

Mojca GOLOBIČ
Wolfgang PFEFFERKORN
Sergeja PRAPER

New forms of decision making for sustainability

1. Introduction

The entrance of Palazzo Pubblico in the central Piazza in Siena is decorated by 14. Century frescoes painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, showing the beneficial effects of good governance (*buon governo*) and the misery that bad governance (*mal governo*) brings to city and countryside. Interpretation from today's perspective would lead to the argument that the sustainable development implies or requires a particular form of decision making. »The ways in which societies are managed affects their mental climate as well as the conditions for economic expansions and social welfare« (Tarchys, 2001: 40) confirms the validity of Lorenzetti's message for economy and society. The importance of decision making form for the environment is recognized by Rio declaration: »Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level.« (United Nations General Assembly, 1992b: §10). Agenda 21 summarizes the interdependence between decision making and sustainability, whereby underlining the importance of public participation: »Active participation of civil society in development and implementation of policies and programmes is the first condition to move towards sustainable development« (United Nations General Assembly, 1992a).

Present decision making practice does not seem to lead effectively in direction of sustainability. Prevailing decision-making systems in many countries tend to separate economic, social and environmental factors (United Nations General Assembly, 1992a) and the choice of goals and of the means for reaching them remain largely delegated, centralized and hierarchical (OECD, 2001). As such, the established forms of decision making are unable to claim either the effectiveness or the legitimacy required to face the challenges posed by the actual technological, economic and social changes. Agenda21 already calls for an adjustment or even a fundamental reshaping of decision-making to achieve the objectives of sustainable development. This reshaping was mainly seen as increased public participation in the decision making practice (WCED, 1987, United Nations General Assembly, 1992a and 1992b). The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 only discovered, that the »business as usual« has not brought us any closer to the sustainability goals (European Commission, 2001) and had put »improving governance at all levels« among the priorities for WSSD (Ministerial Declaration, 2001). The deep contradiction between long term planning, which is required to move towards sustainability goals, and democratic decision making within the traditional arenas of market and party politics (Von Schomberg, 2002) is being confirmed by several recent examples, with the behaviour of USA regarding the Kyoto protocol being among the most notable ones.

If our present decision making systems do not lead us towards sustainability targets, what should then »buon gover-

no« look like? Are we just not using the possibilities of present decision making forms, or are they inadequate as such? The answers differ, but many (e.g. von Schnomberg, 2002) think that even having exploited the full possibilities of market and governmental regulation, the targets of sustainability do not seem to be within reach, and more fundamental change is needed. There are however also other views (Bartlett, Oldgard, 2002), arguing that the form of decision making does not guarantee the »right« choices let alone their implementation with desired effects.

2. Decision making forms and their relation to sustainable development

Which are those decision making forms that we have at our disposal? What are their main capabilities and insufficiencies to deal with sustainability challenges? The following brief overview aims for a theoretical framework to help answering these questions by later adding some examples. Although sustainable development could conceivably be based on a range of social and political arrangements, the recent political rhetoric almost exclusively relates it to participative democracy. Complementary option is a new, international arena for long-term planning (Von Schomberg, 2002). But the prevailing decision arenas are still the traditional ones: market and (party) politics.

2.1 Markets

The rise of multinational corporations has created a lateral shift from political to economic decision making and today, more and more decisions are being taken by market forces. The globalisation processes have therefore taken away a share of decision making power from elected and traditionally competent authorities on national and local level. Since the main standard (reference) of the market is efficiency, they should be successful in achieving economic objectives of sustainability. However, markets really work only for consumer commodities, and under »ideal« circumstances. More globally, markets also cause big losses due to asymmetrical shocks and sub optimal use of local resources.

The performance of markets in terms of social welfare is even worse. Two of the most significant problems are increasing gap between winners and losers, leading to social unrests and violence and concentration of capital leading to the rule of monopolists, who are not submitted to democratic control (Valaskakis, 2001). Although the 1999 Human Development Report recognizes the problem of increasing gap between rich and poor, it considers the market to be the solution, rather than the problem: The increased trade, among other things, is an opportunity in the era of globalization to eradicate poverty (UNDP, 1999). Maybe the most problematic relation exists between markets and environmental targets: the ideal ultimate goal of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation seems incontestable (Von Schomberg, 2002). Meeting sustainability targets is in many ways in inherent contradiction to operation of markets, for example by the requirement for adjustments of consumption levels and the restriction on free use of privately owned natural resources.

However some sustainability targets such as energy efficiency seem to be perfectly supported by (free) market strategies.

Although markets themselves would never internalize the environmental costs, the market instruments, such as eco-taxes, could be effectively used to achieve this. The »factor 4 argument« (Weizaecker et al, 2000), to double our wealth with half of today's actual usage of natural resources, is by large based on clever market strategies.

2.2 Politics

The market deficits in solving relations between individuals and society, assertion of rights, and achievement of social justice/equity has been in democratic tradition corrected by political interventions. The political decision making processes include several variations. An important distinction regards the level of inclusiveness and the role of involved players. When considering the decision making process as one including awareness raising, opinion making and alternative development, the distinction could be made between the techno-bureaucratic, consultative and co-decision making (deliberative) approach.

Techno-bureaucratic decision making forms leave decisions to administration and experts, either by delegating formal decision power (i.e state agencies or offices), or by providing exclusive technical support to formal decision maker. This type of decision making prevailed within the rational decision paradigm of modern society, and is today often recalled in demands such as »let experts decide« and a somehow naive argument that science can ensure »objective« (i.e. fair, ideal) decisions. Public support to technocratic approaches could be attributed to the lack of rational argumentation and a shift towards populism in political discourse, which both diminished the trust in political decision making capacity. On the practical side, a combination of fast technologic and scientific development and increased bureaucratization of decision making procedures is a favourable one for technocracy revival. Indeed, such processes have their merits, such as time and money efficiency. This may be important when there is a need for an urgent and highly technical action (i.e. in cases of natural hazards).

Nevertheless, technocratic decision-making processes do have problems to gain legitimacy. Setting long-term sustainability targets, particularly the environmental ones, has in many countries already earned an unpopular reputation of an elite or »eco-dictatorial« decision making form (Von Schomberg, 2002). Non-transparency, exclusion of 'non-experts' and transfer of discretion power to people (or institutions), which neither have been granted the decision power nor do they bear responsibility, are the main reasons.

There are a number of reasons to link increased public participation with the goal of sustainable development, including improvement of the policy making process and enhanced social competence and social capital (Bartlett, Oldgard 2002). The level of involvement can differ with consultative approaches at the minimum side of the spectrum and deliberative at the maximum.

Consultative decision making forms usually enhance the established bureaucratic procedures by introducing additional opportunities for consultation with stakeholders. These opportunities are sometimes offered in the scoping phase, but most often at public displays and discussions of draft documents. In some policy areas (e.g. spatial planning or environmental impact assessments) this is a required

procedure, while in others it may depend on the willingness of the responsible authority to consult the stakeholders or on the need to gain support from the stakeholders in order to implement a policy measure. In cases of a long lasting and convincing majority of one political party, it may be less inclined to do so. Consultative approach is adequate when the public interest is limited to a well-defined issue or to a few and well organized interest groups. It may also be applied complementary to other opportunities for the public to influence the decisions.

Co-decision making is different in that all stakeholders are equal. The main task of the experts is to provide knowledge support and to foster dialogue and discussion leading to consensus. So-called deliberative processes are controlled by the participants and should include defining the scope of decision and objectives. Ideally, the panel of stakeholders should participate throughout the process; and involved groups should be able to initiate additional research of certain issues. Civil forums are probably the most common organisational form, but there is a wide set of different approaches and tools available. Co-decision making is especially important when important issues of public interests are at stake, when there is a strong interest in the public for co-operation, when public interest is unclear or conflicting, when policy implementation crucially depends on public support and consensus.

Such approaches have been infamous for being very time consuming and ineffective. These problems are relative and may be overcome by adequate organisation. A more serious problem of participatory decision-making is related to representation and legitimacy of participants. It is usually (but sometimes wrongly) considered that civil groups and NGOs adequately represent 'public interest' or local inhabitants in general, and as such they enjoy high level of legitimacy. However, that claim cannot easily be validated since they do not always play according to established (democratic) rules (Valaskakis, 2001). The non-transparent and non-democratic management of such organizations could mask very particular interests of certain groups ('hidden agendas'). Another problem is (in) adequate intellectual and social potential of participants, which is needed for a balanced and effective process and in order to assume responsibility for decisions.

After providing this tentative theoretical framework we will try to analyse some examples from decision making practice to possibly find some empirical evidence on their effectiveness in steering decisions towards sustainability objectives.

3. Investigation of decision-making Practice

The surveyed examples were collected in the know-how phase of the »Future in the Alps« project, coordinated and led by CIPRA international (2004-2006). The project dealt with several topics, related to sustainable development and relevant for the Alpine area: regional value added, governance capacity, nature protected areas and transport. Two additional transversal themes were considered: policies and implementation measures and new decision making forms. For the intention of this paper, analysis was done in two steps. The first step concerned identification of »decision making hot spot issues« where we included information and

projects analysed within all thematic fields of the project. The detailed results of the analysis can be found in the project report (Pfefferkorn et al, 2006). The second phase involved a more profound analysis of effects in terms of sustainability objectives. In this phase we considered only the examples collected and evaluated under the »new decision making forms« chapter.

An important source for collecting best practice examples was data base of the projects, which were submitted for a »Future in the Alps« projects competition (see: <http://competition.cipra.org/en/competition/>). These were verified and updated by the examples collected by the project expert teams. Each project (best practice example) was described by standard descriptive and evaluative categories. Additional sources of information were interviews with case projects participants and experts, results of other research projects as well as literature, newspaper and internet surveys. The scope of the cases refers to the situation in the Alps. Despite some regional specifics, we consider the results to be generally applicable to most of the European regions. The different political situation of involved countries Š1Ć also guaranties that the results are not biased due to a specific political system.

3.1 Decision-making »hot-spots«

This brief and qualitative analysis allowed us to get an insight into existing and upcoming problems, which have to be solved by decision-making processes. It also gave us some hints on where these decision-making forms are more or less successful. We used the whole data base of the competition and »best practice examples«, especially the descriptions in categories: participants, process, activities, results, difficulties. Major difficulties and challenges in each of the sustainability aspects are:

- (1) Economy. The main issues concern increasing gap between favoured and less favoured areas, regional compensation and development strategies to activate endogenous potential for creating economic benefits. These issues particularly challenge remote and sparsely populated Alpine regions. Transport is another major issue related to Alpine economy. Main challenges are related to thinning out or even cancelling public transport services while on the other hand increasing private commuter, tourism or leisure mobility. The main decision-related barrier to find solutions seems to be lack of strong policies and instruments (‘political will’) to counteract the powerful interest groups and lobbying organisations. The negotiation processes and platforms, which would enable alternative options to be seriously considered, are also lacking.
- (2) Society. Alpine regions are affected by several macro-trends, which reduce their governance capacities – in other words their abilities to self-organise the political, economic and social life. Concentration processes weaken the regional and local financial and organisational resources for self-organisation. Public services, which were traditionally provided by national or regional authorities must be replaced by locally or privately organized ones. Migration processes often cause losses of intellectual, social and economical capital in peripheral regions. The affected regions do not only have to cope with economical problems but also with challenges originating in decreasing social cohesion and over aged

populations. On the other side, immigration and urbanisation processes in certain mountain regions can overstrain or even destabilise traditional governance systems resulting in a deprivation of self organisation capabilities.

- (3) Environment. Due to a high share of naturally important areas in the Alps, the most notable difficulties concern planning, zoning and management of protected areas. These include conflicts between national or regional administrative units and local authorities about the implementation of use and protection regimes, land use conflicts between agriculture and nature protection, low local or regional support for the creation of a new protected area and low legitimacy of policy decisions. The lack of bottom-up and cross-sectoral co-operation can be seen as one of the main reasons. Another relevant issue in all Alpine countries is management of natural risk, which will become a more and more important policy field in the face of climate changes. Existing prevalingly technocratic decision making processes have not been successful in providing support for negotiating socially legitimised risk acceptance levels and the necessary and affordable safety measures.

The long-standing difficulties in all Alpine countries to effectively implement norms, regulations or concepts for sustainable development can be attributed to the following main causes, related to the decision making procedures:

- Disputed or unclear distribution of duties and responsibilities between different levels.
- Lacking political will for policy implementation and prevailing conflicts of interests or ideologies between the involved groups.
- Lacking resources for implementation: The increase of complexity of policies and regulations overstrains the resources of certain local communities. However, the transfer of responsibilities of local political bodies and organisations to regional level is politically disputed.
- Lack of trust between the relevant regional or local actors like for example public authorities, interest groups or NGOs due to e.g. failed or instrumentalised participatory initiatives or general mistrust.

3.2 Contribution of »good« decision making forms for sustainable development

This part of the analysis involved only examples, which were assessed as decision-making »best practices«. The selection was based on a set of criteria, which took into account only the decision making form itself and not the results of the project. These criteria were:

- The procedure allows integration of different types of knowledge. Knowledge transfer between the different groups is desired and supported.
- The issue dealt with is embedded into a wider and integrated approach, where at least neighbouring topics (horizontally and vertically) are considered.
- There is a negotiation process with clear aims, rules and defined expected outcomes.
- Those, who are responsible for the procedure, actively encourage co-operation between the (conflicting) parties involved into the procedure.
- The decision making procedure has innovative potential compared to the traditionally used decision making procedures either in concept, methods and tools or involved actors.

The sample consists of 31 examples from all Alpine countries with additional two examples from EU level decision making Š2C. Most of the best practice examples have a recent date: almost all started in 21st century and have finished recently or are still ongoing. This is quite understandable since the focus was on the *new* decision making forms. The examples correspond to a multiplicity of processes like e.g. situation analysis, problem analysis and definition, strategy development or conflict resolution. Most of the cases refer to comprehensive decision making issues, involving several sectors, issues and stakeholders. Projects are related to all aspects of sustainability: society (social cohesion, social services, and governance capacity), economy (regional products, regional value added, and agriculture), environment (nature conservation, protected areas, forestry and risk prevention) and mobility.

The chosen examples represent a range of the possibilities and a variety of different methodologies and tools, which are applied in today's practice. Most rely on well-proven techniques: information dissemination, panels, workshops, expert (think-tanks) and mixed working groups. Some of them apply specific formats or »trendy« trade marks, such as focus groups, future conferences, European Awareness Scenario Workshops, Citizen Conference. When bigger numbers of participants need to be considered, the traditional tools such as opinion surveys and referendums are used. There are only few methods, which could really be called innovative, such as planning cells, forum theatre, city walks, project markets, and even these may be just other versions of or names for traditional methods.

The selected set of criteria corresponds to the prevailing discourse favouring participatory approaches. It is therefore quite logical that the most examples pertain to the group of participatory decision making forms: although many would claim to be co-decisive or deliberative, in reality it were the consultative approaches that prevailed. Even some rather technocratic styles were to be found, particularly among the nature conservation projects. Market approaches were also not so few, mostly presenting alternative ways of organizing demand and supply. Two EU projects could be considered a tentative examples of a »third decision making arena« (von Schomberg, 2002) expanding consultation and participation in trans-national context. The merits, which qualified the collected examples as best practices, were rather diverse. The mere ability of the different stakeholders to creatively communicate with one another and thus achieve synergies is often already considered to be an achievement. This, rather disappointing finding shows that the decision-making reality is still quite far from the theoretical standards. However there were also real achievements in content, methods or formal procedure, which could be considered innovative. The innovations include the design of the procedure to improve transparency, networking, formalizing newly developed relations in informal agreements / contracts / formal acts, non-conventional distribution of responsibilities and roles and new comprehension of subsidiarity. A quite diverse set of innovative ways of embedding civil initiatives into formal procedures proves that these are not as inflexible as usually assumed. A great deal of innovativeness could also be detected in the set of participants: marginal groups are being more often involved, whereby youth seem to be the most popular group to involve, while other specific groups (elderly, immigrants, disabled...) still seem to be neglected. An important shift of the »new decision making forms« shows an emphasis on empowerment,

awareness raising and education for responsible citizenship and participation of different groups. It may be somewhat surprising, but the exploration of innovative technologies is not very much an issue in decision-making practice. Only few cases of on-line tools or computer visualizations and simulations were mentioned. Although use of technology itself does not automatically mean innovation in decision making form, new technologies can significantly contribute to changes of decision making process. Advances in ICT in particular have had very strong impact in the Alpine space by reducing traditional spatial isolation. In our cases the role of technology is rather ambivalent in terms of (de) technocratisation of the process.

For the evaluation of the best practice examples in terms of their contribution towards sustainable development we used the evaluation forms stored in the database. These forms consisted of the following categories:

- Descriptive: short description, participants, objectives, process, activities, results, difficulties, budget.
- Evaluative: impact on nature and environment, economic value added, socio-cultural value added, innovative content, good governance, PR impact, multiplier effect / networking and transferability.
- Although all the evaluation categories may be interesting from the viewpoint of sustainability, we will focus on the first three items, which refer to the standard three pillars of sustainability. Since no detailed indicators were specified, we could only use rather general, descriptive methodology.
- The effects were in general not easy to assess. Since majority of the projects are recent or ongoing, the effects were sometimes only expected and not yet measurable. Also, the cause – effect chains are not always clear: in many cases, the project does not directly cause certain effect but rather contribute to or enable an outcome. So in many cases the effects could only be assumed or deduced from the objectives and / or adopted measures. Nevertheless, the synthesis of the evaluative records shows rather coherent picture:

(1) Impact on nature and environment

Among the 31 analyzed best practice examples, four had no evident relevance for environment. Other effects were grouped into:

- Indirect/long term: raising environmental awareness among the population or administration, changed mobility or consumers patterns etc...
- Procedural: enabling cooperation of environmental groups in the decision making processes, introducing environmental criteria in policy and decision making...
- Initiation or implementation or support of environmental projects in the areas of waste management, water supply, renewable energy ...
- Developing programs and measures for management, mainly in the areas of cultural landscape and habitat protection and urban environment quality (noise pollution, green open space, traffic reduction).

There is a rather significant correlation between the projects, focussing on nature and biodiversity conservation and technocratic type of decision-making process, where scientists play an exclusive role. There are cases, where people are invited to participate only to provide the audience and a lever for legitimisation of a scientific exercise. Over relying

on this type of approach has been often identified as one of the reasons for conflicts in establishment and management of nature protection areas (Austria, Germany, Slovenia). In this cases, consultative or co-decision making approaches seem to work much better.

(2) Economic value added

Here we had 5 projects without tangible economic effects. In two cases explicitly negative effects were mentioned, in terms of downsizing or even foregoing proposed development. Quite often the effects were introduced as positive, but could be viewed otherwise from a more short term or developer's view. This situation occurs when outcome of a process is protection/improvement of assets such as landscape scenery, biodiversity, environmental quality for potentially more sustainable economic use (i.e tourism, housing) in the future. There was one case where effects were quantified (protective forest maintenance cost vs. benefits). Other positive effects were only descriptive or assumed; many of them indirect:

- Initiation of new enterprises, mainly in the area of agricultural complementary activities (tourism, food processing and trade, biomass) and SMEs.
- Improvement of information and organizational support for enterprises (data bases, contact points, networks, joint marketing ...).
- Improvement of administration and institutional conditions (simplification of licensing, preparation of spatial plans, adaptation of building codes to requirements of enterprises...).
- Infrastructure protection and improvement.
- Improvement of human resources: activation of existing expertise, education and capacity building, reduction of social cost of exclusion, unemployment...
- Change in consumer behaviour (increased spending in the area, reduction of energy use and commuting cost).

While market type of decision making is expected to ensure best economic results, the analysis doesn't quite confirm that. Especially the globalized markets do not bring decisions favourable to local economies, in particular in small, introvert economies, such as Alpine. The difficult challenge is to maintain the regional and 'authentic' character of the products and to compete in the globalized food and tourism market. In this context the calls for state interventions are more and more to be heard, either in terms of subsidies or other support to help establish viable and competitive local enterprises and to help them cope with the big transnational companies such as Carrefour in France, Spar or Aldi in Germany or Migros and Coop in Switzerland. Markets themselves do not support coordination, which is needed for example to provide efficient functioning of »labelling«. More innovative approaches therefore include self – organization, networking and parallel local markets to avoid negative impacts of globalization. Technocratic types of decision making are not efficient here, and were usually the ones, resulting in the negative effects. Consultative approaches seem to perform best, helping to provide networks of players to achieve synergies.

(3) Socio-cultural value added

As could be expected, the relation of best examples of decision-making practice to socio-cultural criteria was stron-

gest and exclusively positive. There was only one case, where no value added was mentioned. Other contributions include:

- Increased social capital and governance capacity (increased awareness and social responsibility - also among young population - improved learning process, innovativeness, self- confidence, capability for problem and conflict solving).
- Better integration of socially less-active and marginal groups.
- Improved correspondence of decisions to the needs in society, improved cost effectiveness in terms of social relevance, improved legitimization.
- Increased local and regional identity.
- Enhanced cooperation, communication and networking (vertical and horizontal); trans and cross sectoral, trans and cross boundary...); increased trust among stakeholders.
- Relaxing the traditionally rigid decision structure: alternative distribution of decision power and responsibilities.

As expected, market and techno-bureaucratic types have not much to contribute in this respect. Although consultative types of decision-making can contribute to the social objectives, there is also a threat that they become non-transparent, corporativistic type of deliberation, where only the strongest and well organised or institutionalised actors (i.e local employers) exert their influence, while other interests are marginalized. Some of the projects tend to this direction, which can be explained by small local communities in the Alps with strong conservative and patriarchal traditions. Most of the power is concentrated within a few families with large property or traditional authority (e.g. in Valais or Haute-Savoie in France). In such circumstances, the consultative approach can be understood in a rather pre-modern way of »elder meetings«. This 'high jacking' of local politics has in some cases already led to judgements that local level is granted too much decision power, which they are not able to deal with (Austria, Switzerland, France, Slovenia). Co-decision making on the other hand faces serious barriers: the competence of the stakeholders to contribute to the deliberation may be one of the biggest obstacles in Alpine areas with undereducated and elderly population. Younger generations are attracted to the urban centres and do not participate in local decision-making. In some alpine areas with immigration (e.g. Bavarian Alps) there are groups (immigrant workers, retired people) who are new to a rather traditional and stiff social structure and find it difficult to actively involve in local affairs. Among the projects, analysed within the Future in the Alps projects, many are explicitly aimed towards empowerment of local stakeholders. Another big group are concrete projects (such as establishment of heritage museums or trails, trademarks, community centres...), which often function as a focus point for joint endeavours of different stakeholders and foster sense of community and co-operation. Especially if they are organised supra locally, these projects are valuable for the Alpine space since they help the isolated communities to change the tradition of self-sufficiency and non-co-operation and to activate synergies.

In general, best practice examples searched integrated solutions to solve several problems at the same time. This approach differs from the traditional sectoral one, and although it is rather complex and demanding, our examples show that it is feasible. We could also speculate that more complex problems pose bigger challenge for the traditional decision making forms and therefore inspire innovative approaches.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Presented research was primarily motivated by the vague relation between the form of the decision making procedure and its effects in terms of sustainability objectives. This relation has been extensively discussed in the literature within several theoretical frameworks, but lacks empirical evidence. As expected, gathering empirical evidence is a difficult task, probably impossible if the goal is to provide scientifically valid results. The evaluation of projects and their effect is a demanding exercise with often vague results. Each project is a specific case and its effects are influenced by many complex factors. Generalizing results is even more speculative since no »controlled« experiment is possible. Nevertheless, a survey of sustainability practice, approached from this research perspective, brought some interesting insights. Although our sample was restricted to the Alpine countries, we can assume that most of these findings are equally valid for other European regions. The conclusions that we can draw from our pilot research, are the following:

- The overview of »decision-making hot spots« has shown that the ongoing technological, economic, ecological and social changes in society demand for corresponding decision making models and procedures, which existing practice doesn't seem to fit very well. The observed decision making fields (regional value added, protected areas, transport, social capacity and policy implementation) show implementation difficulties, which underline the need for such forms of decision making, which will be able to cope with complexity of today's decision making.
- Regardless what is the decision making form in place (market, technocratic, consultative, co-decision or any combination of these), some common conditions would always improve the effectiveness and results: transparency, trustworthiness of responsible actors, respect and serious consideration for different opinions and alternative options, open opportunities for all interested to give comments and to participate in decision making, willingness to accept critic and arguments, readiness for compromise and consensus.
- The efforts to answer to these challenges are already reflected in some initiatives, i.e. the 'Code of Practice on Consultation' of the British Prime Minister (Cabinet Office..., 2004), the EC 'Impact Assessment Guidelines' (European commission, 2005), and the EC 'General Principles and Minimum Standards for Consultation of Interested Parties by the Commission' (European Commission, 2002). Another good example could be the French »Commission Nationale de Débat Public«, which is in charge of collecting all the opinions – e.g. regarding the construction of new motorways (Pfefferkorn et al., 2006).
- The research has shown that the projects, involving decision making forms, which were assessed as »state of the art« or presently »best practices« of decision making perform rather effective in terms of meeting sustainability goals in all three areas: economy, environment and society. As expected, their effects in social sphere were highest and most positive, the contribution towards environmental goals generally high, but sometimes ambiguous, while the economic effects could sometimes be assessed as rather long-term and redistributive.
- The rate to which the decision – making form contributed to these achievements could of course be questioned. To account for this, the comparison should be made with a control group of »non-best practice« examples in terms of decision making. But the selection of these examples;

and collecting of data would have been difficult. The general overview of the existing (»conventional«) decision making forms, and their effectiveness in meeting sustainability goals, was used as a substitute for such a control group and a reference for evaluation.

- The conclusions based on presented study are only tentative and can by no means construct a proven or generally valid theory. The research was far too limited in its scope. But it gave some indication for further and more systematic survey to bring more reliable results. Another interesting research direction would be the inter and trans-national level of innovative decision-making practice, which was not dealt with within this study (with a little exception of two EU level examples).

Doc. dr. Mojca Golobič, Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia

E-mail: mojca.golobic@uirsi.si

Wolfgang Pfefferkorn, Regional Consulting ZT GmbH, Austria

E-mail: pfefferkorn@rosinak.co.at

Sergeja Praper, Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia

E-mail: sergeja.praper@uirsi.si

Notes

[1] Italy, France, Austria and Germany are EU15 members; Slovenia is a new member and Switzerland a non EU member.

[2] All best practice examples with detailed description can also be found at: http://projects.cipra.org/bestpractice/bestpractice_overview.

For literature and sources turn to page 12.