

# **Citizen Partizipation: dialogue, monologue or what?**

## **Current approaches and opportunities for participation.**

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### **1 Traditional problems of citizen participation**

#### *Little response and superficiality*

1. Experience with traditional forms of citizens' participation has mostly been discouraging. Only a minority of citizens takes any interest in existing offers to participate, and in most cases participation is transitory.

#### *Very often only organised interest groups take part.*

2. There is a wide gap between theory and practice of organised citizen participation, in many cases it is restricted just to listening to organised interest groups.

#### *Socially selective*

3. Traditional political participation is unequally spread and based on social structure. It is dominated by well-educated, people in the higher professional positions, middle-aged men and public service employees. Foreigners, immigrants, young people, women, older people and low-income families are usually under-represented.

#### *Problems of time*

4. Even if they are interested in politics many citizens do not have enough time to participate fully.

#### *Citizen participation is very often too late.*

5. Interest and engagement are in many cases the result of being personally affected and only happen when the decision-making process is already well advanced. The result is that the possibilities of influencing decisions are limited..

#### *Tendency to segmentation*

6. In our society (i.e. Germany) a tendency to "isolation in society" (segmentation) exists. Different groups discuss more over each other's heads than with each other and what is achieved is often just confirmation of opinion rather than exchange of opinion.

### **2 Citizen participation on public transport**

#### *Varying objectives*

7. Over the last few years varying methods have been used to tackle these problems, especially with regard to public transport. Regardless of whether the accent is on continuous control of quality and special offers, the influence of interest groups or the development of creativity and competence, the following approaches can be considered for public transport.

#### *Regular passenger surveys*

8. Regular passenger surveys provide information on the development of customer satisfaction. If non-users are also asked, there is a possibility of discovering the reason for choosing other forms of transport and assessing market potential. However, the fact that surveys can capture only current, spontaneous reactions, giving no time or opportunity for those questioned to weigh answers carefully or to think of new suggestions or proposals, is a distinct disadvantage.

#### *Suggestion-/Complaint-management*

9. Only 4 in 100 customers make a formal complaint if they are dissatisfied, although the greater majority will relate their negative experiences to many others. The suggestion and complaints system is very often an unused resource. Opportunity to complain or make suggestions must be made simple and easy with rewards for good suggestions also being very useful.

#### *Passengers' councils*

10. A Passengers' Council involves all interested parties during the planning and development stages of public transport recommendations. Smaller groups and the interests of young people and children must be given adequate representation. It is not recommended that Passengers' Councils should consist only of representatives of organisations. Ideally they should be made up of 50% representatives of organisations and 50% co-opted members from passengers, on a two year rotation.

#### *Future workshops*

11. The "future workshop" idea was developed by Robert Jungk. Groups are brought together to exchange and develop common ideas and to examine the possibility of practical application. The 1<sup>st</sup> phase is a "criticism phase" of analysing problems. The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase is the "fantasy idea" phase, focussing on improvement and the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase is the "conversion phase" – seeking ways of converting the ideas into reality.

#### *Citizen expert opinion*

This model was developed by Peter C. Dienel, a Professor of Sociology

in Wuppertal. Groups of 25 men and women, selected at random, are given leave from work for 4 days and collaborate on a "citizen expert opinion" on a problem set by the enterprise. This procedure was first used in 1995/96 on public transport problems by USTRA, a public transport operator in the Hanover region.

### 3 Example: citizens expert opinion ÜSTRA

#### *Twelve planning cells with 297 participants*

13. 297 people worked together during 1995/96 in 12 planning cells on the problems of public transport. The objective was to develop improvements to public transport in the capital city Hanover (federal state Lower Saxony). Key points were general questions about mobility and travelling, the feeling about subjective safety, travelling times and future fare structures.

#### *Heterogeneous participants*

By using random selection, a very broad cross-section of the population was achieved. Every year from 1914-1977 was represented by at least one person born in that year. Regular users of public transport were included as well as dedicated car users. The percentage of men and women was each 50%, and more than half were in regular employment. Parents with small children were helped by the provision of child-care facilities. In two cases, family members acted as a carer for participants with health problems and as interpreter for a participant with language difficulties.

#### *Program divided in 16 working units*

15. As a basis for the deliberations a programme was devised which was divided into 16 themed working units and also contained practice tests on bus and rail connections, surface stops and underground rail stations, information for passengers and friendliness to customers.

#### *Process support and expert advisers*

16. A three man team supported the whole process as well as 5 of the units being supported by expert advisers. Neither the experts nor the support team was present at the final evaluation process.

#### *More than 150 evaluations*

17. In total, each participant produced more than 150 evaluations. About half of these were individual, the other half being group efforts. In order to avoid leadership opinions the groups were regularly re-constituted, with the group size varying from 2-5 people. After the evaluation process was finished, all participants had the opportunity to give written comments on the results. 241 out of 248) made use of the opportunity .

### *Positive response*

18. All participants expressed approval of the procedure and many wished to engage further. The experts also found it an enriching experience.

### *Continuation of participation.*

19. The participation process did not end with the presentation of the citizens' expert opinions. In several groups the participants worked actively on implementing the recommendations and the transport enterprise kept them fully informed on the pace of implementation. A provisional final report was published in 1998 which details every recommendation and reports on every step which has been taken towards implementing them.

### *Practicability and achieving the goal.*

20. The expectations raised in the process have, to a large extent, been fulfilled. The people taking part were highly motivated and able to grasp complicated concepts in a short time, as well as being qualified to pass opinions. This has shown that citizen involvement is a valuable resource which is very much under-used.

### *Weaknesses*

21. Particular weaknesses of the procedure are the high costs of execution and the exclusivity of the participants. The costs must be looked at relation to the results and other expenses of planning. The effects of the latter can be reduced by offering other participation possibilities complementary to planning, such as future workshops.

## 4 Concluding remarks

### *No patent remedies*

22. In general there is no patent formula which can be applied to citizen participation. The choice of which method is most suitable must be assessed case by case on actual projects. In many cases a mixture of methods, or taking elements from each, will be the best choice.

### *Requirements*

23. Ground rules for the success of citizen participation are that discussions must be open-ended from the beginning and that all participants have a clear understanding of their value, that all interested parties have an equal and fair chance of influencing the results and last, but not least, that the deliberations have a good chance of a successful outcome.

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