



Experiences with public participation during action planning in small and medium-sized German cities

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ABSTRACT

Information and participation of the public is required by the Environmental Noise Directive, article 8 and 9. The public is supposed to be informed early enough and to have the opportunity to participate in the course of noise action planning. As the directive has been implemented in Germany since more than ten years, different experiences have been made with participation of the public in small and medium-sized German cities from 5.000 up to 50.000 inhabitants. A broad range of participation tools has been developed and is used in different situations. Face-to-face participation has turned out to be essential, yet internet participation has become more and more important even in smaller communities. An effective approach are "noise walks", where noisy and quiet areas are visited in groups of 15 to 25 people in no longer than 1,5 hour walks and subjective impressions are discussed among participants.

Keywords: Action Planning, Community, Environmental Noise Directive, Noise mitigation, Participation,

1 INTRODUCTION

In Article 9, the Environmental Noise Directive (END) demands the information of the public about the given situation concerning noise. Above that, according to Article 8, the public has to be given the opportunity to participate in the establishing of action plans against noise and to review the proposed measures. The comments and proposals given by the public have to be taken into consideration in the course of action planning. For the communities when starting on action planning, these demands of the END lead to a number of questions:

- Which media are best suited to inform the public (accessibility)?
- In which way the information should be presented (clear and understandable information)?
- Who is responsible for the information and participation of the public in a community?
- How is the process of participation organized and which possibilities of participation are existent?
- Which approaches are best suited for smaller communities in comparison to bigger cities?

“The EU Environmental Noise Directive (END) ²constitutes an obligation to the member states of the European Union to reduce the noise load in congested urban areas and within the vicinity of arterial roads, main railroad lines and major airports and to prevent an increase of noise in quiet areas. In order to do so, strategic noise maps are to be created and noise action plans are to be developed. It is an important objective to protect the population from health impacts caused by noise.”³

The public should have the opportunity to be involved in developing the action plans and to have their suggestions for these plans heard. They should also have a chance to be involved in the (later) review of the action plans. The range of opportunities for public participation cited is very wide, because neither the Directive nor the German Federal Immission Control Act (BImSchG) have no

¹ Lärmbilanz 2015, p. 16.

² Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC

³ Umweltbundesamt 2014, p. 7

specific guidelines for this.

Article 8

Action plans

(7) Member States shall ensure that the public is consulted about proposals for action plans, given early and effective opportunities to participate in the preparation and review of the action plans, that the results of that participation are taken into account and that the public is informed on the decisions taken. Reasonable time-frames shall be provided allowing sufficient time for each stage of public participation.

In Germany, the communities generally are responsible for drawing up action plans, but there are no definite regulations concerning participation included. Thus it depends on the size of the community and on the decision of the responsible authorities to what extent participation of the public will be provided in the process of action planning. The following contribution deals with the experiences in small and medium-sized German communities from about 20.000 up to 100.000 inhabitants.

2 ACTION PLANNING IN GERMAN COMMUNITIES

The Environmental Directive requires Member States to prepare and publish, every 5 years, noise maps and noise management action plans for:

- agglomerations with more than 100,000 inhabitants
- major roads (more than 3 million vehicles a year)
- major railways (more than 30.000 trains a year)
- major airports (more than 50.000 movements a year, including small aircrafts and helicopters)

In 2014, there were 11.116 communities in Germany. As small and medium-sized communities defined, are all communities between 5.000 and 100.000 inhabitants, which represent 25,4 % (=2.821 of all communities in Germany.(Source: DStatis 31.12.2014). According to the actual “Lärmbilanz” (noise balance) of the German Federal Agency for Environment (UBA), 17% of all the municipalities in Germany have submitted a report on noise action planning. (UBA 2015, p. 25).

The report also states: “There is a correlation between the population size and the reporting of a noise action plan. Small and medium-sized municipalities with noise maps submit reports less frequently than large cities. The same correlation was noted for stage one in 2010.” (p. 27).

3 GENERAL AIMS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Objectives of information and participation of the public are generally:

- the identification of noise issues that are not found on the noise map (including subjective perception),
- a problem-oriented discussion and result openness,
- raising public awareness with respect to the topic,
- enhancing the chances of implementation through the public discourse established in connection with noise action planning.

In addition, public participation frequently provides hints with respect to smaller and less cost-intensive measures, such as a “rattling manhole cover”. The quick removal of such smaller annoyances provides a chance for the community to generate extensive effects with little effort.

Since the way in which active information and participation are to be implemented is not explicitly laid out by the Environmental Noise Directive or the BImSchG; the lack of these regulations makes it possible for each community to select their own, appropriate process.

4 APPROACHES FOR CONSULTING THE PUBLIC

In those smaller cities where public participation during action planning has been applied, a broad range of participation tools has been developed and is used in different situations.

4.1 Face-to-face participation: Public events and workshops

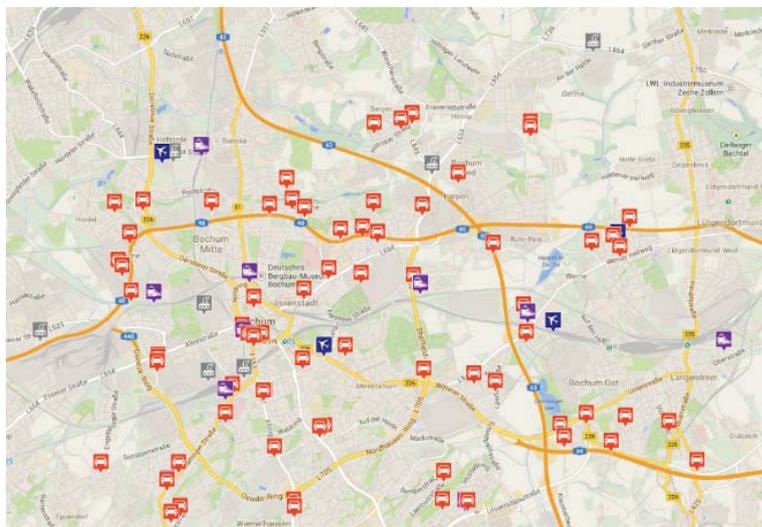
Face-to-face participation has turned out to be important especially in towns or cities with more than 20.000 inhabitants. Mostly there are events for information or workshops in the city hall. Often an important city representative like the mayor or the head of the planning department invites and welcomes the participants personally. Mostly, there are at least two of these events: At the beginning of the process of action planning and at the end of the process, when results are presented and recommendations and hints of the public shall be considered. Very often, smaller working groups are established to discuss special topics as is shown in the following picture. This allows a more intensive discussion and usually comes to very good results.



Picture 1 – Working group during a public event (Source: konsalt)

4.2 Participation in the internet

In recent years, internet participation has become more and more important in smaller communities. Many of the communities use the internet or information on their general website. In some cases, participation tools are offered or online-questionnaires covering noise topics in the community can be answered by the public.



Picture 2 – Participation in the internet (Source: konsalt)

Whereas only some years ago, the use of the internet was restricted to certain groups, as predominantly males or younger people, recently it has become much more common also among older groups of the population. In 2014, 76,8 % of the German population uses the internet, ten years before, in 2004, it were 53 % of the population. Still there is a difference between younger and older people: In Germany, 48 % of persons of 60 years and more use the internet, whereas the rate among younger persons between 18 and 24 years is almost 100 %. (Source: Statista 2016).

As it shows, the internet can be a good alternative or way to participate for those who have not enough time to go to public meetings, for instance in the case of young families with children. Thus the internet is often successfully combined with other approaches to address especially younger groups of the population.

4.3 Sound walks

Especially in smaller communities, "noise walks", "sound walks", or bicycles tours are used to let the public participate. Noisy and quiet areas are visited along a designated route in groups of 15 to 25 people in no longer than 1,5 hour walks and subjective impressions are discussed among participants.

Almost in all cases where action planning is accompanied by public participation, there are highly motivated representatives sometimes only one or two persons, in the city administration who are highly dedicated to the issue of noise and noise reduction.

4.4 Others

Many small communities with less than 10.000 inhabitants renounce public participation or deal with the topic of action planning in public assemblies of the community council. The results of discussions and decisions are published in the official journal or in the local newspaper.

5 THE PROBLEM OF MISSING REPONSIBILITIES

Smaller communities in Germany normally are not responsible or in charge of streets other than city streets. Major roads with more than 3 million vehicles yearly are in the responsibility of the Federal Government or the Bundesland.(federal state). Also railway lines are not in the responsibility of the community. For those who take part in a participation process, it is very difficult to explain this situation with the result that very often people feel frustrated.

Additionally, in the course of the five years since 2010 und 2015, many proposals in very elaborated and with great participation of the public have not been implemented or not even started either because of lack of financing or as a consequence of missing responsibilities. Because of this, it has to be expected that in future participation processes during action planning there will be many complaints the community administration has to deal with. This might become a serious problem for the consulting process in many smaller communities.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Small and medium-sized communities in Germany generally have less financial and personal resources for the consulting of the public during the process of action planning as have bigger cities or agglomerations.. Yet, in many cases very creative and successful methods for the participation of the public are used in smaller communities. This very often depends on one or two persons in the administration who are especially dedicated to the subject of action planning and participation.

. A future challenge for these communities lies in the implementation of measures for noise reduction, since they either do not have the necessary money to pay for those measures, or it is not in their responsibility to implement measures. For the process of participation this will become in the near future probably a major problem, since the public does not understand why many measures in the action plans have not come into realization.

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