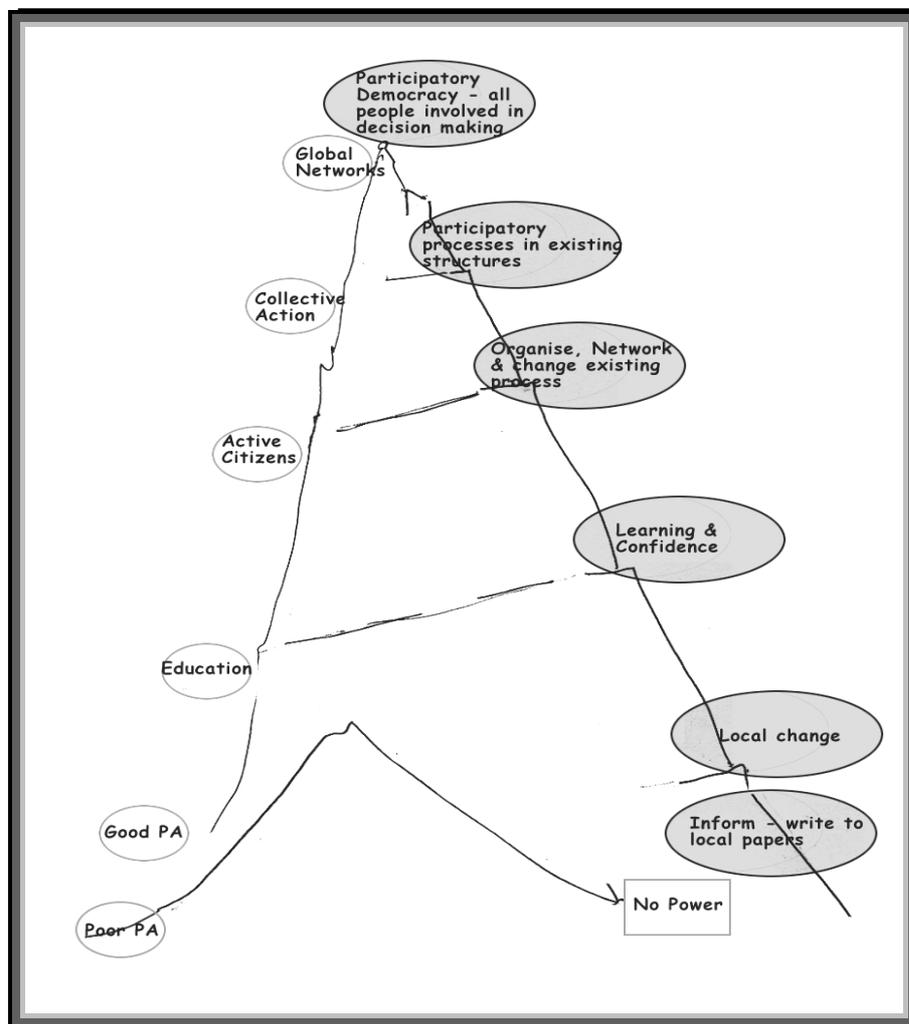


# Participatory Practitioners for Change

Second meeting at Charney Manor,  
26 - 27 October 2004



The PA Mountain

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## 1. Introduction

In April 2004, Oxfam organised a meeting of participatory practitioners in the UK, the purpose of which was to provide an opportunity to reflect on the history of participatory approaches in the UK, and in particular participatory appraisal (PA), and work together to identify issues and develop strategies to address them where appropriate. At the first meeting<sup>1</sup>, participants identified a number of common concerns about participation in the UK, and felt that there would be real value in being able to work together as a group of practitioners, forming a collective voice, to address some of those issues. In so doing, the group agreed the following key shared principles of participatory approaches:

- PA should be an empowering approach that should be underpinned by principles of community development and should include/embody collective action to transform their lives according to their own criteria.
- PA should be based in continuous learning process that respects self-knowledge, establishes a climate of trust and openness, and fosters creativity and new skills
- PA should be proactively inclusive, paying attention to both differences and similarities.
- PA should always enable critical reflection to challenge established beliefs and power relations both within and around communities, and should always seek to achieve equal partnership between all stakeholders.
- PA should never be an extractive process, and should be robust and ethical.

The group also explored and prioritised key issues that concerned the group and identified areas that the group felt they could realistically achieve impact. These areas included the following:

- Guidelines for commissioners that would help them support good participative practice – through outlining what makes a good process, what they should be looking for in a consultant, and so on;
- Action Learning Sets: working together in different ways to explore issues that particularly interested different people, in particular around personal practice;
- Regional networks; where there is no local or national network, such as in the West Midlands, some participants wanted to explore how they could link up with people in their area, and/or improve the ‘networks’ already in existence; and
- pulling together lessons learned around good practice in the use of participatory approaches in order to develop a body of evidence that could be used in advocacy.

An action plan was developed, drawing together various proposed activities to be taken forward by various group members before the second meeting.

The purpose of this second meeting was to take forward such discussions from the previous meeting, further reflect on the issues facing participation in the UK, move towards formalising the group (if that seemed suitable) and decide on shared action / working together where appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> The first retreat took place in April 2004. The report of the meeting can be obtained from Oxfam UK Poverty Programme, email [sgriffiths@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:sgriffiths@oxfam.org.uk) or telephone 01865 313105

At both meetings, the agenda was established by the group at the meeting. From the start Oxfam has been keen to ensure that there should be significant sharing of responsibility and shared ownership of the project. Funds are available to support the group until the end 2005, with sufficient to support four network meetings and a small number of events that would enable the group to implement their ideas. At this second meeting, the group identified the need to think about how the network could be funded in the longer term.

## **2. Participants**

To initiate the network, Oxfam contacted practitioners known to them who have been driving the development of PA in the UK, through training and support to others - the 'Movers and Shakers' of PA development. In those initial invitations we asked people to suggest others that they thought would be interested in the meeting, and so attempted to extend the invitation more widely. This continued for the second meeting, with many of the participants having attended the first meeting, others who had been unable to attend the first but were able to participate in this meeting, and others still who had become aware of the group since the first meeting. There is currently a mailing list of 40 practitioners, and this grows all the time as people inform colleagues and associates.

Attending this second meeting were:

Kate Gant (Independent trainer)  
Jo Rowlands (Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme)  
Keith Budden (Groundwork Birmingham)  
John Rowley (Independent Consultant)  
Duncan Fuller (PEANuT)  
Jan Walsh (Groundwork Wales)  
Megan Evans (Participation Cymru)  
Peter Bryant (Independent trainer)  
Eve Bevan (Food and Nutrition Project, Shepherds Bush Healthy Living Centre)  
Naysan Adlparvar (Reading University Postgraduate Student)  
Lynda Thoroughgood  
Peter Musgrave (Action Aid)  
Nick Lunch (Insight)  
Chris Johnes (Communities First Support Network, Wales)  
Charlotte Flower (Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme)  
Pippa Bobbett (Independent Practitioner)  
Vicky Johnson (Development Focus)

Apologies were sent from the following:

Chris Johnes (Communities First Support Network, Wales)  
Barbara Castle (Independent Consultant)  
Scott Jones (Centre for International Development and Training, Wolverhampton University)  
Sarah Madden (Independent Consultant/Trainer)

## **3. Overview**

The event ran, as before, from Tuesday lunchtime to mid-afternoon on Wednesday. The plan for the first afternoon was to catch up with each other on events since the last meeting, introduce new participants, review the action plan and then hear from Naysan Adlparvar about his research which included development of a time line of the history of PA which had been started at the first meeting. This would then prime

the group to raise issues that it would like to take forward over the rest of the meeting, prioritise those and agree the programme for the rest of the time.

#### **4. Review of action plan**

There were five key actions that were reviewed (the numbers given below refer to the number in the Action Plan of the first retreat meeting)

- 1: Guidelines for commissioners - this did not really get taken forward since the first meeting, but there is still a keen interest to do so;
- 2: Action Learning Sets - not specifically developed since the first meeting, but a number of participants at the first meeting have met since, and built links with each other to share practice, work more closely with each other
- 3: The West Midlands group did meet with REGEN West Midlands, and there is real interest in taking a regional network forward
- 7: Collection of good practice - this has not happened, and it was agreed that the process needed to be facilitated in order to make it happen; a group agreed to discuss this at the meeting;
- 13: 'Blogging': Duncan agreed to do this as soon after the meeting as possible: all the participants agreed to give it a go.

Although the review of the action points felt a little negative, the 'catch up' session – when everyone shared a 'spark' either from the first meeting or since – revealed that the first meeting and its report had influenced people's own practice, and had inspired them to challenge their own thinking and their own practice a great deal. Motivation to work as a group remained very high, and it had been this that had seemingly brought people back to the second meeting.

Naysan's presentation (please see Annex A) was a useful summary of issues raised at the last meeting, but also included additional points raised by those interviewed who were not at the first meeting. A key observation he raised was around the name 'Movers and Shakers' – seen as some to be an exclusive name; later on in the meeting we discussed this issue in more depth and agreed to change the name to Participatory Practitioners for Change.

#### **5. Issues raised for discussion**

The group then went on to raise and prioritise the issues it wanted to address in the rest of the meeting. Using a card sorting exercise, a summary of which is in Annex B, three 'Big Issues' and four 'smaller ones' were identified. Two rounds of concurrent meetings were then held, with plenary sessions in between. Participants chose which issue they wanted to explore, and each group self-organised how they wanted to hold the discussion. In addition to discussing the issue, each group was also asked to consider the following questions:

- What is the function of this group?
- What makes us 'movers and shakers'?
- What is stopping us?

Within the write-ups, action points are highlighted and where possible the person responsible is named. These are summarised in the main action plan in section 6 and any activities that have happened between the meeting and the preparation of this report have been added to that plan.

## 5.1. Participative democracy

The group thought that resources and influence are geared by politics. It was felt that the current political system prevents empowerment and that people are disengaged from the formal political process. This is reflected by turnout at local elections (around 30%) whereas 60-70% is achieved in local New Deal for Communities project areas. It was suggested that this is because people cannot see the effect of politics on day-to-day events and perceive that NDCs have more 'real' power.

### **Empowered Communities = Better Government**

There was a consensus that empowered communities would effect a bigger change at a local level and lead to better government. Concern remained that participatory tools are not being used for active citizenship but as market research, and that there is a need to establish to what extent PA is being used in areas of consultation, education and taking action. It was suggested that better examples of representation may be found in Parish Councils rather than Borough Councils.

The group raised the issue of whether participatory democracy should be promoted; whether a vision of people making decisions using PA tools should be a goal of participatory democracy? If so, it was felt that the PA process would need to be made relevant by devolving power through the implementation of research, education, and collective action. However a concern was then raised regarding whether such a goal could lead to forms of PA tyranny?

The group identified that PA tools could be linked to such areas as budgeting and taxation, Citizens Juries, decision-making at neighbourhood level, and collective learning. It was felt that there should be a focus, not just on the tools, but also on looking at people behaving symbiotically (for example Findhorn, *Gaian Democracies* by Madron and Jopling, Referenda in Amsterdam<sup>2</sup>).

### **Creating Active Citizens through PA**

The group observed that whilst PA can solve small local issues, it also has potential to work at higher scales; however it was argued that for this to occur, more support is often needed.

In thinking about active citizenship, and its relations to participatory appraisal, questions were then raised concerning:

- who is voting?
- how we can get PA more widely adopted?
- how we can get more people to commit to working in PA way elected to government (risk playing to lowest common denominator)?
- how we can make demands visible?
- how we can engage people when there is no culture of proper political debate?
- how we can establish a political system that supports not undermines?

The group subsequently looked at steps anyone could take to further PA knowledge and methods, as some form of response to some or all of these questions:

- educating and informing people in power about the benefits of using PA as a decision-making tool
- commit to take personal involvement in promoting alternative models in our own community (write letters to local newspapers; lobby local political Parties)

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<sup>2</sup> Pete Bryant has since circulated information about this; attached in Annex D

- use different, and perhaps more impact-laden media (theatre; participatory video)
- ride on the back of other projects / schemes to promote the use of PA (Housing Associations)

Marketing and promotion of PA was seen as a key issue, with many practices being used that are not 'real' PA. As such, suggestions for improving the perception of PA were identified as follows:

- Marketing PA as fun, perhaps using video comparison of PA meetings and usual decision-making meetings;
- Develop a catchy strap line, to credit PA process in reports of successful projects;
- Give references and links in promoting PA;
- Use one of the tools as an opening for discussing PA (Green Mapping at L21);
- See if PA training needs to be more political to support the creation of Active Citizens; and
- Share examples with each other and link to each other's web sites

### The Five Key Steps

The group saw five areas where headway could be made in advancing participatory democracy:

1. Promote participatory democracy and go beyond PA to meaningful involvement in political structures - become active citizens ourselves;
2. Show reference to PA on documents (reports, promotions etc.)
3. Share case studies via various resources (video, web page)
4. Work collaboratively among network members to connect our skills – review past projects and strengths towards doing a big project together to show how it works.
5. Remember we are Movers & Shakers because we have (pa)ssion, skills etc.(anybody can join and will want to)

The group used a mountain analogy to represent the spiral of experiential knowledge and reflection required in good PA practice, moving from consultation to active citizenship and participatory democracy (see figure 1 below).

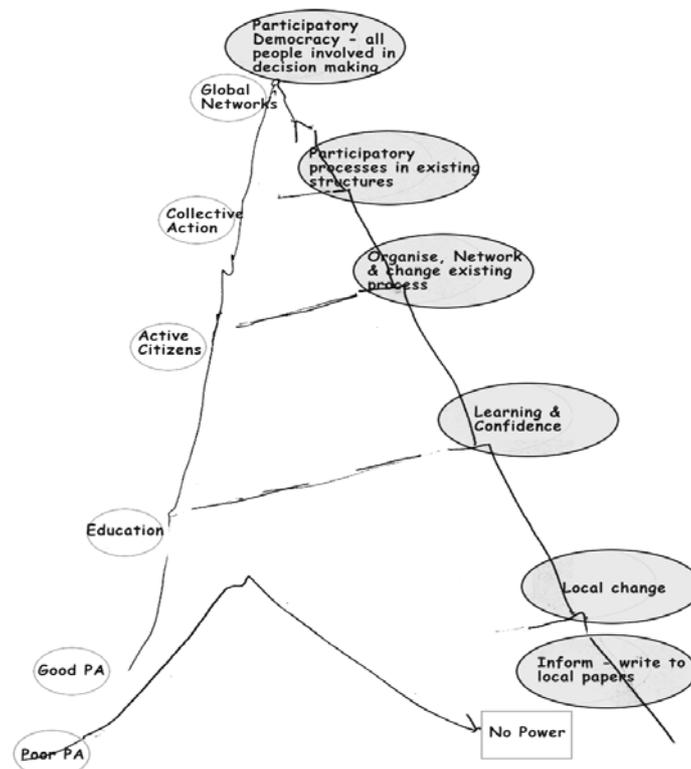


Figure 1: the PA Mountain

## 5.2 Policy

The policy group started from the premise that there was no shortage of policy that supported a participatory approach, but that a range of barriers seemed to be visible at the level of implementation. In order to focus the discussion, the group decided to create a diagram that would give some structure to their discussion (see Figure 2 opposite).

Firstly, some key areas of policy were identified eg Sustainable Communities, Communities First (see rectangular box on the diagram) and then some of the structures through which this policy should be implemented were explored (small ovals on the diagram). The group then saw that there was a missing “layer” of the structure that were the regulating bodies which are shown in the large oval mid way between the policy and the implementing bodies.

Things that helped and hindered the implementation of participatory values were then identified as snakes (hindrances) and ladders (helps) and brief notes were made on the discussion.

At the top right of the diagram are two ladders that relate to the policies and the group’s understanding of them e.g **Map the policies that create the space**. Urban Forum was suggested as a group that has a good understanding of this and from whom more could be learned. Much of the remaining discussion related to:

- the need to provide case study material to lobby policy makers **Celebrate the champions**
- the need to identify communication mechanisms whereby practitioners can talk to policy makers and decision makers.
- the lack of accountability by implementing bodies because they are too busy being accountable “up” to government
- the sense of unwillingness on the part of commissioners to embrace more genuine empowerment

It was extremely useful to have input on the Welsh situation where the Participation Cymru is well linked in to policy makers and decision makers and the “dragon post-its” on the left of the diagram demonstrate the specific actions that can be taken in the Welsh situation.

## 5.3 The network

This group looked at the future function and structure of the Movers and Shakers network. A potential structure outlining how this group would relate to other existing and future networks was drawn up (see figure 3). The following discussion and action points came up:

- Name change - it was felt Movers and Shakers may have been appropriate initially but no longer. The group later agreed with **Participatory Practitioners for Change**.
- Action Aid is to consider where to put its resources - either into this network or into a Reflect network which would link into PPfC
- Future funding of the network is crucial - a number of the group are to explore this
- The initial M & S report can be used to draw up a draft terms of reference and an A4 sheet outlining the networks aims, objectives, etc
- Need to explore shared policy agendas with Involve

## Figure 2 - Policy



Provide paper info. to vol. sector, partnership council and assoc. networks



CFSN, Oxfam, Participation Cymru etc. as national network to promote network



Facilitator network + connect with CDC



Ensure links between networks (CFSN, Cynnal Cymru, SEN)



Link to ASPBs to PA using CFSN as conduit



Guidance for Common Strategies



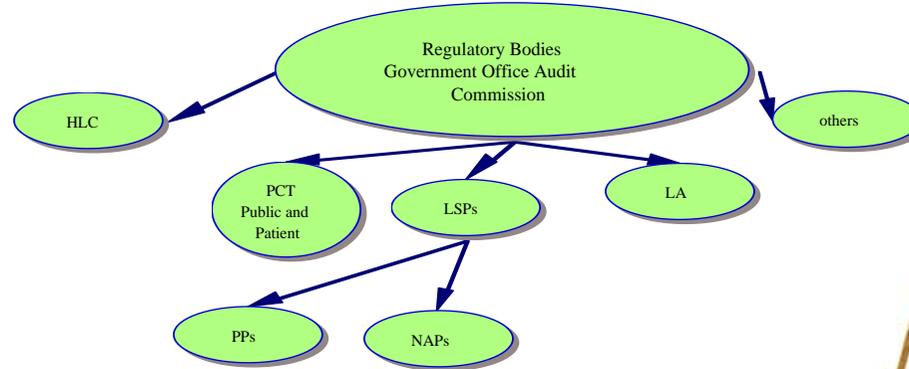
Identify other appropriate bodies to form network (PC/Oxfam/CFSN)



Guidance for C.First action plans



Establish training module/forum which promote PA principles



Map the policies that create the space



Links with Urban Forum



50 voices are better than one SID



Find the champions



Can we talk with enough unity to be heard



Accountability not local



Commissioners' guidelines



Short-termism



Evidence of effectiveness



Celebrate the champions



Add names to list



Undervaluing of skills and time



Show partnership models have worked



Small budgets



Communication mechanisms



Explore links with Involve



Expose hi-jackers + bad case studies



Mainstreaming means takeover by large private or statutory body



All bids include evaluation process



Joint bids to fulfil evaluation vision of M&S



Money to measure effectiveness



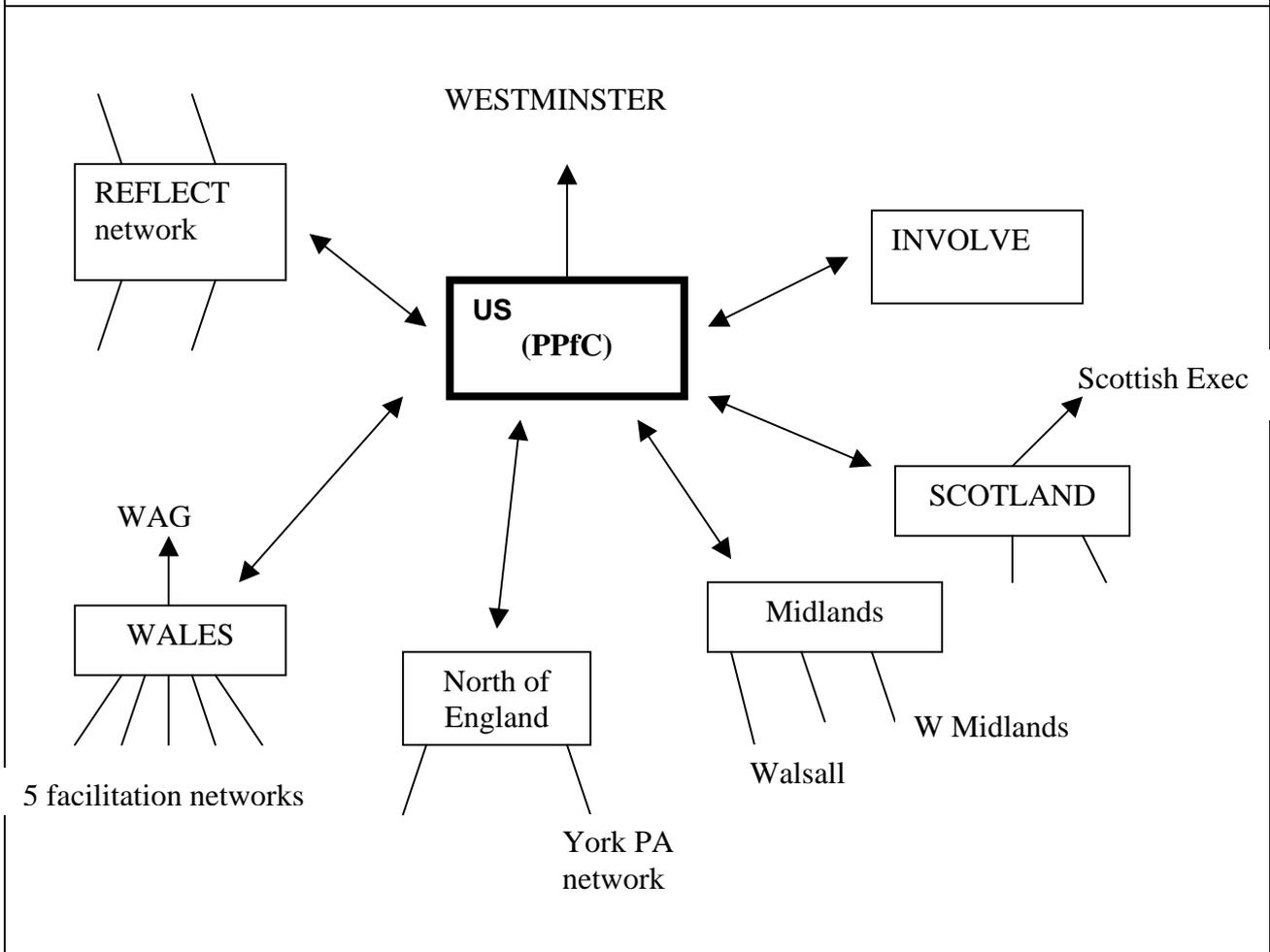
Not enough impact assessment



Prioritise targets to allow local accountability too

- Go back to 40 invitees and ask if they agree with the new structure
- Members of the network to arrange to meet with “Involve”
- All members to communicate with their network members and colleagues about PPfC
- The network is to be seen as a cross partnership “network”
- It was felt that members of PPfC should be seen as individuals with an interest and commitment to participation rather than organisations who solely want a presence in the network.

**Figure 3:** possible structure of the network. As an individual one can be involved at any level, but the main role of PPfC is to maximise the potential of every other network to raise issues at national level



The arrows in this diagram mostly represent individuals who participate in a number of different networks, and so link them up

#### 5.4 Skills

The group agreed that it is essential to approach work with the intention of learning. The approach requires some humility and a practice based on the admission that one does not know either the ideal process or the ideal outcome at the beginning.

This is more than just professional development (Continuous Professional Development) that might be more selfish.

**A Principle:** one should always work for their personal and professional development and so adopt a self-critical approach and humble acceptance of the need to learn.

This means that time always needs to be budgeted for personal development and care taken to try new ideas and avoid repeating the same-old-stuff unless there is a clearly thought-through reason for it.

Commissioners need to be convinced of the need to build in time for reflection and sharing learning in all P/A initiatives.

### Specific action points

- **Skills audit:** This was mentioned also by another sub-group as a possible action for the entire *Participatory Practitioners for Change* group. It might be more pertinent for the smaller regional or interest groupings. The next *Participatory Practitioners for Change* full meeting should consider this; even as a very short unprepared exercise it could be useful.
- **Individual learning:** committing time to working on one's own to improve skills and knowledge. This means doing necessary reading; going through PLA Notes etc.
- **Extract lessons from our own work:** this is the logical thing to do if one has made a decision to work from case histories and the said that there is a need to demonstrate the effectiveness of good participatory work. Time needs to be assigned to do this and it would be useful to have a format to simplify the collection of lessons and a mechanism for sharing the lessons.
- **Evaluate and review lessons:** also required would be some simple method for assessing lessons and moderating them as useful and as examples of good or bad practice. It is still true that there might not be agreement on what constitutes good practice. One should keep clear of statements like "best practice" since it implies a level of judgemental imperialism that the group cannot aspire to. It might be possible to share ideas electronically (e.g. e-forum or exchanges Blog)
- **Existing groups can do skills sharing:** The existing networks could add some exercises and commit the time to sharing ideas and methods as part of their normal meetings. It might be possible to have short sessions in which people offer ideas of things that worked very well or very badly in their recent experience. A quick face-to-face version of Tips for Trainers, perhaps...
- **New groups can include skill sharing:** As new groups and networks form, they could include skill share as part of their activities. New groups could be created for the specific purpose of sharing skills and ideas but it seems unlikely for the *Participatory Practitioners for Change* who seem more functionally focussed and tend to see skill share as an additional means, an accessory, not as an end in itself. Short practical skill share sessions could be included into the meetings and the Case Studies meeting might lead naturally into skill share work.
- **Skills sharing could be informal 121 and one-off:** The group should expect to help each other in very simple informal ways according to its needs and not expect only to work in formal meetings or settings. It should be acceptable to call up another person in the *Participatory Practitioners for Change* and ask for specific advice about an ongoing piece of work or a particular problem or worry. Eventually everyone will receive support from others and each exchange need not include immediate reciprocal support.

### 5.5 Guidelines for commissioners

The importance of 'Commissioners Guidelines' was discussed at the last 'Movers and Shakers' Retreat and was revisited this time. It was agreed that the benefit of guidelines could be two-fold. By outlining what PA practitioners require from

commissioners as well as outlining quality guidelines for practitioners themselves. Instead of reinventing the wheel, it was agreed that guidelines would be developed based on what is already being used.

#### Action Plan:

- Finding out what has already been done, for example; by CFSN and ICA (Netherlands), Oxfam – *Have you been PA'd* and collate information.
- Telecom of original group (looking at 'Commissioners Guidelines') to brainstorm headings and build on, if necessary, already existing guidelines

Original group: Barbara, Scott, Charlotte, Duncan and Groundwork (with Charlotte leading)

### **5.6 Case studies**

These relate to results from the skills workshops. It was felt that a **Case Studies event** would be useful to come together to share “stories” or case studies, both good and bad. The outcome this event would be documented case studies, which could be used to:

- Promote PA as an effective approach to achieve participation
- Influence policy/decision makers on good practice
- promote discussion about what participation is and establish minimum standards
- Learn from people’s experiences and so improve practice
- Inspire

The case studies could be posted on the SID<sup>3</sup> website area, etc.

The following points were made:

- For the day a case study format would be needed – a type of proforma, must include a “box” on policy links
- Proforma - purpose, content, process and presentation needs to be considered beforehand
- Must share “bad” practice in order to learn from it
- Could ask the question “how can we use this case study”
- Could pay research students to ask people about experiences eg. PEANUT, University of Glamorgan, IDS MA students, University of Reading,
- At the event the most suitable case studies to promote PA could be chosen.
- Presentation of case studies is crucial, need to look at the use of different formats eg. Video
- Most successful if all attendees bring case study
- Need to explore the use of Action Learning type approach at the event to produce case study
- Possibly pay journalist or writer to write up case studies in accessible format

### **5.7 Barriers**

The group identified a range of different barriers, many of which are inter-related and in themselves complex: see Figure 4. For example, for some there is an issue around branding PA: what gets called PA seems to cover a range of different approaches, and so there are different and maybe conflicting understandings of what it is; however, concerns around branding are that it opens up issues around flexibility, limiting the wide ownership and development of PA as collection of tools and approaches. These barriers operate at different levels as well – time is an issue for

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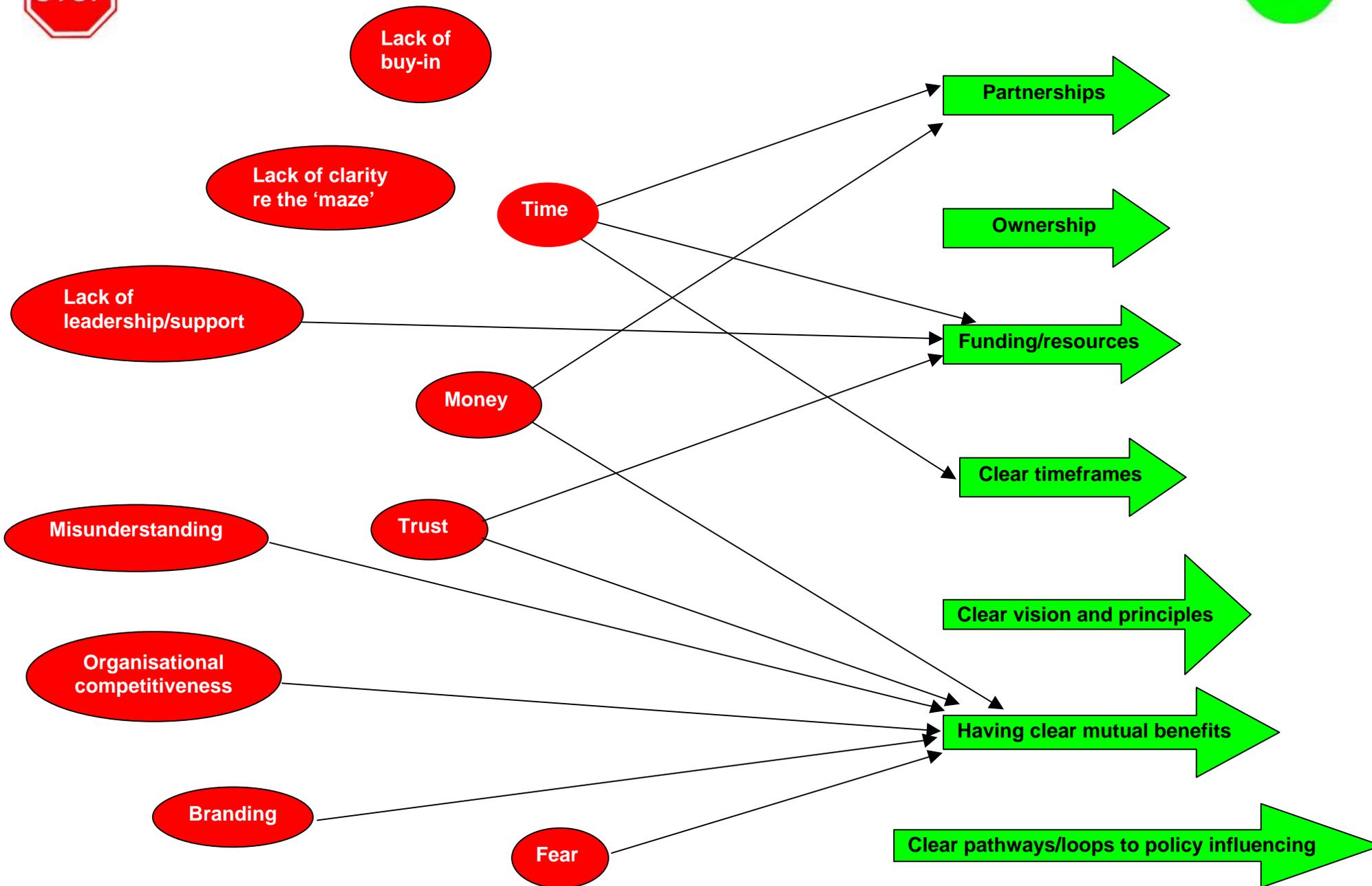
<sup>3</sup> SID is an online information bank on the UK Poverty Programme website that was launched in early 2005, visit: [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/sid](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/sid)

Figure 4: Issues raised by the group exploring barriers to good participation practice and how to tackle them



### Barriers to good participation practice

### Ways through the barriers



community members – they do not have much spare time to invest in processes, time is required to develop trust, for local authorities there are pressures of time to get things achieved.

The group then attempted to think through strategies for overcoming these barriers, and these are represented in Figure 4 as well. There are strong links between these and the other conversations held in other groups, and the activities developed around developing guidelines for commissioners, for working with others such as ‘Involve, for developing a body of case study evidence to use in lobbying and developing good practice, and for using the event resources available to the group for opening up the debate about participation

## 6. Action plan

What	Who	When	What has happened to date Dec 04
1. An event, turning stories into case studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- need a format/framework for this</li> <li>- need to focus on both skills and practice as well as policy</li> </ul>	Jo and Megan	mid to late Jan 05  within 2 weeks; circulate to all	This has been planned for 27 <sup>th</sup> January 2005. Jo and Megan are organising it
2. Better articulate mutual benefits of being in this group ( <i>in one pager?</i> )			
3. Guidance notes; group to take forward.	Charlotte to lead Original group – Barbara, Scott, Duncan		Group still keen to proceed. To convene early 2005
4. Email list and telephone numbers	Emma	Within two weeks	Done
5. Next meeting, next April. Need to ask those not attending if venue was an issue?	Emma		
6. Start collecting ‘participatory democracy’ case studies to put into one document to circulate to each other. This is to stimulate discussion	All – to circulate. Peter B will start off with one or two to give example	By next meeting	
7. A4 paper to give to INVOLVE to represent what this group is doing	John will draft something and circulate to get to Charlotte  Charlotte to finalise	By Wed next week  By Thurs next week	Has been done; see Annex C
8. Sharpening understanding of policy work – what are other agencies doing around participation and policy? What policies are relevant? Which are about empowerment? Should have a session on this at the next meeting, and all need to do ‘homework’ on this by then (answering above questions. In addition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Charlotte to report back on Involve</li> <li>- Vicky will attend Urban Forum meeting and will report back</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing Case study event Next meeting  Within 2 weeks  Asap	
9. Look at what is happening locally and nationally. collectively auditing/mapping	All	Ongoing Next meeting	

connections			
10. Blogging: establish a blog to test out.	Duncan	By end of next week	Duncan has set the Blog up <sup>4</sup>
11. Collaborative working among network members: inform each other of what we do. BLOG our websites and or additional information about our organisations/activities, etc	All	By end Nov	
12. Funding: [PA:UK WAS AN ALTERNATIVE NAME] PA:UK – by next meeting need to have thought through what we need to consider and do to access funding for future work  Regionally: - Wales - West Midlands - - N of England - London - Oxford  Need to co-ordinate building into existing bids resources to support the work of the PA:UK group	Charlotte, Vicky, Keith, Pippa, Lynda  Megan, Jan Keith, Kate, Scott, Eleanor, Paul Duncan, Peter B Eve, Lynda and Pete M Nick, Pippa, John, Jo		
13. Naysan's report - transcript sign off - draft	Naysan Charlotte, Duncan	End Dec	
14. Documenting this meeting Rough and ready report: - Skills - Barriers - Participative democracy - Policy - Case studies - Networks - Guidelines - Action points  Draft 'public' report  Reference group to comment on and return to Charlotte  Report produced and circulated	John Pete M Lynda Pippa Megan Megan Eve Charlotte  Charlotte  Duncan, John and Vicky  Oxfam	By end of next week  By end Nov  By early Dec  By Xmas	

<sup>4</sup> see <http://participatorypractitionersforchange.blogspot.com/>

## **Annex A: Naysan's handouts**

This is the handout circulated by Naysan at the meeting. Discussion generated by his presentation focussed in particular on the issue of accreditation of courses (many in the group do and have run accredited courses of different types), and the name of the group. Naysan is preparing a report of this work, which should be ready in early 2005. Contact Charlotte Flower ([cflower@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:cflower@oxfam.org.uk)) for more details.

### **'Time line' Presentation: Handout**

#### **Section One: The Original 'time line' and the present research.**

- In this presentation I am attempting to: i) introduce the research, ii) flag up some issues for discussion, iii) point out a few observations and possible ideas from practitioners for the 'way forward'.
- Original 'time line' sought to raise origins, issues and concerns relating to PA rather than an accurate history.
- The present research involved interviewing 18 practitioners who used PA in their work across the UK (list of contributors and interview questions available).
- The product of this research will attempt to highlight and draw together the various issues and perspectives of the practitioners into a document to help identify the 'way forward'.

#### **Section Two: Reflections on PA practice and Participation in the UK.**

- Origins of PA from Universities and key individuals
- Influence of funding and policy on 'spaces' for PA.
- The perceived role of PA.
- Little commitment by decision-makers to act upon/see worth of PA outputs.
- Extractive 'appraisal' only.
- Limited communication of what constituted 'good quality' work.
- Networking: The worry of competition, agendas and exclusion.
- Accreditation!

**NOTE:** *Clear trends in difference of perspectives in issues, concerns and therefore the 'way forward' across practitioner circumstances; e.g. independent practitioners (private) – 'community support' practitioners (public) and PA practitioner vs. PA trainers. E.g. Accreditation*

#### **Section Three: The 'Way Forward'.**

- A common conception of PA including documentation of cases of good practice that can lead to increased advocacy and credibility of PA at decision-making levels.
- Need to understand how PA tools can be used in all stages of a project cycle. Including documented examples of 'good practice' and training opportunities.
- To work with decision-makers to show them the benefits and credibility of PA methods and principles.

Suggestions included:

- Accreditation or code of ethics could be informed from other disciplines.
- OCN-type accreditation with course content assessed by a secondary PA specific body. Composed of experienced practitioners.
- As an alternative to accreditation: a national centralised log of practitioners that organisations could consult. Maintained by the national network and includes practitioners from 'recognised' trainers. Additionally it would log practitioner experience.
- Ethical framework with responsibility placed on practitioner answerable to an 'ethical committee'.
- A strengthening of the commissioning process behind PA work to help set a clear understanding of the process and secure action upon outputs. Guidelines may be useful. Linked to introducing decision-makers to PA.

- Possibility of a small central fund for which bids could be made by practitioners or communities. Practitioner-community collaboration for bidding process.
- Possible streaming of PA work as some individuals felt that certain practitioners were better oriented to work with certain client groups. Collaboration of network members on PA work to increase quality and learning between practitioners.
- Multi-tiered co-ordination by OXFAM and/or National network. Including advocacy, co-ordination and training.

**NOTE:** *Clear differences in circumstances of individual, organisational and network capacity in different geographical areas can be seen, which relates to the co-ordination of the 'way forward' e.g. Wales*

#### The Range of Interview Questions.

- 1) What has been happening with PA in the UK over the last decade?
  - What are its origins and trends of practice?
  - What do you take PA to mean?
  - What role do you think policy and the related funding opportunities have in affecting these trends?
- 2) What do you see as the issues facing PA and participatory practice today?
  - From your experience of using PA with communities do you think unequal power relations, within those communities, is an issue of concern? If so, can you explain a little about them?
  - Do you think that the power relationship between communities and decision-makers, can be an issue of concern? If you do, why is this?
  - What are your views on quality control for PA practice in terms of training and accreditation?
- 3) What do you see as the possible ways forward regarding the issues you raised?
  - What role could you envisage a National PA Network playing in the future of PA practice in the UK?

#### List of PA Practitioners Interviewed.

1. Keith Budden – East Birmingham Director, Groundwork (England).
2. Penny Byrne – Participatory Researcher, University of Glamorgan (Wales).
3. Christine Caldwell – Project Manager, East End Health Action (Scotland).
4. Eleanor Chell – Walsall PA Network (England).
5. Charlotte Flower – Participatory Methods Adviser, Oxfam UKPP (UK).
6. Duncan Fuller – PEANuT, University of Northumbria (England).
7. Kate Gant – Independent Practitioner (England).
8. Susan Guy – Independent Practitioner, Scottish Participative Initiatives (Scotland).
9. Paul Hartill – Walsall PA Network (England).
10. Andy Inglis – [previously] Independent Practitioner, Scottish Participative Initiatives (Scotland).
11. Stuart Jones – Participatory Researcher, University of Glamorgan (Wales).
12. Roger Newton – Information and Development Manager, York Council for Voluntary Service (England).
13. Mel Nicholls – Project Officer, Social Inclusion Project, Oxfam UKPP (England).
14. John Rowley – Independent Practitioner (England).
15. Frances Thyer – Communities First Support Network (Wales).
16. Linda Tock – Independent Practitioner, Community Focus (England).
17. Jan Walsh – Communities First Support Network, Groundwork Wales (Wales).
18. Sarah Ward – Parish Planning Development Worker, Community Council of Berkshire (England)

## Annex B: summary of card exercise to identify issues to be discussed:

### Policy

- Influencing policy makers and donors
- 'Bucket of water' syndrome – what other solutions are there to resistance to participation from decision-makers?
- Influencing policy makers
- PA – legitimacy and engagement at policy levels

### Skills

- Improving my skills, mentoring etc. Is it action learning or buddying?
- 'continual professional development'
- skill share (success swop)

### Case studies

- Case studies – maybe tell the 'stories' today?
- Why, which, what are the ingredients?
- Share bad practice

### Network issues

- Who is in the network? Are there any boundaries and if so what are they?
- Setting up and growing regional networks
- How local do 'good' networks have to be
- How to get networks to go well
- Where does this group want to go?
- Setting up PA 'network' in Wales!?
- Role and function of regional network
- The future of the W Midlands network. Why? What?
- Leadership
- How to use the Oxfam 'events' budget

### Guidance, codes and standards

- Code and guidance for PA practitioners
- Guidance/codes – drawing together learning to lead to influence
- Minimum standards of participation from grassroots perspective (Oxfam working on)
- Legitimacy?
- Guidelines for commissioners and practitioners

### Barriers

- Poor PA problem tree (John)
- Explore things which need to be considered when using PA in the UK – eg how can PA be used within the managerial/organisational/community cultures of the UK and within its history of political struggles

### Marketing PA

- Role of big organisations – Oxfam, Action Aid, etc
- What is stopping us? (M&S)

### Participatory democracy and citizenship

- Successful social change in other countries and places. What has shifted? How can we share, learn, document that?
- The need to promote notions/examples of participatory democracy i.e. PA is fine but what structures/systems can they feed into? How can we do this?

## **Annex C: Participatory Practitioners for Change:**

This is the one page summary drafted by C Flower to present to Involve

### **Who we are:**

We are an affiliation of practitioners who work in a range of different sectors in the UK (health, community development, social exclusion, environment), in a range of different ways (small and large voluntary organisations, statutory, freelance trainers and practitioners, community organisations) – and using a range of participatory approaches. Our common issue is that much that is done in the name of participation does not in fact lead to greater involvement of people, nor does it lead to any significant change in the status quo of power and decision making.

Our first step as a group has been to develop core principles that we believe define good participatory practice, and will use these to guide our work both individually and collectively, working in association with others in small teams or networks in our own particular locations to improve participatory work. We see the Participatory Practitioners for Change group as a way of sharing learning from the smaller groups and as a way of spreading learning more effectively and being more influential. We aim to link with other groups of practice and with national level initiatives in order to prevent duplication and to promote greater effectiveness.

We base most of our methods on those that come from the recent history of improving participation in international development work (RRA, PRA, PLA and PA) but we do not claim any methods as our own and include and adapt any tools that we find helpful. We think that methods should be adapted to the specific situation in which they are used and that the automatic application of tools is unlikely to be useful. We use the term PA (Participation for Action) to describe this collection of approaches.

### **Our five core principles:**

A good PA process is underpinned by principles of good community development and depends on three things: respect for a number of key principles; use of a rigorous process and the effective use of a range of tools.

**PA should be empowering**, leading to action, especially collective action and should help people to become active citizens.

**Good PA involves continuous learning**, in which everyone should accept that they have something to learn from the process. PA practitioners adopt an approach of self-critical reflection and they acknowledge the expert knowledge of other participants.

**PA should be proactively inclusive**, making it easier for a wide range of people to take part and make their views heard, and in particular PA practitioners try to include and seek out people who are often ignored or do not take part in other community development processes. PA processes pay attention to differences and do not try to homogenise different opinions and points of view

**PA should challenge established beliefs and power relations both within and around communities**, through recognising the role of existing power relations in disadvantaging certain groups and individuals and facilitating social change through the effective involvement of disadvantaged people in social and political processes.

**A good PA process is robust and ethical**, containing many ways of checking observations and validating results so that the outcomes can be reliable and that the process is not extractive, and delivers change to those involved

## **Annex D: Brief overview of Amsterdam Referendum**

### **Brief introduction:**

The Referendum system adopted by Amsterdam Council in 2003 allows citizens to have a direct input into some of the decision making processes of local government.

### **The context**

The 'Popular Initiative' was supported by a broad range of organisations and took some 2 years of lobbying before it was accepted by the Council. The population of Amsterdam is made up of 555,000 eligible voters.

The Dutch Constitution does not allow binding referendums, however, the Council has promised to respect the outcome of referendums.

The following topics are excluded from the referendum process: Local taxes, the budget, 'vulnerable groups' (asylum seekers, prostitutes, homeless people), urgent issues and the salaries of politicians and public officials.

### **The process**

1. A group of local people identify a proposal which they would like to see implemented by the Council.
2. 1000 citizens must sign their support for the proposal. (When drafting their proposal the group has the right to the help of civil servants)
3. The Council must consider the proposal and then either accept it or explain in detail why they reject it.
4. If the proposal is rejected citizens have six months to gather 25,000 signatures (4 ½ % of eligible voters) in order to force a referendum.
5. Campaigning: A budget is allocated by the Council, half of which is given to the citizens group and half used by the Council. A Referendum brochure is produced and sent to all voters. The Citizens group and the Council get half of the space each and must react to each others arguments.
6. Referendums are valid if 10% of eligible voters participate. If in each year there is more than one referendum these will be combined into a once a year voting day.

### **For more information:**

Amsterdam Referendum: <http://www.european-referendum.org/netherlands>

Campaign for Direct Democracy in Britain: <http://www.iniref.org>