

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH / COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Town/City planning is a profession which aims to utilize land and resources to best advantage for the use of people. Consultations with local communities are therefore an equally important aspect of development as is the co-ordination between the plan maker and the governing authority. Consultation improves the council's/ government's relationship with the community and leads to better decisions. It allows people interested in, or affected by, projects to offer their point of view before a decision is made.

Consulting people in development planning is a proven instrument for more sustainable output and multiplies the rate of successful realization of development by people because it is more likely to produce a set of outcomes actually desired by the community.

The consultation process in development planning should comprise its beneficiaries and stakeholders. The consultation approach must focus on questions like 'who are the users of the plan', 'what are their needs and expectations in terms of development of their locality', 'who are the beneficiaries and stakeholders', and 'who' is the executing agency and planners at project and implementation level. In some developing countries, laws and policies largely limit the right of common man to be involved in development planning. Development plans are imposed on the people.

The important fact that the end user of the plan is the community and the success/ failure of planning proposal is dependent on the community is often ignored. Community consultation is used as a word of fantasy wherein the community has no role to play unless and until a comprehensive detailed plan is prepared by the development authority. This encourages dissatisfaction amongst

the people and they lack a feeling of responsibility /ownership of the plan. The success or failure of plans is thus a big question mark.



Success and Failure – A big Question Mark when the community is ignored.

On the contrary, developed countries have realized the importance of Community Consultation in plan/policy making process. And consider consultation and engagement as building blocks for good governance. Several initiatives have been taken by the state and local governments to encourage community participation. Attempts are being made by the authorities to involve the community from initial stages of the project inception. Community is often involved from visioning to development stage, fostering levels of satisfaction and sense of community ownership of the plan. This increases rate of success and also enables governments to govern better.

Following below is a short discussion on the process, obstacles and outcomes of participatory approach adopted for the Master Plan of Delhi, and a general approach followed in preparation of Development control plans/ locality plans in New South Wales

MASTER PLAN OF DELHI - 2021

The draft Master Plan was prepared by DDA with the help of technical staff and experts, presented for discussion before its members and the Advisory Council at a meeting chaired by the Lieutenant-Governor and then notified for inviting public suggestions/ objections through Gazette notification by the Union Government and public notice in newspapers. Public suggestions/objections were open for acceptance for 90days after the date of notification. Modifications were made in light of these suggestions, objections and comments from the public and the Master Plan was finally approved by the Minister of Urban development.

The above process clearly indicates that no attempts were made to understand the needs and aspirations of the community from their perspective. The public comments and suggestions were invited only at final stages leaving not much scope of incorporation in the scheme due to exhaustion of allocated budgets and time constraints. The plan is approved by incorporating some minor suggestions. The community had no clear picture of the development strategy and outcomes before it was formally notified for suggestions. As such there is no feeling of ownership of commitment to the plan. Most of the objections and suggestions put forward by people reflect personal interest having an impact on their property without a thorough understanding and commitment to future vision and development of their locality or city.

The overall process thus can practically be referred to as non- participatory in nature, as merely inviting objections is no way of participatory planning. It rather creates dissatisfaction in the community and mistrust for the government, when people realize that their objections are not likely to be incorporated in the plan. It is merely a gimmick for mentioning in the project write-up to fulfill the statutory requirement of consultation with the community.

The community needs to be involved in initial stages of plan development and formulation of vision for the locality/ city to develop clear understanding of the planning process, its benefits to the community, to foster a feeling of ownership, commitment and responsibility for the plan.

NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Australia provides a fertile ground for community engagement. However, it is not a leader when it comes to allowing participation of otherwise “voiceless” citizens in processes which are usually dominated by interest groups and politically vocal individuals. Australia, historically, has lagged behind countries like Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States with attempts however; there have been quite a few examples of community consultation in NSW in past few decades. Government organizations and councils do understand the value of community consultation and give due importance and consideration to it. A general process adopted in preparation of development plans is as below:

The project is so structured as to involve the community at various stages of plan development and implementation. To achieve high level of expertise and reduce chances of conflicts, the concerned government agency generally invites expressions of interests from a consultant in the plan making process. It has become a common practice for most of the councils to include the requirements of community consultation at the tender invitation stage itself to ensure effective community consultation in plan making.

Stakeholder meeting

Generally as a first step, government representatives and the engaged consultants will meet with the existing service providers, key community groups and leaders to provide detailed information on the need for development plan, its potential benefit to the community and the effect it will have on existing structure of the area. After winning the confidence of from these key players the wider community is informed, usually through a public meeting.



Public meeting

The community is given information on their role in the project, need for development plan, process to be adopted, time frame for the project etc. These public meetings are conducted formally by giving advance notice of the meeting time. This helps people plan their attendance and prepare for the meeting. local media , newspapers, radio/s might also sometimes in involved to report on the meeting or issuing a media release on the outcomes of the meeting to reach wider audience and encourage other people to attend the next meeting.



Steering committee

If the community supports the development, a steering committee is formed comprising, committee members who represent a cross-section of the community and understand community issues, government processes, and business planning. These include representatives of the community, stakeholders, beneficiaries and government officials, planning professionals etc



ISSUES

Following up on the discussion above some of the key issues that come to forefront are discussed below:

1) Should the community be involved in formulating the vision of an area and what should be the level of involvement?

The community is no longer simply the target or object of development but an active subject in the plan development process. There is ample reason to consult with and involve the full range of community members in all phases of development projects. It has been observed that too many projects have failed because the consultation process was incomplete and non participatory. Involving community increases chances of success as it is more likely to produce set of outcomes actually desired by the community.

2) Benefits of community involvement like improved coordination, reduced complexity, better communication & participation, effective land use controls.

- Wins the trust and approval of the community involved.
- Enables local people to understand and appreciate the aim of the development project.
- Rewarding way to get to know the community, their ideas, wants and needs.
- Ensures that the project will benefit the local community and is not just something that the organizations/ consultants wanted to do.
- Community consultation can provide important location specific information. It can alert it to potential problems, for example with details of the local terrain that agency technicians had not foreseen.
- By consulting with local people and involving them in a range of decisions, the returns on investment can be improved.
- Consultation takes time (a cost), however, it also prevents future conflicts, which are not only costly, but also are an outcome of a dissatisfied community.
- Consultation may increase stakeholder commitment to a project. Stakeholder commitment, which grows with stakeholder “ownership” of projects and complexity associated with the new efforts, can be overcome.
- Consultation can provide accurate and more detailed and information, which otherwise might be difficult to obtain
- Improved understanding of local values, priorities and expectations can result in project designs and delivery mechanisms that are more compatible with socio cultural conditions.
- Consultation can generate a greater willingness for stakeholders to invest their time, labor and other resources in a project they “own,” thereby stretching the value of invested funds Provides important location specific information.

3) Policy and government intervention- how it can assist in making the consultation work ensuring desired outcomes

Government initiatives can make a great difference in the way the community participation is approached. It can set guidelines and policy initiatives to suggest actual procedures and process involved. An excellent example of such an initiative can be observed in New south Wales, wherein NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning has prepared a two part report called “*Ideas for Community Consultation*”. Several councils also have their own set of guidelines to guide the consultation process. A policy document called “*Community Consultation – best practice guidelines*” by Tweed Shire Council is discussed here in brief

Ideas for Community Consultation

This report presents ideas for achieving better community consultation, as a strategic arm of the reform of the plan making system in NSW. A summary of the report as indicated in the report itself is as below.

Part 1 (Principles) of this report identifies a range of challenges facing plan makers as they try to integrate public input into the plan making process, and help communities identify with and participate in complex procedures of government.

This Part offers three key ideas for achieving better community consultation. These are:

- _ engaging principles for effective community consultation
- _ collaboration, and
- _ basing consultation methods on a four-step model.

This Part also deals with the question of selecting participants in a consultative process. Where representativeness is important, the application of random selection is recommended. Arguments supporting random selection, and means of achieving it, are outlined.

In this context, the specific challenges to plan making faced at the State, regional and local levels are discussed, so that practitioners can determine clearly how the proposed skills offered in this Part will help them undertake better community consultation.

Part 2 (Procedures) describes a range of consultative methods. Some relative advantages and disadvantages of each method are outlined, to assist plan makers and government agencies determine which method would be appropriate for a particular consultative challenge at any given moment.

The methods discussed in Part 2 complement the principles outlined in Part 1, and together these proposals offer dynamic and flexible options for enhancing community consultation in the planning process.

The focus of this draft report is on proposing innovative and dynamic solutions, to energise and activate community consultation by government agencies in NSW.

Community Consultation – best practice guidelines

Several councils have their own set of guidelines to approach community participation like the Tweed Shire council has a policy document known as “*Community Consultation – best practice guidelines*”. This document discusses the purpose of the document, what is consultation, why consult, when to consult, timing of consultation, timing of consultation, planning the consultation strategy, statement of intent, engaging key participants, encouraging involvement choosing appropriate methods, providing information, gathering information, maximizing participation, Feeding Back Outcomes and Decisions and Evaluating the Consultation Strategy

Such initiatives and guidelines from the government prepared in consultation with the experts can set step by step guidelines leading to more effective outcomes as a result of the extensive and time consuming consultation process.

4) Obstacles inherent to a strategic planning process - conflicting values amongst participants, uncertainty about outcomes, land use management

Communities can be reluctant to become involved in consultation activities where:

- they believe their view is unimportant;
- conflicting values among participants
- there is a lack of organization and coordination by the organizers; and
- they are not provided with feedback on their input.
- there is uncertainty about outcomes
- limited access to public transport to attend meetings;
- costs involved in travelling to meetings; and
- there is ambiguity on land use management

5) Limits and Risks involved

- Some of the risks of community consultation are associated with almost any development project. If policymakers do not make an institutional commitment to consultation, and do not constantly monitor the process, it can become an excuse for tapping donor resources.
- Merely going through the motions of consulting with affected groups can raise *expectations* about local involvement in the development process, and when people realize it is a show, they will become bitter and may well be unwilling to “participate” in future projects.
- Sometimes inexperienced consultants/ facilitators plunge headlong into public to ask what they want, without explaining the context of development plans. They may find people responding with demands the agency is unable to deliver. For example while trying to access community expectations in relation to spatial an strategic planning, if a question is general question is asked “what do you want” the response might be “I want a cow or a new gas stove” . This is not our scope of study and we might not be able to provide it to the householder.
- When the consultation process has not been handled properly, the new resources may be *captured by elites*, particularly if there is more top-down intervention than genuine consultation. Clever local leaders create cooperatives for their own benefit and, in the absence of close monitoring, give donor agencies the false impression that they are supporting local grassroots organizations. This is a common case observed in developing countries

6) Guidelines for successful community consultation

- Recognizing that the local people are the experts in their community, their knowledge and experience should be recognised.
- Building trust and respect between different participants is important
- Clear and agreed agenda will set boundaries for discussion to avoid discussions on topics which are beyond the scope of spatial planning and development control formulation.

- Make attempts to understand the context for different groups and contradictions the group might face
- Make it timely, the participation should not be so late in the life of an issue that it is tokenistic, or merely confirms decisions already made.
- Make it community-focused. Ask participants not what they want personally or what is in their self-interest, but what they consider appropriate in their role as citizens.
- Make it effective. Although decision-making can strive for consensus, complete agreement need not be the outcome. Be clear on how the decisions will be made so that participants know and understand the impact of their involvement.
- Make it matter. It is important that there is a strong likelihood that any recommendations which emerge from the consultative process will be adopted. If they are not, it is important that a public explanation is provided. Faith in the process is important by both the power holders and the participants.
- An independent, skilled and flexible facilitator with no vested interest is essential in order to achieve a good consultation and involve active community participation.
- It's important to be close enough to the community so that they will let you know if you're doing the wrong thing.
- Ensure that the community consultation is held in the native language so as to invite maximum participation and good understanding of issues.