

# BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

France has to preserve, maintain, promote and develop its heritage in a number of fields. In order to succeed in doing so it is important for it to innovate, offer new forms of economic activity and promote a sense of 'living together', yet all manner of projects have caused ongoing controversy and in some cases even been halted.

Constructive consultation between all stakeholders concerned combined with a legible decision-making process that is implemented throughout the duration of the project are the two inseparable conditions for creating a climate of trust and shared intelligence that promotes the development of value-creating projects.

**W**hilst the boundaries with other methods of interaction between stakeholders may be blurred, consultation is an entirely different concept from debate, negotiation or social dialogue. Indeed, all have their rules and meet specific requirements with regards to organisation, time frame, etc.

Whilst consultation has established itself as a specific feature of the French decision-making process, it has not escaped criticism with regards to its principles or the terms of its implementation, including cost, time frames, the role of expert assessment, difficulties identifying project sponsors, the role of the State and the link between consultation and decision-making. It is a form of participatory democracy that supplements representative democracy and enlightens the decision-making process.

The French people aspire to achieve a broader rate of participation in consultation despite the observation that the public is withdrawing from various forms of political involvement (of which abstention is a symptom). This betrays the particular attention they pay to changes in their living environment and to local affairs. This desire can also be expressed as a request to be a contributor and consequently given a degree of responsibility in setting and pursuing objectives.

Consultation can result in a project being revisited, testing its reliability and often enabling it to be improved or enriched in some way. It is also a means of ensuring the coherence and durability of territorial development.

Finally, consultation can support reflection on technological development and the prospects offered by advances in the scientific and technological fields.

## 1. The following practices are encouraged by the ESEC:

- project owners implementing a consultation process as early on in the project as is possible;
- a territorial approach to projects by promoting the inter-authority dimension;
- adapting the consultation process to the context, the scale of the project and the objectives pursued whilst using a variety of innovative methods for promoting collective intelligence and incorporating the use of the Internet;
- involving the various stakeholders in the choice of studies and expert assessments and the performance and follow-up thereof;
- project owners taking into account all of the costs associated with consultation from the very origins of the project;
- encouraging direct relations with the public rather than systematically holding major debates.
- implementing reciprocal learning approaches and sharing



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experiences with stakeholders through site visits and both document-based and onsite consultation.

## 2. Recommendations and proposed avenues of action

With regards to bodies and authorities, the ESEC would suggest the following:

- that the decision-maker report back on their choices and that participants in the consultation process be made aware that their views have been taken into consideration;
- that the law regarding public debate be reviewed and that the option of linking related cases be made available;
- that the potential extension of the role of the National Commission on Public Debate (CNDP – Commission nationale du débat public) as a resource centre and a tool for capitalising on the French experience in the field of consultation be made a reality;
- that a suitable body be identified to provide system support and monitoring for small-town projects;
- that a support programme be devised from the time the project is submitted for consultation;
- that an evaluation system be put in place by each body using its own resources or drawing on external support, depending on the circumstances.

With regards to tools, the ESEC would suggest the following:

- that a 'consultation charter' be drawn up to serve as a reminder of the general principles of transparency and consultation from the very beginnings of the project, representativeness of the various bodies put in place, information, training, explanation of the project in context, respect for the players involved, suggestions for alternative solutions, preferred stages and schedule, right through to the point at which the decision is made, taking inspiration from good practices;
- that a study be performed for the purposes of suggesting methods of funding that involve savers to a greater degree, with banks nevertheless maintaining their position on the front line with regards to accepting the risks associated with long-term projects;
- that research and trials regarding the link between ICT and consultation be developed;
- that recommendations regarding consultation and monitoring be incorporated into calls for tenders and expression of interest;
- that the completion of a consultation process and the provision of training for players involved in the debate be made pre-requisites for the granting of any potential public aid.

With regards to consultation-based training and education, the ESEC recommends the following:

- training the various players involved in the consultation process and offering joint training programmes that facilitate a mingling of cultures, ensuring that project owners promote consultation techniques among project managers, strategic and operational managers and backers, and incorporating the cost of the necessary training for all of the stakeholders concerned into the budget;
- incorporating the consultation aspect into both project management and administration training programmes and engineer training programmes;
- introducing a series of programmes designed to raise awareness and educate elected representatives and State departments on the major issues and methods associated with consultation;
- initiatives designed to raise awareness in anticipation of greater involvement on the part of the public in the consultation process, to organise the sharing of knowledge and to develop the necessary scientific culture.

With regards to compensation, the ESEC would suggest the following:

- examining the notion of a mutual fund at the most appropriate level. Its aims should be linked to the project and outlined, for example, at the time an urban planning directive or project support programme is drawn up;
- considering the possibility of creating a local endowment fund modelled on urban regeneration agreements for projects of a certain scale that are jointly run by the State, the authorities and the project owner;
- examining the issue of compensation with the aim of developing regulation regarding percentages of local purchases and local recruitment in light of the competition obligations imposed by European regulation and local training programmes for overseeing the consequences on the region affected by the project.

With regards to feedback, research and evaluation, the ESEC would suggest the following:

- that feedback on the 20 projects submitted in the framework of the 'Grand Chantier' procedure be provided, notably in terms of the economic contributions made.
- that an analysis of recent urban consultation initiatives be performed in order to learn from these past initiatives.