

## **New forums out of sustainability – recent trends at the local level**

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*“They (planners) work to encourage practical public deliberation - public listening, learning and beginning to act on innovative agreements too - as they move project and policy proposals forward to viable implementation or decisive rejection (the ‘no-build’ option)” ... “I take participation not only to present well-known dangers of manipulation (Arnestein 1969), but also to present real political opportunities for deliberative, even transformative, learning and participatory action research.” (Forester, 1999)*

### **Abstract**

Today local authorities are under growing scrutiny from the part of the citizens. Greater levels of education, more timely availability of information and greater environmental awareness contribute to higher demands on proximity of governments to the citizens. The inherited pyramidal top down model, highly technically based, does no longer answer efficiently to complex problems in the power fragmented arenas of the world of today (Bryson, 1992).

This new challenge of operating in more open contexts frequently creates difficulties to planners and stress on the political arenas dealing with local problems. It also disturbs the most dedicated public officials. Under the pursuit of local sustainability in response to the Rio Summit of 1992, a set of experiments created new forums involving the society at large. This development may turn to be a good alternative to establish new aspects of local governance.

The search for sustainability implies the involvement and participation of the local communities, aiming the development of a common vision, the identification of priority actions and the construction of partnerships.

This paper provides a description of the use of interactive methods to sit at the same table the local stakeholders during the setting and implementation of Local Agenda 21. While making these settings more flexible, these methods bring new ways to the decision process at the local level and constitute value added to the more traditional processes, because they allow for the construction of social, intellectual and political capital, while integrating the bottom up approaches. Their substantial value lies in making possible a learning process among the participants, a sharing of responsibilities and a more elaborated level of interaction with the establishment of partnerships. Here, we discuss how the contribution of interactive methods may contribute to design new decision making processes and to render more flexible traditional ones, particularly at the local level.

Departing from Bryson view that the settings for exercising leadership are the forums, arenas and courts, it is argued in this paper that the expansion of forums and creation of new arenas is of the utmost importance for us planners. In fact, if planners and local decisors want to effectively address local environmental problems, new devices such as this have to be implemented. If not, decisions concerning planning and environmental issues may result in conflict and will be solved away from technical and local arenas (e.g., in courts).

Moving from a representative to a participative democracy requires new approaches. Finally, concludes that the merging of the hierarchical top down expertise based model with the bottom up ordinary knowledge (Lindblom, 1979) may constitute a good alternative.

### **Introduction**

The challenge of sustainability at the local level led to a set of events that reached a high point in the Rio Summit of 1992, where local governments committed themselves towards sustainability. With the coming of the Rio 10 and its overall assessment, the revision of what has been done so far is now at stake. Among the key issues, it assumes a particular importance the call to create opportunities for wide participation of local actors in the search for strategies and actions to achieve sustainability.

This responds to the deliberative shift in the theory of democracy implying that the essence of democratic legitimacy is now being sought in the ability of all individuals involved in a collective decision to pursue “authentic deliberation about that decision”. A decision is accepted “only if it could

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be justified for them in convincing terms" (Dryzek, 2000). This turn of affairs necessarily affected local environmental planning.

Municipalities in Portugal took to carry out Local Agenda 21 (LA21) on their own initiative – no legal requirement made it mandatory. It developed frequently from the urgency of local politicians to respond to the environmental expectations of their constituency. While developing the local agenda, forums were created for the involvement of local authors. Though, Portuguese formal institutions are highly hierarchical, centralized and supported by specific bureaucratic procedures, these new modes of operation have been gaining adeptness and acceptance from specialists, economic agents and citizens. This brings new ways of work to environmental planning and innovation to the local decision processes. At the same time the local communities develop "systematic institutional design" (Healey, 1997).

This paper evaluates the implementation of participative workshops on the ground, pursued while implementing LA21. It seeks to understand and explain the findings of the authors – a participant observer - in the light of the shift towards deliberative democracy recurring to the theoretical ideas of the "new institutionalism" writers. Citizen participation ambivalence is debated. Bryson's contexts of leadership – forums, arenas and courts – are used here to illustrate the contribution of the workshops as a device of flexibility and adjustment of the usual planning activity, merging the hierarchical top down expertise based model with the bottom up ordinary knowledge (Lindblom, 1979)

### **LA21 Challenge**

The challenge of sustainability at the local level emerged with a new dimension from the Rio Summit in 1992 (Chapter 28 of Agenda 21) followed by three European meetings on Sustainable towns (Aalborg, 1994; Lisbon, 1996; Hannover, 2000). The Aalborg Charter states the resolution of the municipalities defining as the main objective to promote sustainable development at the local level by strengthening both the partnership among actors and the inter-authority cooperation in the field of urban environment (Coenen, 1998). In 1997 more than 1800 local governments of 64 countries had already implemented Local Agenda 21 (LA21).

The General Secretary of the United Nations while evaluating the progress of the LA21 implementation in 1997, stressed the role of the local authorities by noting that the most promising developments occurred at the town and municipal levels and the local strategic plans revealed to be more successful than those at national level, that in terms of direct impact (CIVITAS, 2000).

In accordance with the guiding documents for the implementation of Agenda 21 the methodology may include (Cotter, 1999; ICLEI, 1996; CIVITAS, 2000): (1) Characterization of the Environmental Profile – including the identification of municipal structures, strategies and resources to be developed; (2) Visioning – development of a future sustainable vision and identification of strategic vectors and objectives to be attained; (3) building up of partnerships – establishing a common understanding of the community and development of joint collaboration among entities; (4) Development of an Action Plan – to be carried out in response to each strategic vector (structures, budget, resources and responsible stakeholders); (5) Implementation and monitoring – development of an internal system of management and follow up and monitoring (e.g., environmental thermometer); (6) Evaluation and periodical revision.

In the guiding documents of ICLEI, participation is considered essential to assure the long range sustainability and can be considered in the following phases: (1) in the preparation of the Action Plan; (2) in identifying the vision, objectives, priorities and goals to be attained; (3) in defining partnerships to carry on needed actions; (4) in developing procedures to monitor and report on the evolution.

Participation assumes in the LA21 a relevant role because, according to its defenders, it should offer the opportunity to articulate the various stakeholders' interests, gives the local government needed information for the decision process and emancipates certain social groups (Coenen et al, 1998). According to the Aalborg charter participation aims at an expanded public consultation, assuring all sectors of the community an opportunity for getting heard and involved.

In Portugal, as in many other countries, locally generated debate and action planning has sought to apply bottom-up participatory innovative techniques (visioning, consensus building, participative workshops) to reach agreement on strategic actions, policies and proposals. In this process local authorities worked together with residents, community organizations, NGOs, firms, unions and other local actors to develop community sustainable action plans for sustainability.

### Deliberative democracy and citizen participation

Participation is therefore, at stake. Looking at these experiences of sustainability it is obvious that it has been contributed towards changes in local governance. LA21 implementation also represents a good example of the globalization effects. In fact, in Europe, the municipalities got together and assumed voluntarily the implementation of LA21, frequently without directives or support of their own central governments.

To understand these issues in a wider theoretical context it is useful to reflect on some recent ideas about the contemporary social, economic and political activity and to analyse what the literature says about planning and participation.

After the 1990 deliberative turn, the theory of democracy moved from being a mere aggregation of preferences to become "a democratic control through communication that encourages reflection upon preference without coercion" (Dryzek, 2000). The idea is not to create more government, but to operate in a network form of organization playing a crucial role in bringing contestation of discourses out into the open.

There is some ambivalence behind citizen participation. From the literature its role and contribution is unclear (Dray, 1997). One of the planning dilemmas, as stated by Benevise (1989) is that at the same time that it cannot succeed without some participation, it cannot afford to be dominated by the participatory processes (Dray, 1997). Literature in citizen participation is inconclusive about how it looks like in practice, and collects little consensus about what exactly is supposed to accomplish (Dray, 1997). Moreover, Pateman (1977) states that the fact that " 'participation' has been used in a wide variety of different situations by different people" has contributed to drain any meaningful content out of it.

The issue is that citizen participation is strongly connected to the philosophy of democracy and cannot be seen detached from that. As Fagence (1977) states (Dray, 1997):

*"the pursuit of citizen participation in planning is too frequently undertaken in considerable ignorance of the political philosophy of democracy. It is apparent from the case studies that most planning agencies engage in practices of citizen participation as if they were simply additional planning techniques to be woven into the planning process. Little thought, if any, is given to the considerable complexities of democracy, its theory and practice, or issues of representation. Many of the traumas generated within participation practices may be traced to naïve conceptions of democracy. Inadequate understanding of theory has contributed to the less desirable or expected performance of the citizen participation."*

Other authors agree: Coppock (1977) considers that "underlying the role and contribution of the citizen participation is a more fundamental debate about representative and participatory democracy" (Dray, 1997). Different roles have been claimed to participation. Fagence (1977) considers it a mean toward power equalization and reinterpretation of the democratic ethic. Pateman, analyzing John Stuart Mill's participatory theory of democracy, sees government and political institutions as educative, stressing that it is at the local level where the real educative effects of participation are felt, because the issues affect individuals more directly (Dray, 1997). Pateman adds that it is also at the local level that individuals "learn democracy" (Dray, 1997).

Besides its role, there are different interpretations on how to accomplish participation. Traditional liberalists - Polsby, 1963; Dahl, 1961, Schumpeter, 1943 - defend a "mediating role of interest groups and political representatives between citizens and the policy process", while according to Fischer (1993) "the participatory democrats demand a more direct association" (Dray, 1997). Moreover, Rich (1986) reports that many believe that "other opportunities for participation such as voting, lobbying, demonstrating, and letter writing are too sporadic and biased against specific interests to be meaningful, and that a formal mechanism for citizen participation in the policy process provides a more reliable, ongoing dialog with decision makers" (Dray, 1997).

The level of formality raises further issues, including the relationship of bureaucracy and democracy, which "is simultaneously symbiotic and paradoxical because bureaucracy is responsible for administering the programs that sustain the democratic state but it is also a constant source of tension, friction, and conflict in the democratic state" (Dray, 1997). Clavel (1986) arguments that most thinking about tension between imperatives of administration and the virtue of citizen participation in government is impoverished, because it tends to contrast these two issues too starkly. Clavel does not see planning as a elite bureaucratized activity as many critics do, but as a profession that is in

principle dedicated to visions and models that could be validated by capturing the popular imagination (Dray, 1997). This view is more in the line of the sustainable planning practice at the local level.

If planning is considered a political activity then some form of citizen participation appears to be necessary in a democratic state. What is a meaningful way of participation is considered still unresolved. Different scholars have different views. There is an implied assumption, among defenders of effective participation, that it increases the likelihood that public interest will be realized. Planners must have the power to propose decisions, but simultaneously have to integrate the desire and demands of citizens. Some kind of balance should be achieved. This is a problem of leadership, organization, alternatives, and systems of responsibility and confidence (Dray, 1997).

### **Complex power in fragmented arenas – a challenge for planners**

To exercise leadership Bryson and Einsweiler (1982) suggest that public leaders must be skilled in the design and use of forums, arenas and courts:

(1) forums for the creation and communication of meaning

In today society there are forums everywhere. They may include discussion groups, public hearings, task forces, conferences, newspapers, television, radio. They can be place bounded (public hearings) or non place bounding (newspaper). A practice of linking speakers and audiences wherein meaning is created and communicated through discussion, debate, or deliberation.

(2) arenas for decision making

Arenas can be mostly political or mostly economic. Both distribute and redistribute access to participation in policy making and implementation. They may maintain or change political and economic relations. They may include executive committees, city councils, markets, faculty senates, board of directors. Involves the participation of actors from a delimited domain of activity as part of the process of policy making.

(3) courts to enforcing ethical principles, constitutions and laws resolving residual conflicts.

Courts are used to judge or evaluate decisions or conduct in relation to laws or norms, usually in order to settle disputes. They distribute and redistribute access to legitimacy. It may include court of public opinion, professional licensing bodies, dean's office, Supreme court, military tribunals, traffic courts.

Institutions viewed in this perspective are more than the usual formal institutions we are used to. Innes (2000) identifies institution as "patterns which persist over time in a society, involving behavior, practices, expectations, understandings and modes of action" (...) "These institutions involve roles for participants and relationships among those rules" (...) "An institution constantly but slowly evolves through the action of agents who reinterpret it while also being constrained by it" (...) "An institution emerges through a process of trial and error and because it works effectively for a particular context and time". It is this type of ephemera, flexible, adaptative institutions that conform better to the on going deliberative democracy.

### **Adjusting and Flexibilizing Institutions**

*New Institutionalism* – Emerging out of the philosophical foundations of the "communicative action" and "structuralism" (Habermas, 1984; Giddens, 1984) several authors (e.g., Innes, Healey, Forester) explore the new forms of the social structuring and restructuring opportunities available to people and organizations while shaping their lives and places (Healey at al., 1996). They offer a set of key dimensions (Doak, 1998):

- "the important role of individual action and interpretation in social and political processes, though working in relation to other individuals and often creating "cultural communities" of shared meanings and understandings;
- the construction of discourses within and between groups and organizations that build, consolidate, challenge and modify shared meanings and understandings;
- the dynamic nature of social, economic and political change which knowledge, experience and images are exchanged between people and communities in a series of interconnected networks and 'nodes of activity' (e.g., households, leisure activities, firms, community organizations and government agencies);

- the exercise and negotiation of power relations within and between communities which can develop into structural driving forces which shapes and are shaped by, the relevant communities over periods of time;
- the contingent nature of the interplay of these facets as they work themselves out in the different places and social milieu with varying institutional capacities;
- the increasingly fragmented and partial contribution of formal governmental organizations to urban management strategies;
- the subsequent struggle of government agencies to adapt to the new conditions by restructuring themselves in terms of organizational structure and responsibility, accountability and policy processes or “ways of doing things”

This is important to LA21 because there is the belief that participation has a key role in these processes and should be able to facilitate decision making according to principles of sustainability. How it can be done requires reflection on the social, political and economic processes of our current society.

It is important to understand how participation processes and policy discourses are constructed in the pursuit for sustainability, as part of the new democratic agenda. Communities should seek joint collaborative solutions for local problems building “links both in social relations and in discourses, between the relational webs in the urban area” (Healey et al, 1995).

“LA21, participation is a central part of the whole concept” (Lustig et al, 1998) It offers the potential to generate new discourses, restructure local social relations “between cultural communities and between them and their natural environment”. This offers a basis for reflection on the contribution of LA21 while developing forums for participation.

Lustig (1998) presents a set of differences while comparing planning “business as usual”(STEP)<sup>2</sup> and the process of the LA 21, which are very useful to put both into perspective:

<b>STEP</b>	<b>LA21</b>
Aims to make planning more rational and scientifically based	Emphasizes process issues like participation and finding consensus
Located within the government and worked for local government	Located both within and outside local government
Idea that local government should actively guide (economic, urban, and other) development	Based on the principle of subsidiarity, seen as a process of organizing local problem-solving potential
Includes the public only within limited public participation activities	Is carried out both by local government officials and people and organizations outside local government
Government - a dominant actor that guides the process	Government - one of many actors, though an important one
Limited set of actors	Broad spectrum of actors (Ngos and marginalized groups are specifically targeted)
Public plays a limited role	Public plays a dominant role
Participation serves to give local people information about city's plans, the right of being heard, and a voice on decisions that affect them. Just presenting their opinions on what government should or should not do.	Participation is a central part of the whole concept, therefore a more integral part of preparing an LA21, people are involved deciding on their own actions.

“When assessing what may be realistic for the LA 21, it is essential to be conscious of the local power structure, the local planning system, and the potentials and limitations both of public participation and of local government itself. If this knowledge is used constructively, participatory LA21 processes will be able to contribute to urban sustainability and to improving local decision processes” (Lustig et al, 1998).

### **Portuguese LA 21 Experience**

The experience reported here refers exclusively to the activities of the CIVITAS, a center for sustainability operating in the New University of Lisbon, though other initiatives of LA21 may have happened in the country elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> STEP – the German integrated urban development planning dating from 1970's

For the CIVITAS, and due to requirements of flexibility and adaptability, the team opted for a version of LA21 that responded more adequately to the national reality – the Environmental Municipal Plans (EMP). These plans are simultaneously a strategic environmental plan at the municipal level – contributing to sustainability at the long range - and operational plans targeting action at the short range. The main objective is to define articulated and consensual strategies, and develop specific actions of intervention and management (Vasconcelos *et al.*, 1999).

These plans operate tools for the municipalities in order to (Vasconcelos *et al.*, 1999) identify the state of the environment, select the environmental problems that urge immediate resolution and begin with the ones for which there are already available means of intervention, debate solutions for the identified environmental problems, define actions and specific intervention strategies articulated among all the partners, contribute for an increased efficacy of the interventions, encourage cooperation and the building up of partnerships and promote citizens participation.

The CIVITAS team structures the – continuous, interactive, integrated, participated - planning process of an EMP in four stages (Farinha *et al.*, 1998; Vasconcelos *et al.*, 1999):

(1) *Diagnosis and selective profile of the state of the environment in the municipality*

The technical team develops a preliminary report, defining a matrix of objectives of sustainable development focusing in the main local environmental problems and key potentialities of the municipality. This report is developed with basis on the existing available information (plans, studies, reports) and interviews with municipal technicians and key stakeholders in the area. Afterwards the team makes the report available to a local consulting board incorporating local actors for the following up debate. Local key stakeholders identified through interaction of the team with the local experts, interest association, businessman, etc integrate this board. Whenever, for any reason, a stakeholder is identified as missing, the team makes all the efforts to bring the actor to the table and updates the new participant in the ongoing process. This report is made available to a wide community of partners in thematic workshops as a base document for participant discussion.

(2) *Visioning and identification of the strategic vectors for sustainable development.*

a. *Visioning workshop* - Development of visions for the municipality by the local actors – political, social, cultural and economic agents – is pursued in workshops. It includes structuring urgent priorities and local key potentialities for the sustainable development around strategic vectors.

b. *Thematic workshops* - Once the strategic vectors have been identified, thematic workshops are carried out to address the strategic vectors with highest priority in order to identify ways and partners to handle them.

(3) *Other participatory structures*

Reports describing the discussions and proposals in the workshops are produced and serve as a basis to write the *Preliminary program and strategy of action for the sustainable development* to be presented in a Local Forum, where the team encourages people involved to participate, analyze, debate and suggest adjustments and proposals. While doing this the participants learn about each other interests and concerns, become more knowledgeable of their area by listening to the others, and begin to establish social networks which are essential to the following phases, in particular to the building up of partnerships. After this, adjustments are made to integrate the participated contributions.

(4) *Environmental actions proposal and contractualization*

This stage consists in the organization of the *Environmental Action Program*, which includes the processes and actions for the implementation of the strategic vectors, identifying partnerships as a basis for contractualization. The information used results mostly from the workshops and forums that take place.

(5) *Monitoring of the process*

A set of indicators is developed, with the participation of the involved actors, to allow the municipality to periodically evaluate the evolution of what was proposed. The information used in this process derives mostly from the workshops and forums.

This methodology is general, having some of the EMPs assumed particular aspects depending on the local reality. As an example, some variations on this methodology for some of the municipalities are presented below.

Quite a substantial amount of knowledge generated during the process comes from sources such as inquiries carried out to the population (e.g., *Montijo*) or intensive interviewing to key actors (e.g., *Setúbal*). In the first case – *Montijo* – the territory has mostly urban portions, while others are totally rural. This poses distinct types of issues. Therefore, the team carried out a personal questionnaire to a sample of the population to grasp a better feeling of the needs and expectations of the residents in the different locations. In *Setúbal*, the team realized that there existed beforehand a group of active intellectuals, as well as economic agents, with a background history of achievements on environmental quality. Therefore, two team members carried out extensive and intensive interviewing to these individuals, always requesting the identification of other key actors in the area to be surveyed. These interviews were important relevant information to structure the profile of the municipality, its main and most urgent environmental problems and potentialities, and even generated some proposals for follow up debate.

Though the process is organized following the described stages, sometimes more than one stage is held simultaneously. This methodology is merely indicative, since it has to be adapted to each municipality, taking into account its profile and local characteristics. So far, the CIVITAS has worked with eight municipalities - *Oeiras, Alcobaça, Setúbal, Santiago do Cacém, Cascais, Montijo, Torres Vedras and Sesimbra* – five of which in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

### Designing participative forums

The experience reported in this paper results from the involvement of the author in the implementation of the LA21 in municipalities in the Lisbon region, though other initiatives have been happening elsewhere in the country. For each municipality the idea is to identify the state of the art of the environment, select the major problems, define specific actions and strategic interventions articulating with all the stakeholders, contributing to efficacy by encouraging cooperation and building up of partnerships through citizen involvement. This planning process towards sustainability is continuous, interactive, integrated and participated.

Participation is mostly assured through workshops. The workshops intend to involve the key local stakeholders, giving them the opportunity to express their concerns and to exchange ideas. This methodology developed by our team was built partially on the European Awareness Scenario Workshop<sup>3</sup> (EASW) and on the experience of its members who have worked in several participatory activities (e.g., attending and lecturing courses); doing professional work such as family mediation; setting up interaction mostly within technical arenas (e.g., waste management taxes).

The basic idea is to bring together about 30 to 40 people of the community (residents, technicians, politicians and economic agents) who work in four teams, initially within their categories and afterwards reassembled in cross category teams. This group of participants, who gather for one or two days, may have one or more of the following tasks, depending on the stage of the EMP: develop a joint vision for their municipality, identify local concerns and potentialities in the context of sustainability, suggest actions and make proposals to address these concerns and evaluate the potentialities, develop possible partnerships among them assuming the sharing of responsibility and enacted contracts of compromise.

Usually, in a initial workshop, the focus is in developing the joint vision for the municipality. The following workshops – the thematic workshops – focus on a specific strategic vector identified in the first workshop, and all the work addresses how and by whom that strategic vector can be addressed, namely what are the inhibitors to carry out the proposed actions and the actors that can contribute to solve identified limitations.

Until now the team has carried out a total of 24 workshops in 6 municipalities, allowing for the conclusions here reported.

### Lessons learned

Time has still to pass by before the potential of LA21 participatory process can be fully assessed. Transforming attitudes and practices seems to be slow, but steady. It is expected as more people become involved in these new ways, a growing potential towards change will emerge.

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<sup>3</sup> The EASW is a "systematic mechanism specially designed to facilitate meaningful dialog between groups" (EC, 2000). The CIVITAS team members participated over the past two years in the FLEXIMODE consortium, supported by the European Commission's *Innovation and SMEs* Program in expanding the EASW methodology.

Assuming that the setting of social interaction in policy making processes is interpreted under the forums, arenas and courts framework, it is clear that what CIVITAS is doing while promoting the workshops is designing and expanding the forums. This seems to be a crucial contribution to assure that planning issues are addressed in the right contexts and not solved in courts due to conflicts that arise.

While participating in these workshops, the participants create the so called social, intellectual and political capital (Gruber, 1994; Innes *et al.*, 1994) that become essential for the assurance of the implementation phase and therefore of a longer range sustainability.

This is mainly confirmed by the answers in the evaluation questionnaire, distributed at the end of the sessions, where people frequently refer to the advantages of using this technique to: exchange ideas, building up relationships, finding new ways to solve problems.

These workshops operate in several ways:

For the participants

- giving participants a sense of ownership and identity which are important to the future;
- providing a space for debate of ideas (mentioned in the most part of the evaluation questionnaires)
- giving room for the establishment of new relationships which contribute to learning and to the finding of easier and more direct ways of solving some of the problems;

For the politicians

- building up the Mayor image because of his/her demonstrated willingness to listen to the people (as participants refer during the sessions);
- giving an opportunity to more directly relate to their constituencies;
- providing occasions for reflection on the course of local policy, as issues which were not previously considered priority frequently jump to the main political agenda;

Participants not only learn about each others interests and rationale, but discover (as one of them told me) that they can work together. Participants also build synergies conducting to innovative ideas, solutions and proposals. They learn to trust more their politicians by learning also the difficulties they face in everyday life when willing to implement projects together. They build knowledge along the way by bringing in their diverse views and interpretations. Though it is still early to assess the importance that this building up of intellectual knowledge will play in the implementation phase, the guess is that it will make a difference in the future course of action.

Simultaneously, participants frequently become more motivated and make their time available to carry out needed tasks during the process (e.g., offering to carry out some of the tasks between consecutive workshops, or to find and clarify specific issues raised during the sessions).

Most of the participants only had previous contact with participation in public hearings of Environmental Impact Studies. They frequently reported the frustration felt in these processes due to the ambiguity and lack of specific proposals in those sessions. In contrast, it is common that they report a sense of achievement and pleasure after working in the LA21 workshops organized in smaller teams and with specific goals.

One interesting finding was that in the more urbanized areas these workshops often become more dominated by technicians (Vasconcelos, 1996). It seems that one of the reasons that leads to this is the complexity of the solutions needed to address problems in these more urbanized areas where a higher number of factors comes into play. There is also the possibility that citizens belonging to larger communities feel less empowered due to a greater anonymity and reduced sense of identity. It is rather curious to verify that some of the professionals working sometimes in the same city hall and having previously contacted each other by phone, end up seeing each other in person for the first time in these workshops (reported by one participant).

In more rural municipalities the team runs into another kind of difficulty, mainly due to the presence of illiterate participants. This requires quite a different approach. Some experiments in interactive processes had to deal with these less educated people (e.g., World Bank in South Africa). The methodology has to be shifted to incorporate more oral communication and drawing in order to allow for an effective participation of these less educated groups. Another situation that the team did not yet

face, but is likely to happen, is that of a non Portuguese speaking participant, since the immigrant population has been consistently growing, particularly in urban areas.

Though a lot of effort has been made to cover all the local groups and to bring to the table the less heard ones, there is still a lot to be done. Besides people from special cultural groups (e.g., gypsies, africans) there are also the youngsters who are often the more frequent users of the urban public space. The CIVITAS team has been putting more emphasis in involving these less heard groups.

### **New opportunities for planners' skills**

The neutral technical posture presumably assumed by most planners until now does not fit anymore in our nowadays society which deals with complex problems in fragmented arenas. There has been evidence that planning issues, particularly related to land use, which are challenged by the civil society end up being solved in courts by judges interpreting the existing law (e.g., France). This reveals very often inadequacy of forums for debating ideas and consensual developing joint solutions.

Sustainability, as well as carrying capacity, are two very appealing philosophical concepts, but rather difficult to explore in the ground. To act sustainability in all the aspects of society life, though valuable to have in mind, has little guidance from the literature.

Planning for sustainability at the municipal level is part of this challenge, but the methodologies to achieve it have to be developed keeping in mind a whole range of local characteristics. Therefore, planning for sustainability falls in the so called complex problems in a world of "no one in charge", of "shared-power", where "institutions must share objectives, activities, resources, power, or authority in order to achieve collective gains or minimize losses" (as reported in Bryson *et al.*, 1992).

Citizen participation around complex issues, such as sustainability, is not innocuous and it may bring the suspicion of the politicians and upset the stakeholders. When this happens power and the rational argument comes into play, questioning citizen participation. But the rationalization process is self-defeating, though it gives power to the expert initially, as soon as the first innovations can be translated into rules and programs the expert's power disappears. Forester (1999) shows how practitioner recurring to a political vision and pragmatic skill can facilitate practical and timely participatory planning processes.

Nowadays, fragmented arenas are a challenge to planners well trained to operate within community, technical and political grounds. This skill gives them an advantage to deal with the complexity and uncertainty characteristic of these arenas.

It is still early to make an evaluation of the true implementation of actions following up the LA21. However, these interactive methodologies have received greater demand from the part of politicians operating in public policy arenas.

People responding to the evaluation questionnaire frequently mention as positive the possibility to interact and establish networks. Unexpected partnerships (e.g., NGOs and businesses) have been addressing each other interests in solving a specific problem (social capital). People also mentioned the advantage of exchanging ideas stressing what they have learned with the others (intellectual capital).

If nothing else, the involvement of a diversity of local actors with various interests often brings to political agendas new unseen issues and reformulate old ones. Contrary to what is usually thought in the more political arenas, a decision maker who opens up to share his/her power by having greater involvement of their constituencies frequently becomes more popular within his/her electorate (e.g., Mayor of Évora<sup>4</sup> as reported in Vasconcelos, 1996).

In a world moving towards deliberative democracy the essence of democratic legitimacy lies in the outcomes of authentic deliberation by those who will be affected by the joint solutions (Dryzek, 1990; Dryzek, 2000). The building up of public policy will have to rely, more and more, in active citizenship and public discourse. The trend seems to be towards the community taking into their hands its own future. Planners working in public policy arenas cannot ignore this and will have to be able to work up these new methodologies to integrate new forms of operation in seeking solutions for public policy. Fragmented arenas are a challenge for planners. The skills they developed along their professional lives to deal simultaneously with community, technical and political arenas give them an advantage to

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<sup>4</sup> The mayor of Évora, who had conducted a participatory process to develop the local plan, was re-elected independent of his party having lost its majority.

make the most of this opportunity. The expansion of forums is a must if we want planning issues to be addressed within the speciality.

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