

Name of Exercise: Public participation in decision making for water supply to Paide

Location: Järva County, Paide town and municipality

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Article 7*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To discuss different options for water supply catchment areas for the town of Paide.

Background:

Several problems create difficulties for Paide's water supply. The construction of a new water plant and pipe system will not suffice in the longer term because the town's water catchment area must be conserved and not polluted in the future. At present, water is taken from the groundwater reserves under the town. However, to continue to use the groundwater under Paide would have cost the city more than water brought from the outskirts of the town. Furthermore, pollution is adversely affecting the water quality under the town since the protective layers between the different water levels have been damaged and surface pollution can now reach directly to the groundwater.

The city presented different options to its citizens for providing water (either from the groundwater reserve beneath the city or from outside the city through several water catchment areas in the vicinity of the town and one distant catchment area). These were publicly discussed in order to find out all positive and negative aspects as well as to understand the social background. The costs of each option were also discussed.

Participation Techniques Used:

Representatives of different political and interest groups were invited to discuss the problem. These included environmental inspectors and active citizens. Some seven active groups and several less active ones participated. The related discussions took place within the city council and its related commissions, within newspapers, radio and the Internet. Meetings with the city government were also organised for the public, who were also given the chance to express their views by asking questions in radio broadcasts or publishing readers' letters or articles in a local newspaper. These political groups made an attempt to find solutions at the political level.

Public hearings took place where city officials met with members of the public. The problem was discussed in the media (newspapers, radio) since the media has shown keen interest in clean water and its production for about 10 years. A Special Clean Water Commission was established by the City Council, an action proposed by the Head of the City Council in order to involve one of the most active opinion leaders directly in the work.

The strengths and weaknesses of different options were presented by the public and the media. The water problem of Paide has been discussed actively for 5 years. When the different options were made public, the media became more active. Local media offered updates of the developments each month. Different media forums were interested: local and state newspapers and also television (there were 3 broadcasts on state television).

As Paide City Government did not have an Internet homepage at that time, a discussion was held through the homepage of the local IT company.

Who participated?

Members of the City Government, City Council, and active citizens participated in the Internet discussion. More specifically, during August-September 1998 this involved the Head of the City Council, Head of Clean Water Commission, environmental inspector, 8 citizens, and the city government.

Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:

- 1995 – initiation of the Vodja water catchment area concept
- 1996-1998 – opposing opinions in Paide City Council regarding the Vodja catchment area and Paide area
- end of 1998 – City Council decision to construct the Vodja water catchment area.

A decline in interest of the public and media could be noticed after the decision of the City Council. Interest rose again when Paide was included in a project of three towns (financed by PHARE) to concentrate on the establishment of a water plant and pipe system.

What information was made available?

Information concerning the whole consultation process (including City Government sessions and City Council meetings) was made public through the media. No charge was made for specific information relating to the water catchment areas. Furthermore, the sessions of the City Council were publicised and were open to the public. The agenda was published in advance by the media. The City Government also informed its citizens through radio broadcasts via its "Information Hour" each Wednesday. Citizens can telephone during this hour and ask questions from the City Government. Also all materials of the City council are available to the public in the office of the City Council.

The public has always been informed about new policies or plans, usually through the media although sometimes at too early a stage. For instance, some citizens were informed about ideas, which were still under discussion. This caused some confusion, as some citizens took this to constitute a decision. The outcome was nevertheless positive as citizens were involved from the very early stage and accepted the final decisions with greater understanding

Enough information was made public although sometimes the information was too detailed or irrelevant. For instance, discussion was distracted from the main issue and time was wasted by discussing who would receive the honour for having made the original proposal.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The most suitable option was chosen due to the public's demands for additional research. The research work was carried through by the corresponding department in the City Council. Research showed that the water layer under Paide was not suitable to supply the city.

Comments of participants in the process:

The City Council is satisfied with the procedure. Discussions on this topic are over and all parties are satisfied with the outcome. The public is also satisfied with the results as they have come to understand that this is the right option.

Contact:	Heli Suvi, Anti Annus
Address:	Paide Town Government Keskväljak 14 PAIDE 72711
Phone:	+ 238 38 622
E-mail:	helisuvi@estpak.ee
Fax:	+ 238 38 622
Website:	www.paide.ee

REC view on participation exercise:

The Paide municipality appears to have made a good effort to conduct a thorough and successful public participation exercise. The use of the internet is an interesting example of the use of electronic technology to improve the effectiveness of public participation. Several open meetings were held and a real dialogue seems to have been achieved. There is no specific information in the case study about time-frames fixed, but it seems that the process, taking place over such a long period of time, provided ample opportunities for public participation.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 7:

In general, the requirements of Article 7 appear to have been met in this case.