LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

LESSONS FROM IRELAND

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[1]The purpose of this report is to provide a guide to citizen participation in local government and governance in Ireland as an aid to fostering best practice in local development. The remit of the local government system in Ireland is to deliver a range of services to the community that it serves, through a democratic system of locally elected councillors. However it is increasingly recognised that development is a multi-dimensional process incorporating quality of life objectives, which can only be successfully delivered through direct participative governance and cross-sectoral partnerships. The guide will discuss citizen participation in local government and governance in Ireland through the use of case studies and examples, set within the context of an understanding of the concept of participation.

THE VALUE AND PURPOSE OF PARTICIPATION

The issue of participation, or the lack of it, has found its way on to national and international agendas. In many parts of the world, interest in research and development into participatory development approaches is increasing. It is now accepted that citizen participation in local development is the key to the equality, inclusiveness and sustainability of development.

DEFINING PARTICIPATION

It is impossible to establish a universal definition of participation. An understanding of the concept is often assumed; in practice, development actions are often based on differing perceptions of participation and different perceptions of the level and quality of participation being sought, partly because of the lack of experience of effective participation practice.

The literature gives a series of definitions of participation ranging from "token involvement of people", to, "autonomous decision making by popular organizations at local level" At its most basic, participation is "to take part" - this is very simplistic and implies that everyone is participating at some level in every action. If we are to understand participation we need to explore beyond "taking part" and look to other commentators who have explored the extent and nature to which people "take part".

Platt (1996) refers to the three types of participation of local communities and individuals. These are:

- Physical participation - being present, using one's skills and efforts;

- Mental participation - conceptualising the activity, decision-making, organization and management;

- Emotional participation - assuming responsibility, power and authority

Participation can be top-down or bottom- up, uniform or diverse, simple or complex, static or dynamic, controllable or uncontrollable, predictable or unpredictable. By introducing professionals, controls, bureaucracy and systems, participation can loose its spontaneity, its flexibility and its

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usefulness. An accurate definition of participation needs to accommodate the complexity inherent in participation and the power relationships that enable or hinder participation. Reversing power is the key to participation. "Putting people first in development projects is not just about organizing people but it means empowering them to be social actors rather than passive subjects and take control over the activities that affect their lives." (Cernea 1985).

Participation is generally considered a core value in community development. While community development has for a long time been recognized as a beneficial process, the importance of participation within community development has been inadequately stressed. This is partly due to the lack of a clear interpretation of development, and, therefore, of the key constituents of effective development. The need for a new paradigm to address this deficiency was highlighted by the UNDP in its *Human Development Report*, 1994. The UNDP's paradigm:

> "Puts people at the centre of development;
> Regards economic growth as a means and not an end;
> Protects the life opportunities of future generations as well as the present generations".

The "Third Sector" has been referred to as the innovator of participatory research and development. Third World development approaches have long recognised the centrality of participation not only as a development strategy but also as a development objective. However, in our "developed" societies we have not accepted the importance of participation to the same extent until now. According to one expert in the field of community development, "There is a fundamental redefinition occurring in Irish society…a new vision for the future…happening at the fringes of Irish society rather than at it's centre…at the bottom rather than at the top…more likely to be found in community groups rather than in universities; amongst women than amongst men and amongst voluntary groups rather than in state bodies" (Collins quoted in Reynolds and Healy, 1993, p 103).

This shift is being pushed by the empowerment of citizens through local development initiatives, the general increase in awareness and the growth in community based approaches to development which reflects the failure of 'conventional services' to solve problems. The work undertaken in local development in Ireland has provided a laboratory to experiment with varying processes of participation. However, little, if any, critically reflective energy has up to now been invested in identifying the models of good practice. As Ireland moves rapidly into post modernism with the introduction of new "integrated and inclusive" structures for local development planning and management, we may see the dawn of a new highly participative society.

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report will present an overview of local government and governance in Ireland with an emphasis on citizen participation and models of good practice. Local Government structures together with mechanisms for participation are outlined in Section 2. The local authority system provides a framework for delivery of a range of services ranging from housing through to waste management. The emergence of local development structures outside of the local government system, summarised in Section 3, has illustrated the necessity for direct citizen engagement in the development process. Central government has responded to the challenge with a reform of local government designed to enhance participatory democracy (Section 4) and by supporting area-based local development programmes (Section 5). In addition a number of local authorities have become pro-actively involved in championing local initiatives that are primarily process oriented. Some examples are included in Section 5. Lessons learned are explored in Section 6.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES

The Local Government system in Ireland includes the local authorities and the regional authorities. The elected local authorities are the county councils (29), the five county borough corporations (representing the larger urban centres), five borough corporations, urban district councils (49) and boards of town commissioners (30). The members of these authorities are elected by a system of proportional representation, with elections taking place every five years. Each constituency is sub-divided into a number of local areas from within which candidates are elected to sit on the council. The membership of county councils and county boroughs ranges from fifteen to fifty-two. Borough councils have 12 members and urban district councils and boards of town commissioners have nine members. The county councils and county boroughs are the principal agents of public administration with a lesser range of functions coming within the ambit of the other bodies. Town Commissioners have a more limited range of functions than the other authorities.

The principal services provided by the local authorities comprise:

- Housing and building

- Road transportation and safety

- Water supply and sewerage

- Development incentives and controls including planning

- Environmental protection

- Recreation and amenities

- Agriculture, education, health and welfare

- Miscellaneous services

Compared to other European states, the Irish local government system is relatively weak with a more limited range of functions and powers. Local authorities have no role in policing, public transport or personal social services. Powers in respect of education, health and agriculture have been severely constrained (Local authorities administer higher education grants; county vocational education committees do not come within the city and county management system). The only social function is in respect of housing.

THE ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS

The functions of local authorities are divided into executive and reserved functions. The reserved functions are performed directly by the elected members and comprise major matters of policy and principle. Such functions include the adoption of annual estimates, borrowing of money; the making of development plans; making, amending or revoking bye-laws; bringing enactment into force and

nominating persons to act on other public bodies. Any function that is not a reserved function is the responsibility of the executive. The policy role of the elected members has not been fully realised, partly due to the lack of adequate support systems.

THE CITIZEN AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

Structures for participation in local government are in a state of flux in Ireland with the recent establishment of Strategic Policy Committees and County Development Boards. These structures are examined in more detail in Section 3 below. In addition, in recent years local authorities have been involved in an increasing number of initiatives involving citizen participation in the delivery of services (see Section 4). Historically, apart from representation through the democratic process, citizens have participated directly in local government through a limited number of committees and through the planning process.

CITIZENS AND PLANNING

Planning is a significant function of the local authority. Day-to-day planning decisions on individual planning applications are an executive function while the adoption of Development Plans is a reserved function.

Under current legislation and structures a draft Development Plan is prepared by the Council Executive and is put before the Elected Members. The Draft is adopted and put on public display for three months, prior to its final ratification [2] by the Council. Opportunity for public participation is largely limited to reaction to the draft Plan. Such involvement may be termed passive consultation. The terms of a new Planning Act (2000) enhance the scope and range of participation for citizens in the planning process. There is now a statutory obligation on the Planning Authority to advertise its intention to prepare a draft plan and to invite comments and submissions.

Individuals or community groups or organisations also have a right to make submissions on planning applications. Under the new Planning Act (2000), the manager is required to take into account any objections lodged on planning applications whereas previously they may or may not have been taken into account by the planning authority.

Despite the limitations inherent in the current system there are some examples where citizen participation has extended beyond the scope of the regulatory framework thus pointing to opportunities for developing models of good practice for active involvement in the planning process.

CASE STUDY

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL AREA PLANNING IN COUNTY CLARE

Overview
Ballinruan/Crusheen are two townlands five miles from the county town (Ennis) in the Mid-Western coastal county of Clare, in the West of Ireland. These rural based townlands have just

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[2] There are related procedures if the Draft Plan is materially altered as a result of amendments resulting from the public display.

fewer than 400 houses. The townlands are characterised by pockets of high population growth and pockets of severe rural disadvantage. There are closed houses and a significant number of houses with single elderly occupants. The local economy is strongly supported by an active working population who travel out of the area for work in Ennis or further afield.

The local development council became very concerned that the rural setting of these townlands would be radically altered by the spill-over of housing from Ennis. They feared, from the experience of many other rural communities on the outskirts of fast developing urban centres, that permissions for housing development would be granted without consultation.

Because of the concerns of the local group, these townlands were selected as pilot areas for a Clare LEADER (RRD) initiative called the Local Development Planning Programme. The objectives of the programme were:
- To engage maximum participation of the community in the drawing up of the plan
- To provide relevant training to build the capacity of the community in the formulation and implementation of the plan

This programme is an innovative and comprehensive approach to the assessment of needs by communities in rural areas. In 1997 the parish of Crusheen/Ballinruan together with Rural Resource Development (RRD) and Clare County Council came together to formulate a local development plan for the two townlands. The participatory planning process that emerged was very innovative in the context of local development and is a model of good practice on positive citizen participation.

Process
Following initial meetings the partners in this process proposed to use the 'house meeting'[3] model as a way of jointly assessing needs. The committee planned the process, prepared work sheets, called a briefing evening for house meeting hosts and leaders, oversaw the carrying out of the process and then through a workshop assembled the feedback into a booklet. Sixteen house meetings were held with almost one hundred and fifty people attending. A wide range of occupations and ages were represented. The feedback from the house meetings was very positive mainly because they were friendly and informal. There were high levels of participation. People met as neighbours and friends to discuss the issues that concerned them and expressed a wish to do so again. At a second round of house meetings, nominations were taken for at Steering Committee, made up of stakeholders in the local planning process, to oversee the planning process and to take responsibility for the many aspects of it. This Group, including the volunteer local development grouping, met to agree collaborative actions for more effective partnership in meeting needs and improved the quality of life in those rural communities. Thirty-four people became actively involved in the process. This planning forum met regularly with active participation to develop a local development plan to meet local needs.

In the following months, a vision statement and objectives were prepared and the professional planner was engaged to assist with the process. This involved formulating and devising a questionnaire to gather information from the people of the community which, following analysis, would identify the options for project and programme development in the local area. The next stage of the process is underway, at present, to prioritise options from the analysis and it is expected that the draft plan will be available to the general community, for consideration in the near future. During the process, the community was consistently kept informed of progress. This

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[3] This model builds on the concept of *house stations* in the west of Ireland.

was an important factor in ensuring almost 87% response from all households through a completed questionnaire.

Outcomes

The house meeting consultative process and the planning forum is deemed to be a very good model of local participation and partnership in planning local development. The planning forum, which continues to meet, is a very open process of two-way information exchange of information from Clare County Council and the local areas. A high level of trust has developed with recognition of the openness and flexibility of Clare County Council planning officials. As the process is ongoing, the outcomes in terms of more acceptable decisions, more effective service delivery and more sustainable local development structures have yet to be proven.

An integral component of the Local Development Planning process was the introduction of the capacity building programme **Training for Transformation.** It has made the difference in building the capacity of community by recognizing their own knowledge and experience and by empowering participants to take action on matters relating to community life.

The process is being replicated in the adjoining parish of Feakle and a similar process is underway. The experience of the pilot project in Crusheen/Ballinruan was of huge benefit to all of the partners involved, in this latest initiative, and while some changes have been made to the original process, the overall model and objectives have been adhered to. The entire process has taken more than two years to complete, with huge commitment from both communities.

The Local Development Planning model brings the term "partnership" into a new dimension, which allows for participation, consultation and transformation.

Source: A Review of Rural Resource Development Ltd. And LEADER II in Clare 1999

3. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of area based local development structures outside of the local authority system has taken place in the context of a growing realisation globally, nationally and locally that to be sustainable, development should bring about not only an improvement in social and physical conditions but it must also contribute to an improvement in the capacity of people and communities to control and sustain those conditions.

The limitations of both central and local government systems together with the perceived failure of the statutory agencies to address persistent problems of urban unemployment and disadvantage and of rural deprivation, led to the first pilot area-based local development initiatives in the 1980's. EU funding mechanisms under the Structural Funds provided the opportunity for further expansion of such initiatives during the period of the first Community Support Framework (CSF) for Ireland, 1989-1993. Sixteen area-based partnerships were established on a pilot basis to tackle long-term unemployment with the support of a global grant administered through ADM (Area Development Management). County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) were established on a pilot basis to promote and support micro-enterprises. In addition under the LEADER 1 Community Initiative, 16 LEADER groups were established in selected areas of the country to promote an area-based approach to rural development. The LEADER II Community initiative covering the period 1994-1999 provided funding for groups on a countrywide basis.

Under the terms of the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development 1994-1999, further funding was made available to deliver integrated programmes on (i) Local Enterprise delivered through the mechanism of the County Enterprise Boards on a countrywide basis, (ii) Integrated development of designated disadvantaged and other areas to be delivered largely through the Area Partnerships, and (iii) urban and village renewal. These measures were to complement the funding made available through LEADER II. The objective of the Operational Programme was to bring about social and economic development at local level, to involve and to enable local communities to be involved in that development in a formal way and to achieve physical improvements to the environment (OPLURD 1994-1999).

The programme recognised the role which local initiatives can play as a catalyst for local economic, social and environmental development and the importance of locally based measures to complement the national approach. For example, the role of the County Enterprise Boards is to develop indigenous potential and stimulate economic activity at local level, through the provision of financial assistance and technical support for the development of micro enterprises undertaken by individuals, firms and community groups and support the creation of an enterprise partnership at local level between the social partners, financial institutions and local communities that had not been achieved at local government or statutory levels.

PARTNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Significantly the Operational Programme acknowledged the particular importance of direct

participation in the planning and implementation of local initiatives. Participation is achieved through the partnership structures, which are a particular feature of all of these boards (CEBs, Partnership companies and also LEADER groups). The Boards include representatives from a multiplicity of sectors and social partner organisations including state agencies, local authorities, employers' organisations, trade unions, farming organisations as well as voluntary and community based organisations. The availability of resources for small-scale local projects that both support local entrepreneurs and fund activities which contribute to an improvement in the quality of life, enhance the capability of communities to participate in the process.

AREA PARTNERSHIPS

Following the initial operation of 12 pilot partnership companies in the early 1990's, the concept was expanded during the 1994-1999 period with the establishment of 38 Area-based Partnerships. The brief of the partnership companies was to work with the long-term unemployed and socially excluded, i.e. those most marginalized from economic and social life.

CASE-STUDY

SOUTHSIDE PARTNERSHIP: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Southside Partnership is one of 38 area-based partnerships throughout Ireland, and one of 11 in Dublin, supported by Area Development Management and the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development (part of the Irish Government's Community Support Framework 1994-1999) under the Social Inclusion measure. The Board consists of 22 Directors, four representing the Social Partners, nine representing the community sector, six representing state agencies and three representing the local authorities.

The company consists of a number of committees and working groups including the Operating Group, a sub-committee of the Board, Local Employment Services Management Committee, Expanding Economic Opportunities Network and the Education Working Group.

Southside Partnerships Equality Statement states that it "is committed to working towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion through the achievement of equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all people who live in the Southside Partnership's designated areas. Southside Partnership's work is informed by a human rights philosophy".

The goal of Southside Partnership is to tackle poverty and exclusion in pocket communities in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and South Dublin County Council areas. Its target groups and communities experience extreme poverty, often characterised by economic deprivation which carries on from one generation to the next, high levels of welfare dependency, educational under-achievement, poor quality environment and housing, inadequate service provision and problems of vandalism, drug misuse and crime. While the various target groups such as the long-term unemployed, Travellers, lone parents and people with disabilities have differing characteristics and problems, they share the common experience of being marginalised from society, having little control over the decisions and policies that shape their lives.

The work of the Partnership, therefore, is rooted in a community development perspective that seeks to empower marginalised groups to take control of the decisions affecting their lives. Citizen participation is central to all aspects of its work and is achieved in the following ways:

Consultation: An extensive consultation process was undertaken for the Partnership's six-year strategic plan 'United Vision 2000-2006', involving over 1000 people in developing a vision for the future of their communities. Target groups were involved in the design and hosting of the consultation and innovative and creative methods were used to maximise participation. Draft plans were devised on the basis of people's input and then fed back to the community for final agreement, thus ensuring consensus on the strategies adopted.

Capacity Building: The Partnership works with target individuals, groups and communities on an intensive basis to strengthen their capacity to effect change in their own lives and the lives of their communities. Groups are facilitated to develop plans for their areas and work in collaboration with outside agencies to implement them. A strong emphasis is placed on leadership development to train community leaders to represent the interests of disadvantaged groups at policy level. A Local Development Training Institute (LDTI) has been set up by Southside Partnership to facilitate this process.

Partnership structures: The Partnership board is composed of representatives of social, partners, state agencies and community and voluntary interests. This blend of interests and perspectives is replicated throughout all Partnership structures. Over 30 networks and working groups have been established to facilitate all sectors to work together to devise and implement solutions to issues such as early school leaving, enterprise development, employment services, Traveller inclusion and community development support. These structures challenge and facilitate decision-makers to change their practices and policies to ensure that local people have control over the decisions affecting their communities.

For Southside Partnership, citizen participation is not an end in itself, nor is it restricted to programmes and activities that are Partnership initiated. It is about challenging the non-inclusive way that decisions have traditionally been made for disadvantaged communities and ensuring that structures are put in place to guarantee effective ongoing participatory planning. It is also about strengthening people's ability to engage as equal partners in the process.

One example of the Partnership's approach to promoting active citizen participation is its Community Development Support Programme (CDSP). Thus far, this programme has brought together a range of statutory agencies and local development groups to devise a strategic programme of support for community development in the region. As a consequence of the CDSP, there has been a proliferation in the number of community projects and their capacity has been strengthened. The involvement of people from all target groups in community initiatives has greatly expanded. Furthermore, the CDSP has facilitated the local community sector to strengthen its collective voice through the establishment of a community platform and other networks and has established an inter-agency forum to facilitate dialogue between state agencies and community representatives. Over the period 2000-2006, this work will be further developed, and a strong emphasis will be placed on the improvement of accommodation and physical living conditions of disadvantaged communities, an issue which emerged as the principal issue of concern in the consultation process.

LEADER

According to the European Commission, the aim of LEADER II was to stimulate innovative measures by those engaged at local level in all sectors of rural activity, to make known the results of these experiments throughout the Community and to assist rural operators in different Member States who wish to profit from the lessons learned elsewhere.

The objective of LEADER II Operational Programme was to complement other measures in the CSF for Ireland, to bring about the social and economic development of rural areas, and specifically to assist broadly based local rural groups who have the capacity to implement medium to long-term plans for the development of their areas. Funding was made available for animation/capacity building and for the implementation of development plans covering sectors such as rural tourism, small enterprises, crafts, etc.

CASE-STUDY

KELT
KELT is a Local Development Company located in Co. Kildare. The company was formed in 1994 for the purposes of preparing an application for LEADER II funding. The company received the contract to administer and manage the LEADER II Programme for County Kildare in February 1996 from the Department for Agriculture and Food.

The current Board of KELT consists of 21 Directors, eight representing the community sector, six representing the state agency sector, five representing the social partner sector and two representing local government. There is a rotation system in place within the Board to allow for new members and wider participation.

The company consists of a number of committees, namely a five person executive committee, a three-person finance committee and three evaluation committees, which are non-policy making. All policy discussions and decisions are made at Board level.

There are three Board members representative of different sectors on each of the committees with the balance being made up of non-board members with experience relevant to the work of the committee.

Experience of Community Representatives
Community representatives were nominated to the board by a range of constituent organisations, some area based, others sectoral, and to whom they have a responsibility for feedback and consultation. There is no formal mechanism for feedback from community representatives on the Board to the wider community and no administrative or financial support from KELT. This is a problem particularly for community organisations that are not in receipt of any state or EU funding. The comparison is drawn with representatives from other sectors such as statutory agencies that have staffed offices to deal with such issues. As a consequence report-back varies from one organisation to another – some are structured, others ad hoc. Resources should be provided to community representatives to enable them to feed formation back and to access information to bring to the Board.

Experience to date of community representatives on the Board of KELT has been positive not least because of the sense that community representatives have an equal say and impact. More could perhaps be achieved through stronger links between community representatives on the Board. There is no mechanism for such networking at present.

Consultation with the wider community
During the initial preparation of the application for LEADER II funding extensive consultation took place throughout Co. Kildare. When KELT received the LEADER II funding an intensive series of information nights were held across the county.

In preparation for the next round of LEADER funding a Public Consultation meeting has taken place in each of the six electoral areas within the county. KELT placed advertisements in local newspapers, community newsletters and on the local radio promoting the consultation process and asking people and groups to submit ideas, projects and suggestions. In addition approximately 700 letters with questionnaires were sent to all individuals, groups and project promoters on the KELT mailing list.

During the implementation of the LEADER II Programme citizen participation was encouraged and facilitated through:

- KELT staff meeting with groups on a one-to-one basis
- Encouraging and assisting community groups to draw-up their own Development Plans
- Agriculture Innovation Awards Scheme
- Environmental Workshops Programme
- The Showcase - a county event that promoted local development agencies and projects
- On-going articles in local newspapers

KELT could be more proactive in getting information out to the community throughout the process rather than just at specified consultation periods. This could be achieved by the preparation of regular Progress Reports for all Board Members, which could be disseminated into their respective communities.

Participation in LEADER II for the most part took place within communities of interest because of the sectoral nature of the programme, which was sub-divided into a number of measures i.e. Agriculture, Horticulture, Tourism, Enterprise, Environment and Community Education and Training. In the next round of LEADER (LEADER Plus) KELT intend to put greater emphasis on those who are more marginalized through a Quality of Life theme.

INTRODUCTION

Local government in Ireland has developed largely from a judicial system introduced under a colonial regime and is historically more removed from its community base than many continental European systems of local government. The local government system is inhibited by a lack of resources and an over-dependence on central government decisions made annually as part of the budgetary process, and by a lack of coherence and co-ordination in the delivery of services. Through lack of resources and an inability to respond to new pressures that transcend their traditional functions, local authorities have to some extent been by-passed by the growth of the partnership companies – CEBs, LEADER Groups and Partnerships (see Sections 2 & 3 above) – many of which excluded local government representation thus creating tensions between two largely separate local development systems.

Traditionally citizen participation in local government has been through the electoral system, with councillors representing each local electoral area. The elected members receive their mandate to represent citizens through the democratic process of local elections held every five years. Despite the democratic process inherent in the system, local communities have felt increasingly alienated from local government, partly because of frustration with the limited range of activities which fall within the remit of the local authority and perceived inefficiency, partly because of the clientilism associated with elected members who are perceived as representing the views of only some sections of the community, the perceived corruption of local government, and partly because of the perceived failure of local authorities to be pro-active in responding to new needs and demands.   At the same time local councillors have felt frustrated by the range and scope of activity, and the funding opportunities made available to local development groups, which seemed in many cases to be taking over the functions that should accrue to democratically elected representatives.

A NEW MODEL FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

In response to these factors and also because of the recognition that the introduction of social partnership in Ireland at national level has provided the basis for social and economic progress, proposals for enhanced participative democracy at local level were set out in a 1997 programme for Better Local Government. The Devolution Commission set up by Government in 1995 to address the problem of uncoordinated and exclusive systems established the basic principle behind the reform, i.e. the existing local development systems should be brought together.

The Better Local Government programme set out to ensure that

- Local communities and their representatives have a real say in the delivery of the full range of public services locally

- New forms of participation by local communities in the decision-making processes of local councils are facilitated;

- The role of local councillors in setting policy and giving leadership to socio-economic development together with the social partners is enhanced.

Measures were proposed which would recognise the legitimacy of local government as a

democratic institution, enhance the electoral mandate within local government and broaden involvement in local government.

STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES

The reform measures included the establishment of *Strategic Policy Committees* within the local authority system, which bring together elected members and community representatives and sectoral interests. The establishment of the SPCs gives councillors a more meaningful role in policy review and development, also offers an opportunity for deeper involvement of councillors in the corporate governance of the local authority and provides an enhanced opportunity for citizen involvement. Elected members chair the SPCs and councillors are in the majority on each committee. However at least one-third of the members of each committee are drawn from bodies within the community that are relevant to the work of the committee.

COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

The programme was further revised following consultation and negotiation on the introduction of new structures, and the recommendations of an interdepartmental Task Force that had been established to put forward a model for the integration of local government and local development systems. The Task Force[4] put forward a set of key principles to underlie a new model of local governance:

- Partnership/participation — A new model will have to be constructed on partnership lines with the meaningful involvement of all sectors;

- Social inclusion — The focus on social inclusion of many of the local development structures must be retained;

- Community development — The new model should provide an outlet for the involvement of local communities in decision-making;

- Democratic legitimacy — Moves towards an integrated framework need to recognise the democratic legitimacy of local government while building on the opportunity for more effective participation based on the partnership model;

- Process — A new model should be performance driven, should facilitate initiatives, and should recognise the importance of the process of participation for marginalized groups;

- Flexibility — The new model should operate with flexibility and an ability to respond to changed circumstances. Established public bodies need to be capable of adopting innovative approaches to local and community issues;

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[4] Report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, August 1998, DOELG, Dublin.

- Simplicity	The functions and roles of bodies at local level should be clear-cut & simple as feasible;	
- Thematic and area-based approaches	The two should be combined for maximum affect;	
- Voluntary effort	Existing voluntary effort should be retained and harnessed;	
- Local Government	Must become participative as well as representative;	
- Linkages with other programmes	Including the delivery of EU programmes	
- Value for money		

The recommendations of the Task Force led to the establishment of County Development Boards with effect from 1st January 2000 as part of the integration process between local government and local development at county level. The composition and functioning of the Boards is intended to reflect the set of principles set down by the Task Force.

These boards will replace County Strategy Groups, which previously had a limited coordinating role for some local services. The primary functions of the CDBs will be to draw up a comprehensive strategy for economic, social and cultural development within the county and to oversee its implementation.

It is envisaged that CDBs will have a particular role in ensuring co-ordination of local service delivery. The CDB will develop a vision at local level to encompass various local and sectoral plans; provide the focus for co-operation on a continuing basis at county level in the work of the various agencies, promote co-ordination and by bringing together the various interests, seek to maximise the effectiveness of spending on programmes and projects at local level included in the National Development Plan.

The recently appointed Directors of Community and Enterprise have drawn up a register of community and voluntary organisations in their areas interested in participating in the Board and its support structures. Voluntary and community groups from a range of sectors including community or rural development, conservation, culture, heritage, Gaeltactht, community infrastructure or the environment, recreation, disadvantage, disabled and others were invited to register with the County Council in order to join a Community and Voluntary Forum for each electoral area from which representatives have been nominated to the Boards. As Table 1 illustrates, the different local partnerships (ADM Partnership Companies, LEADER companies and CEBs) are all represented on the Boards. For the first time the community and voluntary sector is being supported to fulfil its role as a social partner at local level (see case study Meath CDB).

One of the central tasks of the CBD is to draw up a strategy for economic, social and cultural development within each county/city area. The strategy which is due to be finalised by January 2002 will be an agreed framework of overall objectives and targets into which relevant plans can fit and not a detailed sector-by-sector plan. Responsibility for the delivery of detailed sectoral plans will remain with the relevant partners, including sectoral agencies and Partnership companies.

Table 1 County Development Board Typical Membership Structure

Sector	MEMBERS
Local GOVERNMENT	• SPC Chairs • Cathaoirleach • County /City Manager • Urban Representative
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT	Two representatives from each of the following types of local development bodies: • County Enterprise Boards • LEADER Groups • ADM-supported Partnership Companies & Community Groups
STATE AGENCIES	Representatives of state agencies active in the area as appropriate: including Heath Board, FAS, VEC, Teagasc, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Udaras na Gaeltachta, Dept. of Social, Community & Family Affairs and the Regional Tourism Authorities.
SOCIAL PARTNERS	• Employers and Business Organisations (1) • Trade Unions (1) • Agricultural & Farming Organisations (1) • Community & Voluntary Organisations (2)

In addition to the involvement of the Board itself in the preparation of the strategy, ad hoc working groups covering a variety of themes as appropriate to particular counties, such as social inclusion, adult learning, rural transport, tourism, spatial planning and others will be set up to facilitate consultation and participation in the process of preparing the county strategy. These groups will include community representatives.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION ON SPCS AND CDBS

Introduction

The Better Local Government Programme referred to above, seeks to enhance the electoral mandate within local Government by strengthening the corporate position of elected members through the formulation of a restructured committee system, namely Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). The proposed new system acknowledges that elected representatives should be engaged at an early stage in policy formulation. It also seeks to broaden involvement in Local Government through the participation of a range of sectoral interests. The Department of Environment and Local Government issued guidelines in November 1997, setting out a framework within which each local authority should devise and establish an appropriate SPC structure.

The intention is that SPCs should:

- Assist the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy

- Reflect the major functions or services of a local authority within a broader context

The SPC system is intended to give councilors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy-making process from the early stages, when policy options are more fluid. SPCs can provide advice/reports etc. directly to the Council on matter within their range of responsibilities or on related issues, either their own initiative or as decided by the Council.

In terms of citizen participation the most important sectors represented on the SPCs and CDB are the public representatives and the representatives of the community and voluntary sector in the county. This process was the first time that the community and voluntary sector were, as a matter of government policy, being invited as full partners to participate in strategic planning at county level. It was also a very significant step in enhancing citizen participation and, hopefully supporting representative democracy with participative democracy.

CASE-STUDIES

DUN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES
Dunlaoghaire-Rathdown is located to the south of Dublin city along the coast and is a largely urban area with Dunlaoghaire Borough at its core. It extends into the foothills of the Dublin Mountains.

Structure and Membership of SPC's
Dunlaoghaire-Rathdown County Council has established five committees to cover the following areas of policy: Culture, Community Development and Amenities; Environment; housing; Economic Development and Planning; and Transportation. Each committee is chaired by a Councillor and typically has eleven councillors representing the local government sector, one representative from each of the farming, business/commercial sectors, two community/voluntary/disadvantaged sector representatives and one to three from environment, conservation/cultural interests as appropriate.

Formation & Constitution of SPCs: election of Community Representatives
A first round of Strategic Policy Committees was established in 1998/1999. The committees were re-established in 2000 following the issuing of new guidelines by Government. The Council undertook consultation with the community to fill the places on the various committees. For the initial round the Council undertook the following consultation process with the community:
- Contacted organisations that they are aware of
- Placed public advertisements inviting applications
- Held public meetings
- Employed independent facilitators for selection meetings

For the second round the Council:
- Wrote to all those that attended previously
- Contacted over 300 groups on the County Development Board mailing list
- Attended the Community Platform (which represents the community and voluntary sector)
While the election of community representatives was the responsibility of the organisations, the Council specified a number of sub-sectors that they wished to have represented on the relevant SPC

such as:

- Sport
- Residents/Other
- Youth
- Travellers
- Disability
- Environment/culture

Each sub-sector through a facilitated election process elected a nominee(s) to the relevant SPCs. There were in total seven community/voluntary/disadvantaged sector representatives elected to the committees. A total of 104 community/ voluntary/disadvantaged sector groups responded to the process. It is the responsibility of each of the sub-sectoral representatives to provide feedback to the groups within their sub-sector. The council will facilitate this process through the provision of a mailing list and of a venue should they wish to meet with the groups within their sub-sector.

Training is being provided to the SPC members on how the Local Authority works. Further training will be organised nationally by central Government to cover areas such as consensus building, teamwork, the nature of decision-making, etc.

The SPC's have only met once so far at an informal plenary meeting. The first formal meeting is to take place next month. It is therefore not possible to measure the outcomes of the process. However some of the SPCs during the first round had made recommendations to the council, which were adopted and resulted in changes, been made.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION - MEATH STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES & COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD
This case study will detail the process of selecting and electing of representatives form the community & voluntary sector in County Meath to participate in the allotted positions in both the SPCs and CDB.

Process
The first step in selecting community & voluntary representatives was to inform and consult the community & voluntary sector in County Meath regarding local government reforms and the opportunity for their participation. This task was undertaken by the newly established office of the Director of Community & Enterprise in County Meath. This is a local authority contract appointment.

A public information meeting targeted at all those groups and individuals' active in the community and voluntary sector in County Meath was called in mid February 2000. At that meeting it was agreed that the following process would be utilised in relation to the establishment of the County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector and the selection of representatives to sit on the Meath County Development Board (CDB) and the four Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's) to be established by Meath County Council:

- Registration of all community & voluntary sector groups for the purpose of making a nomination(s). A set of criteria to determine those eligible to register was agreed.
- Nominations for the positions on the CDB and SPCs were invited according to agreed

procedures. Nominations were submitted to the office of the Director of Community & Enterprise by an agreed date.

- At the first meeting of the newly formed County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector nominees were invited to speak for 5 minutes on their reasons for going forward and what they would bring to the role. The meeting also facilitated a roundtable of nominees to discuss issues.
- A second meeting of County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector was called to ratify the nominations and agree the voting process.
- Ballot papers were prepared by Meath County Council officials and were sent to all registered voting groups registered to the County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector and the office of the Director of Community & Enterprise.
- Meath county council officials officiated at the voting process that was held in conjunction with the next meeting of the County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector. Voting was conducted according to the proportional representation system and results were announced that night at the meeting.
- Elected candidates met as a group with an external facilitator to clarify roles, to determine a collective process and to agree priorities. A process of feedback through the County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector was agreed and a support mechanism for these voluntary elected representatives proposed.

Outcomes

The process was implemented as agreed and proved both effective and educational. As an outcome, the platform is established and nine people from the community and voluntary sector have taken their places on the SPCs and CDB. They are working as a team and have the platform as their forum within the sector to consult on an on-going basis. The inaugural meetings of the CDB and the SPCs were held and work is ongoing.

The feedback from the information dissemination process, the nomination process, the election process and the team working of the elected representatives was very positive.

However it still remains for the effectiveness of the community & voluntary sector representatives on the board of the CDB and SPCs to be demonstrated. Equally the effectiveness of the feedback mechanism to the County Meath Platform for the Community and Voluntary Sector, and the effectiveness of this platform, has still to be proven.

It must be noted that the above process marks a significant step forward in terms of citizen participation, particularly citizen activists in the community & voluntary sector, because:

- It is the first time that the community and voluntary sector has been recognised officially as a key partner in local development at county level
- It is the first formal organisation of activists in the community and voluntary sector at county level
- It is the first integrated representation of the community and voluntary sector on the strategic planning committees of the county
- It is the first time that the local authority has committed to providing resources to support the organisation of the community and voluntary sector at county level.

This process is a strategic recognition of the learning and work achieved through local development organisations in Ireland over the last decade and the impact of the EU funding to strengthen the community & voluntary sector

It is also the first applied recognition of the role and relationship of participative democracy side by side with representative democracy, and it is the first real challenge to the community and voluntary sector to participate fully and equally with the social partners, public representatives and the statuary sector in the preparation of, and consequent delivery of, a detailed strategic document for the integrated development of the whole county.

FACILITATING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

A number of issues need to be addressed to ensure that community representatives will be able to participate fully. The level of readiness to participate in such structures varies significantly with some representatives well used to dealing with state agencies in the course of their work while others have no such experience and feel over-awed by the process. Gaps exist in the level of knowledge of how the local authority works. In the view of a local government official, the Strategic Policy Committees offer potential for enhanced citizen participation but it is expecting a lot from voluntary people to contribute to complex issues such as social housing, planning, etc. especially as less and less people are willing to volunteer. The training referred to above will help to overcome some of these barriers.

There is also a resource issue for community representatives because of the time input involved for members representing a voluntary committee that would not have either the financial or administrative resources to support that person.

Holding meetings in the Council Chamber is an issue for some. This is regarded as councillors' territory and some of the other sectors feel at a disadvantage. The degree of acceptance by other sectors of the involvement of the community sector varies from potential opportunity to intrusion.

BETTER DELIVERY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

The development of new structures to enhance citizen participation in local government and to aid the integration of local development systems has to be accompanied by new and innovative measures to improve the delivery of local services. In order to improve the delivery, a number of local authorities have embarked on a decentralisation programme to bring services, which require direct contact between citizens and staff closer to citizens. For example in Donegal, six new council offices are planned with three already built. In the case of Donegal, the new offices will be staffed by the appropriate personnel actually dealing with the service involved – such as planning, motor tax, waste collection, connection to water services, etc. It is envisaged that staff working at local level will be delegated to take decisions in respect of certain functions. Space is being provided in the new local offices to accommodate area based staff from local development agencies including LEADER companies, Partnership Boards, County Enterprise Boards and Community information Centre Services.

CASE STUDY

ENHANCING DELIVERY THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & ONE-STOP-SHOPS IN COUNTY MEATH

Background
Meath County Council is committed to citizen access to all activities of the county council as a means of sustaining local development, of encouraging effective interaction with citizens and as the most efficient method for decision-making. The County Council has developed a strategy to decentralise access to information and decision making to the local electoral area level through "One-Stop-Shops". Information technology (IT) is central to this process. With central government support Meath county Council initiated a strategy to open an integrated local authority service point or "One-Stop-Shop" in each electoral district, supported by a roll out of accessible information provision through various technologies.

To support this initiative, Meath County Council commissioned a report in February 1998 to devise a model for quality public service delivery in the North Meath area, served by the town of Kells. The consultants were asked to review the perceptions of people living in North Meath regarding public service provision, to consult state agencies regarding their method of service delivery and to propose a "One-Stop-Shop" model for enhanced and sustainable public service delivery to the area. This report identifies the possibilities for citizen participation through IT and is an excellent practical document to guide the planning and implementation of a rural based "One-Stop-Shop" for the delivery of public service and local information/services.

The report notes that the development of a local IT service centres, or "One-Stop-Shop", provided an opportunity to define services according to the needs of the community. Rather than just a new office location providing the same services that were always available, it could provide the opportunity to develop a valuable resource centre and a forum for ongoing assessment and co-ordination of local services. The consultation process showed a readiness on the part of service providers and the community to work towards such an area-based public service delivery approach.

The report made the following recommendations.
- An inter-agency committee is established to set up the "One-Stop-Shop" with full IT facilities
- An inter-agency forum is established to look at and develop models of integration of public service delivery in areas such as joint needs assessment, consultation and strategic planning
- Service provision agencies should adopt a common planning process, producing five year public service plans based on a common and integrated assessment of needs in each local area
- A partnership model (public agencies, social partners and community representatives working together) for public service delivery be adopted at area level, through a "One-Stop-Shop", and then at local community level based on an area plan
- The "One-Stop-Shop" be established as a single point of contact in a central location for the integrated provision of general and specific information on public and local services with a follow-up targeted referral service
- To facilitate networking, joint training days be arranged for staff from all agencies to increase awareness of each agency's focus and services
- Staff from all agencies to attend customer care courses together.
- That IT provides the most useful cost effective tool for need monitoring, remote consultation and integrated service delivery.

The follow on to the report demonstrates the difficulty in responding to the challenges of IT for citizen participation in service delivery. These include:

- Inaccessibility and lack of familiarity of IT with the average citizen, but particularly among those most excluded
- The lack of familiarity among service agencies with IT as a medium of service delivery
- The individualised nature of statutory service providing agencies
- The cost and inconvenience of shifting from the familiar model of service delivery to the less familiar outreach/one stop shop/IT model of service delivery.

Actions & Progress

In tandem with the report Meath County Council is implementing a phased process of setting up local authority "One-Stop-Shops" in each local electoral area. These "One-Stop-Shop" centres will have a state of the art IT infrastructure to support local citizen participation, full transparency of information and empowerment of decision-making. This initiative by Meath County Council is a clear indication that the local authority expects other state service providers to follow this lead and deliver integrated services locally.

Meath County Council has opened a "One-Stop-Shop" in two electoral areas in County Meath in the last year. In both centres all feasible efforts are being made to decentralise decision-making and to maximise public access to information. Initiatives are underway to improve communication systems for local authority staff working out of the "One-Stop-Shop".

However, when compared to the report recommendations, much more needs to be done to enable greater citizen participation. Some of the action areas yet to be developed include:

- Dialogue with statuary providers of targeted services, e.g. services to those with disabilities
- Dialogue with private sector service providers, e.g. transport providers
- Dialogue with community and voluntary groups to increase impact, e.g. access to most marginalised
- Dialogue with citizens through participative fora and panels to determine needs and most appropriate means of delivery
- Greater use of IT public assess points for information access
- Greater use of public notice boards
- Awareness and training of local authority and public service agency staff on the use of IT
- Increased familiarisation of IT among the public

Concurrently, the establishment of the County Development Boards are 'encouraging' all sectors in Meath to co-operate in developing integrated models of service delivery. Furthermore, the establishment of a county level community and voluntary sector platform and local electoral area community and voluntary sector for a will provide the fora to optimise interaction with community organisations. The CCDB process together with fully resourced "One-Stop-Shops" could help to ensure universally equitable access to public services, using the most appropriate technology.

INTRODUCTION

Local authorities in Ireland have been involved in a number of initiatives, some stimulated by EU funding mechanisms such as the town and village renewal scheme, others by the Local Agenda process such as the Cork Environmental Forum which have provided the opportunity for a more participative approach to the delivery of local services. Other initiatives have developed from local authority and community co-operation set within a Local Agenda 21 context and facilitated by funding sources that included the LIFE programme, the EU financial instrument for the environment. Two examples of such projects that directly involved local authorities were the Beatha eco-label project and the Bantry Bay Charter.

LOCAL URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

TOWN AND VILLAGE RENEWAL

Under the measure for town and village renewal, included in the sub-programme on Local Urban and Rural Development which was part of the CSF for Ireland 1994-1999 (see also Section 3 above), schemes were drawn up in consultation with local communities for renewal of town and villages in many parts of the country. Through consultation between Council officials and councillors from each electoral area, parish councils, local development groups, chambers of commerce, social and community service organisations, priorities for each town or village were negotiated, the local infrastructure was improved and renewal and regeneration measures were put in place.

The extent of the participative process involved varied from one local authority to another but the better-managed schemes serve as useful models of community involvement in the delivery of local improvement schemes and as prototypes of a more participative approach for the preparation of Development Plans and planning schemes generally within local authorities.

CASE-STUDY

WESTMEATH URBAN & VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME 1994-1999

In Westmeath local council members selected a number of towns and villages from those that met the requirements, to participate in the scheme. When approval was received for the selected towns and villages Westmeath County Council promoted the schemes by a range of methods including notices in local newspapers, newsletters, public meetings and local radio. In addition direct contact was made with local groups such as Tidy Towns by local councillors and area engineers particularly in the case of the Village Renewal Scheme to encourage them to be involved in the implementation of the scheme.

The timescale for preparation of plans and implementation of the scheme limited the opportunity for public consultation. Examining the level and nature of the citizen involvement within the scheme in Westmeath a mixture of feedback was received. Some felt that the timeframe for the preparation of plans was too tight to allow for any real consultation from the public. On the other hand some groups were very happy with the level of consultation and involvement they had throughout the scheme. The level of satisfaction or otherwise with the consultation was to some extent determined by experience in local participation, commitment to the process as well as the workload of the

County Council staff involved. During the course of the implementation of the Programme, the Council became increasingly aware of the value of working with the local community in designing and implementing the Scheme within the selected towns and villages. Thus those communities involved at a later stage in the process tended to have a more positive experience of working with the County Council.

In parallel with the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme the Westmeath LEADER group was working with local communities and Tidy Towns Groups in developing Village enhancement plans. These actions fed into the scheme and also gave the local community the confidence and resources to work with the County Council.

Through involvement with both the LEADER Programme and the town and village renewal scheme, the local communities became more aware of the Local Development process, how Local Government worked and how they could have a role in the enhancement of their own town or village. This awareness was also created by groups networking and through newsletters.

Westmeath County Council has also become more conscious of the local development process and the long-term value of encouraging and assisting citizen participation and ownership in the work it does. Some staff felt that they need more training to assist them in working with local communities in order to allow them to work more effectively to encourage community participation and ownership in the development of local areas.

INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT – PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES

LOCAL AGENDA 21

Agenda 21 is a blueprint endorsed by over 150 countries at the 1992 UN Conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro for how the nations of the world can work individually and collectively towards sustainable development. Sustainable development is not just about environmental protection; it is also concerned with the quality of life, with equity, including the distribution of resources, and with the interactions between environment and development. Local Agenda 21 is part of the process of defining and articulating sustainable development at a local/regional level and identifying how it can best be achieved. Consultation and consensus building are essential elements but local authorities may choose different means to develop the process. Sustainable development can only be brought about through cooperation and partnership between different interests and groups in society.

CASE-STUDIES

CORK ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

The Cork Environmental Forum was established by Cork County Council early in 1995 as a cross-community based initiative to foster, promote and implement sustainable development within the Cork region under the auspices of Local Agenda 21 and in accordance with the broad objectives of and the European Union Fifth Action Programme on the Environment, Towards Sustainability. The Forum includes representatives from a range of sectoral interests including community organisations and statutory agencies. Meetings and workshops take place about every six weeks at various locations around the county and are open to all interested parties.

The Forum set up a number of working groups to pursue different areas of concern and is currently developing a series of 'position papers' on key environmental issues. These papers will lead to the setting of achievable targets for environmental improvement in Cork. The Forum has obtained funding under the Environmental Partnership grant scheme[5], administered by the Department of Environment and Local Government, to undertake a range of community environmental awareness projects.

Outcomes
The Cork Environmental Forum represents a useful example of a relatively early local authority initiative in community participation under the broad umbrella of Local Agenda 21. The range and scope of its activities, which are largely concerned with conservation issue and physical planning activities, including social housing, reflects the limited scope of activity of the local authority itself. The extent to which it can take a wider, more integrated approach to sustainable development has been constrained by its positioning within the local authority structure. The work of the County Development Board should provide the opportunity for a widening of the activity of Forums such as this with a greater cross-sectoral involvement.

BEATHA ECO LABEL PROJECT

The Beatha eco-labelling project was a pilot initiative carried out between 1995 and 1998 in the western counties of Kerry, Galway, Mayo and Donegal. The project was managed and part-funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta (Regional Development Authority for Irish speaking areas) together with Kerry, Galway, Mayo and Donegal County Councils and co-funded under the EU LIFE programme for the environment. The aim of the project was to establish a environmental quality mark which could be used as a marketing tool for tourism and other economic sectors by the areas to which it had been successfully applied. Within each area local communities and the local authority were encouraged to work in partnership to manage and enhance their environment in a sustainable way. The local authority and local community or group of communities could only make application for the award jointly. In order to attain the environmental quality mark – the Beatha Award – a certain standard of excellence had to be reached in respect of air quality, water quality, land use, planning, transport, natural environment, cultural environment, built environment, waste and energy.

Outcomes
 The success of the Beatha project[6] lay in the way in which a member of staff of the County Council was made responsible for interaction with community groups and as a direct liaison with the various sections of the County Council. This approach ensured the commitment of the local authority and the community groups to co-operation and involvement. Such a partnership demanded consultation on specific issues as these arose and regular open sessions where the community could identify needs and contribute to the formulation of local environmental improvement plans, targets and co-operative implementation. Through this process of consultation, local authority and communities were able to reach agreement on overall objectives. In County Kerry in particular where the project was carried out in a small community located at the western edge of the Dingle peninsula, the Beatha project became a practical example of Local Agenda 21 in action. In this case the Local Authority

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[5] This scheme was set up in 1997 to provide funding for awareness projects at local level involving a partnership between local authorities and NGOs or community groups, in the context of Local Agenda 21.

[6] While the project was brought to a successful conclusion in each of the pilot areas with a number – though not all – of the participating communities achieving the Beatha Award, the initiative is no longer current due to the absence of available funding.

and the community worked out a more sustainable system of waste management, with the county council providing special composting bins and the community agreeing in return to a reduced number of rubbish collections for household waste.

The lack of resources to continue the project and to extend the concept to other areas has had a negative impact on some of the communities and partners involved in the project, partly because of raised expectations that have not been met, with respect to direct action by Local Authorities in response to locally identified needs.

BANTRY BAY CHARTER

The objective of the Bantry Bay LIFE project which commenced in 1997 is the development of a consensus based integrated management strategy for Bantry Bay involving as many as those with an interest in the management of the bay, as possible. The project is led by Cork County Council and involves a partnership with the Coastal Resources Centre at National University of Ireland, Cork, and the National Enterprise Centre at Cork Institute of Technology. Over sixty stakeholders' organisations representing the diversity of life and opinion, including regulatory bodies, are directly involved in the development and agreement of the Charter and its proposals.

Process
The project involved the following stages:
1. Invitations to participate in drawing up the charter – through a widespread media campaign, public meetings and a newsletter which has continued to provide information on the project up to the present; a database was compiled, including all stakeholders identified and other interested parties.
2. Identifying issues – confidential meetings were held with different stakeholders to discuss concerns about future management; these concerns made up the full list of issues which set the agenda to be addressed in the next stage of the process.
3. Roundtable – a roundtable structure was set up at which all stakeholder groups were represented. These representatives had responsibility to work on behalf of stakeholders towards consensus on management proposals. The roundtable developed an agreed set of ground rules to assist its operation.
4. Working groups - a series of working groups were mandated by the roundtable to concentrate on areas of concern from the issues list. These groups met regularly over eleven months, freely giving of their time. When requested, experts were invited to make inputs to meetings. The groups listened to each other's perspectives, identified common ground and developed options in response to the issues of concern. Non-partisan observers produced summaries of meetings.
5. Proposals generated – the working groups generated twenty-three proposals many of which involved input from more than one group. These were widely disseminated through the media, to those on the database and through public consultation events.
6. Building Consensus – through lengthy roundtable meetings negotiation and discussion took place around the proposals and the basis of the Charter was agreed. New issues or areas requiring further work were identified and this process is on going.
7. The Charter – the document contains twenty-three proposals, many of which are interlinked, under the headings of Government, Production, Protection and Infrastructure.
8. Continuation of the process – the process continues as follows:
    i. Production of a strategy that spells out how the Charter is to be carried out;
    ii. Implementation of the agreements contained in the Charter;
    iii. On-going Roundtable review of the Charter and agreement of new proposals
    iv. Monitoring the success of the Charter.

Key characteristics of the process:

- Open, transparent and inclusive;
- Neutral
- Flexible and responsive to circumstances
- Informed by the participants themselves.

The project has involved the development of a community based GIS catalogue of resources. The GIS was made available to the public at Bantry and Castletownbere libraries and is a useful model of making information available to the community to facilitate participation in decision-making.

Outcomes

An innovative feature of the project is the use of facilitators to build a consensus over a series of round table sessions building on workshops that were organised around specific themes. By definition it is a highly participative process. However it was not necessarily a fully inclusive process in that it did not ensure the participation of those who are typically most excluded from participation. It is useful to compare the approach with adopted by the SRUNA project carried under the auspices of the Dublin Regional Authority. This project examined the recreational use and capacity of amenity areas in the Dublin region through an inclusive, participative model, which focussed particularly on the needs of those most often excluded.

LESSONS LEARNED

The case studies presented in this report give some indication of the scope of participatory democracy in Ireland at the present time. We can see from the typology of participation presented in Table 2 (columns 1 & 2) that citizens may participate, and that agents of change may offer opportunity of citizen participation, for different motives. An attempt has been made in column 3 of the table to link the case-study examples to the typology.

Table 2: Typology of Participation

Typology	Characteristics of each type	Case studies
Manipulative participation:	Participation is pretence with people's representatives on official boards but who are un-elected and have no power.	
Passive participation:	People participate by being told what has been decided and has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management who do not listen to people's responses. The information offered belongs only to external professionals.	County Development Plan process up to present, i.e. before the advent of the new Planning Act (2000)
Participation by Consultation:	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes and so control analysis. This process does not concede any share in decision-making and professionals are under no obligation to adopt people's views.	Delivery of local services through One-Stop- Shops
Participation for Material incentives:	People participate by contributing resources, e.g. labour, in return for material incentives.	
Functional Participation:	External agents see people's participation as a means of achieving project goals, especially reductions in costs. People may form groups to meet pre-determined objectives. This participation may be inter-active and may involve shared decision-making, but tends to arise only after external agents have made major decisions. Local people may only be co-opted to serve external goals.	Town & Village Renewal schemes Cork Environmental Forum SPCs & CDBs but the latter are moving towards Interactive Participation;

Interactive participation:	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and the formation, or strengthening, of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just as a means of achieving project goals. The process involves inter-disciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of structured and systematic learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how local resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures and practices.	LEADER companies e.g. KELT; CEBs; Bantry Bay Charter IZCM pilot project; Partnership in planning: Ballinraun/Crusheen, Co. Clare Partnership Companies e.g. Southside Partnership (elements of the activity extend into self-mobilisation);
Self Mobilization:	People participate by taking initiatives, independently of external institutions, to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for the resources and technical advice that they need, but retain control over how the resources are used.	

(Source: Adapted from Pretty, 1995)

While much of the experience of citizen participation up to now has fallen far short of the ideal there is an increasing recognition of the need to involve citizens in the process of decision-making. Equally the transition to more participative structures will take time. Meanwhile pilot projects such as many of those outlined in the preceding sections and more permanent structures such as CDBs provide a laboratory for learning for both citizens and public agencies.

In order to draw lessons from the experience of participation in Ireland it is necessary to revisit the question of why participation is an essential building block in local development. Progress towards sustainable development requires co-operation and consensus and the participation of all actors in society including civil society. Without such active involvement it will not be possible to bring about the kinds of societal change needed to make a real difference. The participation of citizens in decision-making is needed to ensure that social and environmental as well as economic dimensions are included in the process.

Traditionally the local government system had engaged citizens only in limited passive participation. It was no coincidence that the local development structures put in place to counteract the inadequacies in the local government system introduced different and innovative, opportunities for citizen participation. The scope for engagement in the processes of local government and governance has been significantly extended through a number of pilot initiatives as detailed in the preceding sections and especially through the partnership bodies. Most recently the establishment of County/City Development Boards has been an attempt to integrate local government and local development structures and to enhance participatory democracy.

A number of lessons can be drawn from the examples presented:

1) The transformation from government to governance is a gradual process requiring on-going support;

2) Objectives can be achieved in a variety of ways;

3) Institutional structures are important to ensure that all actors are brought into the process; otherwise there is a reliance on ad hoc measures and once-off experiments with no lasting impact. The Community For a set up to facilitate the CDB process is a good example of an institutional framework which will help to deliver the required outcome,: i.e. the election of community representatives to the Boards;

4) Pilot actions play a significant role but mechanisms for mainstreaming successful actions are needed; otherwise there is a risk that the impetus will be lost and that old practices will be resumed (e.g. Beatha experience);

5) Meaningful participation requires a commitment of resources to give all participants an equal opportunity and an equal footing as stakeholders;

6) Evaluation of actions must be built into the process. Not all new experiments in participative democracy will work (for example some models may not be fully inclusive);

7) Training for empowerment for those traditionally excluded and training for participation for those who traditionally held the power is an on-going requirement to move towards interactive participation and self-mobilisation;

8) The additional benefit from the partnership model should be clearly reflected in the outcomes, i.e. the achievement of new objectives because of the inclusion of all partners to the process (e.g. RRD experiment in local planning);

9) The catalyst for change has come partly from within but has also been driven by opportunities and requirement of EU programmes and instruments;

10) Bringing together processes that have been devised at local level and strategic vision from the centre offers the best opportunity for movement towards a sustainable model of development.

CONCLUSIONS

Not all of them It is evident from the case studies that there is an increasing level of participation by civil society in decision-making structures at local level. Participation as we have seen can take a number of different forms. A Charter for Citizen's participation is presented below: it is offered as a guide to facilitating participation of the highest order: The next step is to ensure that on-going support is made available to ensure that such participation will contribute to enhancing the foundations for a more sustainable society. Ireland must "hasten slowly" and implement the principles of participation from the start if we are to build sustainable foundations for true citizen participation in all aspects of development.

TEN POINT CHARTER FOR CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

1. The more dis-empowered must seek and invite the participation of the empowered.

2. Structures need to be horizontal, rather than hierarchal, and interactive, rather than unidirectional.

3. Capacity Building at all levels is required to sustain participation.

4. Openness, dialogue and flexible structures are essential to sustain citizen participation.

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5. Models of best practice in optimum participation need to be integrated into local structures regularly.

6. Real citizen participation requires a change in culture among formal organisations and a change in expectations among citizens.

7. Levels of citizen participation need to be graded from minimum involvement to a full sense of ownership.

8. Real participation processes require a commitment of resources from all sections to make all participants stakeholders.

9. Citizen participation is not just a change in structure or the introduction of new structures. Real citizen participation is an integrated way of working.

10. Citizen participation needs to achieve demonstrable outcomes that motivate all stakeholders to maintain their commitment to participation.

Most of the structures that have been put in place in Ireland are too recent to be able to fully evaluate their impact. Many other innovative initiatives have been of a temporary pilot nature and have not been subject to full evaluation of either methodology or outcomes. Even where the process is clearly of value the initiative cannot make a lasting contribution to enhancing participation unless a decision is made to mainstream and to provide on-going funding. Monitoring and evaluation of both local development initiatives and local government structures is required to ensure that the participative process is inclusive and that the outcomes will make a difference.

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