



partnership on socio-economic
and integrated development of
deprived neighbourhoods

Short version of the

Exchange of Experience Report of Theme II

Communication with / consultation of local
communities and direct involvement of
inhabitants living in deprived urban
neighbourhoods

Vienna, August 2004



'It is for the public authorities to accept that modern government needs to be actively supported by a participant population; that the problems are too complex, the professional and economic resources too scarce and the diversity of experiences required too wide for any group of councillors and officials to be able to cope without tapping the skills and energies of the local population.'

A Rowe

Democracy Renewed

Content

- 1. Introduction 4
- 2. Community Consultation and Neighbourhood Management..... 4
- 3. Local Experiences of the POSEIDON Partnership 5
- 4. The key issues and overall challenges 8
 - The participation deal..... 8
 - People hard to reach 8
 - The issue of successful failure 9
 - The linkage issue..... 10
 - The issue of area knowledge management 11
 - The issue of resources..... 12
 - The issue of community building..... 12
- 5. Final remark..... 13

1. Introduction

The first phase of the POSEIDON project focused on the exchange of experiences concerning neighbourhood management approaches between the partner cities of the POSEIDON project. This short version of the exchange of experience report comprehends the results of the exchange of experience process of the second POSEIDON theme dealing with communication with and consultation of local communities and direct involvement of inhabitants living in deprived urban neighbourhoods.

This theme deals with approaches stimulating communication and community consultation in deprived neighbourhoods, especially with marginalized or vulnerable population groups hard to reach. Such initiatives aim at encouraging self-responsible action of inhabitants living in these areas (community involvement), especially by setting up structures for democratic citizens' participation or local development partnerships.

The operational objective was to review mechanisms or methods for community consultation and citizens participation in deprived neighbourhoods and to practically improve direct involvement of the population living in these areas.

For further information about the POSEIDON project, please visit the project website: www.poseidon-partnership.net

2. Community Consultation and Neighbourhood Management

Neighbourhood management as a mode of local governance strongly relies on the involvement and the active support of residents and businessmen on the local level. The development of new modes of local governance and the approaching of 'new localism' enhanced the intentions of the public authorities to take community consultation initiatives as active policy measures. To achieve good governance on the local level, public authorities have to work in equal partnerships with local residents, local businessmen, the representatives of non-governmental organisations and other players of civil society. Comprehensive participation can be regarded as the basis for local governance to increase the efficiency of local planning.

If they are effectively designed and adequately implemented, informal participation procedures can lead to more efficient and effective decision making compared to solely and exclusive 'in-house' procedures by public administration.

With community consultation the results of planning procedures seem to be more efficient because the residents are satisfied with them if they have been allowed to integrate their opinions and demands into the planning procedures.

Beside the better acceptance of results, the quality of results may also be improved by means of community consultation. On the one hand, community consultation enables local authorities to get access to information on the latest developments in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, community consultation makes it possible to balance conflicting interests on the local level.

Community consultation can help to develop a constructive climate of co-operation between residents, businessmen, local politicians and administrative bodies and decreases the 'communicative and systemic distance' between the groups of the different sectors involved. Thus community consultation can be interpreted as a co-operative negotiation and bargaining model fostering the development from government to governance regimes on the local level.

Community consultation can foster community building, which can be regarded as an ongoing process where members of the community share experiences, talents, knowledge and skills that strengthen or develop them and the community. 'Community building is an approach to improving conditions, expanding opportunities and sustaining positive change within communities by developing, enhancing and sustaining the relationships and social networks of those who make up the community.'¹ Community consultation can also be an encouragement for self-help and induce empowerment processes on the individual as well as on the collective level.

Last but not least, community consultation procedures can be interpreted as expressions of a good democracy. They serve as stabilising and stimulating elements of 'civil society'. Thus participation and community consultation can be regarded as fundamental values.

3. Local Experiences of the POSEIDON Partnership

This short version of the *Exchange of Experience Report* covers several main aspects of the experiences of the partner cities. The long version gives a far more detailed description of POSEIDON.

The **Viennese** experiences mainly consist of two area management programs with strong participation, empowerment and community building aspects. The aim of the

¹ Source: Homepage of the 'National Community Building Network'

projects is to improve the quality of life, the economic performance and the environmental situation of the deprived areas (*Volkert-* und *Alliiertenviertel* and *Viertel um den Wallensteinplatz*) in the 2nd and 20th district of Vienna. Community consultation should not only serve as a means to gather information and impressions about the specific needs of the area, but also to establish working groups for developing 'sub-projects' of the 'Grätzelmanagement' in order to improve the socio-economic situation of the area. Residents have 50% of the voting rights in the 'advisory committee' of the project, and they can decide upon the implementation of sub-projects financed by the existing 'local disposal fund'.

Participation processes in **Amsterdam** are regulated by a bye-law. In general there are three modes of participation: information, the consultation of citizens and the co-production of projects and approaches together with the citizens. The experiences of Amsterdam cover community consultation concerning the design of an urban development plan for the major restructuring of the so called 'Slotermeerhof' area. Residents are consulted in terms of the development plan upon which the city council will decide. Co-production is achieved through a local inter-sector steering group (residents, housing corporations, district, council...) and through several general public meetings as well as through information activities.

The area selected by the **Provincia di Genova** is an inner valley at the borders of the metropolitan area of the city of Genoa called 'Scrivia Valley' where several factors of deprivation and social exclusion (inefficient social infrastructure, urban sprawl without a general land plan, the lack of professional qualification...) can be found. The implementation of community consultation is strongly linked to a program called 'PRUSST', an Italian acronym for 'Urban Renewal and Sustainable Development of Territory Program'. To improve the situation, the *Provincia di Genova* and the local authorities involved agreed on participation. They called upon local stakeholders, associations and citizens to present their proposals on specific themes. Participation focused on the articulation of the residents' needs and demands and was followed by the nomination of residents' representatives who were integrated in the co-production of project proposals. This development process was supported by external experts who contributed the definition of the targets and approaches.

The area renewal activities of **London-Haringey** are strongly embedded in the national policy framework for urban regeneration. The *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* and the *National Action Plan* for area renewal (Local Government Act 200) focus on the establishment of local governing structures (new localism) and the involvement of local communities (residents, businessmen) in the elaboration of a Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Community consultation is centred on the involvement of residents

concerning community building and information as well as on training and education. Another aim is to get access to the opinions and interests of the residents and local businessmen. Residents are involved through questionnaires, residents' interviews, residents' meetings and similar communicative events and approaches. Ideas of residents are adopted and implemented by the neighbourhood managers if possible.

North Kent is a multi-centre network of urban centres with a great diversity of communities. Thus the key issue around community involvement is to ensure the integration of the new communities into the existing communities and to ensure that all residents and stakeholders benefit from new developments. The priorities for community involvement are the three established Community Enterprise Hubs. Each hub is responsive to the respective local needs, with the physical nature, participating organizations, services and resources varying from region to region. A combination of physical resources (community centers, resource centres etc.) and projects to address the key issues of young people, the elderly, learning and skills, financial exclusion, the capacity of local people and organizations, racial equality and the local environment provide a structure for community involvement. The hubs allow for liaison with other cross cutting institutions such as 'healthy living centres' and 'community learning centres'.

The **Stockholm** experience comes from a neighbourhood called Rinkeby, which has been the subject of several renewal and improvement schemes during the last decades. The neighbourhood managers of Rinkeby try to reach the local residents making use of the mainstreaming services provided by the city (e.g. parental meetings in schools) and accompanying the 'activated' residents in 'idea groups' and well balanced 'citizens' boards' and 'working groups' on projects to improve the area. These community dialogue forums have a completely free agenda and get support from the existing mainstreaming services of the neighbourhood if requested. Four different neighbourhood board exists (by initiative of the local politicians). The board is; women board, disabled board, elderly board and youth board. The boards comments on the documents sent to the local politicians and will also makes suggestions and comment on the City District initiative projects elaborated by the residents. There exists a neighbourhood board that comments the projects elaborated by the residents and makes suggestions. Afterwards local politicians decide upon the implementation of these projects. The fact that residents are only involved in elaborating projects to improve the condition of the neighbourhood and not in deciding upon their implementation is made clear to the residents at the very beginning of the community consultation process.

4. The key issues and overall challenges

Although the approaches of community consultation and the general and political conditions vary considerably between the partner cities of POSEIDON, the existing experiences indicate that the key issues and challenges arising through the implementation of community consultation processes are more or less the same.

The participation deal

The experiences of the partner cities of POSEIDON indicate that one challenge concerning community consultation is the elaboration and sustainable implementation of a coherent participation frame. Successful community consultation requires a clear and fair participation deal between the involved sectors like residents, businessmen, politicians, public authorities and so forth. Such a fair deal would include a balance of commitments between the involved actors, clear rules of engagement, clear roles of involved actors and transparency concerning the structure of the process, the philosophy of the process and decision making structures.

EEperiences show that the 'right' participation deal for every area and every agenda does not exist. Methods and approaches have to be designed according to the needs and to the general conditions of each area. A deal has to be adequate. It has to be set up and realized according to the specific requirements, general conditions and aims of the consultation initiatives.

The challenges of community consultation concerning the participation deal can be summarized as follows:

- Development and implementation of an **adequate, fair and sustainable participation deal**.
- Establishment of a **self-binding regime** for local mayors **concerning the delegation of power** to residents or local partnerships.
- Elaboration and implementation of **quality standards** for participation processes.

People hard to reach

Experiences indicate that each partner city faces the same challenge, namely that there exists a great number of people who are hard to reach through community consultation. These people mostly belong to the important target groups of these programs. They face cumulative socio-economic disadvantages and can be regarded at least partially as socially excluded. Reaching these people is a great challenge for neighbourhood

management initiatives focusing on community building since they would definitely fail if these people were not reached systematically. Without access to these groups of people it will not be possible to get a comprehensive and representative picture of the demands, problems and shortcomings of the area.

Besides residents who are partly hard to reach another important target group which should be involved in local partnerships are members of public authorities, local politicians and experts (e.g. landscape architects, experts for planning procedures...). This group of people has to be convinced that the dialogue with residents and local businessmen is favourable to the progress and the quality of their work. This change of perception needs time since it includes a learning process for this group.

The challenges for community consultation concerning people hard to reach:

- Development and implementation of approaches concerning the **low threshold levels of participation**.
- Development and implementation of approaches concerning **appropriate topics**.
- Development and implementation of approaches that **overcome the existing low expectations and foster empowerment processes**.
- Development of an **adequate learning environment for public authorities, local politicians and experts** in different professions to bring about the necessary changes of perception and to achieve the commitment of these groups in local dialogues.

The issue of successful failure

The success or failure of projects and initiatives, especially in the field of neighbourhood management, is neither complete nor comprehensive. The causes and consequences of failure in participation processes in the field of neighbourhood management are manifold. The causes of failure may be unclear participation deals, unfavourable systemic environments or a lack of qualification of neighbourhood managers. Another reason for failure seems to be the inexperience of the actors involved concerning the sometimes unpredictable dynamics of community consultation. This is especially the case if there is not provided for a systemic environment for mutual and institutional learning.

Existing experiences show that there is a lack of adequate quantitative and qualitative indicators for measuring the degree of success of community consultation. As in terms of social work in general, the results of community consultation are mostly intangible and sometimes also invisible.

The challenges for community consultation concerning 'successful failure':

- **Finding the sector specific aims** to and the sector specific success factors.
- Establishing an **environment for collective, mutual and institutional learning** processes.
- Establishing **coaching structures for politicians**. Coaching should help to **make clear the process orientation** of neighbourhood management and community consultation.
- Elaborating adequate **quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure the success, the efficiency and the effectiveness** of community consultation approaches.

The linkage issue

One major issue of neighbourhood management is to establish communicative and structural linkages. On the one hand, communicative linkages have to be built up between the sectors involved like residents, businessmen, local authorities and local politicians. On the other hand, structural linkages like partnerships on the neighbourhood level have to be established between the different promotion programs within the cities or between the different funds for urban regeneration. Experiences of the POSEIDON partnership show that a sustainable involvement of the different sectors is sometimes hard to achieve, both in terms of funding as well as in terms of communication and co-ordination. Since the establishment of effective and efficient local governance structures is crucial to the success of neighbourhood management and community consultation, the implementation of local partnerships for area renewal and the role of community consultation within this partnerships will be important issues for the second phase of the POSEIDON project.

The challenges for community consultation concerning the linkage issue:

- Achieving a **continuous commitment** of the different sectors, especially of the higher levels of public authorities and politicians, to the community consultation processes.
- Developing and implementing methods and structures that guarantee a **continuous communication and co-ordination** between the sectors involved like residents, businessmen, public authorities and politicians.
- Elaborating a **coherent and comprehensive network management strategy** on the area as well as on the municipal level.
- Checking **win-win situations** for area-renewal partnerships. Win-win situations foster sustainable networks for urban renewal.
- Reassessment of relationships between central and local governments to **reach a coherent work of the public authorities in the area through the establishment of local governance structures** which ease (potential) tensions between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches.

The issue of area knowledge management

As already stated, neighbourhood management and community consultation imply individual and collective learning processes for all sectors involved and/or partners and can refer to various issues. Although learning is an individual process it can be supported by effective knowledge management procedures implemented by the agents of the consultation initiative. This means the delivery of methods to foster mutual reflection to achieve lessons learned and institutional learning. One learning potential refers to the individual level of the involved residents and is mostly described through 'empowerment'. Another potential refers to inter-sector learning processes.

The challenges for community consultation concerning area knowledge management:

- Developing and implementing **area based knowledge management approaches** that guarantee a comprehensive picture of the area's situation.
- Developing and implementing tools and methods fostering **individual and institutional learning processes**.
- Developing and implementing tools and methods fostering the **adoption of external expertise** through neighbourhood management processes (e.g. lessons learned).

The issue of resources

One key issue for successful community consultation within neighbourhood management projects is the sufficient supply of 'communicative resources' on the neighbourhood level. Community consultation implies communication on the neighbourhood level which has to be co-ordinated, structured and accompanied. Especially accompanying the residents involved and the businessmen requires high-level communicative resources which have to be provided for by the accompanists in the consultation processes. This implies the moderation of working groups and forums, the mediation between conflicting actors, process steering in terms of communication and so forth.

Another resource for an efficient community consultation in neighbourhood management is money. Long-term participation can only take place if the residents involved can show visible results. A visible result can be any kind of social or physical infrastructure in the neighbourhood. A fast and easy access to the budgets required (e.g. local disposal fund) should be possible since the motivation for commitment can decrease rather quickly if the financial base for an adequate outcome is not given.

The challenges of resources in community consultation processes:

- Developing and implementing **organisational modes to meet the cyclic demand for accompaniment** of communication within the consultation process.
- Developing and implementing financial structures that guarantee the **financing of outcomes** of community consultation (e.g. local disposal fund).
- Establishing a **coherent and proper organisation and administration** which does not rely on the work of accompanists.

The issue of community building

Community building requires the co-operation of all sectors like local residents, community-based organizations, businesses, schools, religious institutions, health and social service agencies. Co-operation can only be efficient in an atmosphere of trust and respect. It takes time and commitment to make such a collaboration come true.

Experiences indicate that the efficiency of community-building efforts always depends on the knowledge of the local conditions. A comprehensive research in the potentials of the neighbourhood is indispensable for building on the existing strengths (local capacities and assets) of the local communities.

Most of the areas of the POSEIDON partner cities face a considerable ethnic and cultural diversity within their deprived neighbourhoods. Since racism remains the main barrier to a fair distribution of resources and opportunities in our societies a fundamental task of community building is to foster equality for all ethnic and cultural groups. Community building and community consultation should promote the history and the values of the various cultural traditions and ethnic groups.

The challenges for participation concerning community building:

- Developing and implementing ways to reach **efficient and sustained involvement** of all important sectors in the community building activities.
- Elaborating a **set of indicators** to get a comprehensive picture of the existing strengths of the community serving as a starting point for community building efforts.
- Developing strategies to **reach sustainable involvement** of residents in community building processes.
- Developing strategies to achieve the necessary degree of **self-organisation within the community**.

5. Final remark

The first round of the inter-regional exchange of experience of the POSEIDON partnership has led to various topics to be worked on by the partners during the next project phases.

Beside this main key issues and challenges, the project working group on theme II will also deal with other aspects like resources required for the successful implementation of community consultation or the requirements for a proper management of community consultation.

The aspects elaborated will be important for the preparation and implementation of the local pilot projects in the partner cities of POSEIDON. New approaches will be developed, implemented and evaluated during the next project phases of POSEIDON. The outcomes of the next reflexion and learning phases will result in an inter-regional experience guide on neighbourhood management, which will document the achievements and potential shortcomings of the new approaches.

As already anticipated at the very beginning of the project, the inter-regional exchange requires a common wording and a deeper understanding of the different historical trajectories of community consultation. Therefore, the POSEIDON partners will continue

their work on an inter-regional glossary on neighbourhood management and community consultation.

All further reports and documents will be available on the POSEIDON Website www.poseidon-partnership.net for downloading.