

# Public participation

## Public participation and professional action in two Swedish road projects

**After having read Ingrid Duchhart's fantastic article in *Topos* "Dreaming of Africa" (Duchhart, 2003) I almost decided not to write anything at all about public participation. Ingrid's article was so positively covering public participation. But then again, I am eager to let you know about the work I do for my forthcoming PhD. My PhD studies started in 2002 and will continue into 2008. Being a part time student I have time to reflect over what I read in literature and what I find in my own research. One reflection that I have made is that using common sense as in the work described by Ingrid Duchhart is an important aspect also in academic work.**

### **Kajsa Hylmö**

Ph.D Student at the Swedish Agricultural University (SLU) in Alnarp, Sweden  
Kajsa.Hylmo@lpal.slu.se

So, how does Road Planning in Sweden connect to Ingrid's Africa? It does, but it may take a while to make the discovery. My research assignment was to shorten the time spent at the Swedish Road Administration (SRA) during the early stages of road planning projects. This is the point of departure for my paper.

When I first got the assignment I felt a bit lost. But talking to the people at the SRA soon gave me an entry. The managers of the two projects I was studying were both convinced that the public was getting all the information they wanted. I wasn't equally convinced. Therefore I set out to read all the letters that had been submitted to them. While reading and also visiting public meetings held by the SRA I soon discovered that stakeholders of one of my projects were not at all satisfied with the project or the information given to them. There was a clear difference between the two projects. The task was to find out why this difference was occurring.

### **Public Correspondence**

An analysis of the correspondence relating to the two road projects showed different patterns (Hylmö, 2005). The more successful manager was able to win laypeople's approval by inviting them to early participation. At the same time he received heavy critique from local officials on the analytical work of the first phase, the prefeasibility phase, which he took note of thus managing to receive their approval during later phases. The other manager had formed a closed and lopsided "Interest Group" to act as communicators between the SRA and the public, a purpose that failed. He also let the laypeople know there was little chance that their arguments would have any bearing on the project. As a consequence, a flood of letters and negative arguments hit this project. Such floods of letters are not the intention of public partici-

pation schemes. Instead public engagement, managers listening to stakeholder concerns and demonstrating responsiveness to their concern should be the objective. If the public perceives that objective decisions have been made with a reasonable degree of their input, they will most likely be satisfied.

When trying to achieve acceptance for landscape changes, managers need to recognize that people hold images of and are sensitive to intrusions into their landscapes (Schwahn, 2002). Therefore it is not enough merely to follow the law, make documentation available to the public, and hold public meetings. It is also necessary for managers to acknowledge people's feelings by actively including them in the planning phases as was done for instance in Ingrid's successful Kenyan projects. In Kenya Ingrid used meetings with oral discussions, here I am solely relating to written information. A successful result in printed form can be achieved by answering questions and showing people inclusion in the documentation.

### **Readable Documents**

How can people understand the planner's work and how will they feel acknowledged? In Sweden as in many other countries documentation is the officially accepted way to present the findings of the process. My professor, Erik Skärbäck, and I claim that one sure way to be successful in official documentation is by presenting facts, evaluations and decisions in an accurate and transparent way.

To investigate this hypothesis, we studied the documents presented by the two project managers. We found that also in documentation there were substantial differences between the two projects. The more successful project manager had recognized a commonly used procedure model for landscape planning, a model

also used in the Öresund Sound Bridge Project (figure 1). The figure showing this model has been developed from a figure in Skärbäck (1981).

Following this work chain of landscape planning we developed a matrix (figure 2) to check the documents of the two projects. A group of landscape planning students at Alnarp, Sweden, tested the matrix, and after their input the matrix was adjusted. Refinements are continuously being done, but already we have found the matrix to be usable.

We were trying to get a picture of how the information was put out in the documents and used the matrix to analyze how the two projects were displaying the various phases of work. This brought out an additional difference between the two projects.

The successful project manager had presented his material in a clear, easy to follow way by showing all the levels of work throughout his documents. Besides giving reasons for why to build a road, he showed all relevant data, his analysis, his evaluation and his conclusions. Doing so, he gave people an understanding of what was going on and why. Working in this manner people were given answers to posed questions and apparently given the feeling they were listened to and included in the process. Isn't this exactly what happened in the verbal communication, as described in the African article?

### Speaking in favor of transparency

Have I come to be in favor of transparency?

O yes! After having done this bit of research I am so much more convinced that public participation has a future. Involving people in their own environment is essential not only to stakeholders, but also to the success of the project

outcome. But in Sweden as well as in Kenya, for a successful project it is necessary that the management truly wishes to involve the public in the process. This includes sharing information orally or in written form in an easily understandable way, through transparency. Or as Ingrid Duchhart writes: "it was the long term, patient, and people oriented approach of the project leader, Kuria Gathuru, that gave rise to the model village it became" (Duchhart, 2003).

### References

- Duchhart, I. 2003. Dreaming of Africa. *Topos, Periodiek van het Laboratorium voor de Ruimtelijke Planvorming* (02): 14-17.
- Hylmö, K. 2005. Improving the Road Planning Process: A Case Study of Stakeholder Comments on Two Swedish Road Projects. *Environmental Practice, Journal of the National Association of Environmental Professionals* 7(1): 1-10.
- Schwahn, C. 2002. Landscape and Policy in the North Sea Marshes. In *Wind Power in a Changing World* Pasqualetti, J.M., J. Martin & R.W. Righter, eds. Academic Press, San Diego. 133-150.
- Skärbäck, E. 1981. *Landskapsinformation och planering*. Konsulentavdelningen, Landskap 60, Alnarp. 109.

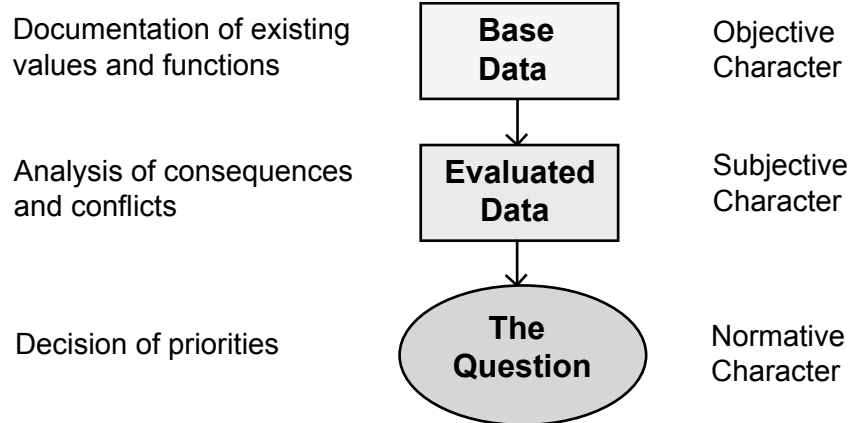


Figure 1. The transparent work chain used for the Öresund Bridge Project.

	Phase of work
1	Give reasons for the project
2a	Collect existing data
2b	Update and deepen data
3a	Estimate and appraise environmental impact
3b	Estimate and appraise land use conflicts
4	Check for possible a measures
5	Suggest priorities of alternatives

Figure 2. The procedure model shows a clear progression from inventory through analysis to synthesis and an increasing degree of evaluation.