

benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents

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The benefits of participation processes from the point of view of the various groups of agents

The following overview is intended for persons who initiate or take part in participation processes (authorities, project promoters, ordinary citizens, process facilitators, NGOs, representatives of interest groups etc.). It identifies the benefits available to various groups of agents from participation processes. Where different agents benefit in the same way, this is indicated separately for each group of agents.

As a result, each group can form a complete picture of the benefits it can gain; at the same time the overview facilitates the formation of “benefit coalitions“. Participation processes can benefit all the participants in different ways, depending on their individual role. Ordinary citizens who take part in participation processes benefit because their needs and interests can be taken into account more effectively. As a rule, they are „local experts“ with detailed knowledge of specific problems in their surroundings. In many cases they also have concrete ideas for solving these problems. When various agents’ knowledge and perspectives are tapped in planning processes, creative solutions generally result, that are also durable, because they have been developed on a broad basis and – above all – have the support of those affected. Persons able to have a say in planning processes are more likely to feel they share responsibility for community affairs; participation also helps to resolve conflicts of interest between different groups. All in all, local democracy gains and people are more willing to collaborate where participation is involved – and this benefits politicians and administrators: not only is the content of decisions improved, but they are easier to understand and more generally accepted, which means that the results can be implemented faster – something that the whole community benefits from.

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je nach Rolle unterschiedlicher Nutzen

We distinguish between formal and informal participation processes, which differ as regards intensity of participation (possibilities) and scope for action.

In **formal processes** legal regulations prescribe who is entitled to take part, what rights they have and how binding the decision is. Examples are: approval procedures for plant or for means of communication, and land-use planning procedures, e.g. in the case of zoning plans or regional programmes. An environmental audit, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) as per the relevant EU Directive, or a project assessment as regards nature conservation also belong in the category of formal procedures. The participants’ scope for action (as laid down by law) can range from the mere right to be informed and to express a point of view all the way to the right to file applications and objections. In Austria the strongest position in formal procedures is known as “party status”; it provides extensive rights to information and to having a say,

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formal forms of participation

plus the right to appeal to a higher authority against decisions. The course of formal procedures is also regulated by law, e.g. by time limits for expressing points of view or filing objections. The authorities / the bodies responsible for overseeing land use are bound to take such points of view into account in their decisions. At the end of a formal procedure an authority has usually published a decision (e.g. in the form of an official notification, a zoning plan or programme), and again legal regulations prescribe how this is to be implemented.

Formale Verfahren sind durch Gesetze vorgegeben, wie z.B.:

- > Verfahren zur Genehmigung von Projekten oder zur Vorbereitung von Gesetzen
- > Planungsverfahren der Raumordnung zur Erstellung von Flächenwidmungsplänen
- > Verfahren zur Erstellung von Regionalentwicklungskonzepten oder sektoralen Programmen (z.B. Verkehrsplanungen)
- > Strategische Umweltprüfungen bei Plänen und Programmen.

Informale Verfahren sind alle nicht durch ein Gesetz vorgegebenen Verfahren, wie z.B.:

- > Beteiligungsprozesse zur Entwicklung von Politiken, Strategien oder Aktionsplänen
- > lokale/regionale Entwicklungsprozesse (z.B. Lokale Agenda 21-Prozesse) oder auch
- > Prozesse zur Bearbeitung von Konflikten wie Mediationsverfahren oder Runde Tische.

Informal forms of participation do not “run on rails” in this way; they can be structured to suit the particular circumstances applying – this is up to the persons involved. They are purely voluntary; the central principle is to tackle an assignment together, generally with the aim of reaching and implementing a consensus solution. Those involved usually agree together who can take part, how the assignment is to be tackled and what procedural rules should apply. Informal participation can take many different, flexible forms: Agenda 21,

Round Table, Future Workshop, Future Conference, mediation and so on. Depending on the form in question, arrangements vary about how binding the results of the process will be as regards implementation. The solutions put forward may simply be recommendations for a body taking political decisions, or they may be passed as a binding programme and taken over as they stand. In mediation processes the collective solution reached is normally cast in the form of an agreement enforceable by law.

Basically, informal participation processes should not be viewed as substitutes for or as competing with formal procedures; rather, they can supplement these, e.g. in a preparatory phase, or be employed in fields where formal procedures play no part whatever. For instance, a strategic environmental assessment can incorporate some form of cooperative participation (such as a Round Table), even though this is not strictly required by law. In some cases formal procedures and informal processes may be interleaved; the Austrian

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statute on environmental audits allows for the official audit procedure to be interrupted (if all parties agree) so that a mediation process can be conducted.

The following table outlines the benefits available from participation. As informal processes can yield additional benefits or other kinds of benefit in many cases, the aspects of special relevance to informal processes are shown in **green** (in a monochrome printout in **grey**).

Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards their own activities/position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New approaches to a solution (innovative ideas) for existing problems may emerge - Active citizens who organize themselves may take over individual communal tasks - Decisions are supported by the participants' wider knowledge base, and thus better prepared - Political decisions can be legitimized more easily and accepted more readily - DConfidence in political decisions is strengthened - People identify more closely with their community/region or village/town 	<p>... as regards their own activities/position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New approaches to a solution (innovative ideas) for existing problems may emerge - Active citizens who organize themselves may take over individual communal tasks - Decisions are supported by the participants' wider knowledge base, and thus better prepared - It becomes easier to weigh up and reconcile diverging interests - As official procedures tend to go faster (fewer objections filed, fewer subsequent complaints), administration is simplified overall - Misgivings and complaints can be dealt with at an earlier stage 	<p>... as regards their own activities/position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own values/ideas/interests can be tabled and acted on - They can have a say in projects, plans, programmes and policies - Decisions affecting them and their quality of life can be influenced and jointly shaped - The chance to organize themselves can be utilized to create new scope for action - Active citizenship is recognized and welcomed 	<p>... as regards their own activities/position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own values/ideas/interests can be tabled and acted on - It is possible to have a say in projects, plans, programmes and policies - The organization can gain in status and influence 	<p>... as regards their own activities/position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The results of official approval procedures are accepted more widely - Entrepreneurial risk is diminished, legal security is increased - The chances of projects being realized sooner improve, as fewer objections are filed and there are fewer subsequent complaints

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Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interests and needs of the various segments of society become more visible - The pressure of expectations, and the extent of lobbying for special interests, can both be diminished - A framework for resolving conflicts is created, diverging interests can be reconciled - A culture of participation, local democracy, cooperation and dialogue with the citizenry is promoted - Communication with the citizenry and the flow of information are both improved - Marginal groups can be integrated in the community 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interests and needs of the various segments of society become more visible - The pressure of expectations, and the extent of lobbying for special interests, can both be diminished - A framework for resolving conflicts is created, diverging interests can be reconciled - A culture of participation, local democracy, cooperation and dialogue with the citizenry is promoted - Communication with the citizenry and the flow of information are both improved - Political pressure can be reduced - Topics that go beyond classical administrative tasks can be discussed 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning sites and platforms for confidently expressing one's interests are created - The results of official approval procedures are accepted more widely - People understand better how politics and the administration work - A culture of selforganization and selfdetermination is promoted - Topics that go beyond classical administrative tasks can be discussed 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A chance is provided to table interests - A stock of mutual trust (for future cooperation) can accumulate 	<p>... as regards dealing with others (participants / stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Longer-lasting solutions (with fewer court cases) can be achieved - Relations with stakeholder groups within the company can be improved (evidence of dialogue and consensus capability) - The company may become better integrated in the community/region it is based in - More understanding for other interests develops - A basis of trust for future cooperation (including confidence in a firm's products and services) can develop

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Who can participation processes benefit how? – Aspects affecting different groups of agents

Politicians	Administrators	Ordinary citizens and grassroots initiatives	NGOs and representatives of interest groups	Project promoters
<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Durch die Argumente und Sichtweisen der „Anderen“ (Faktenwissen, Erfahrungswissen) entsteht Wissenszuwachs - Die Kompetenz für zukünftige Aushandlungen erhöht sich - Relevante Informationen werden zugänglich(er) 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Durch die Argumente und Sichtweisen der „Anderen“ (Faktenwissen, Erfahrungswissen) entsteht Wissenszuwachs - Die Kompetenz für zukünftige Aushandlungen erhöht sich - Relevante Informationen werden zugänglich(er) - Die Einsicht in den Entscheidungsprozess wird erhöht 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases - Relevant information becomes (more) accessible - More insight develops into the decision-making process 	<p>... as regards information/ the transfer of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people's arguments and perspectives (factual knowledge, empirical knowledge) lead to a wider knowledge base - Negotiating competence (an asset in future dealings) increases
<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The closer one is in touch with ordinary people, the better for one's image - One is more closely identified with the community/region or village/town 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The process of building trust can be encouraged - Impulses for a clientoriented administration can be provided 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - "Experts on everyday life" can experience how their special knowledge is valued 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - One's competence and distinctive image can become more visible to members of one's own organization 	<p>... as regards how others perceive one</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal relationships take shape - Each participant can gain recognition, sympathy etc. both in his or her role and as a human being - The company's image can be improved

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STRATEGIC GROUP ON PARTICIPATION

In 2002, on the initiative of the Ministry of the Environment, ÖGUT set up the Strategic Group on Participation, which is intended to

- > give the notion of „Participation“ clearer contours, develop it further and make it more widely known,
- > promote awareness of participation in the public eye and among decision-makers in politics, the administration and business,
- > work out participation strategies for policies relevant to the environment and sustainability,
- > contribute to sustainable development by promoting participation,
- > promote participation at communal, regional and national level,
- > make concrete “how to” guides available to people with practical interests.

The members of the Strategic Group on Participation are qualified experts on the subject with backgrounds in many different fields. The following experts were members of the group when this worksheet was drafted. For the status quo of membership please visit <http://www.partizipation.at/mitglieder.html>:

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THE WORKSHEETS AS PRODUCTS OF THE STRATEGIC GROUP

The results of debate within the Strategic Group are summarized and published as “Worksheets on Participation” and aim at facilitating practitioners’ work.

- > The Worksheet No. 1 on Participation drawn up in the Strategic Group contains a checklist on preconditions for participation processes in the public sphere and a checklist on quality criteria for participation processes in the public sphere.
- > The Worksheet No. 2 on Participation presents an array of arguments in connexion with the question of what benefits participation provides for which groups of agents.
- > The Worksheet No. 3 on Participation deals with the limits of and possible obstacles to participation processes, and with the risk of such processes being misused.
- > The Worksheet No. 4 on Participation (at present only available in German) contains recommendations on how to improve consultation in formal and informal participation processes.

All products from the Strategic Group are available on the website >> www.partizipation.at. Utilizing the worksheets is permitted and encouraged, provided that reference is made to the “authorship of the ÖGUT Strategic Group on Participation”. Responses and comments are welcome, and will be taken into account as revised versions are generated.

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