

EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EXPERTS AND TECHNOLOGY BROKERS



BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE  
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PROJECT

on environmental & social coherence issues

in Northern Attica boroughs

EURONET

2009

## BRIEF OUTLINE

The Community Consultation that was carried out in 2008 by the Greek NGO EuroNET was entitled “Public Dialogue on Environment and Social Coherence” or in brief ‘In Dialogue with the People’. It was carried out in three neighboring municipalities of the Attica region and funded by an EU program for NGOs. The **aim** was to develop a consensus among the residents, regarding the consequences of the intense urbanization that had occurred in those areas during the past decade.

The consultation covered various **issues**, according to the needs of each area, which were: the ways to protect and increase the local natural wealth, the citizens’ participation in quality-of-life initiatives, the aesthetics of public and commonly used locations, the revitalization of neighborhood as a place of and a means for social coherence, the restriction of open spaces and minimization of green, the traffic and infrastructure problems and the relation between the city and the suburbs. Those issues were of high importance for the local authorities, since they had been assessed as critical for the local development, yet they remained unsolved for long, due to their high degree of complexity.

The project **methodology** was based on real stories that residents would recall on the above-mentioned issues. **Narratives** were gathered from a representative group of the population, comprising merchandisers, professionals, employees, public officers, housekeepers, pensioners, teachers, young people, students, unemployed, emigrants etc. In addition, **drawings**, made during school competitions on themes related to the environment and the neighborhood and exhibited at local schools, were offered to the project by the school headmasters. The combination of narratives and drawings proved to be meaningful. About 200 narratives were captured through pilot interviews and anecdote circles organized locally within a two months period.

The whole material was then **organized thematically** and was **uploaded uncensored** at an internet site that was created especially for the project’s needs. It was also presented in **local exhibitions**, aiming to familiarize the residents with unfamiliar perspectives, in a non-judgmental, non-debating way.

The material was then processed during a **half-day workshop** by its own creators and other residents who volunteered to join the event. Through a combination of Cognitive Edge methods and Open Space techniques, they discussed about the issues emerging from the process and tried to indicate their key-elements: situations, protagonists, competencies and equipment (available or missing), as well as turning points.

They also suggested possible ways to deal with those issues by placing those elements on the Cynefin model in an meaningful to them way. Some of the patterns revealed people's hidden attitudes and expectations from their leaders and co-fellows.

Furthermore, the positive **feedback** regarding the overall experience confirmed that such methods (missing from the local context) could attract stakeholders in a different way of dealing with problems. Finally, based on the narrative and the outputs of the workshop, an archetypal story was created by a storyteller, in order to diffuse the findings to the authorities and the general public.

## **FINDINGS**

As the old countryside character of Anixi became a suburban one, it was not only the outer image of the place that was affected; the coherence of the community was deeply influenced too. It resulted in the creation of a major underlying issue, a gap, between the old inhabitants (the "**locals**") and the newcomers (the "**strangers**"); the former perceived the urbanization as an invasion while the latter brought with them many urban habits (from which they ironically tried to escape) along with new standards of living and, therefore, new demands.

This intense change (urbanization) created new groups within the community, which had different views and pursuits. Through this diversity many different visions emerged, concerning the future of the area; the large number of candidates in the last elections (2006) is quite indicative. Furthermore, many local leaders address the perspective of unification with neighboring municipalities with skepticism, as they doubt whether the existing problems will be solved through a more complicated administration system; they are afraid that the community will lose its autonomy.

Some of the most popular visions for the future depict the town as a place with humanness, coherence and solidarity; of high environmental sensitivity and responsibility; full of green; with intense cultural activity; of a agreeable way of life and order; of high aesthetics in public places; with modern common used infrastructure; with technological facilities etc. The multi-cleavage resulted in the lack of common ground and that in the fact that only a few initiatives taken by the local authority were finally advanced.

Therefore, the most demanding of all challenges is the reinstatement of **trust** among all parts of the community: leaders, stakeholders, officers and citizens.

An interesting point that had emerged during that phase was the **3-fold *public - communal – private***, which, although initially referred to *space*, it was expanded to people's attitudes and behaviors (their own), as well as expectations and demands (from others). However, the researchers considered this 3fold as a significant synthesis tool. According to them, public corresponds to the impersonal law and the others' obligation against it; communal corresponds to the voluntary co-creation of meaning through daily life activities that surpass any meaningless formalities and can lead to the creation of new frames; private corresponds to the personal vision/property and the lonely path for achieving/defending it.

Furthermore, they think that the solution for synthesizing previously mentioned paradoxes and antinomies lies on understanding that a triangle needs to keep all angles (poles) and sides (relations) in place, alive and active, no blockades or exaggerations. If so, the created space of the triangle is the common ground (field), on which trust, loyalty and synergy grow.

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