may not necessarily represent the wider view of local people.

2 The restricted time and also the actual geographical location of public meetings can further restrict the possibility of widespread attendance.

Planning meetings often tend to take place at morning in specific times which can limit the number of people who are able to attend.

Physical access to such meetings can also cause problems for the disabled, the elderly and infirm as well as those who may be deaf.

3 In traditional settings using a physical model, the public are encouraged to place flags on places where they wish to express views and opinions.

This limits the amount of information that the public can put across as the flags are relatively small.

4 Representatives have to take the written proposals, which have been placed on the flags, off the model periodically and collate this information in a database for future analysis.

One-day events can generate a wealth of information and ideas which can easily be lost. Besides, it would take several weeks to be compiled and anglicized.

- 5 Setting up an interactive exhibition in a public street or square depends greatly on atmospheric conditions.

This may restrict participation, if windy conditions are likely to happen it may blow away.

- 6 People can participate far more effectively if information is presented visually rather than in words, which can be costly to prepare and may not be cost-effective.

A great deal of poor development, and hostility to good development, is due to people not grasping what is intended.

- 7 Getting formal permission to set up stall in a public area can take forever, which might be a reason for holding back.

Methods are still evolving and being refined and new ones continue to emerge. There is a shortage of adequate good practice guidance and little knowledge of what does exist. Most practitioners have experience of only a small range of the options available. As a result, inappropriate approaches are all too often adopted.

While, **Urban Design Group** (1998) states,

“Improving the quantity and quality of public involvement in urban design is one of the keys to improving the quality of the built environment.”

Reich et al (1997) argue that improving the effectiveness of participation may benefit from the development of support tools⁵.

⁵ **Reich, Y., Konda, S., Levy, S. N., Monarch, I., and Subrahmanian, E.** have several papers discussing the underlying foundations for supporting participatory design with computational tools. It introduces *n*-dim and illustrates it through a plausible reconstruction of a participatory design project for developing a community library.

1.6. CONCLUDED REMARKS

Despite the theoretical disagreement about the proper definition and practice of participation, it is now widely understood by people in all sectors of the development industry that such involvement can lead to more appropriate and sustainable development solutions and stronger citizen groups and communities.

Yet, there is almost universal uncertainty as to the best way of involving local communities in any given situation. The ways of citizens involvement in urban planning can vary a lot, each community needs to devise its own community planning process carefully to suit local conditions.

A vast range of methods is available with different uses and characteristics. These methods have long been used in public participation and certainly have their remarkable benefits and advantages that have proven efficiency for a long time in this field. However, there are some technical and financial disadvantages of using them which cannot be ignored for their great effect on the quality and quantity of community participating.

Planners can strive to give citizens a meaningful role in the development of plans and ensure that information is made available to the public in a convenient format and sufficiently in advance of any decision. Given this professional culture and ethical requirements, a clear model to use the Internet to facilitate participation will be professionally useful. It may also be possible that the technology addresses concerns raised by critics about conventional practices, allowing for new forms of information dissemination, social interaction and collaborative working.

Actually, the rapid development of the Internet, as a place of information dissemination provides researchers and policy-makers with considerable challenges on how best to realize the potential in the pursuit of worthwhile goals.

In order to propose how the Internet could be used as a participation tool, we need to understand both professional models of good participation and critics of participation as it is practiced today.