

Paper for "Planum Plenum: Strengthening dialogue among citizens"

Swedish experiences of alternative dialogue methods in spatial planning

Today, planning in general and spatial planning in particular form a complex system with multitude of tasks and many players. Planning issues that are not very well anchored with the citizens and different types of actors' risks to be appealed by more or less motivated protests. Existing planning legislation emphasizes the importance of display, referral, and discussion. However quite often these meetings with citizens have a conservative form and agenda. In more and more context in planning, dialogues and other alternative communication processes have been shown to be effective methods for reaching common solutions. In a Swedish project alternative dialog experiences in spatial planning have been summarized and a state of the art report have been published. The report gives examples of different methods and where they are successful to use in the different stages of a planning process.

Organisation of the project

The project was named "Cities for everybody – methods for public discussions about problems and solutions" and has been going on between November 2004 and June 2005. The Swedish National Road Administration has financed the project. The project team was involving the following researchers and consultants:

- Bengt Andersson, Inregia AB (lead partner of the project)
- Dag Boman, Capire Consulting AB
- Björn Hårsman, Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, School of Architecture and the Built Environment
- Göran Cars, Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, School of Architecture and the Built Environment
- Jerker Söderlind, Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, School of Architecture and the Built Environment
- Bertil Hylén, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute
- Joanna Dickenson, Transek AB
- Johan Lindberg, Trivector Traffic AB

From the Swedish National Road Administration Peter Aalto was responsible for the project.

Overall result of the project

The overall result of the project is that there are many good reasons to use alternative dialogue methods within the planning process. The experiences of using alternative dialogue methods is that there is a good form to identify and evaluate alternative solutions, but also to create a broader enthusiasm as well as better understanding within the citizens for sensitive and complex planning issues. One of the biggest advantages with alternative dialogue methods is that they can result in well-balanced common solutions between different participants. It is however important to point out that alternative dialogue methods can not sort out genuine value conflicts between different participants, but meetings and discussion can create better understanding.

If the alternative dialogue meeting will be successful will depend very much on the preparation before the dialogue. It is important to have the right mix of participants, the right

organisation, right method and the right equipment. If a dialogue meeting should be successful it is also important to discuss a real planning issue and that the issue is well specified in time and space. The project has produced checklists on what to do before, during and after a dialogue meeting in order to succeed.

Different dialogue methods

There are a lot of alternative dialogue methods. The project sorted out four major different types, depending on where the specific case is in the planning process. However the method that is used always need to be more or less modified depending on the case of the dialogue.

- *Workshop Dialogue*– is recommended to be used in situations when both solutions and strategies are quite wide open. An example could be a dialogue with citizens and actors create a direction and suggest overall objectives for a future planning process of a specific area.
- *Participant Dialogue* - is recommended to be used when the overall objective for the planning issue is decided but there are different strategies and solutions to reach the objective. The so-called charette is an example of participant dialogue.
- *Priority Dialogue* - is recommended to be used when there is a reduced number of a different type of solutions but one of them needs to be chosen. The so-called multi criteria method is an example of priority dialogue.
- *Negotiation Dialogue* – is recommended to be used when two different actors or two alternative solutions stand in conflict with each other

In the illustration below the four identified major dialogue-methods (green circles) have been placed in the graphologies depending on how much influence there is left to discuss. For instance further on in a planning process there should be no possibility to start all over a discussion that has already been decided. The different types of methods of dialogue need to be specified in order to bring the planning process forward.

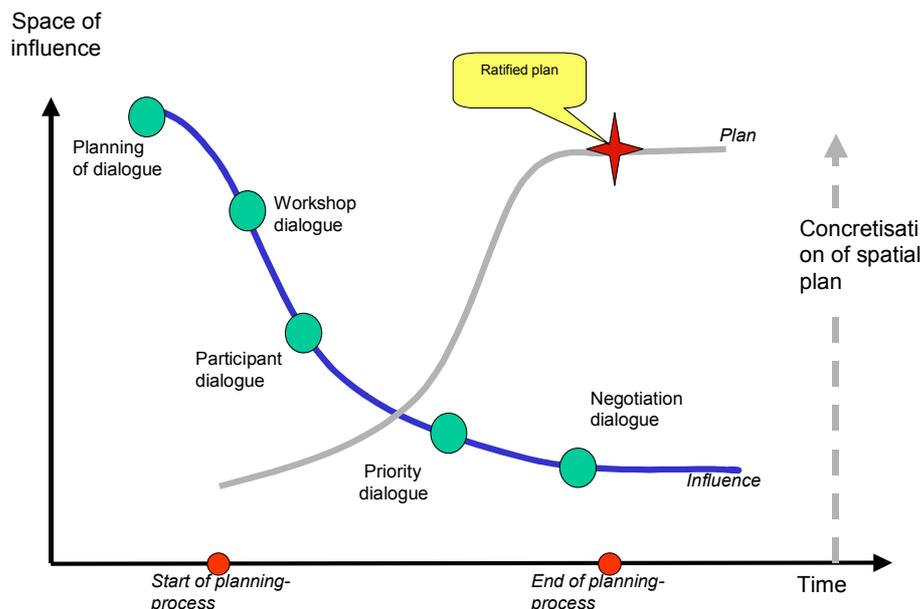


Figure 1: Illustration of different types of dialogue-methods (green circles) and when in the planning process they are recommended to be used. Figure-translation: see above.

Definition of a dialogue within spatial planning

As there where no common accepted definition on what a dialogue in spatial planning is in Sweden the project created a suggested definition from six different criteria's:

1. A dialogue should be about a real and existing planning case.
2. The actors involved in a dialogue should have the responsibility and the mandate to both discuss and decide.
3. A dialogue is based on learning between the different involved actors
4. A dialogue is based on that the different types of actors is present at the same time
5. A dialogue is based on creativity
6. A dialogue should be lead of a person with no specific interest or involvement in the specific planning case

Possibilities with alternative dialogues in spatial planning

Using alternative dialogue methods especially early in the process could result in a faster planning process. The dialogue method itself creates more understanding between the different actors with conflicting agendas; this results in less risk of appeal against formal decision in the planning process. An alternative dialogue method could also have other possibilities:

- Creative ideas is generated
- Better and broader local anchorage
- Knowledge is spread between the different actors with conflicting agendas
- Knowledge about spatial planning in general and the overall objective of sustainable development is spread
- The method itself contains a consequence analysis

Finally it should not be underrated that alternative dialogue methods in spatial planning could have a democratic value in itself.



Figure 2: Discussion during an alternative dialogue about the development of Järva/Barkabyfältet north of Stockholm

Restrictions with alternative dialogues in spatial planning

It is important to point out that alternative dialogue methods can not sort out genuine value conflicts between different participants, but meetings and discussion can create better understanding.

Restrictions with dialogues is:

- A dialogue can result in unrealistic suggestion from a economic point of view
- A dialogue can result in solution that is not well balanced from broader perspective, as one of the actors where to dominate in the dialogue
- A dialogue can result in to high expectations among the participants that is not possibly to reach
- Difficulties to arrange meetings with all involved actors
- A dialogue can be used as a tool for hidden agendas for different types of actors

Checklist for a successful alternative dialogue

The project has produced checklists on what to do before, during and after a dialogue meeting in order to succeed.

Before a dialogue:

- The dialogue must be specified in time and space.
- It is important to specify the objective of the dialogue so that no specific actors or interest is excluded.
- Identification of the right actors that needs to be involved. It is important that all actors are involved already in the beginning.
- It is important to choose the right method of the dialogue and choose the right tools to create a creative atmosphere.
- To remember that the aim and the objective of the dialogue and not the method for the dialogue is the most important, not that other way around
- It is important to make a reservation of a “neutral” local
- It is important to do a rehearsal before the actual dialogue

During a dialogue:

A dialogue should be lead of a person with no specific interest or involvement in the specific planning case. It is important for this person to

- present very specified rules for the dialogue and that these rules are discussed and accepted of all actors
- clarify what the different participants can and not can discuss during the dialogue
- check the participants expectations before the actual case of the dialogue
- work after quite precise time table for the dialogue
- give quite a lot of time for presentation of the different proposals from the dialogue
- make a clear ending of the dialogue

After a dialogue:

It is important to afterwards present

- a documentation of the result of the dialogue for the different actors
- give feedback to the different actors on what was decided and why
- what is going to be the next step in the planning process
- follow up on the method of the dialogue



Figure 3: Discussion during an alternative dialogue about the development of Järva/Barkabyfältet north of Stockholm

Full scale test with alternative dialogue method

Within the project a full-scale test of a dialogue method was carried out. Two different groups of participants did a “work shop dialogue” on how an area north of Stockholm called “Järva/Barkaby-fältet” could be developed. The aim of the dialogue was to make a concrete outline of a future development of the specified area in order to create sustainable development.

The specified area covers several administrative boundaries so several municipalities were present as well as national actors like Swedish National Road Administration and Swedish National rail Administration. Different local citizens and actors were also present for instance participation from local business company and environmental groups as well as other non-governmental organisations.

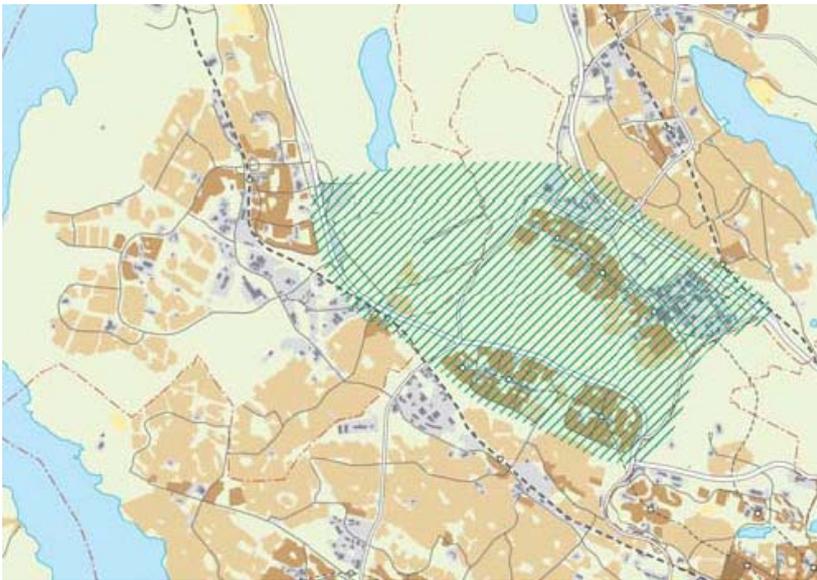


Figure 4: Map showing specified area of discussion in the case “Järva/Barkaby-fältet”



Figure 5: Picture from Kista Science Tower showing specified area of discussion in the case “Järva/Barkaby-fältet”.



Figure 6: The two different groups working.



Figure 7: Results from one of the groups. White colour showing proposed new buildings, blue new water, green showing more high quality nature areas. Violet colour showing different types of proposal within the built environment. Ropes in different colours showing different types of new transport infrastructure.

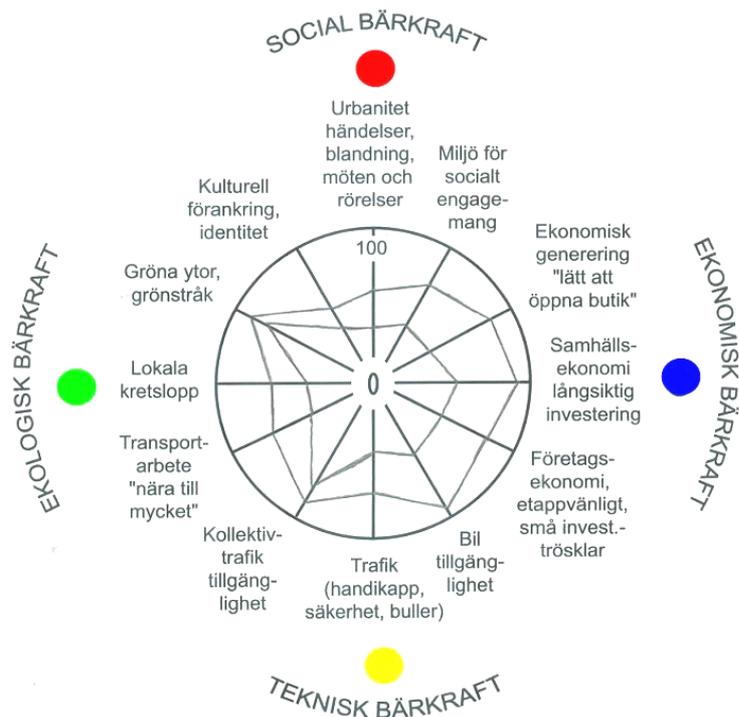


Figure 8: Results from one of the groups. Consequence analysis before and after suggested development for Barkaby/Järvafältet. Different types of indicators according to sustainable development.

Projects proposal for future development

The project has proposed a couple of suggestion where more development could be done:

- The project has produced a more general recommendation when different methods should be used. However these recommendations needs to be more precise.
- It is important to study more in detail the criteria's for selection of the different actors that should be invited to the dialogue
- It is important to study more in detail on how these alternative dialogue methods relate to the legislation.

The role of the planner

It is not enough that the planner is a specialist in any subject area. Rather the planner must be good at identifying and handling more complex problems, and have skills in assessing the impact of a proposed action. Skills in the coordinating and managing the planning process are also required. Management of process that compromises many parties, multi-faceted problems, weighing of interests and issues, communication and negotiating call for different professional skills than those for "traditional" planning. Rather than being an expert in drawing the blueprints the planner must have analytical skills and expert competence in process management.

Information about the project

The project has been documented in a more extended report as well as a popular version. It is possible to download both these documentations from the website www.inregia.se under "Publikationer". However at the moment these two documents are only available in Swedish. Articles have also been published in different Swedish papers. Experiences of the project are now used in other projects in Sweden.