ADVOCACY, PARTICIPATION AND NGOs IN PLANNING

INTERIM REPORT 1

January 2007

Paper presented at
"Citizen Participation in Policy Making"
University of the West of England
14-15 February 2007
Bristol UK

Edited by: Diane Warburton, Gideon Amos and the APaNGO partners
Project managers: Jonathan Rock and Eva George
Town and Country Planning Association
17 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AS
jonathan@tcpa.org,uk
www.tcpa.org.uk / www.apango.eu

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE APANGO PROJECT

The APaNGO[1] project was devised as one of the first European Union action research projects on community participation in planning and development. Its underlying philosophy is the importance of fostering constructive community engagement in order to help deliver sustainable development on the ground.

The project's central purpose is to provide a better understanding of the practice of community participation as it relates to planning and development. This then forms the basis for making recommendations on how practice can be improved. Although derived from the experience of North West Europe, it is expected that the findings of APaNGO will be of interest to all EU Member States and other countries.

Perhaps because development and its impact is by its nature local and place specific, there has been very little exchange between Member States about appropriate engagement techniques and services. These are being developed to deal with the same kinds of participation and advocacy challenges. Furthermore, because of pressure on funding for the NGO (non-governmental organisation) sector, the provision of information for local communities on how to engage with planning and development effectively is few and far between. APaNGO aims to help fill these gaps. One further important feature of the APaNGO project is its focus on planning and development of regional or citywide significance. The larger and more significant a project or plan, the greater will be its impact on the community concerned. However, there is a common perception that, ironically, it is at this scale where it is hardest to engage local communities. In this respect the project builds on research conducted by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA).[2]

The APaNGO project was launched in December 2005 by Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu[3], (Belgium); the City District Geuzenveld-Slotermeer (the Netherlands); Planning Aid for London (UK); Spectacle Productions Ltd (UK); and the Town and Country Planning Association (UK). The TCPA serves as the lead partner accountable for the project to the main funding body, the European Commission's North West Europe INTERREG Secretariat.

This first Interim Report from the APaNGO project covers the findings from the first stage background research. This consisted of desk studies of the Seven Member States in North West Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, and the UK) and the responses to an extensive questionnaire survey. Following an outline of the research methods used, the report provides a summary of the main challenges and trends in advocacy and participation in planning and development. The remainder of the report summarises the evidence base from the APaNGO research, from which the challenges and trends in Section 3 are drawn. Later reports will cover the findings from a series of demonstration projects and will make recommendations on good practice.

---

[1] Advocacy, Participation and NGOs in Planning.
[2] Baker, M., Roberts, P. and Shaw, R. (2003) *Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Planning. National report of the TCPA study*. Town and Country Planning Association, London.
[3] BRAL, Brussels Environmental Association.

2 METHODS AND CONCEPTS

2.1 Introduction

The background research for the APaNGO project was essentially a desk exercise, linked to a questionnaire survey, to examine the existing planning systems, techniques and infrastructure for community involvement in planning in the countries identified (see above). These three elements were defined as follows:

- **Systems** were defined as the legal planning system.

- **Techniques** were defined as usually being owned by someone or an organisation and often protected by copyright. Examples are Planning for Real,® action planning and Enquiry by Design.

- **Infrastructure** was defined as the non-physical structures of organisations and services available to those communities and individuals who want to participate in planning (e.g. planning aid organisations, Bral in Brussels etc.).

2.2 Research methods

The research was carried out in-house by TCPA staff for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Research on Germany, Luxembourg, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands was carried out by independent planners, academics and government officials; in Belgium, the research was carried out in-house by the Brussels Environmental Association (an APaNGO partner).

All research was carried out according to a brief prepared by the TCPA. The brief was as follows:

- **Outline of the planning system – setting the planning context**. The objective here was to gain a general overview of the planning system in the given country. Researchers were asked to give a description of national, regional and local level plans (including the functions of each), noting particularly the opportunities that exist for community involvement in their development and/or adoption, and any specific law, policy or guidance that provides for community involvement in spatial or environmental planning. In particular researchers were asked to cover:
  - planning laws/legislation;
  - policy or guidance;
  - different agencies/bodies (governments and non-governmental bodies) that have a role in the planning system.

- **The infrastructure that exists for community involvement**. The objective here was to provide a description of the main non-governmental community involvement organisations and services in the nation concerned, covering:
  - the main non-governmental organisations that offer help with community involvement in planning;

- other agencies or bodies supported by local, regional or central government specifically tasked with supporting community involvement in spatial or environmental planning;
- particularly those bodies operating across a national or regional level capable of offering local communities help to participate in major regional plans and/or significant scale physical development/regeneration projects.

- **Community involvement techniques/tools**. The objective here was to gain an overview of the techniques/tools that can be used to involve communities in the planning process. The research was intended to cover:
  - techniques/tools predominantly used in the nation concerned which facilitate community involvement – making involvement happen (e.g. simulation and workshops);
  - the advantages and disadvantages of the main techniques, highlighting good practice that might be used at a regional level in other European countries (recognising that these may be the same techniques that are used at a local level).

Research reports have been completed for all the countries identified. For various logistical reasons, research was undertaken separately in the four countries of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), but not separately in the distinct regions of Germany and Belgium. The coverage and depth of the research is quite variable, but there is useful material in each research report. However, there are so many differences between the countries in terms of the local planning systems and infrastructure that direct, detailed comparisons are impossible. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some common issues, as outlined throughout in this report.

In addition, in 2006 the TCPA and partners sent questionnaires to NGOs and other organisations involved in community participation and spatial or environmental planning in nine of the ten APaNGO countries[4] (no questionnaires were sent in France). The aim of the questionnaire was to explore further the current state of participation in planning in the nine countries, and the nature of the experience of those involved. In some countries (e.g. Germany) there was such a low return rate initially that a second mail out was undertaken, and in some cases (Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Belgium) follow-up phone calls and e-mails were used to gain more information. In England, follow-up work was carried out, including group representatives being interviewed (and captured on video).

In total, about 1,000 questionnaires were distributed and 202 were returned. Of those respondents, 130 had been involved directly in planning issues. The detailed analysis of the responses was based only on the 130 with direct experience of involvement in planning issues. Most of the groups responding (96) had a neighbourhood or other geographical focus – more than twice as many as had an issue focus (44 – some had both).

[4] The seven Member States listed earlier, but with the UK considered as four separate countries – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The findings from the questionnaire research are integrated into this report in the appropriate sections.

2.3 Terms and concepts

Before providing a summary of the findings, it may be helpful to focus briefly at this stage on some of the terms and concepts underpinning the research and the findings, as outlined below:

- **Community**. The concept of community has been a subject of controversy among social scientists, geographers, planners and politicians for many years. The term can refer to communities of place (e.g. neighbourhood, village), or identity (e.g. religion, country of origin), or interest (e.g. work, learning, leisure activities).[5]

  The APaNGO project does not formally or narrowly define the concept of community although, given that the focus of the project is on community involvement in planning, there is an inclination to assume that community is (at least in part) geographical. The APaNGO project materials do, however, make clear that, for these purposes, community is understood to include the private and voluntary sectors, as well as the more usual residential community.

- **Community groups**. The APaNGO project has defined community groups as follows:
  - on whatever scale (national, regional or local), a group of people with some shared element;
  - the diversity of the group may vary from residents concerned with the area in which they live and work, to a group with specific interests, principles and/or values (e.g. disability groups, youth groups, trusts, tenants groups etc.);
  - the shared element can vary from an interest in a proposed local development to concerns for global climate change;
  - some of these community groups will be well-established and representative (e.g. non-governmental organisations); and
  - in other cases, community groups may not be organised but only formed to discuss one specific issue relating to the area they live in.

- **Levels of participation**. Although some of the research reports refer to Arnstein's classic ladder of participation[6] as a way of defining levels of community involvement, the APaNGO project overall has to date used the four levels of involvement used in the TCPA report *Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Planning*. These four levels are:[7]

---

[5] For example see 'Can participation build community?' by Diane Warburton, in Wilson, R. (Ed.) (2006) *Post Party Politics. Can participation reconnect people and government?* Involve, London.
[6] Baker, M., Roberts, P. and Shaw, R. (2003) *Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Planning. National report of the TCPA study*. Town and Country Planning Association, London.
[7] These levels are taken from Petts, J. and Leach, B (2001) *Evaluating Methods for Public Participation. Literature review.* Environment Agency R & D Technical Report E2-030.

- **Level one: education and information provision**. Methods that might be included here are seen as including leaflets/brochures, newsletters, unstaffed exhibits/displays, advertising, local and national newspapers, videos and site visits.
- **Level two: information feedback**. Methods that might be included here are seen as including staffed exhibits/displays, telephone help lines, the internet, teleconferencing, public meetings, surveys, interviews and questionnaires and deliberative polls.
- **Level three: involvement and consultation**. Methods that might be included here are seen as including workshops, focus groups/forums and open-house (physical or virtual/internet).
- **Level four: extended involvement**. Methods that might be included here are seen as including community advisory committees/liaison groups, Planning for Real,® citizens' juries, consensus conferences, visioning (including on the internet).

However, some of the APaNGO research reports refer to the concept of 'co-production', which is used to some extent in both the Netherlands and Belgium. In English social policy, this term has become associated with ideas of 'public value'[8] and the potential for citizens to 'co-produce' improved public service outcomes (e.g. better health) with public service agencies (e.g. the National Health Service). It is therefore assumed for the purposes of this report that 'co-production' is a form of partnership. This seems to go beyond any of the four levels identified in the TCPA's *Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Planning* report (above).

We therefore propose that for this report, and subsequent APaNGO reports, the five levels of public participation developed by International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) are used. These are as follows:[9]

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT ⟶

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public participation goal: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives,	*Public participation goal:* To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	*Public participation goal:* To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and	*Public participation goal:* To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	*Public participation goal:* To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

[8] Kelly, G. and Muers, S. (2002) *Creating Public Value. An analytical framework for public service reform*. Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, London.
[9] The IAP2 spectrum is available at www.iap2.org

opportunities and/or solutions.		considered.		
Promise to the public: We will keep you informed.	*Promise to the public*: We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	*Promise to the public*: We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	*Promise to the public*: We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	*Promise to the public*: We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques to consider: • fact sheets • web sites • open houses	*Example techniques to consider*: • public comment • focus groups • surveys • public meetings	*Example techniques to consider*: • workshops • deliberative polling	*Example techniques to consider*: • citizen advisory committees • consensus building • participatory decision-making	*Example techniques to consider*: • citizens' juries • ballots • delegated decisions

- **Public and stakeholders**. Although not as contested as the concept of community, it is important to address the meaning of the terms 'public' and 'stakeholder'. Generally speaking, the 'public' tends to be used as a term for forms of participation that are designed to reach individuals in their role as citizens/residents (rather than as representing any particular interest). The term 'stakeholders' means those individuals and organisations that have a 'stake' in the issue; how the issue is defined, and therefore who is deemed to have a stake, is a key issue too often ignored.

  Good stakeholder analysis would clearly define the issue and then identify and involve those sectors of society and/or organisations that are likely to be affected by, or to affect, the outcome of the decision under review. A similar process can be undertaken to develop a demographically representative sample of the 'public' to represent public opinion (e.g. to use as the basis for opinion polls etc.). More often, processes may simply be publicised to reach 'a wide public' (without that being very clearly defined) and 'stakeholders', either defined by statute/regulation according to the specific process (usually a fairly narrow definition of relevant stakeholders) or defined as those with whom the organisation seeking involvement is most used to working.

  As the APaNGO project is focused on 'community' involvement, the definitions for 'public' and 'stakeholder' are less central to the research findings but, for ease of understanding, where the term 'public' is used in this report it refers to individual citizens, and 'stakeholders' is used to refer to those individuals or organisations representing a more general sectoral interest in the process.

- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**. NGOs include an enormous range of organisations, from major national charities with professional staffs and large budgets to small, local informal community groups with few resources beyond the volunteers involved. These organisations play a variety of roles in planning processes, either as direct participants in discussions on specific issues (from local to national, and international, levels), or in providing support to others who wish to engage (information, training, funding etc.).

- **Community planning**. The generic idea of community planning has come to mean anything from formal land use planning for a given community (often a local authority area) to planning much smaller areas (e.g. rural villages, specific neighbourhoods or housing estates), or it can mean planning by communities for their own future, in varying degrees of co-operation with local governments.

  In Scotland it has a specific meaning, with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) being the equivalent of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in England and Wales; these CPPs have the responsibility for putting together and implementing the Community Strategy, the plan for all services for the public in the locality (as do LSPs in England and Wales under the Local Government Act 2000).

  Given the complexity of different understandings of community planning, we will aim to avoid its use in this document except in the specific context of planning in Scotland, where it is the formal name.

- **Spatial planning**. Spatial planning is concerned with formulating policies for a selected area which can then be used to co-ordinate and where necessary modify the territorial impacts of sectoral policies and actions. Spatial planning is therefore a key process in sustainable development.[10] For example, it can contribute to more stable and predictable conditions for investment and development (of land and buildings), secure community benefits from development, provide a vehicle for public participation and community involvement, and promote the prudent use of land and other natural resources.

[10] "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." World Commission on Environment and Development (known as the Brundtland Commission), United Nations, 1987.

3 IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

3.1 Introduction

The APaNGO research provides a picture of the current policy and practice of community and public involvement in planning across the ten North West European countries involved in the APaNGO project. It develops an overview of different planning systems and infrastructures providing support for community involvement in planning in the different countries, and provides some material on different tools and techniques used to achieve effective community involvement in practice.

The APaNGO Project has sought to test rather than fully assess the effectiveness of the existing infrastructures of support or the techniques used, using the data available. However, it is possible to come to an initial view, as outlined in this section. Fuller details of the research findings that led to the conclusions below are provided in subsequent sections of this report, in the appendices, and in the original country research reports (available on the APaNGO website: www.apango.eu).

This section therefore reviews the research and analysis completed so far, and offers some initial conclusions on the implications and challenges of current policy. These feed into the later stages of the APaNGO project. The APaNGO demonstration projects will provide an enhanced and more precise perspective.

3.2 Emerging themes in involvement in planning

The systems, policy and practice of planning in the ten APaNGO countries vary enormously, and detailed comparisons would be difficult to evidence in full. However, some broad themes have become clear.

3.2.1 Period of change

It is clear from the review of existing planning systems across the ten countries that most have been through a major review over the last five or six years. In some cases, this has resulted in major new legislation and planning frameworks; in others, the structural changes have been less extensive. Overall, however, planning across North West Europe has been through a period of very significant change and, in some cases, that change is continuing. The driving forces for these changes seem to be threefold:

- **To make the planning system simpler, faster, more efficient**. This is in part to help ensure development is actually delivered, and partly in a spirit of positive reform of a set of systems that have sometimes been characterised as overly bureaucratic.

- **To reinvigorate the purpose of planning**. The concept of sustainable development has made a major impact on planning policy, providing a ‘qualitative’ element to planning and development control. In this way, sustainable development has provided new meaning and dynamism to planning, reminding governments why planning is essential and thus reinforcing its place in national

policy. To some extent, and in some places, specific environmental issues (e.g. climate change) are now becoming a higher priority than sustainable development overall, but sustainable development remains the overarching concept.

- **To extend public involvement**. Again, the motivation is to make it easier for the public and stakeholders to get involved in making plans and shaping development, and this has been almost universal across North West Europe.

3.2.2 Local focus

The responses from NGOs to the APaNGO questionnaires revealed that the main focus for involvement in planning issues is still at local level, with over four times as many respondents involved locally (81 out of 130) rather than regionally (19) or nationally (15) (see Section 4.3 for details). This may reflect the nature of the groups targeted in the initial circulation of questionnaires, but it appears to be nonetheless significant.

There are some signs of change. Belgium, Luxembourg, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have consulted on national spatial plans to varying degrees. In England, public participation in regional spatial planning is growing in importance. This may continue to change as regional planning takes on a larger role in those countries where it is still relatively new. However, at present, it is clear that NGOs continue primarily to 'act local' even if they are starting to 'think global'.

3.2.3 Depth of involvement

The findings (see Section 4.5) suggest that the great majority of public and community involvement in planning takes place at the 'lowest' levels of the participation spectrum (see Section 2.3) – information provision and minimal consultation.

This takes the form of government and planning authorities at various spatial levels simply providing information on developments or initiatives, or producing drafts of plans for formal comment. The methods tend to be the provision of printed information (leaflets, letters), formal consultations on written documents, and formal public meetings (often presentations with opportunities to ask questions).

Respondents made it clear that they consider these methods to be the least effective – unengaging and unlikely to attract new people and groups to become involved in planning issues. Workshops and other face-to-face methods are much preferred by respondents and are considered significantly more effective, both in terms of input to specific planning issues and to building longer-term relationships. It should probably be recognised, however, that where decision-making is firmly vested in elected representatives, participation in the process for other groups will consequently be restricted.

Although methods will only ever be one part of developing effective public participation in planning, the very limited approaches that are currently used most often do not engage the community deeply.

There are some significant differences between the countries, with the Netherlands having the highest number of respondents identifying a 'collaborative' approach, closely followed by Luxembourg. The term 'co-production' is increasingly used in the Netherlands and Belgium, and encompasses both collaboration and empowerment. However, as a new technique, it is not yet widely used. Northern Ireland had the highest number of respondents identifying information-giving as the only level of participation used, with a similar picture from respondents in Germany.

3.2.4 Timing of involvement

Most public involvement takes place following publication of a draft plan (as identified above), to which the public is invited to respond within a given timescale. This raises several issues for effective participation:

- When opportunities for comment are restricted to making objections to an agreed set of proposals (the draft plan), negative perceptions of community involvement can arise. Where citizens are able to be involved at an earlier stage, it may be possible for their input to be more positive.

- Consultation periods can be as little as one month. While even this is seen by some as delaying the planning process, it is an extremely short time for information to get out to many local people, who may not even know the draft plan is available until it is too late to comment, and certainly too late for NGOs that may want to consult their members.

It may, therefore, be useful to consider the following to enable community and public involvement to be more effective in terms of improving the quality of input to the planning process, and making involvement more satisfying to participants:

- **Involve citizens much earlier in the process**. This may allow them to develop a sense of ownership over the proposals being created, as well as allowing them to actually influence those proposals. It may also help to create a sense of real and continuing involvement in the *process* of developing the plan and therefore increase knowledge and understanding of the whole planning process, as well as build a continuing sense of civic responsibility.

- **Allow citizens to make proposals**. Rather than just responding to proposals from elsewhere (planners, local elected representatives etc.), this would enable citizens to be more positive, proactive and creative, and avoid negativity.

- **Provide adequate timescales for involvement**. This does not have to delay the plan-making process overall. If the public are involved earlier, the timescale for their involvement can run alongside other research and drafting processes, so the overall time taken is no longer but there is time for wider awareness of the plan to be developed, views formed and more effective involvement achieved. As experience in public and community participation grows (within planning but also in many other fields), it seems to be the case that participation may be able to save time and money (by reducing conflict and protest, and increasing shared

ownerships and responsibility), rather than being a net cost. More evidence is needed, but the current trends seem to show this to be the case.[11]

3.2.5 Continuity of involvement

The respondents to the questionnaire survey called for longer-term involvement, and for better feedback on the decisions that are finally taken as well as on the results of the consultation. At present, about 21% of groups received no feedback at all on their involvement; even more (34%) received no feedback at the end of the process they were involved in (see Section 4.6 for details).

Even *ad hoc* and one-off types of involvement have their role since the process of continuous engagement can lead to consultation fatigue as groups lose track of the process and thus lose interest. Governments and planning authorities themselves may lack continuity (perhaps through changes due to elections and staff turnover etc.), whereas NGOs often stay involved over much longer time periods.

NGOs responding to the research questionnaire were clear that they would prefer continuous relationships rather than being called in at the times that fit with the planning authorities' timetables – and then within very short timescales that make their own work of consulting their members almost impossible.

The particular challenge here is keeping relationships open and well maintained over the longer term without being hugely resource intensive for planning authorities or community groups.

Yet public and community involvement is criticised as attracting the 'usual suspects', and there are complaints that the general public is 'not interested' and impossible to draw in to the process. This highlights the importance of involving 'hard to reach' groups and a wider cross-section of the community generally. This theme is considered further in the demonstration projects.

3.2.6 Lack of clarity

The questionnaire respondents pointed to a general lack of clarity for communities and NGOs about the purpose of the consultation they were involved in, and about who was or should be involved. Poor communications between those organising consultations and participants were identified as a particular problem. In particular, a lack of sufficient information provided to NGOs to support participation was noted (e.g. about planning processes, the issue for discussion, rules for the consultation and jargon etc.).

3.2.7 Who is involved?

Respondents were concerned about a lack of power equality among participants, and between those in formal involvement processes and other stakeholders. This had several aspects:

- **Domination by powerful stakeholders**. The strength in public consultations of the 'usual suspects' and NIMBYs, potentially crowding out less experienced,

[11] For example, Involve (2005) *People and Participation. How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*. Involve, London.

confident and articulate members of the community, is often raised as an issue. However, it appears from some of the consultative mechanisms identified here that, in practice, there may equally be concerns about institutional and private sector stakeholders dominating planning processes. These interests may have a stronger voice in the final conclusions and decisions on planning than is available for community or public participants through the formal consultation mechanisms.

It will be increasingly important that formal consultations on planning issues are seen to offer input on the final decisions, and that decisions are not made behind closed doors with privileged stakeholders who would never be seen at a public event. Until such a change in the culture of NGO and public involvement happens, such that it is not just seen as simply a political necessity – a 'tick box' exercise of no value to the quality of the plan or development – it is unlikely that planning will attract any more or different participants.

Seeking a participation balance or spread of stakeholders would ensure that no single powerful group has excessive influence in the planning and decision-making processes.

Part of the answer to this problem is to deal with all input from stakeholders, the public and NGOs in a transparent and open way (e.g. ensuring that the process of integrating comments and other input from different sources is clear and transparent to all parties). That requires effective internal processes within the planning authority, effective ways of ensuring good quality input from the public and other participants, and good communications about the whole process to wider audiences.

- **Open access/exclusion**. There are some major challenges in designing public participation processes which are open to the wider community and also ensure that the most disadvantaged groups in society are not excluded. Many of the most public processes are more attractive and familiar to, and can therefore be dominated by, the more experienced and confident individuals and groups.

  There are also risks that in creating involvement activities that separate excluded and 'hard to reach' groups from the mainstream processes, further exclusion and alienation (or even victimisation) could result.

  This is linked to the issue of the formality of participation processes in planning. Much of the consultation around planning issues in some countries is very formalised and to a degree, therefore, exclusive of the less articulate and those with too few resources to respond appropriately and within the timescale. In contrast, some level of formality can be very encouraging for participants, who recognise these processes as more official, and thus more important. Creating a balance between respecting and valuing the contribution of participants and having processes that are not 'excluding' in their style and design is a major challenge, which is likely to demand a convergence of participation activities.

- **Participation and democratic representation**. It is clear from the APaNGO research evidence that there are some strains between the role and power of

elected representatives at various governance levels and the amount of influence of public and community participation in planning.

The existing systems of decision-making and participation in planning analysed in this research do not appear to have fully addressed the potential conflicts of these roles and relationships, but it is likely that further challenges will be revealed as participation becomes more widespread following the policy changes outlined elsewhere in this report.

3.3 Implications of existing infrastructures of support

The concept of infrastructures of support refers to the organisations offering expert advice, support, information and sometimes access to funding for public and community participation.

The degree to which this infrastructure links to formal planning processes and systems varies from country to country. However, this section refers primarily to those groups and organisations providing support for participation in planning, other than central or local planning authorities.

There is a wide range of organisations providing support for participation in planning in the APaNGO countries (see Section 5 for details), almost all operating at local level, although some are linked to national federations or associations. These organisations fall into three main types:

- those specifically focused on planning (e.g. planning aid and community technical in the UK and the Republic of Ireland);

- those that have broader remits but specifically cover planning issues as well (e.g. environmental federations in Belgium, urban planning agencies in France, An Taisce in the Republic of Ireland, civic trusts in the UK);

- those that provide general support to communities and the public on all sorts of issues (e.g. Amsterdam's Citizens' Initiative, Belgium's Platform Participation and councils for voluntary service in England and Scotland).

The APaNGO evidence on the infrastructure of support for community involvement suggests that the strength and effectiveness of the support provided depends more on the capabilities of the NGO movement generally in the country concerned than on the structure of the planning system.

This is necessarily a tentative conclusion as there is at present little quantitative data on the infrastructure organisations in the different countries, so there is no sense of the scale of operations or the number or size of organisations. Also, the bodies that have been identified vary in the extent to which they are quasi-governmental, private sector, represent community interests, or are completely independent.

Overall, the feedback from respondents in NGOs is that most felt they were aware that assistance is available, almost half used that assistance, and almost all those who used assistance had found it useful (38 out of 53).

Although these figures initially seem positive, it means that key respondents, all of whom had been involved in planning issues, were not aware of the assistance available, and less than half had actually used that assistance. Where they did get help, it was often from other local bodies and not always those that were there to help specifically (or even tangentially) with planning issues. However, the support given through planning aid and community technical aid services was particularly identified by a number of respondents, and these services are highly valued where they exist.

3.4 Implications of current tools and techniques to encourage involvement

The APaNGO research identifies many tools and techniques that have been used to involve people and groups in planning. In summary, the analysis of all these methods (see Section 6.3) shows that by far the largest categories of tools are those that provide information and those that consult. As already noted, these are the 'lowest' levels of participation on the IAP2 spectrum. Some tools and techniques identified do go further and 'involve' people in planning, and although there are few that go as far as to enable authorities to 'collaborate with' or 'empower' people, these seem to indicate the new directions for the future. The Netherlands and the UK show the greatest experience of these deeper levels of involvement through, for example, collaborative workshops, referenda and citizens' juries.

There are some exciting innovations in methods to involve communities in planning (see Section 6.4), with some organisations developing new tools and techniques. Although these are not widespread at present, the research has revealed promising indications of energy and optimism for the future.

4 EXISTING PLANNING SYSTEMS

4.1 Introduction

This section analyses the main findings from individual research reports for the ten countries in the APaNGO project. There are some significant variations in the depth of information from each of the ten, but this information is essential in understanding the nature of community involvement in each country, as it depends so much on the systems within which it is working.

4.2 Spatial planning in the APaNGO countries

The common features of spatial planning in Europe are generally understood to be:

- identifying long- and medium-term objectives and strategies for territories;
- dealing with land use and physical development;
- co-ordinating sectoral policies such as transport, agriculture and environment.

The common elements of spatial planning processes in practice tend to be as follows:[12]

- **At national level**. All EU Member States, at the time of the study, had some responsibility for the production of a national spatial planning framework which provides a central reference for the formulation of lower tier policies, and which may co-ordinate inter-regional spatial development patterns for matters of national and international significance (except Belgium); this level is particularly important in the UK, Luxembourg and the Republic of Ireland.
- **At regional level**. Most Member States produce spatial planning policy which co-ordinates inter-regional spatial development patterns and provides a strategic reference for more local instruments. The Belgian regions and German *Lander* have considerable autonomy from central government; the regional level is also important in France and the Netherlands.
- **At local (local authority/municipal) level**. The production of local spatial framework documents which set out general criteria for the regulation of land use change; the preparation of land use instruments which define the type of physical development which will be permitted at particular locations; and procedures for the consideration of proposals to develop or change the use of land and property take place in all Member States. Local authorities have the primary responsibility for plan-making, within a framework set by national (and sometimes regional) government.

[12] European Commission (1997) *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies.* Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. Pages 26 and 40.

- **At various levels**. Most Member States also have special mechanisms to encourage the realisation/implementation of the objectives and policies expressed in spatial planning policies, both for development and for the protection of the environment; and other mechanisms of land use regulation which may include, for example, restricting land parcel sub-division, tax and other duties to deal with betterment and compensation, compulsory purchase, etc.

In spite of these apparent similarities in practice, the scope, political importance and strength of spatial planning differs greatly from country to country, and the extent and depth of community involvement is similarly varied. Even the terminology can present challenges; for example, 'regional' can mean a territory with a population of five million (as in the German Lander and regions in England), or a territory with a population of less than half a million (as in the Republic of Ireland). This makes understanding similarities and differences between systems, and their related community involvement processes, difficult – and direct comparisons problematic.

The political imperative to start spatial planning was often very similar: the need to manage development pressures (either to encourage positive development or simply control growing demand for development), linked to housing and health issues – and designed to improve the social conditions of citizens.

Now, there is more focus in spatial planning policies on integrating and co-ordinating investment and development, and on economic development and environmental protection within the overarching concept of sustainable development. The goals of planning are thus more likely to focus around issues such as:

- promoting a system of meaningful and democratic governance that responds to the needs of localities;

- improving environmental performance;

- facilitating social cohesion and security;

- developing land and real estate markets and securing or protecting private rights in land.

Four main traditions of spatial planning across Europe can be identified:[13]

- **Regional economic planning approach**. Here, the purpose of planning is regional social and economic development, and central government plays a major role in managing development pressures across the country, and in undertaking public sector investment. The planning system of France reflects this approach (alongside 'urbanism', see below), as does that of the Republic of Ireland under its new legislation.

- **Comprehensive integrated approach**. This involves a systematic and formal hierarchy of plans from national to local level, with the focus more on spatial co-

[13] European Commission (1997) *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies.* Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. Page 36.

ordination than social and economic development. Public sector investment in delivery on the planning framework is the norm, and this system therefore requires considerable political commitment to the planning process. The Netherlands is associated most closely with this system, as is Germany (although in Germany, regional governments play a particularly important role).

- **Land use management**. Here, planning is associated with the narrower task of controlling the change of use of land at strategic and local levels. Local authorities do most planning, but central government (and increasingly the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales in the UK) supervises the system and sets planning policy objectives. England, Scotland and Wales are the main examples of this. Northern Ireland also focuses on land use, but all planning is implemented by the UK government at present. Belgium has a similar tradition but is more comprehensive in approach.

- **Urbanism**. This tradition focuses on architecture, with concerns about urban design, townscape and building control. Regulation is undertaken through rigid zoning and codes but overall planning systems are less well established and do not have significant political support. Urbanism is a significant element in the French planning system, alongside the regional economic planning approach.

4.3 Community involvement in spatial planning in the APaNGO countries

Public participation has been a core component of the policy and practice of planning since the 1960s and 1970s. In recent years, the range of 'interests' in planning (or perceived stakeholders) has broadened – with an increasing focus on business and private sector investors and environmental lobbies both growing in importance. Spatial planning systems are seen as having to "manage these often competing interests".[14]

The nature of public participation varies as much as spatial planning systems, and is equally affected by the specific historical, cultural, geographical and governance issues in different countries. In particular, the rights and duties of citizens may be governed by the country's constitution or be established by law, as the APaNGO research shows:

- In Belgium, the right to a home was added to the constitution in 1994. However, protection of one's own property has a much bigger influence in the planning system than the right to a home for everyone. Land use regulations are regarded as a restriction on individual rights to private property.

- In France there has been a shift towards decentralisation and the focus for participation in planning has moved towards the '*pays*' level (very local). Although there is little participation at regional levels, there is significant involvement of NGOs in urban renewal at local level, and much closer integration of social,

[14] European Commission (1997) *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies.* Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. Page 33.

economic and environmental issues generally, with planning part of that rather than being seen as a separate activity.

- In Germany, the constitutional principle of equal living conditions throughout the country is reflected in a specific mechanism for redistributing resources between the *Lander*.

- In the Netherlands, the constitution establishes the right to a decent home for all citizens, and requires local authorities to ensure good living conditions and protect the environment (although planning is shifting its priorities away from 'protecting' particular areas to focusing on economic development). Here, the planning system is closely embedded in the legal system and civic action is therefore often focused on rights and security.

- In the UK, where there is no written constitution, the rights and duties of citizens are established through law. This can also be the case in other countries where the constitution does not cover issues related to spatial planning.

These principles can also be clearly seen in the goals and mechanisms for spatial planning in the different countries. Planning systems, and participatory structures, are also deeply affected by the governance of states, and whether they are federal, regionalised or unitary:

- **Federal systems** (e.g. Germany, Belgium) provide for shared or joint powers between the national government and the constituent governments of the federation (although each level may have autonomy on specific issues). In Germany, responsibility for spatial planning is shared between the national government and the *Lander*, with the national government leading on law-making and the *Lander* on administration. In Belgium, the three regions establish their own planning laws and their own planning frameworks; the federal government acts when national and international issues are at stake.

- **Regionalised systems** are not formally federated but have a strong regional tier of administration (these are not apparent in the APaNGO countries, but Spain and Italy fall into this category).

- **Unitary systems** vest power in the national government, although this may be exercised through regional or other offices, or may be delegated to regional, provincial or local government (e.g. France, the Republic of Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the UK). The degree of delegation varies enormously between countries, ranging from the highly centralised England to the highly decentralised Netherlands (and increasingly France).

There appears to be no simple correlation between structures of government and the real locus of power and responsibility within spatial planning in practice.[15] Rather, there is a complex interweaving of local, regional and national bodies. In some countries, such cross-local co-operation is formalised into structures that operate

[15] European Commission (1997) *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies.* Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. Page 41.

within the planning system (e.g. France and the Netherlands; France also formalises cross-regional co-operation).

Similarly, there is no simple correlation between structures of government at national, regional and local levels, spatial planning systems, and community and public participation in planning. However, while planning authorities consult with other tiers of administration and official agencies at all levels (i.e. stakeholder involvement), as a routine part of plan-making, community and public involvement tends to operate almost entirely at local levels.

Certainly, the APaNGO questionnaire survey of NGOs and community groups found that the vast majority of groups participated at the local level (81 out of 130), compared with 19 at regional level and 15 at national level. There are, however, major differences between the countries. For example, in Germany, as many groups participated at the regional as at the local level, whereas in England (which does have regional systems of governance and spatial planning, although these are relatively new) 17 participated at the local level and only one at regional level (and one at national level).

There are some significant variations to these patterns, and there are moves in the policy of some countries to increase involvement at regional and national levels. For example:

- In Belgium and Luxembourg, the authorities have a duty to inform the public about national land use plans, through publicity in local newspapers and at least one public briefing; there is a 45-day time limit for comments; 30 days in Belgium.

- In Germany, regional marketing is being developed to research public views on local 'place' and culture. In addition, regional management is being developed to connect decision-makers and communities in thematic networks.

- In the Netherlands, there is public consultation on the National Spatial Plan; a further draft is then put out for further consultation.

- In the UK:
  - In England, the regional planning body must produce a statement of participation; participation must include the public. The process may include a one-day conference to brief people and allow them to comment; or there may be events and workshops around the region. There is then a formal written consultation on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, and an examination-in-public, to which the public are invited if their original comments relate to the issues being presented for discussion.
  - In Scotland, the public is consulted on first and second drafts of regional plans; six weeks is given for each consultation.
  - In Wales there was an extensive public consultation undertaken on the first Wales Spatial Plan (in 2005). Eight fully participatory workshops were held across Wales to involve people; then a draft was put out for further public and stakeholder consultation. Two final conventions of those already involved were then held to consider the final draft plan.

- In the Republic of Ireland, there is statutory consultation on the regional planning guidelines, which are reviewed every six years. The consultation happens in two stages: first on the initial issues paper (eight weeks time limit) and second on the draft (ten weeks). There has also been consultation on the National Spatial Strategy where it affects the locality, and consultation on the Regional Development Strategy, including an examination-in-public.

All planning systems have some mechanisms for direct consultation with the public over and above the normal democratic political processes, but "the existence of formal consultation requirements does not necessarily indicate the effectiveness of consultation, in terms of either awareness of the public or their ability to shape the plan".[16]

This is illustrated by the system in the Brussels region in Belgium, where local deliberation committees have responsibility for community involvement but provide no support for community groups, and deliberation meetings are only for official partners and are not open to the public. Those meetings have two parts: the first is an open hearing and discussion, the second a deliberation which leads to official advice and that takes place partly behind closed doors.

Actual participation activities vary enormously and are different for involvement in plan-making and in development control. Full details of the opportunities for public involvement in plan-making at local level, and in development control,

In general, most effort to gain public involvement is focused on the point in the planning process at which the authority published firm proposals, which are made available to the public and to which they are invited to respond. The APaNGO research in Germany found that 76% of participatory activities took place at that stage. Overall, the APaNGO research found:

- **Initial consultation**. This is almost always limited to consultation with official organisations, not the public.

- **Consultation on a draft plan**. This is where most public involvement takes place, and it is almost always undertaken through the publication, advertisement and public display of a draft plan. The public is usually invited to respond to the draft within a given timescale (often one month).

- **Formal objections at hearings and inquiries**. Objectors may be allowed to put their concerns in person, although this is rare.

- **Challenging the plan after adoption**. This is generally limited to challenges on legal and/or procedural grounds (except in France, the Netherlands and Germany).

The APaNGO questionnaire survey also found that more respondents were officially invited to participate (66 out of 130) than those (48) who found out about the

[16] European Commission (1997) *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies.* Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. Page 70.

consultation and responded on their own initiative. The levels of satisfaction among groups about their involvement in these processes were clearly directly related to how their first contact was made – in Luxembourg, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, all those who said they were 'satisfied' with their involvement had taken the initiative to get involved rather than being formally invited. While it is difficult to be certain about the implications of this, in the light of other evidence it seems likely that the level of control over their involvement that these groups felt made a difference. Alternatively, it may be that groups who were willing and able to take the initiative to get involved were more likely to make sure they got out of the process what they were seeking.

4.4 Public and community involvement in development control

In terms of development control, all countries (except for the Republic of Ireland and the UK) have a single building permit, which combines planning and building control and regulates land use change, building construction and (sometimes) demolition. In Belgium, an additional environmental permit may be required. In the UK and the Republic of Ireland, planning permission is separate from building control regulations but comes within the concept of development control.

The public can object to planning applications in most countries and, in most cases, decisions are made on the basis of the local plan (the UK is the exception, where there is more flexibility). Once decisions are made, the main rights of appeal lie with the applicant. Third party rights of appeal are extremely limited (except in the Republic of Ireland), usually to procedural and technical/policy grounds. In Belgium, third parties can appeal against environmental permits.

As planning permission is usually given entirely or mainly based on the principles or details of the development plan, public and community involvement in those plans becomes essential in ensuring that local development is seen as appropriate to local people.

4.5 Levels of involvement

The APaNGO country research reports and questionnaire responses were analysed to assess the levels of community and public involvement in planning issues. The questionnaires also aimed to investigate the levels of involvement that NGOs and other community organisations had in planning issues. There are different ways of classifying levels of involvement (see Section 2.3).

The responses to the questionnaire were originally analysed in different ways, including by references to 'one-off', extended consultation, and 'co-production'; and on a different scale of information, by consultation, co-production and 'other' levels of involvement. As explained earlier, the crucial issue in assessing levels of participation is the extent of 'influence' rather than the methods used (e.g. leaflets or exhibitions) or the number of times a group was consulted (e.g. 'one-off' or extended).

The responses from the countries have therefore been analysed here according to the first four elements of the IAP2 spectrum of public participation: inform, consult, involve and collaborate (see Section 2.3 for the full spectrum); in this analysis, in addition, the 'involve' and 'consult' categories have been reduced to one as there is insufficient data to be more specific on these results. Nevertheless, this analysis clearly shows that the vast majority of public and community participation in spatial planning and development control is at the 'lower' end of the spectrum: information and consultation.

Although there is some good practice, and some processes seem to have had broad and deep engagement and to have maintained contact with participants beyond individual events (e.g. the Wales Spatial Plan consultation), this is very rarely the case. Indeed, the research suggests that, in some cases, consultation is neither wide nor deep, and is often undertaken as a chore, a tick-box exercise, rather than being seen as integral to ensuring high-quality planning policy and development outcomes.

There are some points of difference between the countries, with the Netherlands having the highest number of respondents identifying a 'collaborative' approach, followed closely by Luxembourg. Northern Ireland had the highest proportion of respondents identifying information-giving as the only level used, with a similar picture from respondents in Germany.

The level of community and public participation does not appear to be affected by the tradition of spatial planning (i.e. regional economic planning, a comprehensive integrated approach, land use management or urbanism). An analysis was undertaken for this report but no noticeable differences between the systems were identified, so the results are not repeated here.

Indeed, the level of public and community participation seems likely to be influenced much more by wider social and political trends, which have made the legitimacy and democratic accountability of spatial planning more important – and as central to spatial planning activity as technical information (e.g. demographic, ecological, economic and geographical data). Some possible future changes are outlined at the end of this section.

4.6 Satisfaction with current involvement

The questionnaire responses provided useful feedback on current challenges in public and community involvement in planning, and suggestions for improving the situation. In summary, the findings were as follows:

- There is a lack of sufficient appropriate information provided to the public and stakeholders to support participation (about planning processes, the issue for discussion, the boundaries and rules for the consultation, explanations of technical language/jargon used, what has been agreed, feedback on the final decisions etc.).

- There is a lack of clarity about the purpose of the consultation and who is/should be involved.

- There is a lack of power equality among participants, and between those in formal involvement processes and other stakeholders.

- Communications between those organising consultations and participants are poor (although this can be overcome through experience and as relationships develop).

- Consultation does not happen early enough in the process, and stops too soon (it should continue throughout); timescales can sometimes be too short to achieve good participation.

- The specific technique used is not as important as the way in which the process is run (attitudes, commitment, willingness to change etc. on the part of all those involved).

- Interactive and 'engaging' events are much more effective (and popular with the public and stakeholders) than presentations alone or information provision alone; more engaging events may attract more people.

- Resources need to be made available to some community groups to enable them to participate.

There was also useful data on how much feedback participants received after being involved. Most groups received feedback after their involvement, and almost half had received feedback at the end of the whole planning process. Such feedback is a key element of good practice in public involvement. However, the figures should be read with two important caveats:

- There was still a relatively high number of groups who received no feedback after their involvement (27 out of 130 – 21%); providing no feedback is generally regarded as very poor practice. Even more received no feedback at the end of the process (44 out of 130 – 34%).

- There is little data on the nature of the feedback received by groups. As one respondent from Germany pointed out, the feedback may only be a 'bureaucratic mechanism', such as letters from the mayor welcoming the participation, rather than any details about the outcome of the consultation or about the wider planning process.

In considering improvements to current policy and practice in public and community involvement in planning, it is useful to understand the motivations of those who are currently involved. In summary, the most common motivations among respondents to the APaNGO research survey were:

- a general belief in the needs and rights of communities to have a say in the decisions that affect their future, and the desire to support community engagement and ensure that it happens;

- to influence and shape developments locally, alongside a fear of the developments that may happen if they are not involved;

- to represent community views;

- to advance specific sectoral interests (e.g. specific demographic groups such as older people or people with disabilities, or specific interests such as cycling);

- to preserve or improve the neighbourhood (e.g. preserve wildlife or common land);

- to learn about planning processes or consultation;

- to find out about what is going on;

- to improve local amenities (e.g. shops, post office);

- it was a legal requirement or seen as a duty.

4.7 Conclusions

There is considerable variety among the APaNGO countries in the ways in which the public and communities are involved in planning at present. However, all planning systems reviewed here have some requirements for, at least, information to be provided and, usually, some level of feedback made possible (consultation). Involvement has taken place most often on a draft plan, within a relatively short timescale (often one month). In addition, most involvement currently takes place at local level.

The feedback from APaNGO questionnaire respondents is generally quite critical of current involvement practices. However, the motivations of those currently involved and the problems (and ways forward) identified suggest a continuing strong willingness of NGOs and community groups to being involved in planning issues and processes, but some specific concerns with the way things work at present.

5 INFRASTRUCTURE OF SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

5.1 Introduction

The research reports gave details of investigations into the nature of the infrastructure of support for community involvement in planning in the ten countries. This section reports on those findings.

5.2 Analysis of infrastructures of support

The APaNGO research has identified some useful examples of national, regional and local bodies that provide support for local community involvement in planning.

In summary, the findings suggest the following:

- **Regional economic planning approach**. France is the main example of this tradition of planning, which focuses on regional social and economic development, but also the Republic of Ireland to some extent. It is worth noting that the infrastructure of support in France is focused mainly on bringing together business and economic development interests with other local community interests. There is also an extensive network of local agencies that bring together all relevant bodies to work on urban planning issues – a collaborative approach that is not necessarily as apparent in other planning traditions.

- **Comprehensive integrated approach**. This very formal, hierarchical tradition of planning, with a focus on spatial co-ordination and public sector delivery of plans. It requires significant local political commitment to succeed. The infrastructure of support for public participation in planning in the Netherlands (the country most associated with this tradition) is typified by a mix of *ad hoc* local bodies with a wide range of purposes (e.g. care and welfare, mobility studies and broad citizen participation) and general support from national government for citizen participation. While in the Netherlands there are bodies that specifically support community involvement in planning, no such bodies have been reported as existing in Germany (the other main example of this planning tradition).

- **Land use management**. In this planning tradition, the focus is on the change of use of land, and this system is mainly apparent in the UK and Belgium. In these countries, there is a good infrastructure of support specifically for community involvement in planning, especially through technical and professional advice provided at low or no cost to community groups and others who would otherwise not be able to afford such support (planning aid and community technical aid are the usual forms of this support). In these countries there is also an extensive broader infrastructure of support for general voluntary and community action (e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service and Rural Community Councils in England; Community Councils in Wales and Scotland), and broad environmental networks that do significant work on planning issues (e.g. in Belgium).

- **Urbanism**. This tradition focuses on architecture and urban design (mainly apparent in France, alongside the regional economic planning approach). The existence of specific local agencies that focus on involving local people in town management and urbanism illustrate the importance of these issues in the places with a focus on urbanism in their planning traditions.

Overall, the countries with a land use planning tradition (the UK and Belgium) tend to have more organisations providing support for community involvement in planning, and the most local bodies and services that focus specifically on planning. In other countries the specific focus on planning is not anywhere near as widespread, with participation in planning being seen as one of many ways in which citizens become involved in local, regional and national politics.

In all countries there are community groups of citizens that get involved in planning issues from time to time, but it seems that it is only where there is a land use planning tradition, and where planning is a focus for citizen action, that specific support is available on planning. It is unclear at this stage how much this is due to the planning tradition, and how much it is due to wider forces (e.g. land ownership patterns, the extent of subsidiarity and local power to make decisions, democratic structures, wider political priorities). It is also unclear whether the widespread activities around community involvement in planning have created this situation and the development of infrastructures is a response to that demand, or whether the development of such an extensive infrastructure has created the level of activity.

Another point of interest here is to note that there is a difference in the culture and style of the various infrastructures of support in terms of being within or outside the state/government structures. In countries with regional economic planning, comprehensive integrated and urbanism approaches, there is a sense of overall common purpose and enterprise between citizens and state about social, economic and environmental outcomes – although there remain significant points of difference on detail. This is not the case in countries with a land use management planning tradition, where the emphasis in citizen action is oppositional and largely negative (i.e. opposing development). Again it is unclear at this stage how much this is due to the planning tradition, and how much it is due to wider forces (e.g. land ownership patterns, the extent of subsidiarity and local power to make decisions, democratic structures, wider political priorities).

5.3 Perspectives from the grassroots

The APaNGO questionnaire survey of NGOs and community groups involved in planning provides a useful grassroots perspective on the existence and usefulness of advice and support on planning issues. .

Overall, the great majority of respondents (88 out of 130) felt they were aware of the help that was available, although less than half had used that help. Of those that did, the great majority did find it useful: planning aid and community technical aid were identified particularly as being helpful, although various other local organisations were also mentioned.

5.4 Conclusions

The APaNGO research suggests that there is some support available to NGOs, community groups and the public to improve their involvement in planning. Some of this support is specific and highly valued by the users of these services (especially planning aid and community technical aid), but these services really only exist in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Elsewhere, planning seems to be seen as one of many issues for public and community involvement and there are far fewer specific support structures available.

6 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

6.1 Introduction

APaNGO's research reports for each country provided varying degrees of detail about the tools and techniques for community involvement in planning used or promoted in the ten countries. This section outlines some of the main findings of the APaNGO research, particularly on the tools and techniques currently used.

6.2 The main community involvement tools and techniques

Most of the APaNGO country research reports and the questionnaire responses from NGOs and community groups covered similar tools and techniques, although often using different terminology to describe them (not just language differences). The main tools and techniques identified in the APaNGO countries are, in alphabetical order:[17]

- **Advisory/consultative councils**. These are groups that are usually established for a longer period than a one-off consultation; they may be set up for a specific planning project or programmes, or may be permanent so they can be called on for specific purposes.

- **Citizens' juries**. These are representative, and usually small (12-16 people), samples of the general population. A jury meets like a court jury to deliberate a particular issue over a number of days. The jurors hear evidence from expert and other witnesses and are able to challenge and question them. They then deliberate, discuss and debate among themselves, before putting forward recommendations and making their conclusions public.

- **Citizens' panels**. These are large, demographically representative groups of citizens/the electorate, consulted on a regular basis and over time (usually several years) as a sounding board on public opinion for issues of concern or importance. Panels may range in size from a few hundred to several thousand people.

- **Community visioning**. Community visioning usually involves a group of people coming together to develop ideas about what they would ideally want their community to be like. After the vision is agreed the group then work on looking at what needs to be done to bring about that vision and draw these requirements together in an action plan. Community visioning can involve a single conference or several workshop events over a period of months. Groups meet, and may be assisted by a trained facilitator.

[17] These definitions and descriptions are taken from APaNGO research reports, from Involve (2006) *People and Participation. How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*. Involve, London; and from Graham Smith for the POWER Inquiry (2005) *Beyond the Ballot. 57 democratic innovations from around the world*. The POWER Inquiry, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, London.

- **Consensus conferences**. Similar to a citizens' jury, the consensus conference mechanism is designed to bring together a panel of ordinary people (usually 10-20 people) who are provided with information and question expert witnesses on a particular topic, consider the evidence, and then make recommendations that are published more widely. The difference is that citizens' juries usually meet in private, whereas a consensus conference is usually held in public.

- **Exhibitions and displays**. These may be one-off displays for one day, or may be used longer term to support more in-depth involvement processes. They may often be accompanied by some opportunities for public feedback (e.g. forms or cards for the public to fill in with their comments). There may also be staff available to answer questions.

- **Focus groups**. These bring together a small group of people (usually 6-10 people) to discuss an issue in depth for between one and two hours, in an informal setting. A skilled facilitator is usually needed to encourage participants to discuss their thoughts, feelings and reactions openly. Focus groups differ from deliberative 'workshops' in that focus groups usually provide only very basic information and the emphasis is on gathering people's existing opinions, rather than providing in-depth opportunities for people to discuss their views with each other, review background information and come to a more considered view.

- **Opinion polls**. Opinion polls and other surveys and questionnaires are used to gain quantitative information on people's existing views, although they can be used as part of wider and more in-depth consultative exercises which use the polling and survey results as the baseline for further consultation. Deliberative polling is very different, and involves the public having a chance to consider new information and discuss the implications among themselves and with others before coming to the conclusions they offer to the researchers.

- **Planning for Real**.® This is a structured 'hands-on' process of community consultation and participation. It essentially involves the involvement of the community in a workshop environment, with the output being the creation of a three-dimensional model of the neighbourhood. The model-making process starts by building a large-scale map on which a three-dimensional model is built, often by local people, to begin the process of looking at the area as a whole – finding where your house is, tracing your regular journeys, and considering what needs to be done to improve community well-being through physical planning.

- **Public meetings**. Public meetings are the most common form of meeting used by local planning authorities. They are intended to provide information, to stimulate debate, and to encourage the general public who are affected by proposals to air their views. However, the form of public meetings often involves presentations by developers, experts and the planning authority, sometimes supported by an exhibition or other visual display, after which the public are invited to ask questions. In traditional public meetings the main focus is to expose the programme or project to the public, rather than enter a productive dialogue which may lead to change, and the format (presentations and questions) can often lead to disputes and conflict within and following the meeting.

- **Publicity and media**. These are used both simply to communicate information about plans and also to publicise opportunities for further involvement, and so techniques may range from press notices and press releases to sophisticated media and communications strategies designed to promote and support deeper involvement processes.

- **Workshops**. Sometimes called 'deliberative workshops', these are interactive events that allow participants to talk with each other, and possibly with experts and others providing detailed information, and then come to conclusions. Ideally, the workshop will produce conclusions that are summarised openly for the whole meeting so that all participants understand the nature of the ideas going forward to future stages in the planning process.

The extent to which the different APaNGO countries use each of these techniques varies enormously, and the research is clear that it is usually the 'way' the technique is used, rather than the technique itself, that determines how deep the community and public involvement is. In practice, this means that a public meeting, conducted in a spirit of openness and willingness to change, may be more positive and productive than a workshop conducted in a spirit of secrecy and exclusivity.

6.3 Levels of community involvement tools and techniques

It is possible to analyse the main tools and techniques using the spectrum of public involvement developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), which is described in more detail in Section 2 of this report. Table 1 shows the different levels of involvement of the different main tools and techniques outlined above (and some others), and identifies the countries that have used these techniques (according to the APaNGO research).

Table 1 Levels of community involvement tools and techniques

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Exhibitions/displays (including road shows): • France (tours by train as well as road) • Germany • England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland • Republic of Ireland	***Repas de quartier*** (district meals, to encourage people to attend and encourage more informality for discussions): • France	**Advisory/consultation councils** (longer-term structures): • France (usually organised by local authorities) • Netherlands	**Collaborative workshops** (to develop joint solutions): • Netherlands	**Citizens' juries**: • Netherlands • England • Republic of Ireland
Public meetings (used to inform the public, including answering questions): • France • Germany • Luxembourg	**Surveys/questionnaires** • France • Netherlands • Scotland (often sent out with 'issues papers' to provide background information) • England	**Workshops and round tables** (to allow participants to talk among themselves as well as with authorities etc.): • France • Germany		**Referenda**: • Netherlands (binding referenda)

• England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland • Republic of Ireland	• Wales • Northern Ireland	• England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland		
Site and field visits: • France • Netherlands	***Boîte à idées*** (suggestion box): • France	**Mediation**: • Germany		**Petitions**: • Belgium • Germany • Wales
Media (including press): • Germany • England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland • Republic of Ireland	**Debates**: • France • Germany • Netherlands	**Consensus conferences**: • Netherlands • Republic of Ireland		**Community visioning**: • England • Scotland
Internet: • Germany • England • Scotland • Republic of Ireland	**Hearings and canvassing**: • Germany • Netherlands • Republic of Ireland			
Leaflets: • Germany • England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland	**Conferences** • Germany • England			
Videos and CD-ROMS: • England • Scotland	**Feedback via internet** (digital debates/web discussions): • Germany • Netherlands (including digital citizens' panels)			
	Focus groups: • Netherlands			
	Scenarios: • Netherlands			
	Citizens' Panels: • England • Scotland			
	Planning for Real®: • England • Scotland • Wales			
	Written consultations: • England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland • Republic of Ireland			

Table 1 is not comprehensive, but does provide an indication of the depth of community involvement associated with the different techniques and the countries that currently use (or have recently used) these techniques.

To supplement the information in Table 1, it is worth noting the following:

- In France, most community involvement techniques are those that are part of the formal planning system; the other tools and techniques are not widely used. Indeed, the APaNGO research suggests that none of these techniques is widely used in certain countries, particularly Luxembourg – where techniques for public involvement are very limited.

- There is a fairly extensive set of tools and techniques used at regional levels in Germany (although the focus is stakeholder rather than public or community involvement); elsewhere, the main focus for the use of techniques for public involvement is almost always at local level.

- In the Netherlands, there is a wide range of specific methods, tools and techniques for public involvement in planning, only a few of which are outlined here.

As can be seen from Table 1, by far the most extensive use of tools and techniques is within the categories of information provision and consultation (especially on written draft plans), with only a few examples of deeper and longer-term involvement and very few providing collaboration or empowerment.

This is not to say that there are no examples of such working, but it is clear from the APaNGO research that these deeper forms of involvement are the exception, and that by far the majority of public and community involvement in planning takes place in terms of information provision and limited consultation by planning authorities. Where there have been interactive exercises, and face-to-face communications (e.g. workshops), these are much more popular with groups than formal meetings, information provision (brochures, letters, etc.) or information collection (e.g. questionnaires).

A more general point was made by a respondent to the questionnaire from Germany: that where challenges did arise, they were due much more to the way the consultation had been carried out, rather than the specific technique or method used. This supports findings in other research that the attitudes of those carrying out the consultation and their willingness to listen (etc.) are at least as important as choosing any specific technique to consult the public, NGOs and other stakeholders.

6.4 Examples of innovative community involvement tools and techniques

The APaNGO research has identified some examples of the use of some the above techniques and others in specific circumstances. These examples provide some illustration of the range of ways that authorities are involving communities in planning processes, and are trying to build good practice:

- **Action planning**.[18] These sorts of events "allow people to produce plans of action at carefully structured sessions at which all those affected work creatively together. They can be used at any stage of the development process and provide an alternative to reliance on bureaucratic planning". Examples of action planning include an action-planning day; a community planning forum; a design fest; a design workshop; a future search conference; an open space workshop; and Planning for Real® sessions.

- ***Auto-évaluation*, Bordeaux, France**. Here, the local authority brought together a group to develop a tool to enable public involvement organisations to check the functioning and efficiency of their public consultation. Essentially this is a checklist on good public consultation.

- ***Carte démographique*, France**. With this card, used in one town in France, citizens can be consulted and enabled to vote on the Internet. It was found to be especially useful for involving people with physical disabilities who may have found it hard to attend meetings.

- **Charettes**. These are not dissimilar in function to Planning for Real® type exercises. They mostly relate to high-energy design processes and usually involve professional interaction with the community during a time-limited exercise (usually one to two days), with opportunities to challenge emerging ideas and conceptions coming from both sides. Charettes are very 'end product' orientated and for planning matters can help bring together all sectors of the community, including local stakeholders, politicians and decision-makers. Accordingly, they may be more 'newsworthy' than other participation formats, but do not always result in unanimity. The main outcome of a successful Charette is the attainment of an agreed goal and a sense of achievement by the non-professional participants.

- **The CLEAR Project, Scotland**. This is a training and capacity building project developed by Planning Aid Scotland. CLEAR (Community Local Environment Awareness Raising) provides training for local communities to enable them to have a greater say in the development of their area.

- **Electronic consultation methods, Germany**. Electronic consultation has been used increasingly in Germany following the development of integrated e-government strategies in the municipalities. Visualisation methods (e.g. Geographic Information Systems, three-dimensional models and animations) have been used increasingly to display information, sometimes linked to forums and chat rooms, although this is still unusual and experimental.

- **Enquiry by Design, England**. This process challenges local stakeholders, planners and professionals to respond to the issues of a particular site through an intensive design process.[19] Enquiry by Design workshops are used to bring together major stakeholders at one time and place to discuss, develop and draw

[18] This technique is described in: Nick Wates (2000) *The Community Planning Handbook*. Earthscan Publications, London. Page 24.
[19] 31/01/2007. www.princes-foundation.org.uk/index.php?id=33

possible urban design and planning solutions to specific, place-based challenges. Through the workshop process, options are investigated interactively through design, debated, and illustrated to reach preferred outcomes.

The actions needed to achieve the implementation of workshop outcomes are also identified in an implementation framework that can form the basis for ongoing action. Enquiry by Design workshops are typically non-binding, to encourage participants to think creatively, to step outside the, sometimes limiting, constraints of their formal roles, and to provide the flexibility to consider and debate a wide range of options.

The 'Enquiry by Design' process is one that is increasingly being used by local authorities to inform the preparation and submission of planning applications or master planning exercises upon which applications will be based. This intensive process can offer significant advantages. New opportunities and synergies emerge which add value and quality to developments, and consensus can be forged among previously implacable opponents. Although 'Enquiry by Design' shares many similarities with other types of planning workshops, it differs in the degree of technical input, the length of the workshop and its strong focus on key stakeholder participation.[20]

- **Games, England and Scotland**. Games are a good way to help people understand the planning process and other people's viewpoints[21]. The games are devised to mirror real life planning scenarios or to teach specific skills. They are mostly played in groups, usually helped by a facilitator or someone who has played them before. There is usually no specific output other than increased awareness, but they may produce preliminary design proposals or an agenda for future initiatives needed.

  There are various game types:
  - board games – adaptations of popular board games to simulate planning and design scenarios;
  - picture analysis – getting people to say what they see in a picture and comparing notes;
  - role-play – acting as if you are in someone else's shoes;
  - storytelling – reciting real or imaginary tales as a way of exploring hidden perceptions;
  - theatre – performing plays to characterise real life and stimulate debate.

- ***LENS-methode*, Netherlands and Scotland**. This was developed in The Netherlands at the beginning of the 1990s. It offers an alternative approach to traditional survey methods which focus on the existing situation and give people a limited number of potential responses. LENS provides an alternative based on 'future analysis', finding out what people want to see happening in the future. It allows greater creativity in people's responses, thereby generating a wide range of ideas for community development.

---

[20] ODPM (2004) *Statements of Community Involvement and Planning Applications.* ODPM, London. Page 15.
[21] This technique is described in: Nick Wates (2000) *The Community Planning Handbook*. Earthscan Publications, London. Page 68.

It works through a series of question and answer sessions between a researcher and a residents' panel. Residents are initially asked to respond to a series of set questions about living in their area. Respondents can then attend panel meetings where responses to the survey are discussed and priorities for action identified. The outcome of the method is a detailed plan setting out priorities, solutions, responsibilities and the resources required.

- **Participatory budgeting**. Very rarely used (used once or twice in England and the Netherlands since the first initiative in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 1989) but of growing interest as this technique provides opportunities for significant empowerment of local citizens over the longer term. The process allows for citizens to have a high degree of agenda-setting power, and for their involvement in investment decision-making. It is seen as a particularly effective way of encouraging investment in poorer neighbourhoods as citizens decide on priorities and then agree action programmes to gain the investment.

- **Participatory village planning, Northern Ireland**. Promoted by the Rural Development Council in Northern Ireland through a practical workbook, the aim of this initiative is to provide practical assistance to rural community organisations starting strategic village planning. Communities develop a community led strategy for each village which it is hoped will greatly assist in community ownership of the plan and therefore help the whole community feel far more engaged and affected by the process.

  The initiative encourages the development of a planning committee formed from a Village Development Association which can then undertake such activities as a 'decades brainstorm', to see how the village has evolved and changed, and the mapping of village assets. This can then be used to establish a village development plan and assess the built environment, the village setting and opportunities for new development.

  Newsletters feature heavily in this framework as providing an invaluable source of information for the local community. Newsletters and the local press feed into the Village Strategy, which informs the design and development of a particular settlement. Northern Ireland is characterised by a dispersed small-settlement pattern and so this method of consultation is vital in reaching some isolated communities and keeping them informed of progress or of what developments are due to occur in their village.

- **Planning Committee input, Wales**. People in Wrexham County Borough who want to comment on planning applications or apply for planning permission have been invited to have their say at the Council's Planning Committee before decisions on major or controversial proposals are made. The new system started at the Planning Committee in July 2003, making Wrexham one of the first Councils in Wales to adopt this nationally recognised good practice.

- **Planning for People™, Scotland**.[22] This is one of the training programmes run by Planning Aid for Scotland and aims to engage local communities in 'areas of change' to help meet the development needs of those wishing to get involved in local environmental and regeneration work through the planning system. It aims to build community organisational skills, to give people the confidence to be more proactive and to engage more effectively in improving the quality of their local environment.

- **Workshops for real**. Derived from public meetings, workshops and 'Planning for Real'® approaches, workshops for real are named as such, because the consultees (a) actually have to *work*; and (b) are made to feel they *really* make a difference in a real-life issue – and that consultation is not simply a token gesture. They were developed by the former Gordon District Council and further refined by Aberdeenshire Council. Normally not more than two representatives from the council attend them.

  Groups of tables are arranged around room with some visual aid (e.g. a map of the local area) on each table, together with a bundle of coloured Post-it stickers. After an initial five-minute introduction each group spends 30-45 minutes discussing and debating among themselves; the colour-coded stickers are used to identify those options on which there is consensus, those that are thrown out and those where the group has identified a new proposal for the council to consider.

The examples given above are by no means the only examples of these ways of working in APaNGO countries or elsewhere, and are cited here simply to give some illustration of the variety of ways in which planning authorities and other organisations are working to involve communities and the public in planning processes.

[22] For more information on Planning for People™: http://www.planning-aid-scotland.org.uk/training.php

7 OVERALL INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

Modernisation of planning systems: Legislation and guidance on planning is being revised, in part for managerial reasons across North West Europe. Community involvement procedures are new in most places and in some cases are still in preparation. It will take time for the political rhetoric of the changed planning systems to be translated into mainstream action on the ground. It will be important to review this and to examine the extent to which participation in planning feeds into wider democratic accountability and active citizenship.

Gap between policy and practice: The low level of the response rate to the survey initially experienced in most, and the nature of responses from some, Member States confirm that the field of community involvement in planning is less dynamic at the grassroots level than might be expected from the policy rhetoric. This may simply be an issue of timing, as identified above. Many of the radical changes proposed in the new planning regulations are only just beginning to be implemented. Nevertheless, in the responses to the APaNGO survey there is not the sense of excitement and enthusiasm from NGOs about planning issues that might be expected given the enormously enhanced role that quite a few governments in the North West Europe hope and expect them to play.

It is likely that, in some cases at least, the gap between policy and practice is not an issue of timing but rather masks entrenched attitudes and values – where involvement is seen merely as a hoop that has to be jumped through. An important challenge is therefore how to change attitudes in some planning authorities and some NGOs so that participation is seen as a way of enabling good planning and/or development outcomes. This suggests that existing approaches to training and capacity building may need to be supplemented in order to improve the situation. There have recently, however, been significant moves (such as in England, Wales and Scotland) towards greater levels of community, public and stakeholder 'involvement' that go beyond consultation, implying longer-term, closer relationships and a more participative approach to planning and development.

A search for deeper involvement: Perhaps owing to the tension between representative democracy and participative processes, there is limited activity among local planning authorities as yet in 'collaboration' or 'empowerment' – for example working with citizens on projects or processes that they initiate or enabling citizens to take over responsibility for a project or process. However, there are various innovative techniques for community involvement already in operation in some countries, and some highly valued existing infrastructures of support, that can assist in the search for deeper and more meaningful forms of participation.

A shared commitment to involvement: The Member States of North West Europe, in their planning systems, share a commitment to community involvement in planning and development as part of a commitment to sustainable development principles. Consequently there is a willingness to change policy and priorities as a result of community involvement.

Evidence of innovation and creativity: The feedback from NGOs suggests that, in spite of a degree of frustration about current involvement practice, there is still enormous commitment to being involved – and supporting involvement – in order to make a positive contribution to the planning process. There is also interest in closer levels of joint working, collaboration and partnership (e.g. in the Netherlands, with growing interest in 'co-production'). The continuing pockets of innovation and creativity in increasing and deepening community involvement, alongside the good will that remains on all sides, are possibly the most important foundations on which to build improvements to public and community involvement in planning in future.

Support from the voluntary sector: The strength of the voluntary sector as a whole in Member States, which emerges to varying degrees across North West Europe, appears to be an important indicator of the strength of infrastructures provided for community involvement in planning and development.

Leading from the local: NGOs continue to 'act local' even if they are starting to 'think global', with the main focus for involvement in planning issues remaining at the local level (with over four times as many involved at local level rather than regionally or nationally), but there are some signs of change as regional planning takes on a larger role.

Overall, then, the research provides a mixed picture. The data are limited, but the issues above suggest some areas where initial conclusions can be drawn. In particular, it will be essential to keep this situation under review as the new legislative changes to planning systems become embedded in practice, and the impacts of those changes can be better assessed.

For more information see: www.apango.eu