

Explaining the potential role of LA21-processes as a participatory planning reform

Track 2 Public participation, Urban Governance, and Public Policy
2A 4 Learning to participate

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Abstract

LA21-processes, on the basis of chapter 28 of Agenda, are under way in more than 4000 municipalities all over the world. A Local Agenda 21 can be characterised as a local action plan for the achievement of sustainable development, which has to be worked out through a broad consultative process between local authorities, citizens and relevant stakeholder groups. The underlying assumption is that a transition towards sustainable development can never be reached without the involvement of all societal actors. For such a consultation process a participatory reform is needed which leads to participation in an early stage of decision making with broad participants involvement.

This paper concentrates on the experiences in a number of Western European countries. In these countries the effects on the ground of LA21-processes on participative practises are becoming visible. The general picture that we will sketch is that the impact of LA21 as a participatory reform is rather limited.

The main question we therefore pose in the paper is: *How can this limited impact of LA21 as a participatory reform be explained?*

To explain the limited success of LA21 as a participation reform and the deviations in practice of what can be seen as an ideal LA21-participation we focus we on limitations of participation processes known from literature and political, administrative and cultural differences between countries and communities.

1. Introduction

'Local Agenda 21' (LA21) refers to the general goal set for local communities by Chapter 28 of the 'action plan for sustainable development' adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Chapter 28 is an appeal to 'local authorities' to engage in a dialogue for sustainable development with the members of their constituencies. This dialogue asks for a new participation process where the communication between local authorities and all local stakeholders goes beyond existing and traditional consultation. By nature LA21 is therefore a participatory reform. What is unique in LA21 as a participatory reform is that Chapter 28 of the Agenda was developed and authored at the supra-national level.

Because LA21 is a supra-national initiative it leaves considerable room for cross-national variation as to how, when and why the LA21 idea becomes salient. The substance of any particular 'Local Agenda 21' will be relative to the specific nature of the local community in question (its geography, demography, economics, society and culture (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998)). In this respect Chapter 28 allows for the need to cope with diversity between local authorities.

Agenda 21 gives little guidance on how local communities should proceed with a Local Agenda 21 process. Chapter 28 does not offer a universal and general step-by-step guide for community involvement and each community has to find its own most appropriate way. But the general assumption is that local authorities can deal very effectively with public involvement because 'as the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public to promote sustainable development' (para. 28.1, A21).

In this paper we make the attempt to consider LA21 as a world-wide 'natural experiment' with community participation. We consider the 4000 municipalities in the world where LA21 is under way as the experiment group. The control group of this natural experiment are all the other municipalities in the world that did not engage in the experiment till so far. The output we are interested in is the shape participation in environmental policy and sustainable development policies have become. Did embarking on the LA21-train cause a participatory reform that leads to a new participation process where the communication between local authorities and all local stakeholders goes beyond existing and traditional consultation?

This paper concentrates on the experiences in a number of Western European countries. In these countries the effects on the ground of LA21-processes are becoming visible. The general picture that we will sketch in section 5, on the basis of some typical shaping of LA21-participation in practice, is that the impact of LA21 as a participatory reform is rather limited. The main question we pose in the paper is: *How can this limited impact of LA21 as a participatory reform be explained?*

First we will define in section 2 what a Local Agenda 21 is about. In section 3 we elaborate on the shape of the ideal LA21-participation in terms of the functions participation has to fulfil, the timing of the participation in the decision process and the number and nature of participants involved. In section 4 we will shortly discuss participation limitations, known from earlier participation experiences, in relation to this 'ideal LA21-participation'.

To explain the limited success of LA21 as a participation reform and the deviations in practice of the ideal LA21-participation we focus in section 7 on political, administrative and cultural differences between countries and communities and differences between individual participants. This section builds on observations and examples from the growing empirical literature on LA21, and particularly the SUSCOM-project¹.

¹ SUSCOM is the abbreviation of a research project fully titled 'Sustainable Communities in Europe': A Cross-National Assessment of the Implementation of Agenda 21 at the Local Level of Governance. The

2. Defining a LA21

Chapter 28 is addressed to 'local authorities' as one of several 'major groups', which the Agenda singles out as particularly relevant for achieving the aims of the overall Agenda itself. It is because 'so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities', that the participation and involvement of local authorities is viewed as 'a determining factor' in fulfilling the objectives of the action plan. The second argument for the role of local authorities is their position as the level of governance closest to the people (see above)., It is within this focus, that Chapter 28 that we should read the first one of only four major 'objectives':

'By 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on 'a Local Agenda 21' for the community'.

Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 is the shortest chapter in the 40-chapter action plan. Chapter 28 is a relatively simple appeal for a new time of dialogue and co-ordinated strategy for pursuing sustainable development at the local level. Agenda 21 gives little guidance on how local communities should proceed with a Local Agenda 21 process, in a sense that Chapter 28 does not offer an universal and general step-by-step guide. Each community has to find its own most appropriate way, dealing with the specific geographic, demographic, economic, societal and cultural nature of the local community in question.

However, several international and regional organisations have played a major role in following up, and filling out, the documentary signals provided by Chapter 28. Among these in Western Europe the most important initiatives and organisations are the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), the European 'Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign', and the so-called 'Aalborg Charter'.

Given this Aalborg Charter and other initiatives the SUSCOM project (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998) reached the following concise understanding of what 'a Local Agenda 21' is all about:

- A Local Agenda 21 is a local action plan for the achievement of sustainable development. It is to be worked out through a broad consultative process between local authorities, citizens and relevant stakeholder groups, and eventually integrated with existing plans, priorities and programs.
- The 'consultation' in question is clearly meant to be a new and different process from existing protective and remedial environmental activities.
- The process has a clear strategic intent. Though the actual content of 'a Local Agenda 21' is not spelled out, there is a clear presumption of both change and instrumental rationality with respect to a realisation of the Earth-Summit goals.
- The action plan should be implemented with due provision for ongoing input, monitoring and revision underway, and it should make special efforts to engage women and youth in all phases of the implementation process.
- Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 is specifically addressed to 'Local Authorities': The responsibility of national governments is primarily facilitative with respect to the LA21 process.
- The substance of any particular 'Local Agenda 21' will be relative to the specific nature of the local community in question (its geography, demography, economics, society and culture), and it should be expected to evolve dynamically over time.

3. Defining LA21-participation

In this paper the interpretation of LA21 as a participation reform is the central issue. Chapter 28 gives a mandate to the local authorities to take responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating a dialogue among 'citizens, local organisations and private enterprises' which is necessary to determine the form and content of their specific LA21 initiative. This 'consultation' mandate given to local authorities is clearly meant to be a new and different process from existing public participation procedures. It's especially this greater effort to increase community involvement that is one of the important criteria that distinguishes LA21 from older environmental policy-making initiatives. (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1997: 6-7)

This dialogue among 'citizens, local organisations and private enterprises' determines the form and content of the specific LA21 initiative (Matthews, 1994; Morphet and Hams, 1994), but there are no general guidelines in Chapter 28, which specify how the participatory process should look like. Local agenda 21 can be regarded as a participatory process of which the set-up is essentially determined at the local level, and outcomes have predominantly a local impact.

Participation processes in general can be classified in many different ways. Clearly LA21-participation has to be seen in the perspective of the necessity of a local dialogue and co-ordinated strategy to be able to pursue sustainable development at the local level. Thinking in terms of meaningful or effective participation immediately reminds us of the concept of participation-ladders as made known by the work of authors like Arnstein (1969). It is clear that a LA21 consultation process aims high at such a ladder. However a high position is not very distinctive for characteristics of LA21-participation.

We think that an elaboration of the following three aspects of participation leads to more clarification of LA21-participation than the classification 'meaningful and effective' participation:

- the function or purpose of the participation;
- the timing of participatory processes in the policy process;
- the number and nature of participants involved.

3.1 LA21 and motives for participation

In general Agenda 21 (chapter 8) deems wide participation in the development of national and local strategies necessary. Participation is considered necessary in sustainable development decision-making given both normative and functional arguments for participation. The normative perspective in Agenda 21 builds on arguments for direct democracy stressing popular sovereignty and putting emphasis on direct involvement in substantive decision-making on the part of the wider public. A LA21 aspires to 'shared responsibility' which means a redefinition of the role of government and societal actors. The local Agenda 21 represents at least an attempt to extend the civil society at the expense of the role of the state and the role of local authorities changes from director to facilitator. There is an inherent tension here with the elitist normative perspective on participation because elitists question the abilities of the public to participate in a meaningful way.

More important than the normative arguments are the functional arguments for participation in Agenda 21, because Agenda 21 sees public participation in the first place as instrumental. All functional arguments for public participation from literature (Coenen, Huitema and O'Toole, 1998) play a part in discussions on public participation in LA21. A LA21 should offer the possibility of articulating the interests of the different stakeholders. This is in line with a first type of functional argument that without participation decisions taken will not be seen as legitimate because they will not reflect the will and values of the people.

In the second place public participation is functional because it contributes to the quality of decision making. Firstly because participation gives local government the information necessary for decision-making. We recognise this argument in the Aalborg Charter stage model. Extensive

public consultation is coupled with a systematic identification of problems and their causes and the consideration and assessment of alternative strategic options. In this way information and experiences of all sectors of the community will be involved in the process of preparation of local action plans. The Aalborg Charter also builds on the decision quality criteria of fairness that reads that all sectors of the community should have say in the decision-making process. This is not only a normative direct democracy argument but also a functional argument from the perspective of efficiency. A fair decision-making process will increase legitimacy and reduce the level of conflict.

In third place an argument for public participation in Agenda 21 is its intrinsic value for the participants. This functional argument stresses that participation is essentially about empowerment or learning democratic skills. Through participation, people will learn of the problems that society faces and how to interact with others that have different opinions or interests. This type of argument is particularly there in Agenda 21 formulated in terms of the intrinsic value of public participation has contributing to the social emancipation of certain groups, especially women and youth.

As an interactive planning reform Agenda 21 explicitly promotes a more communicative approach towards other actors in society (UNCED, 1992). It incorporates the idea that sustainable development is not possible without close co-operation with the community. To reach this communicative approach, participation in planning processes is stressed. The roots for interactive policy-making and planning can be found in the communicative approach to planning and policy-making. The communicative planning concept states that the problem with planning is not a problem of knowledge and control, as orthodox planners think; but the need for more civic consciousness, motivation, formation of political will, emancipation, and so forth. (Van Gunsteren, 1976). The intelligent and responsible participation of many people is seen as indispensable for planning. Exponents of the communicative theory in the planning literature (e.g., Healy, 1992 and 1993; Fischer and Forrester, 1993) stress this communicative aspect of the planning process. In this view, public involvement in planning aims to build consensus around appropriate actions and a sense of ownership of the goals of the plan. This is important because it means that third parties will plan their own decisions and actions to fit in with the intended government policy in the plan (Coenen, 1998b).

Table 1 Arguments and motives for LA21-participation (compare Coenen, Woltjer, Van der Peppel, forthcoming)

Normative arguments		Instrumental arguments	
For local authority	For participants	For participants	For local authority
Functioning of democracy	Emancipation particular of certain groups	Protection of stakeholder interests	Additional source of ideas and information
Creating 'shared responsibility' in and legitimacy of local sustainable development policies	Empowerment and learning about sustainable development problems society faces		Broadening of public support for sustainable development
			Reducing the level of conflict

3.2 The timing of LA21-participation

In a simple policy or planning stages model, all stages can be coupled with meaningful public participation activities. Relevant stages could be (WHO, 1999): (1) assessing needs and assets, (2) agreeing on a vision, (3) generating ideas and plans for action, (4) enabling action, and (5) monitoring and evaluating. Another well-known subdivision into stages is preparation, determination and implementation

The Aalborg charter as the representative stage-model for good LA21 practice clearly promotes participation in the early stages of the planning process. Early participation enables people to exert influence on basic goals of environmental decision making and possible alternatives. If the involvement of parties does not start in the beginning of a decision-making process, participatory decision making may easily mean obtaining partial information aimed at committing participants to predetermined decisions. When participants become active at a later stage, however, decision-making agencies most likely only allow for minor changes in the original policy measures since already a great deal of money and time has been invested (e.g., Connor, 1999).

3.4 The number and nature of participants to involve

Lafferty and Eckerberg define community involvement in LA21 in terms of bringing both average citizens and major stakeholder groups, particularly business and labour unions, into the planning and implementation process with respect to environment-and-development issues. (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1997: 6-7). LA21 is more than just citizen participation. Neither it is just stakeholder participation in municipal decision making.

To sum up, we think that LA21-participation can be best-characterised as a participation process with mixed participation functions, pursued in an early stage of decision making with broad participants involvement.

4. Potential limitations of LA21-participation

We know from earlier participation experiences that any participation process that strives for characteristics like involvement in an early stage of decision making and broad participants' involvement is confronted with certain limitations. In this section we will shortly go over these limitations.

Demands from the participants

The wish for broad participation raises the question of demands of the participants. Participation is demanding for citizens in terms of knowledge, capability, time and resources. First of all there are information requirements. To have an opinion, people need experience with the matter and need some circumstantial information. Secondly participants need a certain level of competence Particularly the capability to phrase concerns and discuss interests related to potentially abstract topics in local sustainable development. Thirdly participation is time and resource consuming (Day, 1997).

The wish to participate

The wish for broad participation, given the demands for the participants, further raises the question to what degree particular citizens actually wish to participate. In general citizens do not engage in environmental decision-making processes when they do not feel a responsibility or an acute threat. LA21 can be seen as a new step in a continuum of initiatives to involve people more in the life and well being of their communities. But LA21 makes the (environmental) political agenda broader and more comprehensive than ever before, addressing both local and global issues.

Representativeness

The wish for broad participation also relates to the problem of representativeness. Even if participants wish to participate, their capability to articulate wishes and perceptions differs highly. It might be dependent on education level, for example. Participation tends to be biased in favour of the dominant actors (e.g. experts, officials and interest groups) who have the time, energy and money necessary to participate in deliberations (Woltjer, 2000). It could well be that those who have the time and opportunities to participate are not representative for the wider population, but have more extreme opinions (Fiorino, 1990).

Type of decisions

The wish for early involvement in decision-making relates to certain types of decisions people have to participate in. Early involvement can mean that people have to participate in decisions about strategic goals, norms and values instead in concrete, operational decisions. There are several problems with participation in strategic decision making. Firstly for participants, in contrast with operational decision making, it is not clear what is at stake for them. Overall, people are inclined to become involved in decision-making issues only when they think that the issue is in their immediate interest (Sewell and Coppock, 1977). Secondly participation at the strategic level requires more knowledge and time which brings us back to the point of the time and resource constraints of ordinary citizens compared to experts, government officials and interest groups have the knowledge, time and energy to engage in participatory decision making.

Creation of expectations

The combinations of a very broad mix of participation functions in LA21-participation also could be a source of problems. If an LA21 process stresses the normative function of democracy it could raise expectations of real influence. LA21-participation is not a form of direct democracy that sets aside representative democracy. Participation should be seen as a complement instead of a replacement of 'conventional' strategies (e.g. Goldberg, 1985; Alexander, 1996; Woltjer, 2000). At the other hand participation without consequences is not very attractive for citizens.

5. The shaping of participation in LA21-processes

We turn our attention to the shape LA21 participation processes take. In practice LA21-participation processes take very different paths. Before we define some typical shaping of LA21-participation in practice, we distinguish in table 2 five forms of a local planning or LA21-process. In the elements or steps we focus on the communication between the local authority and the different stakeholders.

Table 2 Shapes of planning/LA-21 processes on the local level (compare Seip and van Vliet, 1997)

Non-participation	Traditional	Semi-open	Open	Ideal LA21
Problem/goal	Problem/goal	Problem/goal	Problem	A community's contribution to sustainable development
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Development of plan	Development of plan	Development of plan	Facilitation process	Facilitation process
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Rough plan	Rough plan	Consultation relevant actors	Stakeholders formulate problems, goals and solutions	Community formulates problems, goals and solutions
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Final plan	Public enquiry	Rough plan	Public debate	Public debate
	↓	↓	↓	↓
	Final plan	Public enquiry	Rough plan	Vision
		↓	↓	↓
		Final plan	Public enquiry	Public debate
			↓	↓
			Final plan	Rough LA21 plans
				↓
				Public consultation
				↓
				LA21

If we overlook LA21-implementation, the forms above helps us to a characterise some typical LA21- participationprocesses. Or maybe better, participation processes that are called LA21 but do not live up to the ideal model of LA21 participation.

Non participation -- In these cases what is called a LA21 is not more than an environmental plan developed within the municipal departments and without any form of serious consultation of the citizens.

Traditional consultation -- In these cases a LA21 participation process takes the shape of a traditional planning process where the participants come in when there is already a rough plan.

Semi-open LA21-process -- In a semi-open process several actors are consulted before drawing the rough plan. The problem to be discussed is part of this discussion but the local authority chooses the relevant actors. In a semi-open LA21-process early involvement is restricted to limited invited groups of citizens or organisations.

Open planning – In an open planning process the local authority does not come up with first drafts of ideas and plans. They only facilitate a communication process in which any participant that would like to co-operate in defining the problem and the goal of the policy to be made. With the definition of the problem ideas and possible solutions will be discussed. The idea is that in the open planning process participants do not react to ideas or plans from the local authority, but formulate problems and solutions themselves, which will be incorporated in the rough plan.

Real LA21-participation process – The table only shows a small difference between an open planning process and an LA21-process. In fact this is not really a difference, more a difference in accents. The main different accent is that an LA21 is not just about a problem but about the very broad problematic of the community's contribution to sustainable development. The first formulations of problems, ideas and solutions will more have the accent of a visioning process that will be discussed. Further an LA21 is an ongoing open planning process that doesn't stop after making one LA21.

Defining a real ideal LA21-participation model on the basis of the elements or steps that focus on the communication between the local authority and the different stakeholders. More characteristics would be needed to really define an ideal LA21-participation model. The participation process should not only be broad but also not dominated by a certain actor, for instance an NGO, and should fulfil different participation functions (as formulated in section 2).

It is difficult if not impossible on the basis of present empirical material to score the 4000 municipalities where LA21 is underway, on this continuum from non-participation to real LA21-participation. Maybe the road to RIO+10 will offer this possibility (compare ICLEI, 1997). If we take the basic elements of a LA21, as formulated in section 2, as a starting point only a limited number of individual municipalities live up to these ideal elements. The SUSCOM-project shows that most countries have individual local communities that stick out in an attempt to reach an ideal model such as Luleå and Gotland in Sweden, Åland in Finland, Albertslund in Denmark, Fredrikstad in Norway, Lancashire in Great Britain, and The Hague in Netherlands. These are all relatively 'holistic' cases, where strong political leadership tries to join with an ambitious and well-mobilised civil society in an attempt to achieve broad-based and politically integrated change (Coenen and Lafferty, forthcoming). What characterises these cases is the serious look they took at the notion of LA21 and their serious attempt to adjust their own patterns of planning and governance in the direction of the new ideals.

In this paper we pursue a more limited interest. A LA21 that does not meet up to some of the LA21 standards, for instance because it focuses on a limited single interest like climate or biodiversity, can still have an ideal LA21-participation process. Still we think that the conclusion is justified that many LA21-processes deviate from the ideal of open planning. What explains for these deviations?

6. Explaining the differences

In this section we try to explain for the many deviations of the 'ideal model' of LA21 as a participation process with mixed participation functions, pursued in an early stage of decision making with broad participants' involvement.

We work out these explanations on three levels:

- the level of a country
- the level of a particular local authority;
- the level of the participating actor.

6.1 National political, administrative and cultural differences

Tradition and experiences

In Northern-European countries there is a broader practice of public involvement in procedures in environmental and planning acts than in most Southern-European countries. Countries like the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and the Scandinavian countries are among these fore-running countries while in countries like France, Spain, Italy and Ireland there is a relative lack of experience with citizens participation. As a consequence in for instance in France (Larue et al., forthcoming) in LA21-processes public participation in terms of early involvement of the general public is new and experimental. The tradition of public participation limits public consultation to information processes. Partly of this experimental character French municipalities feel uncomfortable and hesitant towards early public involvement. They rather wait to face the public debate till plans have been formulated internally. And secondly there is a lack of capacity both in terms of means as in terms of knowledge. In Spain public participation has only recently been included in the political agenda. The first municipal elections date back to 1979 as an inheritance of the Franco-era (Font, Gomila, Subirats, forthcoming).

Experience with existing participation procedures can be positive or negative. Negative experiences in urban planning, like with urban planning (Stadtentwicklungplanung, STEP) in Germany (Lustig and Weiland, 1998) or traditional statutory planning consultation process in the UK, have frustrated many planners and made them hesitant towards participation. In contrast if a country is advanced in public participation the problem can arise that LA21 is not seen as something new and worthwhile. The interpretation of LA21 in the Netherlands has to be placed within the typical Dutch interpretation of communicative planning and the interactive planning approach. A main feature of Dutch society is its high consensus-based social structure and a long-standing tradition of government consultation with various social groups. This is expressed in environmental policy making through the well know Dutch target group approach. The philosophy that environmental problems are best solved through consultations with the polluters, the target groups, have already been developed in the Netherlands in the eighties. This philosophy fits very well in this main feature of Dutch society as a highly consensus-based social structure with a long-standing tradition of government consultation with various social groups. A specific development in local democracy, the so-called 'political renewal', is particular relevant for LA21. The key motives for the so-called political renewal ('bestuurlijke vernieuwing') were the low local election turn-out in combination with the disinterest of the voters with municipal politics. In the Netherlands LA21 was relabelled as another form of political renewal or target-group policy instead as a appeal from Agenda 21 (Coenen, 1999). Experiences and tradition in Northern European countries is broader than just having consultation procedures in environmental policy and physical planning. It has to do with democratic tradition and political culture. As we have mentioned in the Netherlands there is a strong tradition in consensus-democracy where LA21 could build on. And for instance in the Danish political culture there is a strong tradition in consensus seeking approaches and a tradition in 'people's enlightenment' (Holm and Mabui, 1999).

National LA21 implementation

The way that LA21 is facilitated and stimulated by the national government level can also influence the shape of local participation. In the Netherlands LA21 was stimulated through a system of earmarked funding. The municipalities that choose to start a LA21-proces could receive funding under certain conditions. These conditions were set under guidance of the (national) Environmental Inspectorate, who had to control if municipalities were delivering value for money. The emphasis in this guidance was on concrete projects instead of strategic plans. As a consequence LA21-participation took the shape of citizen participation in activity-agendas, programs of very concrete projects (Coenen, 1999). In contrast for instance in the UK through the lack of guidance and resources many LA21 processes produced community visions that were in itself useful and inspiring but were not very likely to be funded or implemented.

Autonomy of local authorities

The position of local authorities differs widely in their constitution position (Hesse and Sharp, 1991), their position in planning (EU, 1997) and urban environmental policy (EU, 1993). In Ireland the constitutional position of local authorities is very weak. In Ireland because of this relative lack of experiences, as result of the heavily dependent relationship with national government and the overload of recent local government innovations, the challenge of community consultation is seen as a barrier rather than as an opportunity for LA21 implementation (Mullaly, forthcoming). In the UK during the Thatcher and Major conservative governments the autonomy of local authorities was so weakened that many of them saw LA21 as an opportunity for real autonomous policy.

6.2 Local political, administrative and cultural differences

Role of the local authority

An LA21-proces expects a new role from local government. They should facilitate and co-ordinate the consultation processes. But municipalities are used to play a dominant role in local environmental policy. In LA21 processes the municipality has to play a role as facilitator and partner in an open dialogue. Both the municipalities and the stakeholders have problems with getting used to the new role municipalities have to play in an LA21 processes. A bottom-up LA21 process depends very much upon the quality and power of the other actors involved. NGOs and other actors need to be well organised to play a role in Local Agenda 21, while municipalities find it difficult to find equal and relevant partners for the dialogue (Coenen, 1998a).

Some local authorities take a paternalistic approach in LA21 (Coenen and Lafferty, forthcoming). They fear regressive input with respect to the environment-and-development agenda because there is no guarantee that either increased citizen or stakeholder control will automatically result in greater sustainable development. For instance Dutch LA21 practice shows that major discussed themes in Dutch LA21's are on 'here and now' and liveability instead of 'there and than' and sustainability (Coenen, 1999).

The local authority is also very influential on the representativeness of the participation because they can decide about the actors to involve in the process. For instance in France LA21 steering committees bring together representatives of central government, local authorities, associations and experts while inhabitants are not directly associated or represented in those committees (Di Pietro and LaRue, forthcoming). In Spain public participation is often limited to organisations explicitly invited by the municipality (Font, Gomila, Subirats, forthcoming).

Local authorities can also influence representativeness through the way the participation process creates demands for the participants, in terms of time efforts and issues to be discussed.

Characteristics of the municipality

The pioneering LA21-municipalities, although they have very different roots and motives, seem to have some major similar characteristics. The following factors seem to be most advantageous for LA21-initiatives in general (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998, Lafferty, Coenen and Eckerberg, 1999).

- an active and politically mobilised population;
- interested and motivated civil servants;
- interested local politicians;

- positive international contacts and networks;
- existing environment-and-development initiatives.

One could presume that these factors are also advantageous for the LA21-participation process.

6.3 Factors influencing participation by actors

Willingness to participate

We already referred to the ideal LA21-participation as aiming high at the participation ladder. There is another type of participation ladder of great importance for the interpretation of public participation in LA21. While the Arnstein type of ladder concentrates on performance constraints on public involvement there is a second relevant type of ladder that starts from the perspective of individuals aspiring to participate in LA21 activities. These second type of ladders are concerned with hierarchies of political involvement, ranking from less to more political involvement. For instance Milbrath (1965) made an analogy with gladiators spectacles in the classic era. Translated to the LA21 we would find lowest on the ladder participants who are apathetic. Their political role is passive and they have a general disinterest in local sustainable development and policies. Higher on the ladder we find a group that is minimally involved in the LA21 process. They constrain themselves to information seeking and discussing. In the analogy they are the spectators. Highest on the ladder we find the gladiators who really battle in the LA21 process by attending meeting, campaigning and fundraising. Political opportunity literature shows that this last groups is by far the smallest and that the roles participants take are relatively stable (f.i. Almond and Verba, 1965)

In LA21-processes we could see gladiators either as individuals or as a groups or NGOs. That a large part of the population in LA21 municipalities can be categorised as apathetic is a problem in LA21 implementation. For instance in the documented Finnish cases a common problem were passive citizens. In the Finnish interviews and questionnaires the level of citizen participation is generally experienced a being low and limited to a elite group used to participate in societal activities. Politicians doubt if citizens really want to participate (Niemi-Ililahti, forthcoming). An indicator for the distribution among the apathetic, the spectators and the gladiators is the answer to the question how many people know about LA21 in there community? For instance in the Austrian Graz-case after five year of work, European awards and becoming a well-known case all over Europe the general information in the Graz population about it's goals and measures remains catchy (Narodoslawsky and Grabner, forthcoming). In contrast in Sweden both grassroots activities and local politicians involvement have been high and unchanged in the last years while education on Agenda 21 is frequent and therefore concepts are wide spread (Eckerberg and Forsberg, 1998, Eckerberg, forthcoming).

Representativeness of the participation

The level of citizens' involvement raises also the question of participants' representativeness. In Public involvement seldom represents a genuine cross-section of the community. In the UK a specific area of concern are minorities, the poor, youth and aged. In other countries it's the lack of business involvement or the overrepresentation of environmental NGO's that is an issue. In Finland it is the limitation to a elite group used to participate in societal activities (Niemi-Ililahti, forthcoming). This raises the issue of the tension between participatory and representative democracy. A typical critique from the representative local politicians is that the 'gladiators' in LA21 processes come from narrow, unrepresentative groups.

In the UK LA21-processes did NGOs of all studied SUSCOM-countries dominate probably the most. A high level of NGO involvement raises the question of whom NGOs represent. Some talk about 'green ghetto' participation, the dominance of existing environmental NGOs in LA21-participation (Young, 1997). In the UK we also find relatively many 'external forum' LA21s. In these LA21s the LA21 takes over the process. The 'LA21 forum' becomes meeting place for drawing up alternative plans and policies based on anti-establishment (i.e. anti-Council) attitudes among local activists and NGOs. The mode builds on an interpretation of LA21 as an inherent

'grass-roots' idea; a vehicle for mobilising local populations against party politics, local bureaucrats and 'Big Business' (Coenen and Lafferty, forthcoming).

Public involvement

Why do or don't want people to get involved in LA21?

A characteristic of many pioneering municipalities seems to be an active and politically mobilised population. For instance the well-known the Danish pioneer Albertslund has the special preconditions that Albertslund since the 70's attracted a particular kind of residents of whom a good part happens to be environmental conscious, which would explain for more 'gladiators' in Albertslund. In contrast if we look to the overall picture in Denmark the 1998 green NGO Naturfredningsforening survey shows that over 50% of active LA21 municipalities initiated LA21 activities without public consultation.

The reason that people get involved is probably related with the discussed themes in LA21. As we have seen in the Netherlands a major discussions in LA21 is if LA21 should be on the 'here and now' and attract citizens in discussions on liveability or should be on the 'there and then' and also discuss global and future problems. In the LA21s related to the Norwegian Sustainable lifestyle a relation with non-controversial and positive themes and the potential level of conflict is shown (Aal, forthcoming). In the UK many municipalities try to avoid the more difficult or innovative areas of sustainability (Curch and Young, forthcoming). The other side to this coin is that participants want real influence. Involvement will go down if LA21 proposals don't find their way in land-use plans and budgets and community visions will not be implemented in any way.

Another reason not to participate is the capacity needed from the participant in knowledge and time. To participate in the early stages of the planning process means that more is needed than a single response to a draft plan. Constructively commenting on proposals already asks for a variety of 'skills', formulating alternatives and counter arguments even more. The actual number of participants is rather limited. Even in a well-known case like Ten Hague with an extensive participation process only 400 citizens participated (Andringa, 1998)

Finally a reason to get involved could lie in the participants role in the community.

In sustainable communities literature (Ward, 1998) it is often argued that geographically-communities with citizens participating directly in decision making should be a key for sustainable development because their members share common interests and identities. Sharing common interest and identity has to do with community size and historical roots. In many of the studied countries bigger municipalities took the lead in LA21 implementation. This has probably to do with implementation capacity. In the Austrian study LA21-pioneering communities are comparatively big and urban, while in general many Austrian communities are relatively small (Narodoslawsky and Grabner, forthcoming). In France some of the prominent pioneers are suburbs of bigger cities where one would expect a lack of historical community roots. (LaRue et.al. , forthcoming). In Finland it was noted that in the Finnish cases due to the large size of urban communities inhabitants are unfamiliar with each other and lack of commitment to the community (Niemi-Illilahti, forthcoming). In Spain especially in the so-called DEYNA-initiative, the smallness of the municipalities is said to make participation easier (Font, Gomila, Subirats, forthcoming).

7. Conclusion

In this paper we formulated some characteristics of an ideal LA21-participation processes. Theoretically LA21-processes are supposed to be highly meaningful participation processes. This means broad participation, early involvement in decision-making and a mix of participation functions.

We defined a real ideal LA21-participation model on the basis of the elements or steps that focus on the communication between the local authority and the different stakeholders. The analysis show that a focus on these elements could mean that an LA21-process is dominated by a certain actors or only fulfils a certain participation function, for instance support raising. In practice LA21-

processes can lead to a range of participative practices from an open planning type of process to non-participation or empty rituals

In our overview of LA21-implementation we recognise many of the known *limitations* as we shortly described in section 3;

- representativeness of the participants is a problem, LA21-process run the risk of being dominated by green NGO's and activists;
- the type of policy process, thinking about the sustainable development agenda of one's own community, is demanding for participants;
- LA21 suggests a form of neo direct democracy, while in fact LA21 as every other form of open planning is supplementary for representative democracy

LA21-participation practices are on the other hand also an illustration of administrative, political and cultural differences that influence the shape participation processes take. Some of these factors that influence the shape LA21-participation takes can not easily be manipulated, like the weak constitutional position of a local authority in certain countries. Many factors however seem to be linked with tradition in and experiences with participation. These factors suggest that countries and local authorities still have to grow towards new forms of participation. Maybe it's even the state were participative practices are in, present in a certain country or local authority. This could mean that we maybe should look on this as different stages of participative practices countries or local authorities are in, and that these might match or might not yet match with real LA21-participation. For these countries and local authorities it would be a process of learning to really participate.

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