

Different participation methods and their use

(working document as basis for a chapter in the natreg-handbook, Daniel Zollner, 20.8.2010)

To steer a participation process, different methods can be applied. Following table provides an overview on different methods and their use:

METHOD	duration	group size	degree of stakeholder variety	degree of procedural effort	degree of making decisions	degree of generating ideas	degree of solving conflict
Activating opinion survey	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Advocacy planning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Agenda Conference	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Citizen jury	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Citizen panel	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Community Organizing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Consensus conference	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cooperative discourse	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Delphi survey	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dialogue	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dynamic Facilitation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fish Bowl	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Focus Group	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Future conference	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Future workshop	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Internet forum	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mediation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Neosocratic dialogue	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Open space conference	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Planning for real	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Round Table	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SEA Round Table	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Simulation Game	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wisdom Council	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Workshop	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Worldcafé	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

legend: ● small, low, short ● medium ● high, many, long

Table: Participation methods and their use. Source: Based on Austrian Ministry of the Environment 2010 (Lebensministerium 2010), partly adapted.

detailed explanation:

duration	up to one week / some weeks / several months
group size	up to 15 / 30 / or more people
degree of stakeholder variety	one / some / all groups involved
degree of procedural demand	low / medium / high efforts needed to prepare and manage process
degree of making decisions	informing / consulting / deciding
degree of generating ideas	exchanging ideas / developing and planning / creative solutions
degree of solving conflicts	high / medium / low potential to solve conflicts

According to Austrian Ministry of the Environment 2010 (Lebensministerium 2010, <http://www.partizipation.at/methods.html>), the methods can be described as follows:

- **Activating Opinion Survey:** In an activating opinion survey are asked about their views and attitudes; at the same time they are encouraged to stand up for their interests and to take part in developing solutions for their surroundings.
- **Advocacy Planning:** In this participation method, which originated in the USA, an “advocate“ (not in the legal sense; usually a planner) gives ordinary citizens expert advice in planning matters, assists them and represents them before official bodies at communal and state level
- **Agenda Conference:** This is a method which has evolved out of the Local Agenda 21 process; it is used to take stock of the current state of an ongoing process, to assess it jointly, to define goals for the future and to launch campaigns. It is suitable as a starting-point for a participation process, or where a process has got bogged down, or when a new phase is to be started
- **Citizen Jury:** In a citizen jury individuals selected at random (not as representatives of organizations) draw up a “citizens’ assessment“ of a particular issue, based on their own experience and knowledge. The participants make their recommendations and assessments from the point of view of the common weal; on the jury they do not represent any special interests. Experts provide assistance with specialized aspects.
- **Citizen Panel:** Citizen panels provide an opportunity to inform those interested in / affected by a project and to discuss its various aspects in public
- **Community Organizing (by Ulrike Schumacher):** Community Organizing takes place in neighbourhoods, towns, communities or regions. Building relationships and a culture of self-determination and reaching decisions democratically helps citizens to act together and to contribute to solving problems in their surroundings.
- **Consensus Conference:** In a consensus conference selected heterogeneous groups of ordinary citizens engage in intensive dialogue with experts to find an answer to a question that arouses political or social controversy
- **Cooperative Discourse:** Cooperative discourse is a combination of elements of mediation, of the Delphi survey and of the citizen juries aimed at solving planning assignments.
- **Delphi Survey:** A Delphi survey (also known as a Delphi procedure) is a systematic multistage process in which experts are polled on specific topics.
- **Dialogue:** Dialogue is intended to produce a common denominator or something new, for a group. It is not about exchanging views, but about identifying the assumptions and value judgements that underlie the views.
- **Dynamic Facilitation:** Dynamic Facilitation is an open, chaired group discussion with a variable number of participants, ideally between 8 and 20. The method relies on the participants' creativity in finding a solution, and deliberately avoids conventional, linear facilitation structures.
- **Fish Bowl:** Fishbowl is a simple but dynamic alternative to a panel discussion, combining a large-scale format with the advantages of discussion in small groups; this gets a lively atmosphere and spontaneity into conventional event set-ups

- Focus Group: In a focus group 8 to 15 persons take part in a chaired discussion on a predetermined topic; this can lead to a cohesive “group view” developing. The method originated in the field of market research, where it is used to test products and advertising strategies (among other things)
- Future Conference: At a future conference participants selected from all the interest groups affected draw up programmes and action plans for forthcoming projects in line with a predetermined schedule. At a future conference participants selected from all the interest groups affected draw up programmes and action plans for forthcoming projects in line with a predetermined schedule.
- Future Workshop: In a Future Workshop the participants are encouraged to develop imaginative, unconventional solutions to issues of current interest, by means of an atmosphere designed to promote creativity
- Internet Forum: Internet fora are on-line discussion platforms that give ordinary citizens the chance to express a view on a particular issue in writing and to discuss the issue with others.
- Mediation: Mediation is a voluntary process with a clear structure, in which the parties to a conflict search for a permanent solution with the support of professional mediators
- Neosocratic Dialogue: Neosocratic dialogue is an instrument for discussing very general, basic questions, usually of an ethical-philosophical nature, with ordinary citizens
- Open Space Conference: At an open space conference there is a central issue, but no set speakers or pre-arranged study groups. The participants decide themselves who wants to tackle which topic for how long
- Planning For Real: Planning for Real is a community-oriented planning procedure designed to activate people (the idea is “It’s our place – let’s take matters into our own hands”). The aim is to lessen difficulties in communicating between individuals affected in different ways, to bring out latent potential, resources and deficits, and to create an atmosphere of cooperative action among neighbours, experts and local interest groups.
- Round Table: At a Round Table representatives of the interest groups affected by a project discuss a material issue on a level footing and try to find a common solution
- Sea Round Table: A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Round Table is a special form of >>SEA, in which participants from the interest groups affected, administrators and external experts collectively draw up a plan or programme (e.g. for handling traffic or waste management etc.).
- Simulation Game: This method is designed to help the participants understand the complexities of everyday reality in a simulated (and simplified) situation and to recognize system-immanent constraints, options, consequences and alternatives.
- Wisdom Council: A Wisdom Council is a simple, inexpensive and rapid way of boosting ordinary citizens' ability to organize themselves and to shoulder responsibility
- Workshop: A workshop is an informal, occasion-related procedure in which politicians, administrators, experts, property owners, investors and other stakeholders discuss a concrete issue together.
- World Café: This method is designed to start, in a relaxed setting reminiscent of a coffee-house, a creative process spread over several sessions that promotes an exchange of knowledge and ideas among those taking part, and thus leads to new insights