

Name of Exercise: Development of a strategic plan for the city of Sopot

Location: The City of Sopot

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Article 7*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To create, with the public, a document which would be the framework for the short and long term development of the city.

Participation Techniques Used:

When starting the work on the development strategy for Sopot in 1992, the principle of a wide public consultation was adopted, covering the residents, institutions and companies operating in the city. It was assumed that the vision of the city for next 20-30 years should be stable and independent of political changes.

In 1993, a survey was conducted among the inhabitants to identify the social issues and the needs of the inhabitants. Amongst others, there was a question about the preferred direction of the city's development. The survey was conducted by the Public Survey Agency (Pracownia Badan Społecznych) of Sopot. The questionnaire reached 70% of the citizens and the results were taken into account in spending the municipal budget.

In 1995, in order to find out the opinions of the inhabitants for the long term development of Sopot, 150 invitations were sent out to larger companies, institutions and different representations of inhabitants (those deemed to be the most important). This assumed that the strategy should be developed in conjunction with those who want to help create it.

Those who declared in writing (85 people) their wish to participate in debates were involved in making the draft plan. A Strategy Building Team was set up representing the local community and local interest groups.

The debates were held during 10 workshop meetings, which usually lasted 7-8 hours each. For each meeting an appendix was produced providing detailed information, i.e. the topics and objectives of the meeting, the way the meeting would be run, the place and date, the methods of work used, the materials, participants, chairpersons, speakers.

Who participated?

In the first stage (the survey) 70% of Sopot's citizens participated.

In further stages, participants included:

Sopot City Council Members	Sopot City Executive Board members
heads of municipal departments	invited representatives of municipal institutions
representatives of all political parties	the Local Parliament
representatives of NGOs, charities and foundations	tourism representatives
representatives of academia	employees of banks
members of small trade and catering businesses	private entrepreneurs
representatives of the Regional Police Station	the Fire Chief
entities linked with the identity of the city (sports clubs, art galleries etc.)	local authorities

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

Stage I – survey on the general directions of the city development

Stage II – development of the strategy by the representatives of the public

Stage III – public debate on the main points in the form of presentations at the meetings open to everyone

Stage IV – adoption of the strategy by the City Council during an open session

Journalists were always present at the meetings summarising the results achieved so far. They published the results of the Strategy Building Team in the local press on an ongoing basis. Besides the press, 'Television Gdansk' informed the public about the plan by showing a series of interviews relating the current status of the work and made a half-hour film on building the strategy for Sopot through public participation.

What information was made available?

In 1992 "The Information of the President of the City of Sopot for the inhabitants on the status of work on the city development strategy" was published, including: comprehensive data; the genesis indicating the goals of the strategy; the composition of the Strategy Committee; and the summary of the decisions taken, specifying also the extent of public involvement and giving an invitation to participate in the City Council decision-making.

In 1995, two versions of the report on the work on the strategy were published:

1. a 3 page report "General information on the results so far of the work on the strategic plan for the city of Sopot – October 1995". It was meant for a wide distribution amongst citizens, institutions, companies and different lobbies. The aim was to inform people about the status of work and to collect opinions on 4 options for city development.
2. a 15 page report "Draft Strategic Plan for the City of Sopot" was meant for internal consultation at the Council Committees, in the departments of the Municipal Office and for external consultation with the Local Parliament members, the Council for the Regional Strategy and with all those who had worked on the plan.

In addition to both reports, the inhabitants were offered access to full minutes of the Strategy Building Team, recommended background materials such as public opinion surveys, the Report on the State of the City, 'Information on the Inhabitants and the Municipal Property', archives including former reports, databases produced by NGOs and local lobby groups and information on assistance funds.

Inhabitants were asked to submit their comments on the strategic plan to the President's Plenipotentiary for City Development Strategy and also to the NGOs.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The President's Plenipotentiary for City Development Strategy and Non-Governmental Organisations received a lot of correspondence from inhabitants closely following the progress of the strategic plan development, including well thought-out points and opinions, which were used to large extent in finalising the strategic plan.

Comments of participants in the process:

President's Plenipotentiary for the Resort

"Thanks to the involvement of the Sopot inhabitants, represented in the strategy building team – the strategy was unanimously adopted by the City Council (following two year's work) and in 1996 its implementation was begun"

City Council Chairman

"The result of the work on our city development strategy is an effect of efforts of many inhabitants and institutions and many members of the Sopot City Council whom I would like to thank for getting involved in the work on the participatory development of the Sopot development strategy"

President's Plenipotentiary for the City Strategy and Development

"Those who are affected by the plan and with whom it will be implemented continue to work on the future of Sopot. We have thus gained a lot of experience in mobilising and integrating people from different environments around common goals. And the active and not just claiming attitude of the people living and working in Sopot is a promise of further successes"

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REC view on participation exercise:

This case appears to be a quite positive implementation of the principles behind Article 7 of the Convention. Because the authorities made an effort to encourage participation, the final level of participation was relatively high. It also included proactive and creative methods for encouraging public participation. These included tailoring materials for specific audiences, copying comments to NGOs, granting access to local databases, and providing information on financial assistance. While it is not entirely clear what criteria were applied to identify the participating organisations, a 70% rate of participation among citizens in the initial survey is quite remarkable. Moreover, the length of the process and the publicity it received seem to have ensured that any interested members of the public had an opportunity to participate. As no opposing views were expressed it is difficult to evaluate whether any participants may have been dissatisfied with the process. However, the general support indicated for the final result is a positive sign.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 7:

None, based on the information given.