



Participatory appraisal

Participatory appraisal is a methodology that creates a cycle of collecting information, reflection and learning. Participatory appraisal practitioners design a process based on the needs of the client, then use suitable methods to facilitate analysis and discussion of local issues and perceptions with local people. The methodology has evolved rapidly and is continuously modified by users. It can be adapted to work with small groups or entire communities. Each group of participants proceeds gradually from stage to stage, first looking at their perceptions of the current situation, then identifying barriers or gaps and then coming up with solutions or issues for change. Participants are able to choose the level of participation that suits their interests and needs. Many of the methods used are visual, which helps to simplify complex issues. Examples of the different methods used in Participatory appraisal are brainstorming, institutional analysis diagrams, ranking of priorities or criteria and community mapping.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Facilitators trained and experienced in Participatory appraisal are essential.
- Facilitators and participating staff need to have good overall communication and listening skills.

Equipment

- Writing and printing facilities, drawing materials and facilities for group work are all potentially needed.

Time

- Time needed depends on the length of the process.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Participation works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century. New Economics Foundation (1998). CD-Rom edition 1999. Available from: www.neweconomics.org
- Techniques for talking: participatory techniques for land use planning – a review. M. Toogood (2000). RSPB, Sandy, Bedfordshire.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★★

Strengths

- Participatory appraisal is a highly flexible methodology.
- Interactive activities involving many stakeholders are used.
- Participatory appraisal helps groups to determine their priorities for action.
- It can be used in different locations where people naturally gather together.
- The opinions and concerns of local people have a central role in the process.

Weaknesses

- Trained facilitators are required to guide the process.
- A long period of time plus resources to generate outcomes and reach decisions may be necessary.

Web

- Information on different visual methods is provided in the site of Centre for Environment and Society: www.essex.ac.uk/ces
- Scottish Participatory Initiatives (SPI): www.srds.co.uk/spi

Training

- The Prince's Foundation: tel. 020 7613 8500 or www.princes-foundation.org
- Training provided by Scottish Participatory Initiatives SPI (see web) and IIED Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action: tel. 0207 388 2117

Case studies

- The community woodland handbook. McPhillimy, D. (1998). Reforesting Scotland, Edinburgh. Available from: www.community-woods.org.uk
- The Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme 1994–1997. Reforesting Scotland (2001). Contact Reforesting Scotland: tel. 0131 554 4321 or www.reforestingscotland.org



People involved in Participatory appraisal in Felston (Reforesting Scotland).

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox