

Participation Process according to Directive 2002/49/EC

Margit Bonacker

konsalt Gesellschaft für Stadt- und Regionalanalysen und Projektentwicklung mbH, D-22761 Hamburg, Luruper Chaussee 125, Germany
bonacker@konsalt.de

In Article 9, the Environmental Noise Directive demands the information about the given situation concerning noise. Also, according to Article 8, the public has to be given the opportunity to participate on the establishing of action plans against noise and to review the proposed measures. The comments and proposals given by the public have to be taken into consideration in the course of action planning. These demands lead to a number of questions, such as which media are best suited to inform the public? In which way the information should be presented, as the END also demands clear and understandable information? Who is responsible for the process of information and participation and how can this process be organized? First experiences show that participation of the public helps to include local knowledge and new ideas into the process of action planning.

1 Introduction

In Article 9, the Environmental Noise Directive demands the information of the public about the given situation concerning noise. Above that, according to Article 8, the public has to be given the opportunity to participate in the establishing of action plans against noise and to review the proposed measures. The comments and proposals given by the public have to be taken into consideration in the course of action planning. First experiences in the city of Norderstedt in Germany show that participation of the public helps to include local knowledge and new ideas into the process of action planning.

2 Demands of the Environmental Noise Directive

In Article 9, the Environmental Noise Directive demands that the Member States shall insure that strategic noise maps and action plans are made available and disseminated to the public. The information has to be “clear, comprehensible and accessible”. Above that, according to Article 8, the public has to be consulted about proposals for action plans and given “early and effective opportunity to participate in the preparation and review of the action plans. The comments made by the public have to be taken into consideration.

For the communities when starting on action planning,, these demands of the END lead to a number of questions:

- Which media are best suited to inform the public (accessability)?
- In which way the information should be presented (clear and understandable information)?

- Who is responsible for the information and participation of the public in a community and how can this process be organized?

2.1 Definition of "public"

The END defines “public” as the following “One or more natural persons” and “organisations, associations or groups of these persons”. These might include traffic organisations, fire brigades, Chambers of commerce or other non-governmental organisations (NGO’s) who can be important partners in drawing up action plans. Also politicians who decide on money and the mass media are important parts of the public and thus should be involved in the process of information and communication.

2.2 Information of the public

For the information of the public, the END points out to the Directive on the freedom of access to information on the environment and to available information technologies. Considering that in Europe only about half of the population uses the internet (for instance Germany 55%, France 48%, Spain 40%), there have to be other information channels beside the internet as the newspapers, television or special brochures and booklets to inform the public.

2.3 Participation of the public

While the information of the public is comparably easy to manage, the participation of the public in the preparation and review of the action plans is much more complicated. Each member state can decide how to manage participation individually. For instance in Latvia’s national guideline local governments of the agglomeration shall ensure that a meeting for public discussion of a draft action plan for the agglomeration

takes place in premises accessible to the public, as well as shall prepare the necessary informative materials and copies of documents, chair the meeting, ensure the taking of minutes and compile the results. Any person is entitled to participate in a meeting and express proposals. In other national guidelines, for instance the German national guideline, the communities generally are responsible for drawing up action plans, but there are no definite regulations concerning participation included. Thus it depends on the size of the community and on the decision of the responsible authorities to what extent participation of the public will be provided in the process of action planning.

2.4 How to organize participation

Participation in the elaboration of the action plan can be made possible by using public assemblies, workshops, Round Tables, Questionnaires, E-Participation through the internet. For the whole process, an experienced project management and communication with all groups and persons involved is necessary.



Figure 1: Public event in the course of action planning

2.5 A practical example: the City of Norderstedt

The city of Norderstedt has a population of about 75.000 inhabitants. The city belongs to the agglomeration of Hamburg with 1.7 Mio inhabitants in Northern Germany. Although Hamburg had not started action planning, Norderstedt's politicians decided to draw up an action plan including participation of the public. The process started in April 2004 by informing the public through a specially produced booklet / brochure about the noise situation in Norderstedt and the number of people inflicted by environmental noise. This brochure was announced in the newspapers and by the local TV-station. More than 1.800 people showed special interest and ordered the brochure by telephone, postcard or picked it up at the City Hall or other public spaces.

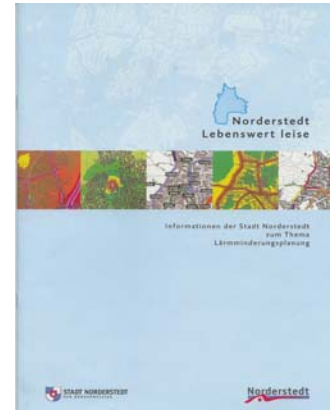


Figure 2: Brochure to inform the public

For the process of action planning a special corporate design had been developed by a professional designer. This design was used on written documents, on posters, on flyers and it helped in a very positive way as a sign of recognition. The next step taken by the administration was to find external communication experts to organize the process of participation. This task was given to konsalt GmbH in Hamburg, who had broad experiences in organizing and moderating participation in other urban planning processes.

A first public event was initialized in June 2004 and took place in the City Hall of Norderstedt. This event had been announced in the newspapers, in the local TV station and in the internet. About 150 persons from all ages and groups attended, many more people showed their interest by asking for written information. At the beginning of the event, which was opened by an official of the city and organised and moderated by konsalt, noise expert Christian Popp (Lärmkontor) and traffic planner Jochen Richard (PRR) informed about the basic noise issues and problems connected to environmental noise in Norderstedt.

At the end of this meeting, four working groups were established: (1) Public traffic and bicycle riding (2) Street traffic and life quality, (3) Noise mitigation in residential areas and (4) Protection of quiet areas (according to the END). These working groups met in the following time once a month to develop an analysis of the situation and to give proposals for action planning. Each group was organised and moderated by an expert of konsalt. The special aims of the four working groups was to point out to special local issues and problems which might not be noticed by professional experts and to give proposals with respect to noise action planning. Whenever special questions or problems occurred, experts were asked to attend the

meeting of the working group. For instance, a traffic expert of the city of Kiel was invited to talk about the experiences with improving bicycle traffic. Other subjects were the controlling of speed limits by the police or safety aspects. The members of the working groups who were all citizens with no experiences in planning or urban politics thus learned about complex planning and decision processes in their city. The discussions in the working groups thus helped to improve understanding of how urban planning functions and how decisions are being taken. The age of the members ranged from about 20 years up to the oldest member who was 78 years old. On the average more older people than younger ones were involved. Slightly more men than women participated.



Figure 3: “Quiet areas” in Norderstedt defined as a result of the working groups

Running parallel to this work, traffic data were gathered and noise maps were prepared by the noise experts of Lärmkontor. These noise maps were presented to the public in a second public event which took place seven months later, in January 2005. During this meeting, the working groups presented the results of their discussions and their proposals for the action plan. One difficulty throughout the process relates to the acoustical effects of the measures proposed. There was always some scepticism by some participants as to what extend the action plan would really be suited to improve the acoustical situation. To find further partners for the support of the process of action planning, the administration invited additionally local stake holders to a special presentation and discussion in the City Hall: private housing associations, traffic

associations, and representatives of the local economy. Special interest was shown by the private housing associations who intend to improve the quality of their housings by reducing noise from cars and other noise sources.



Figure 4: The process of participation

One year after the beginning of the process, the draft of the action plan has been discussed with the working groups. They have given their opinions to it and now the administration has to proofread the action plan. This phase takes longer time than assumed at the beginning of the process since traffic planners and environmental experts have to agree on the same measures. Experience now shows that organizing the information and participating process with the public has to be accompanied by a parallel communication process inside the administration. The final action plan then has to be presented to the political boards and their decisions shall be communicated to the public again.

2.6 Communication framework in the course of action planning

As communication between different stakeholders has turned out to be a very important factor in the realization of noise mitigation and action planning,, the following dimensions of communication have to be taken into consideration when starting action planning:

- Communication with the public / population of urban agglomerations and regions.
- Communication with NGO's as important opinion leaders

- Communication with decision-takers / politicians since they are the ones who decide finally about measures to be taken (and money)
- Communication inside the administration between urban planners, traffic planners and environmental planners since they have to find a compromise between different professional points of view.(

To organize the process of information and communication, additional resources in money, time and experts are needed. Professional moderation and steering of the process between the many different persons and institutions involved is advisable.

3 Summary

As a conclusion, the participation process in Norderstedt has helped to improve transparency of urban planning and administrative action, it has resulted in a higher acceptance of urban planning and political conditions. For the action planner and for the city of Norderstedt the participation of the public helped to give an insight of problems. The results of the working group on quiet areas especially helped the administration in its efforts to improve the urban quality of living and leisure.. The experiences of Norderstedt show that participation of the public helps to include local knowledge and new ideas into the process of action planning. Also understanding and acceptance of urban planning improves to a large extend. At the same time, the communication process has to involve noise experts, traffic planners and urban planners inside the administration as well, since they have to accept the proposed measures. The same is true for the politicians who decide about the money to finance action planning. They have to be integrated in the course of action planning from the very beginning, too. The whole process of drawing up the action plan thus needs careful planning and steering from the very beginning and between all involved persons and institutions.

References

Bonacker, Margit: Information and Public Participation in Developing Action Plans: Legal Framework and Practical Experience. Presentation held in Cracov, December 2004.

Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise.

konsalt: The communication process in the course of action planning in the City of Norderstedt. Final report. 2005 (in preparation)