Case Study
CITY OF FREIBURG, GERMANY

Participatory landuse planning.
An example of good governance.

Developing a comprehensive landuse plan based on a systematic and integrative process of civil society participation using principles of good governance, and resulting in enhanced transparency, partnership and cooperation between citizens and the municipality.

PROGRAM NAME
LANDUSE PLAN 2020 OF THE CITY OF FREIBURG

To evaluate and develop Freiburg’s Landuse Plan 2020 with a strong emphasis on high levels of public participation to define and identify sustainable development strategies.

ABSTRACT
The city of Freiburg’s approach to landuse planning is that the process be transparent, inclusionary, and the results of this participatory process be a landuse plan that manages the City’s growth in a sustainable way.

The city of Freiburg created a systematic and professionally facilitated process to develop the new landuse plan that the city will follow until the year 2020. The plan provides the overall framework for Freiburg’s urban development, and for the improvement of landuse management practices. The process actively involved citizens in all the important steps of planning and decision-making. As one element, citizens established a catalogue of guidelines according to the sustainability principles of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, which built the framework of the land-use plan’s development. Key elements, such as a reduction of land-use and the support of Freiburg’s inner development while decreasing its outside development and the cooperation with its citizens, developed a land-use plan that focuses on a transparent public participation process as well as sustainability aspects. One major outcome of the plan is a significant reduction of land consumption, by focusing on Freiburg’s internal development while limiting or controlling development outside of the city centre.

MUNICIPAL PROFILE

Population: 214,218

Land Area: 153.06 km²

Municipal Budget (2005): Euro 1.2 billion (USD $ 1.5 billion)
The importance of the issue

Municipalities are often challenged when trying to incorporate aspects of sustainability into land use planning. In particular, the increasing demand for land for housing and business development, coupled with the limited amount of land available, makes better management of land use the only sustainable solution. The reconciliation between economic, ecological, and social interests, however, is not always easy. The process in which Freiburg’s Landuse Plan 2020 was developed takes these issues into account, and offers ways that municipalities can work with their citizens to develop a coordinated and comprehensive response to landuse planning. By placing the emphasis on public participation in the planning process, Freiburg’s landuse plan has promoted inclusive decision-making processes, and demonstrated that cooperation between local authorities and civil society can result in coordinated action for sustainable development.

Case

Context of Municipality

Freiburg is situated in the Southwest of Germany, between the Black Forest region, Switzerland and the Alsace region in France. Its population is approximately 215,000 inhabitants. It is known as the “Ecological Capital of Germany” and a “Solar City” worldwide. Freiburg’s economic activity is mainly represented by the service sector.

Case Description

In spring 2002, the municipal council decided to review the landuse plan, paying particular attention to the needs and requests of citizens. The desire to pay particular attention to public input was an outcome of previous participatory processes that had failed in 2001, resulting in the growing mistrust of citizens in the government’s transparency. The result was a clear call for more active public participation from the very start.

To engage the public, the council established a systematic process in which citizens were involved in the decision-making processes and thus able to actively participate in the development of Freiburg’s land-use plan. To allow for maximum input, the landuse plan was extended up to the year 2020 and a cross-departmental project steering group for integrated urban development (Projektgruppe für integrierte Stadtentwicklung, PRISE) was set up in the Mayor’s office.

Based on previous experience, the project group considered participation, transparency in the flow and dissemination of information, administrative decisions, and forms of cooperative work the key ingredients of the planning process. To achieve this, it was decided to arrange for professional facilitation of the public participation sessions.

In the two years that followed, Freiburg succeeded in continuously integrating citizens in the development of Freiburg’s landuse plan, thereby eliminating any mistrust. Ongoing public participation in the landuse plan was organized into three stages:

Stage 1: Development of planning guidelines

The project group, based on public recommendations, developed a catalogue of guidelines addressing all aspects of sustainability which served as a basis for the establishment of Freiburg’s landuse plan. The key objective was the reduction of land consumption in Freiburg, with inner urban development as the priority measure.
The catalogue is split into four categories:

I. Spatial guidelines for Freiburg’s Development;
II. Guidelines for Society, Education, and Culture;
III. Guidelines for Environment, Nature, and Landscape; and
IV. Guidelines for Economic Development.

The preamble states that the future urban development of Freiburg reflects the sustainability guidelines established at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Accordingly, Freiburg’s development can be defined as sustainable, whereby economic growth considers social justice and the maintenance and improvement of the ecological resource base necessary for human beings, plants, and animals.

**Stage 2: Information events**

Between September 2003 and April 2005 several public information events took place on the fundamentals of the landuse plan (e.g. housing and industrial real estate needs, demographic development, etc). Expert opinions, prognoses, evaluations and decisions regarding the selection of building sites were illustrated by the PRISE, discussed constructively by the public and served as a basis for the selection of sites for development. Based on the results of public participation and expert opinions, the PRISE worked out three scenarios, representing quantitatively and qualitatively different development alternatives for 67 building sites in Freiburg: scenario 1 foresaw a minimum number of development sites for housing and trade or mixed use respectively, whereas scenario 2 envisaged additional housing sites, and in scenario 3, more sites were dedicated to trade and mixed uses. These three scenarios were decided upon by the municipal council in November 2004, to serve as the basis for the extended participatory process.

**Stage 3: Facilitation of working groups and extended civil participation**

From December 2004 onwards, the three scenarios were discussed amongst the citizens and with the administration in the most intensive phase of the participatory process. This discussion took place in the framework of an organized process with professional, external facilitation with meetings in town districts and working groups until April 2005.

The professional facilitators were supported by pre-selected volunteers with town planning skills as well as communication skills. Their task was to function as “door-openers and bridge-builders”, engaging the citizens in a constructive dialogue in the planning process. Overall, 38 volunteers were selected for this task, coming from the city’s networks for civil participation (initiatives, clubs, Local Agenda) as well as former town planners and municipal councillors. In November 2004, members of the project group and the professional facilitators trained the volunteers in methodology as well as in content.

In a first round of local meetings held in January 2005, the facilitators and members of the PRISE explained to the interested public the process, such as the organizational context, the set-up of local working groups and the specific elements of the landuse plan. The meetings were held in three town districts in the inner city - North, Southwest, and Southeast. Likewise, community representatives led the discussion process through open council meetings in eight small villages of Freiburg, with 500 people participating. In the town districts, roughly 360 people discussed and evaluated different planning scenarios in 16 working groups, which were facilitated in pairs by the 38 volunteers.

From January to April 2005, the 16 working groups and also the incorporated villages discussed and evaluated the housing, industrial, and mixed-use areas of the three scenarios. When evaluating the development areas, the participants used the following evaluation
categories, similar to the green, yellow, and red traffic lights:

- “Yes” - approving the inclusion of this area into the land-use plan.
- “Yes, if” - meaning that the formulated conditions have to be taken into account in the planning procedure. If these conditions are ignored in the planning procedure, this vote then becomes a “No”.
- “No”-meaning a disagreement with the inclusion of this area in the landuse plan.

By help of bundling events in the three selected districts of the city, the evaluation results of the various working groups were then compiled and balanced: the majority of participants decided on the scenario with the least amount of land used in settlement, industrial, and mixed areas.

Moreover, a new scenario was discussed that would include less building areas than the first scenario.

**Results**

In May 2005, at the final city event, the citizens’ opinions about the landuse proposal (the results of the working groups and of the small villages) were introduced to the public and handed over to the mayor as a ‘vote’ of Freiburg’s citizens. The project steering group for integrated urban development had taken up the main conclusions drawn from the public, including the reduction of land used for developments, and the prioritisation of Freiburg’s internal development over its outside development.

Consequently, the administration incorporated these key elements in the landuse plan in order to protect the surrounding landscapes; according to the citizens’ assessment, only five of the specific building areas differed from the administrations’ former draft of the landuse plan. In response, the administration reduced the size of those specific areas or indicated them as planning alternatives. The modified draft was then forwarded to the municipal council, who approved the citizens’ landuse proposals.

**LESSONS LEARNED AND KEY REPLICATION ASPECTS**

The number of citizens involved and their ongoing commitment to the process was remarkable, attracting not only citizens directly involved and citizens that have traditionally been active, but others as well. Within the discussion process, participants had difficulties in recognising and keeping to the rather general scale of the landuse plan, as well as in distinguishing clearly between general and private interest. It was essential that citizens were trained in the participatory process through informational events and dialogues with experts. Through these mechanisms,
citizens were able to clearly understand their role, identify opportunities, and limits of participation.

The attitude and willingness of the administration to learn in this process, and to maintain an open and transparent dialogue with the citizens, was truly key to the success of the project. This was supported by continuous feedback and internal as well as external process coaching of the administration, regarding its role, attitude, and means of cooperation with the citizens. During the whole participation process, the working groups’ results and decisions by the municipality were constantly discussed and feedback loops were organised. The administration was willing to provide open access to important information, indicating its willingness to establish a transparent process for the citizens. The process in its different stages was constantly supported by material that served as a basis for the participants in the public dialogue:

- a contact person for each issue was assigned;
- all specific land areas were described through short fact sheets;
- several issues of the local newspaper reviewed land use scenarios, thereby assisting the public discussion process; and
- all expert opinions were available on the Internet.

This process in particular has shown the value of an accurate review of the issues and roles in the preparatory phase. The administration was able to realistically outline the planning process, thereby anticipating potential conflicts, and allowing for solutions to be found. The efforts required to prepare, organize and implement a facilitated and broad participatory process should not be underestimated in this form of participation. Furthermore, external facilitation helped in establishing the concept of the “Freiburg model”, and mediated between the citizens and the administration in conflict situations. In addition, the involvement of competent citizens as voluntary facilitators lead to outstanding results. Without, this complex process would not have been possible in the short amount of time given. Essentially important for the success of this project was that all parties involved supported the process and - as a code of honour - did not comment on the content within its duration.

From all angles - participants, citizens, the administration, and the municipal council - the process of public participation is rated as a success. Freiburg’s participatory land use plan has been approved by the municipal council, and the opinions of citizens is being evaluated through a survey. This process of a dialogue between citizenship, politics, and the administration, as well as the learning process for all participants - has proved to be sustainable. The concept of public participation, and facilitation in particular, has proved to be successful and Freiburg plans to apply it in planning processes in the future.
Staff
From the city of Freiburg, three members of the project steering group for integrated urban development (PRISE) participated. Two external facilitators were responsible for the implementation of the workshops, along with 38 volunteer facilitators. From the public, over 860 people contributed constructively and cooperatively in this process.

Budget
Euro 50,000 (USD $60,511).

Financing
All expenditures for the participation process (remuneration of professional facilitators, an allowance given to the 38 voluntary facilitators, and material costs) were financed from annual municipal budgets of Freiburg.

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