

# National styles and attitudes towards participation in planning

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## 1 The GUIDEMAPS project

The research project GUIDEMAPS (Gaining Understanding of Improved Decision Making and Participation Strategies) was funded by the European commission, it was concluded by the end of 2004. The project focussed on certain problems concerning transport planning and participation:

- Local and regional transport schemes represent large investments and have major impacts on quality of life, health and environment;
- Lacking public support and opposition from stakeholders often results in barriers and delays or even a failure of the project.
- At the same time, there are transport projects to be referred to as 'good practice', where it could be managed to avoid or overcome these problems.
- According to a widely accepted assumption, stakeholder involvement is an effective tool to achieve less opposition and better outcomes.

The objectives of the GUIDEMAPS project were:

- Description of common practice in transport decision making and participation across Europe, including the identification of barriers to a successful implementation;
- Learn from 'good practice' what the factors of success are in order to avoid or overcome the barriers and to reach widely accepted solutions by engaging stakeholders;
- Development of guidelines and provision of the guidelines by means of a handbook to transport practitioners and others involved in transport planning processes.

The three annual work programme included:

- A literature review of recent approaches to decision-making and participation processes;
- A survey of over 200 transport projects in seven European countries;
- An in-depth analysis of 20 transport projects in 16 cities;
- The development, field-testing, and dissemination of the GUIDEMAPS handbook.

The GUIDEMAPS consortium consisted of 11 partners from nine European countries:

- University of Technology Aachen, Germany
- BOKU University - Institute for Transport Studies, Vienna, Austria
- CDV Transport Research Centre Bruno, Czech Republic
- City Council of Bruno, Czech Republic
- DREIF/DIT, Isle de France, Paris, France
- Socialdata, Munich, Germany
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
- Consorcio Regional de Transportes de Madrid, Spain
- Sener Ingenieria y Sistemas S.A. Madrid, Spain
- PTRC Education and Research Services Ltd, London, UK
- University of Westminster - Transport Studies Group, London, UK



**Fig. 1-1: Countries represented in the GUIDEMAPS consortium and cities where an in-depth analysis was carried out**

## 2 Approaches to transport decision making across Europe

The EU project PROSPECTS explored different approaches to transport decision-making in Europe. Historically, these have varied across a broad spectrum, from the very informal to the highly rational and formal. The study team characterised these extremes as:

- Muddling through approach, in which objectives are not formally specified, and decisions are only taken when necessary;
- Rational/analytical approach, which places extreme reliance on data and formal analysis, often ignoring practical realities.

Neither of these extremes has proved very effective. Thus, in more recent a number of structured but more pragmatic approaches to decision making has been developed:

- Vision-led decision-making: This is normally closely associated with an individual who has a clear view of the future for the city or region, and how this can be achieved;
- Plan-led decision-making: This is led by transport planning professionals. It follows a formal set of procedures, and can become divorced from the concerns of many stakeholder groups.
- Objectives-led decision-making: Here the focus is on achieving high level objectives, and identifying problems and barriers that need to be addressed.
- Consensus-led approach: This involves the active involvement of various stakeholders, in an effort to reach agreement at each stage of the decision-making process.
- In practice, most cities in Europe use a combination of these approaches, partly by intention and partly in response to changing circumstances.

### 3 Benefits to be expected from stakeholder engagement

Within the scope of transport decision making, stakeholder engagement is no end in itself. It shall serve to achieve certain objectives. First of all, it shall help to improve the planning process by means of several mechanisms:

- Identification of stakeholder concerns early in the process;
- Taking the stakeholder interests thoroughly into account;
- Avoiding or minimising opposition against the project;
- Creation of political credibility;
- Empowerment of stakeholders and creation of a sense of 'ownership';
- Reduction of costs and delays.

The improved process shall in return help to achieve better outcomes by means of:

- Utilisation of the local knowledge amongst stakeholders;
- Generation of new perspectives on local problems;
- Achievement of customised solutions to local challenges;
- Increase of the acceptance of the implemented measure;
- Achievement of more democratic decisions;
- Improvement of the local quality of life.

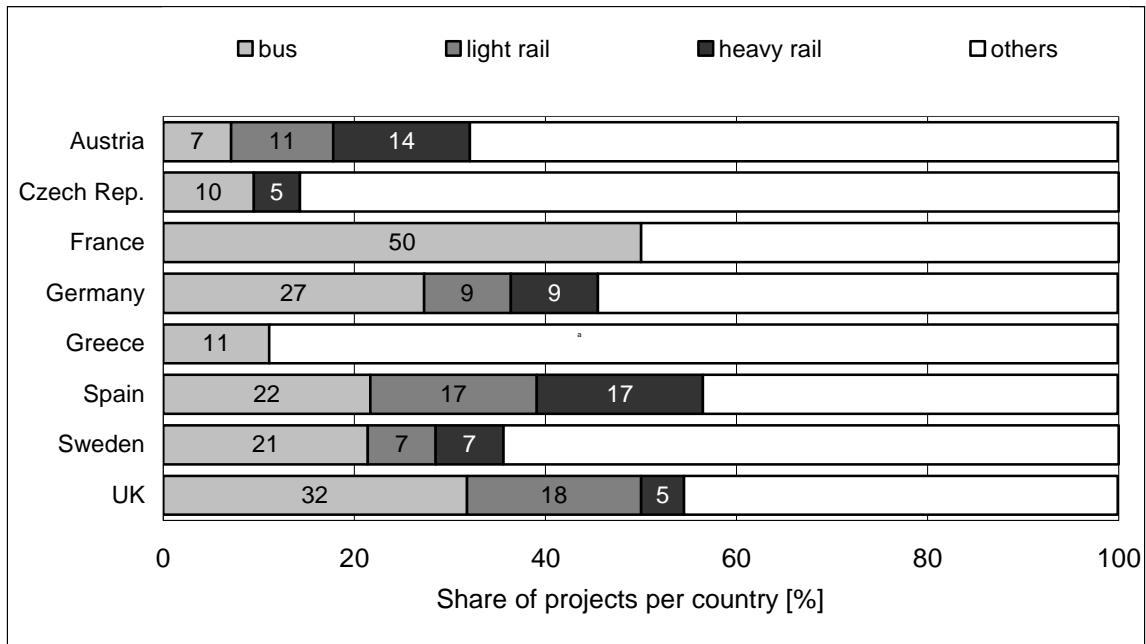
### 4 Survey of current practice in transport decision making and stakeholder engagement

The results presented in the following chapters refer to a survey of 206 transport projects in seven European countries in order to reveal the common practice in transport decision-making and stakeholder engagement across Europe. Tab. 4.1 provides an overview of investigated projects in regard to different countries and project types. Both are fairly equally covered.

Country	Project type					Total
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	strategic	infrastructure	demand management	local scheme	other type	
Austria	7	10	3	8	1	<b>29</b>
Czech Rep.	3	6		7	7	<b>23</b>
France	7			3	20	<b>30</b>
Germany	7	6	6	2		<b>21</b>
Greece	4	9	6	7	2	<b>28</b>
Spain	3	6	11		4	<b>24</b>
Sweden	5	5	12	5	1	<b>28</b>
UK	7	2	3	10	1	<b>23</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>206</b>

**Tab. 4-1** Number of projects per country and project type

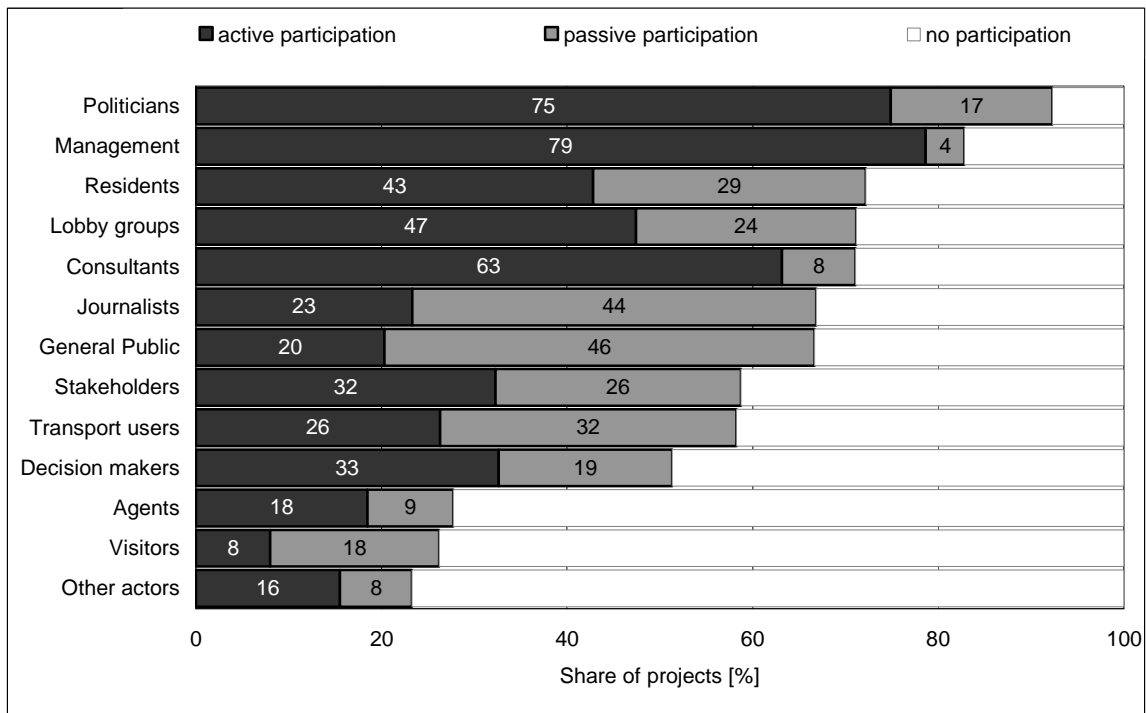
With respect to transport modes, the survey covers all 4 modes represented in urban transport systems, as well as intermodal projects. According to the topic of this seminar, Fig. 4-1 shows the share of projects related to public transport. Over one third of the projects concerned this mode, predominantly bus, but also light rail and heavy rail.



**Fig. 4-1 Share of projects per country with respect to different kinds of public transport**

## 5 Overall findings with respect to stakeholder engagement

In the survey has been asked for the involvement of several groups of stakeholders, and whether they were actively or passively involved. Fig. 5-1 shows the results of this question. Some groups listed there are usually members of the core project team rather than 'participants'. This applies to politicians and project managers, who are involved in almost all projects, but also to consultants. Beyond these groups, the highest share of active involvement refers to residents, lobby groups and stakeholders. Journalists and the general public are often, but rather passively involved.



**Fig. 5-1 Share of projects with active or passive involvement of the respective group**

Another key aspect of participation are the instruments. A broad spectrum of instruments exists, the terminology differs partly from country to country. In the Czech Republic public meetings, hearings and forums are the same event. Fig. 5-2 shows the overall results regarding the use of participation instruments, including the reason of usage. Public announcements, public meetings, consultation documents, complaints and hearings are most often legally prescribed. These are also the instruments most often used on a voluntary basis. More interactive instruments and those enabling a continuous involvement over a longer period are less frequently applied.

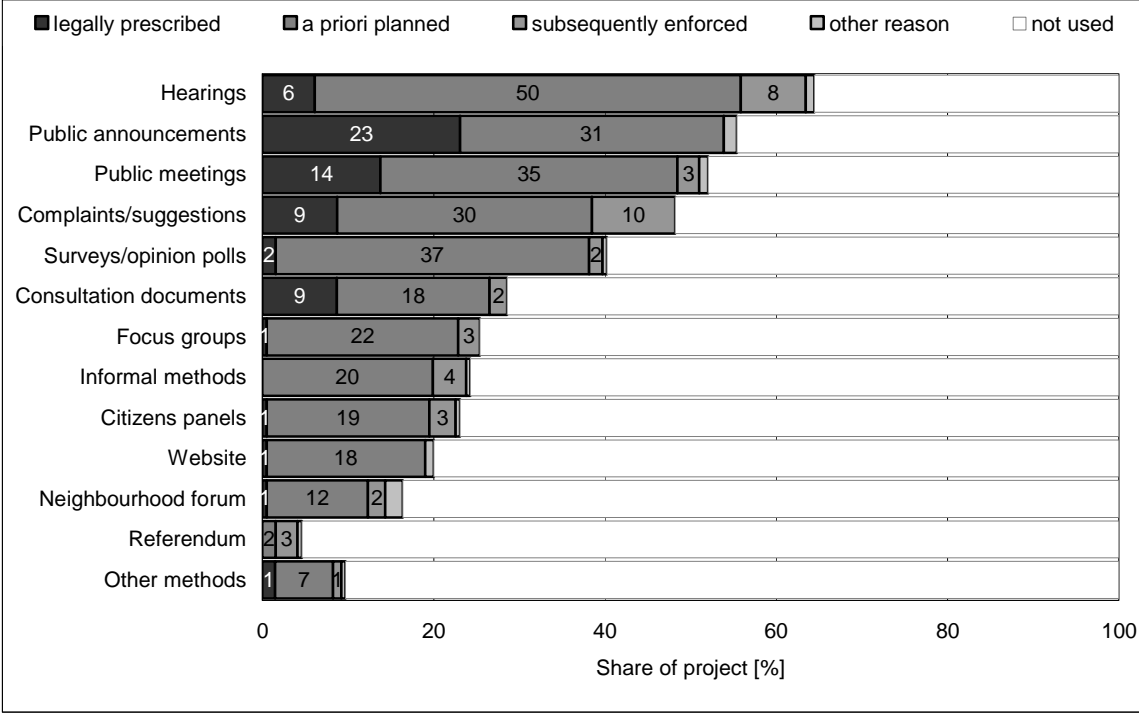
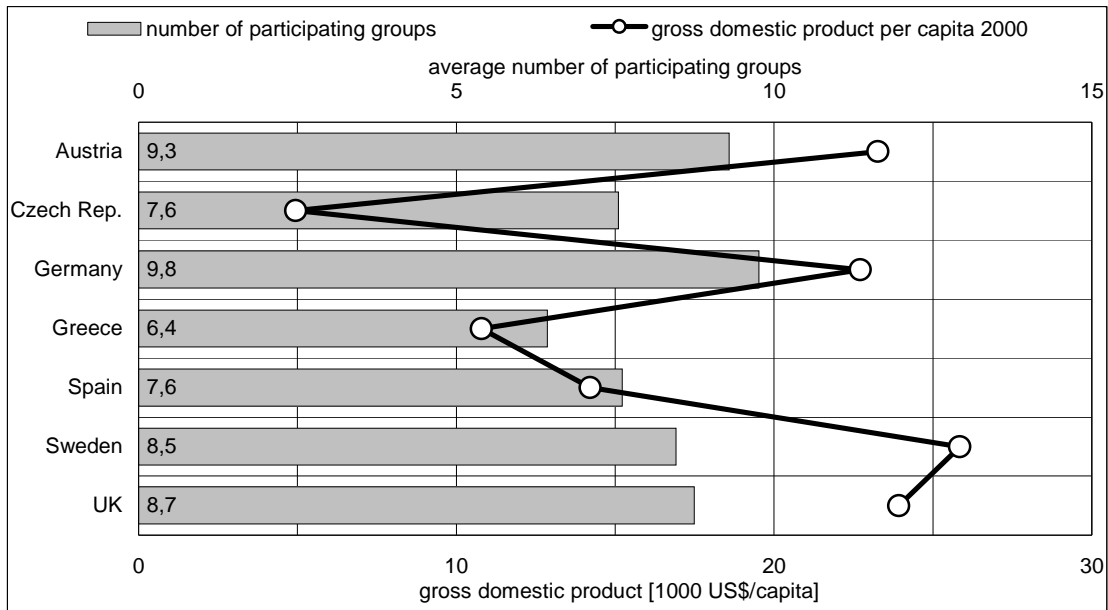


Fig. 5-2 Share of projects where the respective instrument was used

## 6 Practice of stakeholder engagement with respect to different countries

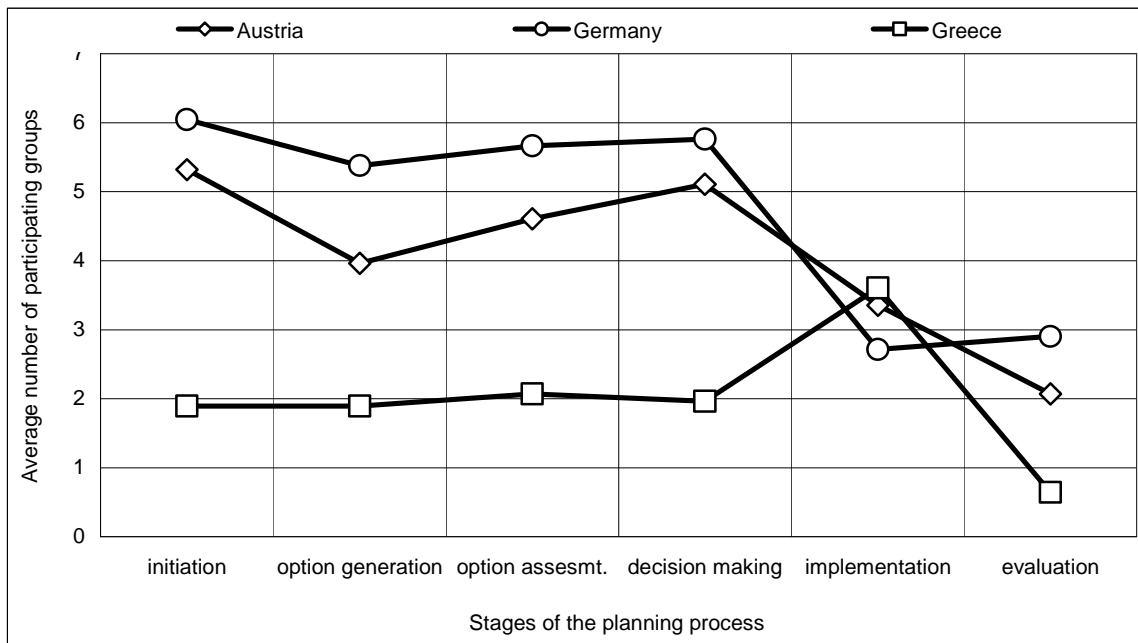
This chapter compares the different countries in regard to the participation process. France is excluded from the comparison. The French sample is strongly biased due to an unrepresentative selection, it would suggest a completely wrong picture of the situation in France.

Fig. 6-1 gives a first impression of the differences between the countries. The bars represent the average number of participating groups in the projects of a country, indicating the extent of the participation process. The profile line shows the gross domestic product. The close relation between these measures along the countries ( $R^2 = 0.58$ ) clearly reveals that a comprehensive participation process with a large number of stakeholders is still a domain of the well developed countries. A deviation from this pattern is the Czech Republic, with more participating groups than the GDP suggests. Despite the economic difficulties, fast progress towards a high standard of public participation seems to take place there.



**Fig. 6-1 Average number of participating groups and gross domestic product per country**

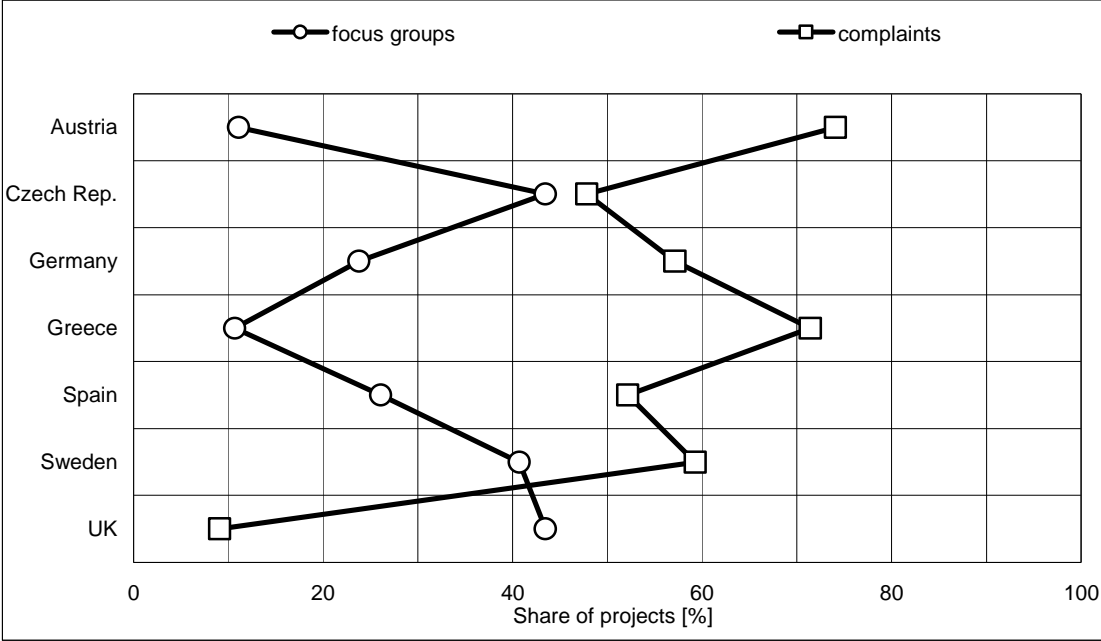
Some differences in participation strategies can be revealed when considering the involvement along the lifetime of the project. Fig. 6-2 shows the number of participating groups along the stages of the planning process in three countries. In Austria and Germany a top-down strategy dominates. The participation process is planned from the beginning, the participating groups are involved as early as possible. Projects in Greece are carried out from the official partners with strong political leadership. Other groups are not involved and hardly notice what is going on. They participate first after the implementation starts and consequences become visible, predominantly by means of complaints. It is common to respond to the complaints by means of modifications during the implementation, or even a removal of the recently implemented measure.



**Fig. 6-2 Average number of participating groups along the planning process in three countries**

The use of certain instruments also provides an insight into different strategies. As an example, Fig. 6-3 shows the use of focus groups and complaints. Focus groups are typically used in an early stage to

explore the knowledge, concerns and interests of stakeholders. Ideally, the information is used to customise the solution right from the start to their needs, so that they don't have to complain afterwards. Complaints are used in later stages, when people realise things happen they don't like. Complaints are often enforced from participants rather than being planned from the outset. Fig. 6-3 shows an almost reversed rate of use of these tools. They can be assumed to represent different strategies. It's again Greece where the emphasis is on complaints rather than on early involvement, but Austria is at the same level. Today it is state of the art in Austria to have a proper participation process, but the development towards participatory decision making started later than in comparable countries. Participation is still often considered as a marketing tool, that helps to convince stakeholders of a predefined solution.

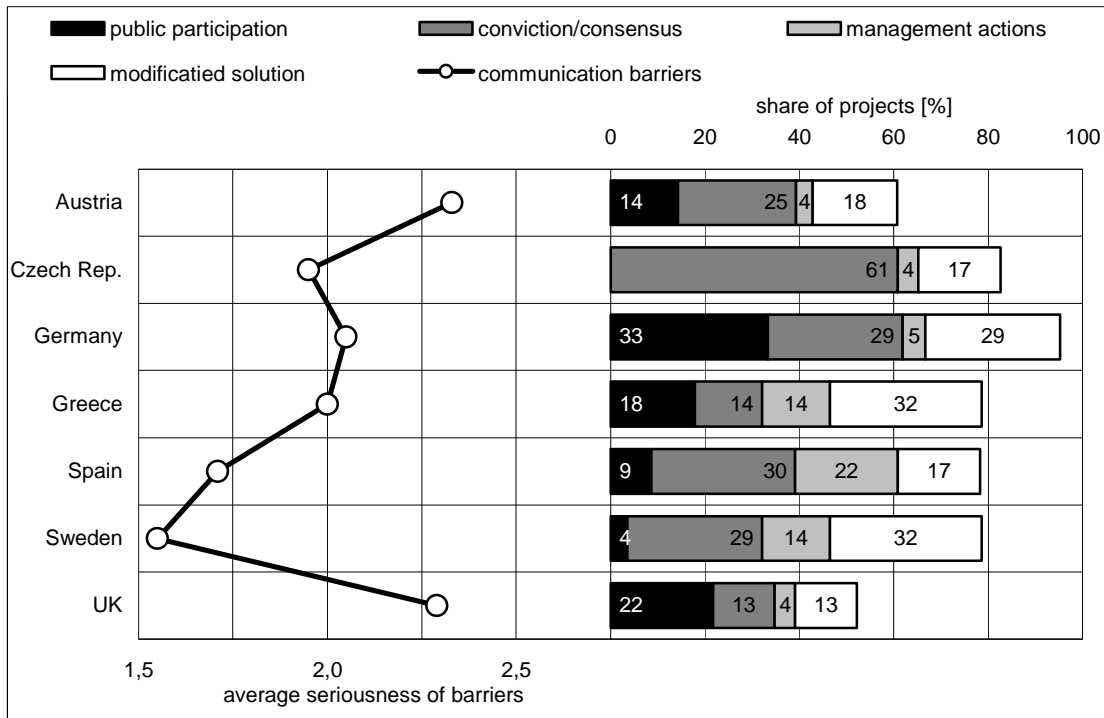


**Fig. 6-3 Share of projects using focus groups or complaints per country**

The respondents of the survey were asked to judge the seriousness of barriers encountered in the project on a scale from 1 to 4 (no problem - not serious - serious - very serious), and to specify if and how they managed to overcome the barriers. The answers were allocated to 4 groups: public participation, conviction/consensus, managerial actions, and modifications of the project. Fig. 6-4 shows the result of both questions: the seriousness of communication barriers (profile line) and the frequency of different ways of overcoming the barriers (bars).

Fig. 6-4 shows a strong relation between the seriousness of communication barriers and the overcoming of barriers with public participation ( $R^2 = 0.36$ ). It identifies public participation being the predominant tool to cope with communication problems. The Czech sample deviates from this pattern. Communication barriers were judged on average, but public participation was not even mentioned as a way of overcoming. Although communication barriers were judged quite serious, most transport projects in the Czech Republic suffer more from other problems: rigid financial restrictions and a difficult property acquisition due to the recent political changes. These problems can hardly be solved with public participation, consensus finding is often the only way to do so. A second reason may be the lack of experience. Although public participation has reached a high standard within short time, it is often considered as a necessary exercise rather than a helpful tool.

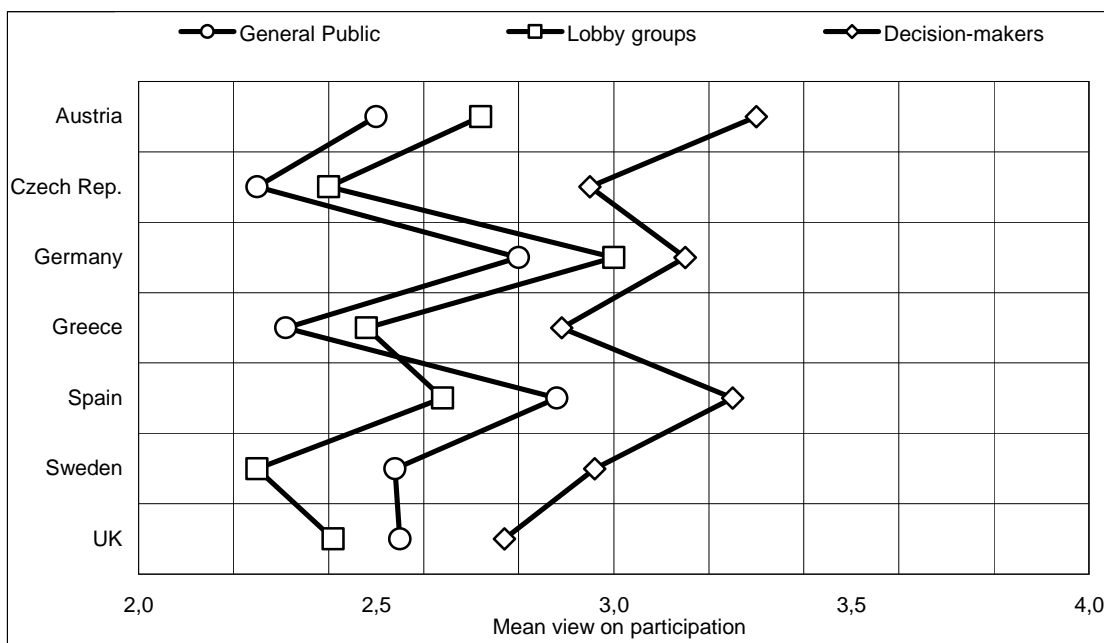
Generally, the judgement of communication barriers seems to express a relative importance in comparison to other problems, rather than having an absolute meaning. From this point of view, the high scores in the UK, Austria, and partly in Germany may reflect that other problems such as managerial, legal or financial ones are less serious in these countries.



**Fig. 6-4** Seriousness of communication barriers and ways of overcoming of barriers per country

## 7 Attitudes towards participation in different countries

The results in Fig. 7-1 rest upon an estimation of the respondents. They judged the view on the participation process of different stakeholders on a scale from 1 to 4 (dissatisfactory - mixed - satisfactory - very satisfactory). The significance of the results is limited, since the participants have not been asked themselves. This limitation also explains, why the order of the three groups with respect to their satisfaction is quite similar in all countries. Politicians were throughout stated to be most satisfied with the participation process, while the lobby groups and the general public were estimated at a lower level. The highest scores were stated in the projects in Austria, Spain and Germany. In the sample from the UK a particular dissatisfaction of politicians stands out.





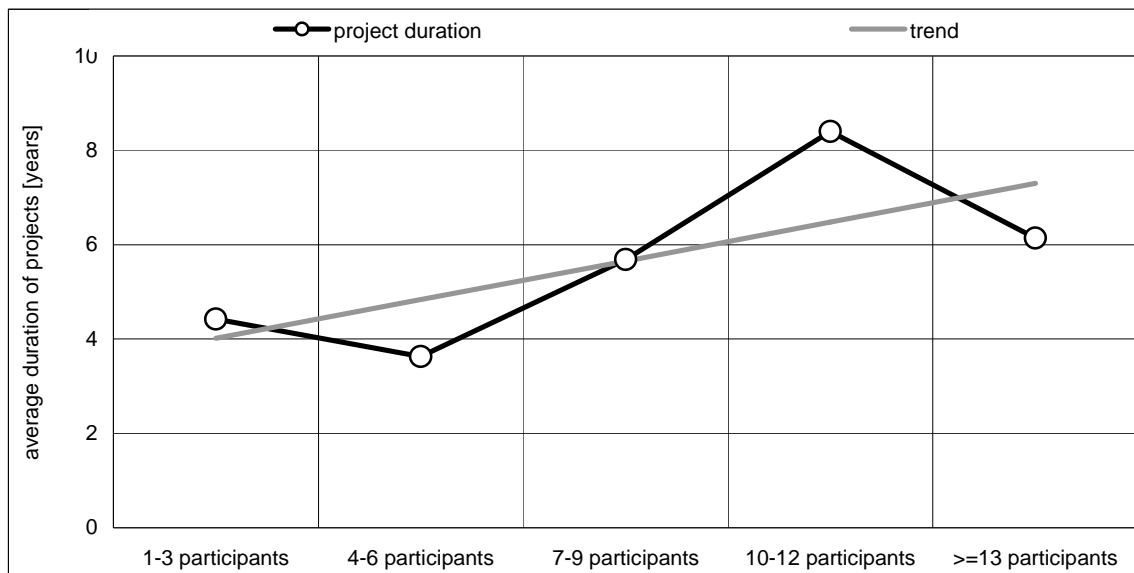
**Fig. 7-1 View on participation of different stakeholders per country**

Another important question with respect to attitudes is whether an extensive involvement leads to a better view on the participation process. Fig. 7-2 shows the results for 4 different groups. The view on participation refers to the same scale as mentioned above. The x-axis shows the number of project stages at which the group was involved (from 0 to a maximum of 6) as an indicator for the extent of involvement. The figure doesn't suggest a systematic relation between the extent of and satisfaction with the involvement for any group. The impression is confirmed by a trend line calculated on the basis of all four groups. It has an almost horizontal orientation. The missing relation may result from two inverse effects. Other things being equal, extensive involvement may indeed lead to higher satisfaction. However, extensive involvement often results from problems with this group and thus indicates a certain dissatisfaction given from the outset.

**Fig. 7-2 View on participation of different stakeholders versus extent of involvement**

## 8 Relations between stakeholder engagement on planning process

The main reason for dealing with participation is the hope it would help to improve the planning process and finally yield a better result. The success of the projects was judged on a scale from 1 to 4 (failure - not very successful - successful - very successful). This scale represents the ordinate in Fig. 8-1. The x-axis shows the extent of involvement of four different groups of stakeholders, which are usually among the key target groups of participation. The relation between extent of involvement and success of the project is not continuously linear and differs over the groups. The bottom line is however an increasing success with an increasing extent of involvement. This is confirmed by the trend line calculated on the basis of all four groups. It has a highly significant positive slope. The trend is particularly obvious with respect to journalists and the general public, while the involvement of residents and transport users makes less difference.



**Fig. 8-1 Extent of participation versus success of implementation**

Another aspect is the common fear that extensive participation would increase both costs and duration of the planning process. The data do not enable an answer with respect to the costs. It is however possible to relate the extent of the participation process to the duration of the project. Fig. 8-2 shows the average duration related to the number of involved groups in the participation process. The figure shows a moderately increasing duration with the number of participating groups.

**Fig. 8-2 Extent of participation process versus duration of the project**

## 9 Conclusions

The findings reveal a considerable diversity with respect to participation strategies in Europe. An important difference makes the economic situation of a country. A well performed participation process is still a domain of the well developed countries. Partly related to the economic situation, further differences appear with respect to the culture of governance. From this point of view two extreme types can be distinguished:

- In 'democratic elitism' decisions are made by politicians on advice of professionals, public participation is not promoted.
- In 'participatory democracy' the view of other groups is rather taken into account.

Reality is not that simple, but the scheme was confirmed in principle. There are still countries with a strictly political decision-making, while a well performed participation process is state of the art in other countries. Public participation in Greece seems particularly weak. Transport planning still hangs on an 'end-of-pipe' participation. The interplay of non-involvement, subsequent complaints, and revisions of the implemented solution seems to be a well-rehearsed game between politicians and citizens, making a rapid change unlikely.

The countries with a higher standard of participation also follow different strategies. Participation processes in Germany, Sweden and Austria are usually top-down planned, with a focus on the general public and on awareness raising. Urban transport planning in the UK deals more with a locally based involvement of residents and a focus on consultation.

Further differences are related to the history. In Czech transport policy, the key problems are budget restrictions and property acquisition due to the political changes in recent years. These problems can hardly be solved with public participation. Despite the difficult economic situation, the Czech projects revealed a surprisingly fast progress towards a high standard of participation. However, public participation did not appear as a solution of problems.

Even in economically well developed countries participation is often seen as a problem rather than a solution. In Austria it is indeed state of the art to carry out a participation process, but it is often considered as a marketing tool to convince people from a predefined solution. This leads to disappointments and reluctance when stakeholders realise that they have not been listened to.