

Studien zur  
internationalen Umweltpolitik

Angela Oels

**Evaluating stakeholder  
participation in the transition  
to sustainable development**

Methodology, case studies, policy implications

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LIT

**Angela Oels**

**Evaluating stakeholder participation  
in the transition to sustainable development**

# Studien zur internationalen Umweltpolitik

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***For my parents***

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## Foreword by Timothy O'Riordan

The question of choosing futures by democratic means is surely a great test of good governance. We live in an unusual age. We now face any number of possible future states for environmental robustness, social wellbeing and economic reliability. These are the basic principles of sustainable development. Without some form of integration of environmental values into our economic measures, and in the absence of some form of participatory justice in the creation of living communities, there can be no sustainability the world over.

The challenge, therefore, is to devise a form of governance that links local action to global wellbeing, and globalisation to local wellbeing. These are not forces that are neatly separable, or in any form of democratic control. The notion of future governance is to marry global patterns of sustaining economies and societies to local patterns of wellbeing that enhance local environments, bring quality to people's lives, and establish a form of economic measurement that lightens the footprint of environmental and social damage.

Angela Oels has shown brilliantly, and in great detail, just how difficult it is to establish some form of future social consensus into a community acting in isolation. The bigger picture outlined above is not in the frame. Both Olching and Rushmoor are not islands of social and economic cohesion. They are buffeted by global economic and cultural changes, they share the same experiences of European Union policies and directives, and they are constantly at the mercy of national spending plans and planning directives. How they evolve, both culturally and economically, therefore, is not entirely up to them. The notion of identity, of self determination and of true local sustainability still eludes them.

Add to this a device called Future Search Conference which is unusual, and which demands time and civic commitment, and one can see why it is that techniques such as this are so very difficult to implement. For one thing, this kind of exercise is largely disconnected from political reality and effective delivery. So only the most committed, virtually professional, consultees get involved. They inevitably had to be the well-meaning middle classes, often early retirees, who like their communities and believe in helping shape their future.

However, such nice people are not representative, and indeed may espouse values that are not commonly shared by many others in the community. They may be busy working, or tending to their families, and they may not necessarily be trained to cope with the special qualities of the Future Search experience.

There is a real dilemma here. Participation via meetings and formal set pieces brings out a minority. Those most in need of help, and least able to communicate, get left by the side. The Future Search actually carries the framework of its own narrowness and inconsequentiality.

There is now the emergence in Europe of a fresh look on how to incorporate sustainable development into local governance. This is centred on a series of modernising initiatives associated with community participation, sustainability appraisal of policies and plans, and improved measures to audit local



government for advancing the sustainability agenda. In the UK, this process is being advanced under a power to promote environmental, social and economic wellbeing, via community inclusion and frameworks of local partnerships. These are early days, but the link between common cause in the public, private and voluntary sectors is an important one to pursue. Eventually there may have to be an obligation of sorts that require government to integrate sustainability principles with their programmes of delivery and subsequent audit. This will prove the durability of the sustainability idea, and the adaptability of local governance to the intricacies of integration of policy and vision, of leadership and championing, and of building a capacity and an empathy for sustainability across the whole community. This is a tall order, and well beyond Future Search.

However, there are days ahead. Right now we have to learn from innovative forms of coping with the future. This particular experience, detailed imaginatively and in exciting detail, is part of that vital learning. We need more studies of this kind to help us on our way.

Timothy O'Riordan  
Norwich, England  
April 2003

## Preface

Stakeholder participation is supposedly a good thing. It is said to improve the quality of policymaking, to mobilise urgently needed resources, to increase public acceptance of policy decisions and to build social capital. There is an abundance of literature that celebrates the expected benefits of involving stakeholders in decision making processes. Stakeholder involvement processes are becoming increasingly important in policymaking processes at local, national and regional levels in Europe. But do stakeholder participation processes live up to the high expectations that are raised in the literature? How can we measure the success of open-ended participatory processes? What are suitable criteria and indicators of success? How do the stakeholders themselves judge the outcomes of their involvement? What can be done to improve the performance of participatory processes? And which structural factors impede stakeholder participation? Evaluative studies of stakeholder participation processes are still rare. This book hopes to make a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature.

In this book I set out a methodology for a stakeholder-based evaluation that is applied to two case studies. I present an analysis of the intended and unintended outcomes of two community-based Future Search Conferences which were used in order to launch a Local Agenda 21 process. I also identify barriers to success which help to explain the rather disappointing long-term performance of both participation processes. I conclude that as long as these barriers remain, local stakeholder participation processes will struggle to live up to the high expectations vested in them.

This book is the slightly revised version of the PhD thesis I submitted in the year 2000 to the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, Great Britain. I have published a couple of book chapters and journal articles on the basis of my thesis material (Oels 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), in some cases moving beyond the original thesis argument (Oels 2002a, 2003d), but the larger part of the thesis has remained unpublished until now. I would like to thank Dr. Susanne Weber, Iris Brünjes, Dr. Peter H. Feindt and Dr. Susanne Stoll-Kleemann for their keen interest in my research and for encouraging me to get this book out sooner rather than later.

In writing this book I have benefited from the generosity and wisdom of many people. I am indebted to those who shared their time, ideas and resources with me, who challenged and supported me and who were there to share the highs and lows of the process of doing a PhD with me. My main thesis supervisor Prof. Timothy O'Riordan was an inspiring facilitator of my personal and intellectual growth. His huge heart and enthusiasm have carried me a long way. This book has benefited from the comments provided by my second supervisor Dr. John Street and by my examiners Prof. Jacquie Burgess and Prof. Nick Pidgeon. I am also much indebted to my friend and housemate for many years Dr. Tim Bending, whose intellectual companionship sharpened my argument and whose detailed comments on my thesis draft have markedly improved its

quality. The language of the book has benefited from corrections kindly provided by Dr. Steve Connelly, Dr. Uljana Mayer, Dr. Michael Polanyi and Dr. James Tansey. All remaining errors are of course my own responsibility.

This book would not have been possible without the commitment of all the people in Rushmoor and Olching who were good enough to put up with my observation of their Future Search Conference, and who made the time to participate in focus group discussions and to be interviewed. Perry Walker, Les Murrell, Cashy Bird, Bürgermeister Waibel and Knut Hüneke deserve a special mention for supporting me in all possible ways with my research endeavours. I would also like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for a generous scholarship, that made it possible to take up the challenge of a PhD in the first place.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and my friends for seeing me through this at times difficult but highly rewarding process of completing such a major piece of research.

Angela Oels  
Hamburg, Germany  
April 2003

## Chapter 1 Introduction

*"For Foucault, ignoring the possibilities of a 'dark side' of any liberation project is the sure recipe for the demobilization of social activists once the liberation project turns sour or becomes obviously unfulfillable." (Darier 1999:20)*

A new generation of participation tools is on the rise in local governance in Europe. The Future Search Conference is a prototype of these new tools, which facilitate broad stakeholder involvement, foster systems thinking, use some principles of self-organisation and are vision-centred. This book presents a critical and in depth assessment of two community-based Future Search Conferences in Great Britain and Germany, which were hosted as 'launch' events of Local Agenda 21 processes.

This first chapter will show how the area of research and the research objectives pursued in this research project emerged in the context of my personal and professional experience. Moreover, I will provide an outline of the remainder of the book.

### **1.1 My background and intrinsic motivation**

I believe that no study should be read without having the author and her background in mind. The same is true for this book. The avenues my thinking has explored have been influenced to a significant extent by my life experience. This research project has facilitated my - not always smooth - transformation into a social scientist. Throughout my school years and undergraduate university studies, I considered myself a natural scientist - and proudly so. In high school, I majored in chemistry, biology and physics. While others explored night clubs, I spent long hours behind telescopes observing the moons of Jupiter as an active member of West Berlin's astronomers' society. From 1990 until 1995, I was an active member of the German environmental youth movement. I decided to study the 'proper' sciences of environmental engineering at the Technical University of Berlin in order to earn my credentials as an environmentalist.

My inquiry has been driven by the questions and experiences which I accumulated throughout the years which I spent as a volunteer with the German youth branch of Friends of the Earth before taking up the PhD. While on the State and later on the Federal board of this organisation, my main concern was with organisational effectiveness and democracy. I was interested in making the youth branch of German Friends of the Earth more what I would call today a 'learning organisation' and to do so in the most participatory way. However, many of the debates about structural reforms led to a polarisation within the organisation, and the piecemeal structural reforms that we managed to agree upon after painstaking discussions created space for participation that few had

energy left to fill. I was left with exhaustion, disappointment and key questions about how to facilitate empowering change processes within large organisations.

My initial enthusiasm for Local Agenda 21 while still a full-time activist can be explained by my frustration with our single issue campaigns, each of which seemed to hit the same brick wall of economic arguments about competitiveness in the global market. Local Agenda 21 seemed to offer a way out of this dead end path, a transition towards a more holistic view of change, which integrates environmental issues with economic, social and political ones. It is here that my interest in studying the viability of the Local Agenda 21 approach to change originates.

A placement with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in London introduced me to the participation tool Future Search Conference, which seemed the ideal answer to all my questions about organisational change. I was gripped by the transformational power that the three day conference event Future Search seemed to offer. As many Future Search Conferences were being run as 'launch events' for Local Agenda 21 processes, this combination of two of my lead interests formed a critical mass and became the focus of my PhD explorations.

A telephone survey I conducted for the New Economics Foundation with Future Search practitioners made me aware that not all Future Search Conferences were necessarily successful in triggering action on the ground. I became interested in the factors influencing success or failure of a Future Search Conference, and in the larger issue of evaluation. As there was hardly any critical or evaluative literature on Future Search Conferencing available at that time, and a review of one of Weisbord's books stated the need for evaluation, I felt that I had found my project - or my project had found me.

## **1.2 The context: renewed interest in citizen participation at the local level**

The late 1990s have seen a revival of citizen participation at the local level in Europe. Citizens are consulted as experts to assess the status quo, to advise decision-making and to monitor progress. They are asked to tackle important issues themselves in locality-based or interest-based task groups. They are invited to develop future scenarios for their locality and to participate in conflict resolution between stakeholder groups.

One of the best indicators of the renewed interest in citizen participation is the boom in guidance documents on the issue. In the UK, there are a number of recently published practitioner handbooks which reflect the rising interest in participatory processes. A good overview of methods can be found in the New Economics Foundation's publication *Participation works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. (NEF 1998) and in the Local Government Management Board's (LGMB) publications *Innovations in Public Participation*. (LGMB 1996) and *Democratic practice: a guide*. (LGMB 1998). A valuable practitioner handbook that draws together all important issues to consider before initiating a participatory process has been provided by David Wilcox with support by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Wilcox 1996).

In Germany, two recent publications by the Stiftung Mitarbeit (1997, 1998) fulfil a similar function. Even the governments in both countries have produced guidance documents on how best to run participatory processes in local governance (DETR 1998a, BMU 1998b). The German *Handbook on Local Agenda 21* (BMU 1998b) even recommends new methods like Open Space Technology and Future Search Conferences.

Why are local authorities keen to engage their citizenry in these various ways? In an impressive survey article, Jim Rossi (1997:173) draws on theories of democracy and agency decision-making when listing five rationales for mass participation in agency decision-making:

1. Increased accountability and oversight
2. Minimizing excessive concentration of power
3. Better quality information for decision-makers and citizen participants
4. Proceduralist values (i.e. that fair process increases the acceptance of outcomes)
5. Breeding citizenship.

Different participatory processes or tools have been designed to match the diverse purposes of citizen participation. In the context of environmental decision-making, Tim O'Riordan (1999b) has usefully distinguished between three types of what he calls deliberative and inclusionary processes (DIPs): (i) instrumental DIPs, (ii) reflective DIPs and (iii) civic DIPs. O'Riordan's classification mirrors the distinction between instrumental purposes of participation (Rossi's rationales No.1-4) and the civic purpose of breeding citizenship (Rossi's rationale No.5). Reflective DIPs are focused upon providing better quality information (Rossi's rationale No.3). For the purposes of the research presented in this book, I shall combine O'Riordan's classification with John Stewart's (LGMB 1996) to provide an overview of the most popular tools (table 1.1).

Reflective purpose (Potential for civic purpose)		Instrumental or civic purpose	
Policy-based (sometimes community-based)	Community-based	Homogenous stakeholder groups	Diverse stakeholder groups
Seeking informed views of citizens	Monitoring and appraisal by citizens	Involving communities of locality and interest	Bringing stakeholders together
Citizens' Jury Consensus Conferencing Focus Groups Deliberative Opinion Poll Issue Forum Study Circle Standing Citizens' Panel Research Citizens' Panel Health Panel Referendum Teledemocracy State of the Town Debate	Community Needs Analysis Priority Search Public Scrutiny Village Appraisal Parish Mapping Community Indicators	Involving communities of locality Neighbourhood Local Agenda 21 Involving communities of Concern	Public meetings Planning for Real Resolving Conflicts Consensus-Building <i>Future Search</i> Community Visioning Round Tables

**Table 1.1 : Innovative tools for citizen participation**

Source: adopted from Stewart 1996

### 1.3 The subject under investigation: Future Search Conferences as prototypes of collaborative planning theory

I make the claim that there is something qualitatively different about the renewed interest in citizen participation in the 1990s, something which is not sufficiently captured in theories of democracy and decision-making alone. Drawing on the literature on globalisation, I shall argue that as a result of the process of globalisation, governments find they increasingly depend upon the resources of other actors in order to bring about collectively desired results. Consequently, governments need to engage in network structures with other actors in order to achieve a pooling of resources towards objectives commonly agreed upon. I shall draw on the 'whole systems' management literature to argue that in a world of constant change and increasing interdependence, organisations and networks will be at their best when they resemble a 'living organism', i.e. have a capacity to self-organise on the basis of feedback loops of communication and an ability to constantly learn and course correct. Finally, I shall draw on the literature on sustainable development in order to make the point that the solution to the pressing 'crisis of nature' and the 'crisis of justice' will require processes of dialogue and network building in order to take effect. I shall conclude from the four strands of literature consulted that deliberative and

inclusionary processes may be considered as symptoms and catalysts of the increasing prevalence of governance in networks.

There is also something qualitatively different about the participatory processes which are used to involve citizens in the 1990s. While some of the 'old' tools are of course still in use, a new generation of methods has evolved, many of which seek out and process information on the basis of systems thinking, require broad stakeholder involvement, utilise principles of self-organisation and are vision-centred. In theoretical terms, the values upon which this new practice of citizen participation is based has best been captured in normative theories of 'argumentative', 'communicative', 'interpretive' or 'collaborative' planning (Healey 1997, 1996, Forester 1989).

What I shall refer to as 'collaborative planning' theory is based on the premise that *"all forms of knowledge are socially constructed"* (Healey 1997:29), thereby rejecting the prior supremacy of science and instrumental rationality. Decision-making is removed from the realm of technical experts and bureaucrats, and reconceptualised as a value-based and political process, requiring the input if not equal participation of all stakeholders. Collaborative planning no longer conceptualises citizens as disconnected rational agents in pursuit of self-interest. Instead, it recognises the social embeddedness of all opinion formation and believes that self-interest and ego can be transcended in favour of the common good, thereby enabling effective collective action. This marks a shift away from bargaining between fixed interests towards consensus-building and shared learning. Citizens are attributed a capacity for civic responsibility that derives from active involvement in local governance.

Collaborative planning theories are based upon Habermas' normative ideal that collective decision-making should take place in deliberative processes that approximate what Habermas has called the 'ideal speech situation'. The 'ideal speech situation' requires fair and competent proceedings, which are supposed to facilitate a deliberative process undistorted by oppressive power relations.

Theories of collaborative planning have been most effectively challenged by followers of Foucault who claim that power relations are ever-present and cannot be neutralised by fair and competent proceedings as suggested by the Habermasian school. Foucault conceptualises power as inherently present in the 'discourses' people draw upon to make sense of their experiences and which (in)form their very identities. A 'discourse' is best understood as *"a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities"* (Hajer 1997:44). From a Foucauldian perspective, what people understand, say and do in the course of a deliberative process is enabled and constrained by the 'discourses' they draw upon, including what is considered 'right', 'true' and 'legitimate' according to these discourses. Discourse theory implies a positioning of an individual in terms of power relations in that some actors are attributed the power of authority while others are denied it. Collaborative planning theory can be understood as a discourse in



that it defines collaborative interaction in a consensus-based setting as the 'right' mode of collective decision-making and is adverse to options like entering conflict.

The Future Search Conference can be regarded as a prototype of collaborative planning practice. It aims to bring together a broad spectrum of local stakeholders in a three-day collaborative process. Participants are regarded as experts in their own right and are encouraged to use the full range of ways of knowing - including anecdotal knowledge. The aim of a Future Search Conference is to create a shared vision for the future of a community or organisation and to do so by identifying the common ground, not by negotiating or resolving conflicts. The 64 participants are carefully chosen by an appointed or self-selecting steering group to represent a broad spectrum of local stakeholder groups. The Future Search Conference follows a standard sequence and is led by trained facilitators.

#### **1.4 The research objectives**

The research objective is to carry out a critical and in depth assessment of the Future Search Conference as an example of collaborative planning practice. This is justified in the context of the rising popularity of collaborative planning practices in general and Future Search Conferences in particular, and the lack of critical evaluative studies on both. The Future Search conference also deserves attention in its own right as it is a rather recent creation and has rarely been systematically explored (Baldwin 1995, Campbell 1988, Polanyi 1999, Stewart 1995).

The research objectives were

- (i) to evaluate two Future Search Conferences from the perspective of participants and organisers, and also to evaluate the achievements of the Future Search Conferences with regard to collaborative planning theory;
- (ii) to investigate the two Future Search Conferences as processes embedded in the wider power relations of society, including a thorough investigation of local politics and a Foucauldian analysis of the conference process;
- (iii) to devise a robust methodology for the evaluation of participatory processes.

#### **1.5 Methodology**

The major challenge I have faced is to develop a suitable evaluation methodology. I had to wrestle with a number of core questions: How do we judge if a collaborative planning process has been successful? What are possible criteria and indicators for the evaluation and who should decide which ones are appropriate in a particular case? What sort of data needs to be gathered on the indicators, over what sort of time period and what are best methods for data creation and collection? I seek to make a contribution to this wider debate.

I will provide one set of preliminary answers from my stakeholder-based evaluation of two Future Search Conferences.

The case study design seemed ideally suited to this task of evaluating a Future Search Conference in its real-life context. I decided to study two Future Search Conferences in more depth over the period of 2 years. Inspired by the Social Audit approach developed by the New Economics Foundation, I allowed those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference to define the criteria and indicators for the evaluation. I conducted short, semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders before the conference and aggregated the suggested evaluation criteria and indicators in a preliminary table, which from then on guided (but not limited) my observations. I was present at both Future Search Conferences as a non-participant observer and conducted a questionnaire survey with open-ended questions at the last conference day. I also recruited a cross-section of participants to three focus group discussions with 5-9 participants each, which took place around ten days after the conference. The aim of the focus groups was to allow the participants to reflect on their conference experience, to evaluate the conference method as such and to gather first impressions on where participants were to take it from there. In addition, I conducted three focus group discussions with young people and mothers of young children, all of whom were underrepresented at the Future Search Conferences. Here, the aim was to check if the under-representation of these groups had meant that the conference had neglected some issues of key importance to these young mothers and teenagers. Eleven (in Olching) to fourteen (in Rushmoor) months later, I returned to each case study area and conducted thirty expert interviews – including conference participants, but also local key players who had no direct involvement with the Future Search process. The aim was now to trace the wider ripples of the Future Search Conference and to discover explanations for failings and successes. I followed the same methodology in both case study areas.

### **1.6 The selection of case studies**

I was successful in identifying two Future Search Conferences in my home country Germany or my host country Great Britain that would take place in the summer or autumn of 1997 in the context of a Local Agenda 21 process. The Future Search Conferences in Rushmoor Borough Council / Great Britain and *Gemeinde Olching* / Germany came up as two cases matching these requirements. Also, the conference organisers and facilitators in each of the areas embraced my research interest and were willing to support me. The cases seemed suitable because they both appeared to be rather 'typical' in their approach to Future Search conferencing for each respective country.

Rushmoor is a commuter area south-west of London, consisting of the two towns Aldershot and Farnborough with a total of 86,000 inhabitants. A key characteristic of the area is its military legacy, with Aldershot labelled 'the home of the British Army', and Farnborough famous for its bi-annual international air

shows. The dependency on the military makes the region vulnerable to cuts in the military spending, and visions for a more 'civic' future were desperately needed. The Future Search Conference was initiated by the Local Agenda 21 coordinator and organised with backing of the chief executive and the liberal democrat Leader of the Council.

*Gemeinde Olching* is a commuter area north-west of Munich, consisting of the three formerly rural villages Esting, Geiselbullach and Olching with a total of 22,000 inhabitants. Roughly 60% of the land in *Gemeinde Olching* is still used for agricultural purposes, but only 1% of the employees are in the agricultural sector. Pressure for further housing developments is still high, as the three former villages are at the verge of turning into a town. In Olching, there is a need to pro-actively decide upon the further development of the area rather than to leave that to the plans of the construction industry and the population pressure from Munich. The Future Search Conference was initiated by a group of environmentalists in a bottom-up fashion and benefited from the early support of the Mayor, who is a member of the Free Voters' Association.

### **1.7 Linking findings to theories**

The discussion part of the book will link the findings of the two case studies to the theories of Future Search conferencing, collaborative planning and power. A first part will assess the implications for the Future Search design on the basis of the research evidence gathered. A second section will analyse to what extent the two investigated Future Search Conferences lived up to the promises of collaborative planning theory. The final part of the discussion is dedicated to an analysis of power relations to the extent that they deepen our understanding of the findings of each stakeholder-based evaluation. I will assess each Future Search conference for evidence of instances of resistance that would indicate the presence of power relations in the conference room. Secondly, I will assess the wider context of power relations within which each Future Search conference was embedded. This will prove crucial in facilitating an understanding of why both conferences failed to deliver much tangible change on the ground. I will draw the book to a close by questioning the assumption that consensus-based processes are the best route to change in the sustainability transition, as postulated by theories of collaborative planning. Instead, I will suggest that consensus and conflict need each other, in that when one of the strategies – conflict or consensus – is entered, the other should always remain a fall-back option.

### **1.8 Outline of this book**

Chapter 2 explores the new context of citizen participation in the 1990s by drawing on theories of globalisation, of governance in networks, of organisational development and systems theory and of Agenda 21. All of these theories deliver part of the answer to the question of why deliberative and inclusionary processes like Future Search Conferences are on the rise in the late 1990s. Chapter 3 draws on normative theories of collaborative planning in order

to capture the ways in which deliberative and inclusionary processes are different from the traditional modes of citizen participation employed in local governance. This chapter will also review case evidence of collaborative planning in order to assess to what extent practice lives up to the promises spelled out in theory. A number of failures to deliver change on the ground point to the need to draw on theories of power in order to make sense of such failure to deliver. The final part of chapter 3 will therefore review theories of power in participation, including brief critique of collaborative planning theory from a Foucauldian perspective.

Chapter 4 turns to the Future Search design as such and provides a focused account of the contested issues encountered in the literature. My pilot survey of ten community-based Future Search Conferences in the UK will be presented, which has informed the research questions and the methodological design. Chapter 5 develops a research methodology capable of providing evidence on the participants' experience of the Future Search Conference and of measuring the overall success of each conference event on the basis of criteria proposed by those with a stake in the conference. Chapters 6 and 7 introduce the two selected case study areas in their national context and present the findings of the evaluation. Chapter 8 spells out the implications for the Future Search design on the basis of the findings of both case studies. Moreover, it is assessed to what extent the two investigated Future Search Conferences lived up to the promises of collaborative planning theories. Finally, the wider context of power relations in each case study is analysed in order to explain the disappointing outcomes in both case studies. Chapter 9 will draw together the main contribution of this book, discuss the future of Future Search conferencing and propose issues for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Future Search Conference as Symptom and Catalyst of the Global Transition to Networks of Governance**

The following three chapters seek to set the scene for my evaluative study of the Future Search Conference model. This chapter shall account for the rising interest in deliberative and inclusionary processes by drawing on four theoretical strands: theories of globalisation, theories of governance in networks, theories of organisational transformation and systems thinking and finally, theories of sustainable development and the practice of Local Agenda 21.

This chapter will start by sketching the phenomenon of globalisation. I shall argue that we find ourselves in a world of electronic communications where activities in one remote part of the world can have immediate and direct impact on far away others. I shall claim that the nation state finds its capacity for autonomous action and hierarchical control severely diminished, as numerous other actors rise outside of it and control significant resources required for collective action. The nation-state finds itself in a complex web of relationships with governmental and non-governmental actors on all geographical scales and depends on their collaboration to achieve collectively desired outcomes. In a second step, I will trace the accompanying shift in political theories. I shall point to the limitations of state-centred theories of government and introduce polycentric network theories of governance as alternatives. I shall explain the mechanisms that make networks an effective means of facilitating collective action, but also point to the problems associated with this form of governance. I shall conclude that the capacity for learning is one of the key conditions for successful governance in networks.

In a third section, I shall approach governance in networks from the perspective of organisational development and management theories. I shall argue that our understanding of the working of networks can be much enhanced by drawing on theories of organisational transformation which conceptualise network systems as living organisms. It is from the metaphor of the living organism, according to these theories, that we can derive principles for effective governance in networks: a living organism has the capacity to self-organise and learn on the basis of continuous feedback it derives about its actions from its respective parts and the environment. I shall point out that it is the interpretation of information (or feedback) on the basis of systems thinking that distinguishes the 'learning organisation' from its ancestors and that we need systems thinking for effective governance in networks. I shall finally introduce Future Search Conferences as one large group intervention designed to catalyse the transition from a bureaucratic to a learning organisation.

The fourth section explores the emergence of the concept 'sustainable development' as a solution to the 'crisis of nature' (i.e. global environmental degradation) and the 'crisis of justice' (i.e. growing inequality between North and South). I shall argue that defining and implementing 'sustainable development' requires dialogue amongst diverse stakeholders at all geographical

scales. In particular, chapter 28 of Agenda 21 – a programme of action for the 21<sup>st</sup> century agreed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 – has recommended that local authorities should engage in a process of consultation with local stakeholders in order to come to a consensus on a Local Agenda 21. As a result, local authorities around the globe have experimented with participatory processes for stakeholder involvement, including those large group interventions developed before the background of a new organisational development paradigm like Future Search Conferences.

I shall conclude by saying that the complex interweaving of these four strands of theory provides the background before which the rising interest in Future Search Conferences and similar deliberative and inclusionary processes must be understood. It is from this literature that we can extract what makes Future Search Conferences and similar large group interventions qualitatively different from traditional means of citizen participation at the local level.

## **2.1 Increasing global interdependence**

This first section shall account for the increasing global interdependence that has given rise to network forms of governance by providing a sketch of the (massive) literature on the concept of 'globalisation'. Globalisation theory emerged in response to the increasing inability of the political theory of International Relations to explain trans-boundary processes that bypass its focus of analysis: the relations between official political agents of nation-states and the relations between officials of nation-states and international political institutions. Enabled by advances in communication and transportation, non-governmental actors of trans-national relations, e.g. businesses and non-profit organisations have emerged on the global stage and are creating a multi-centric world parallel to the state-centric world in which the nation-state remains the main adaptive capacity to global changes.

### **2.1.1 What is globalisation?**

The concept of globalisation has been much contested. However, the two most influential proponents of the concept of globalisation in sociology have come up with very similar definitions of it:

*"Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. ... In the present book, globalization is conceived in much broader terms than that, but its main empirical focus is in line with the increasing acceleration in both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century." (Robertson 1992:8)*

*"Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalisation as the*

*lateral extension of social connections across time and space."* (Giddens 1990:64, emphasis in original)

For Robertson (1992), the new thing is not the process of global system building as such, but our reflexive awareness of it.

Waters (1995: 94,123,157) has compiled a very useful summary of current trends that have been associated with the concept of globalisation and contrasted it with what he perceives as a stage of complete globalisation – which may not be desirable if one does not agree with neo-liberal ideology and which may never be reached.

<b>Current state of affairs</b>	<b>Ideal-typical pattern of globalization</b>
<b>ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION</b>	
<b>Trade</b> Minimum tariff barriers. Substantial non-tariff and cultural barriers. Regional neomercantilism.	<b>Trade</b> Absolute freedom of exchange between localities. Indeterminate flows of services and symbolic commodities.
<b>Production</b> International social division of labour being displaced by a technical division of labour. Substantial decentralization of production. Dematerialization of commodities.	<b>Production</b> Balance of production activity in any locality determined only by physical / geographical advantages.
<b>Investment</b> TNCs being displaced by alliance arrangements but considerable FDI remains.	<b>Investment</b> Minimal FDI. Displaced by trade and production alliances.
<b>Organizational ideology</b> Flexibility paradigm has become orthodox but very substantial sectors of Fordist <i>practice</i> remain.	<b>Organizational ideology</b> Flexible responsiveness to global markets.
<b>Financial Market</b> Globalization largely accomplished.	<b>Financial market</b> Decentralized, instantaneous and 'stateless'
<b>Labour market</b> Increasingly state regulated. Considerable individual pressure for opportunities for 'economic' migration.	<b>Labour market</b> Free movement of labour. No permanent identification with locality.
<b>POLITICAL GLOBALISATION</b>	
<b>State sovereignty</b> Crisis and attenuation of the state. Evidence of aggregation and decentralization of state powers.	<b>State sovereignty</b> Absence of sovereign states. Multiple centres of power at global, local and intermediate levels.
<b>Focus of problem-solving activity</b> Increasing focus on local-global nexus but societal community probably still paramount.	<b>Focus of problem-solving activity</b> Local issues in the context of the global community.
<b>International organizations</b> Multiplying rapidly but relatively powerless.	<b>International organizations</b> Powerful; predominant over national organizations.
<b>International relations</b> Superpower system attenuating.	<b>International relations</b> Fluid and multicentric.

<b>Current state of affairs</b>	<b>Ideal-typical pattern of globalization</b>
<b>Political culture</b> Advance of liberal democracy / postmaterialism.	<b>Political culture</b> Common and planetary transcendence of étatocentric value-commitments.
<b>CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION</b>	
<b>Sacriscape</b> Relativization and fundamentalism.	<b>Sacriscape</b> De-territorialized religious mosaic.
<b>Ethnoscape</b> Emergent infranationalism and supranationalism.	<b>Ethnoscape</b> De-territorialized cosmopolitanism and diversity.
<b>Econoscape</b> Advanced dematerialization of commodities.	<b>Econoscape</b> Consumption of simulations and representations.
<b>Mediascape</b> De-regionalization of distribution of images and information.	<b>Mediascape</b> Global distribution of images and information.
<b>Leisurescape</b> De-classification of subjects and objects.	<b>Leisurescape</b> Universal tourism and the 'end of tourism'.

**Table 2.1 The phenomenon of globalisation**

Source: Waters 1995: 94,123,157

### **2.1.2 The drivers of globalisation**

There is wide disagreement about who or what drives globalisation. Robertson (1992), Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) believe that globalisation is politically driven and has its origins in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century with the formation of the nation-state in Europe, its 'universalization' around the globe and its 'securitization' in a system of international relations. McLuhan (1964) on the other hand, who coined the term 'global village' as early as 1964, thought that electronic media are playing a key role in the latest phase of globalisation by enabling a common mass culture and an awareness of global interdependence for those wired up to it. Finally, Wallerstein (1974,1980), Gilpin (1987) and Sklair (1991) perceive globalisation to be driven by economic players, namely by transnational corporations in the economic sphere, by the transnational capitalist class in the political sphere and by consumerism in the cultural sphere.

Waters has pulled these three strands together and claimed that different drivers were dominant at different points in time. According to Waters, globalisation originated from economic players seeking to expand markets and profits. The very creation of nation-states and their involvement in international activities (i.e. colonization, alliances, diplomacy, wars) were the main globalising force in the second phase. This included regulation to protect their citizenry from the impacts of unregulated market exploitation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the state's ability to make economies grow and to protect its citizenry from risks decreased. At the same time, electronic media created an awareness of global interdependence, and also the basis for a common mass culture with some shared values and standards (i.e. human rights). Waters concludes that we now find ourselves in a world where "[t]he inhabitants of the planet need to be



*able to devise and plan new means of social security and political expression that will protect them from impersonal flows of finance, taste and ideas."* (Waters 1995:163) This seems to suggest that globalisation is inevitable and unstoppable.

However, it remains a controversy to what extent globalisation is an 'uncontrollable' process happening to us as a result of cultural, economic or technological innovation or to what extent it is the product of conscious decisions of nation-states to deregulate their economies and to delegate power to other collective actors. Scott (1997) and colleagues have challenged what they perceive as a 'globalisation myth' and drawn attention to the fact that economic deregulation does not happen on its own but requires a state actor. They also identify the 'need' to deregulate national economies in order to remain a competitive location for corporate investments and job creation as a recommendation stemming from neo-liberal ideology, suggesting instead that there are alternatives. Regulation theorists like Fagan and LeHeron (1994), Peck and Tickell (1994) and Thrift (1994) and Marxists like Altvater and Mahnkopf (1997) moreover stress that there are limits to globalisation in that the 'free' market is bound to undermine the social foundation upon which it is based, and therefore depends on re-regulation to sustain economic success.

### ***2.1.3 Some consequences of globalisation***

Globalisation challenges the sociological terminology of 'community', 'society', 'locality' (Silk 1999, Smith 1999) and 'culture' as well as conventional conceptualisations of democracy, governance and economic security. Here are seven implications which are relevant to the study of local sustainable development:

1. The pattern of social relations and their discourses in a globalised world is detached from place. The concept of placeless communities or 'sociospheres' is introduced to replace 'community' and 'culture'. Locality is questioned as unit for research on the sustainability transition. (Eade 1997)

2. Globalisation is regarded as an increased awareness of the world as a whole, inducing the relativisation and reconstruction of knowledge and values in the face of alternative conceptualisations. We need to study how globalisation processes are re-interpreted and re-produced by people's understanding and actions in different placeless communities. (Robertson 1992)

3. Defining the 'common good' in the Agenda 21 process requires a discourse within and across all sociospheres. The place-based focus of democratic institutions may clash with the placeless social arrangements of a globalised society. (Held 1991)

4. While the more widespread use of media and transport has been celebrated as a buttress for democratisation, there is still inequitable access to the opportunities of the globe, leading to new patterns of social stratification and exclusion. (Eade 1997)

5. Globalisation is seen as producing an imperative for national governments to create a 'level playing field'. However, larger political units like the EU are still perfectly capable of regulating economic activity and facilitating the sustainability transition. (Hirst & Thompson 1996)

6. It has been argued that global competition gives consumers more choice and makes 'world class' products available for all (Kanter 1996). In fact, the range of allowed choices may be limited, and a few dominant 'world class' products may end up externalising social and environmental costs and repressing local alternatives. (Nader et al 1993)

7. The ephemeral character of economic arrangements in an interdependent world makes people vulnerable, for example to job insecurity. Participation in local networks like alternative economic systems can present a coping strategy of social and economic survival. (Douthwaite 1996)

A particular challenge for governments originates from the globalisation of risks like eco-hazards and economic disruption. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992, 1997) has suggested that transnational industrialisation goes along with a globalisation of risks which in turn speed up globalisation in the transnational political rush for a fix. Beck argues that hazards are socially constructed, and that this is ever more true for the 'new' type of risks

- which he regards as a direct, implicit and unavoidable consequence of modernisation (industrialisation, overproduction, globalisation)
- which admit no boundary in time and space (are continuous and general)
- against which the rich and powerful can no longer insulate themselves fully
- which are not directly perceivable to our senses, instead they are scientifically and socially constructed
- the calculation of which has become impossible
- the experience of which is scientifically and politically reflexive.

Our increasing dependence on expert systems and money to evaluate these new hazards and cope with the risks has also increased our vulnerability. Beck sees the new task for governments in redistributing risks in an equal way (instead of redistributing wealth).

Godard (1993) has spelled out in more detail how this new type of risks poses a challenge to national governments:

- interests of parties not directly involved in the decision-making process at stake (i.e. future generations, non-human life, other countries)
- low degree of agreement with respect to values and objectives; low degree of agreement with respect to means, facts, scientific knowledge, competing forms of knowledge
- non-action might lead to irreversible damage, requiring precautionary action

Following Rosenau (1990:12-13) we can add to that

- the emergence of planetary problems (i.e. climate change, biodiversity, ozone layer) that will affect all nations, though to a differing extent
- the emergence of national problems the solution of which require transboundary co-operation.

However, the ease with which spatial distance can be overcome via electronic communication and fast means of transport also offers many opportunities. Some of these are opportunities

- for getting to know, to respect and to preserve cultural diversity,
- for learning from each other,
- for participating in virtual (i.e. non-place-based) communities,
- for agreeing and enforcing shared ethical, social and environmental standards (i.e. human rights),
- for establishing shared mechanisms of conflict resolution and prevention of wars,
- for pooling intelligence and research efforts to address pressing problems.

I conclude that theories of globalisation offer useful interpretations of the process of increasing global interdependence and the challenges – dangers as well as opportunities - posed by this process. While its causes and cures are subject of much debate, globalisation has diminished the capacity of the state to bring about collectively desired outcomes all by itself. The following section will explore the impact of globalisation on the nation-state in more depth and introduce governance in networks as a viable alternative to state-centred models of government.

## **2.2 The changing nature of governance**

The complex web of relationships in which the nation-states find themselves tangled up in the era of globalisation has been summed up by Held (1991) in the following way:

- *"the emergence of a global economic system which outreaches the control of any single state (even dominant states);*
- *the expansion of vast networks of transnational relations and communications over which particular states have limited influence;*
- *the enormous growth in international organizations and regimes, and the intensification of multilateral diplomacy and transgovernmental interaction, which can check and limit the scope of the most powerful states;*
- *the development of a global military order and the build-up of the means of 'total' warfare as a 'stable feature' of the contemporary world which can reduce the range of policies available to governments and their citizens."* (Held 1991:145)

### **2.2.1 Trends that transform the nature of governance**

Moreover, there are further processes of functional differentiation within the individual nation states which have undermined the nation state's capacity for bringing about collectively desired outcomes from below. Dirk Messner (1998:171-174) in his excellent review of the relevant literature lists ten further trends besides the process of globalisation which have transformed the nature of governance and the role of the state therein:

1. The **number of collective actors** (associations, parties, interest groups etc.) which have resources, knowledge and organisational capacity to influence political decision-making processes **is rising** (Olson 1982, Etzioni 1968).
2. A process of **functional differentiation** is at work, which increasingly divides economy and society into sectors and subsystems, and brings with it the danger of fragmentation (Katzenstein 1984, Kenis 1991, Luhmann 1984 & 1986, Willke 1998).
3. An increasing number of private and public actors participate in the policy making process, leading to what Jordan and Richardson have called '**overcrowded policy-making**' (Jordan & Richardson 1983).
4. Since the 1970s, the state has attempted to counter its decreasing ability to control developments in the public sphere and to tackle pressing social problems by expanding the scope and number of state interventions, a process which has been identified as '**policy growth**' process (Hecl 1978).
5. As part of the 'policy growth' process, the **state increasingly fragments** into a heterogeneous network of decentralised institutions at different geographical scales using different forms of policy interventions (Mayntz 1987, Scharpf 1993a&b).
6. The state increasingly draws on '**soft**' mechanisms of coordination like informal administrative action and state-sponsored self-regulation (Hanf 1982). As a result of increasing interaction between public and private actors, the divisions between 'public' and 'private' blur.
7. Empirical studies suggest a decreased capacity of the state for autonomous policy-making and implementation. This **reduced state autonomy** is caused by an increasing dependence of the state on the resources of other social actors, and a tendency towards mutual dependence, called 'interdependence' of social actors seeking decisions on collective action.
8. The **state actively supports the formation of effective collective actors and forums**, because it depends on the capacity of these forums for conflict resolution and integration of diverse view points into workable solutions (Czada 1992, Offe 1987).
9. The interplay of all the above trends gives birth to Etzioni's 'active society' (1968). The mechanisms of coordination and exchange between the diverse actors differ from issue to issue but are in all cases neither purely market-based and nor state-centred. The **ability to communicate**

effectively and the genesis of **shared knowledge** advance to become crucial resources like power and money in the process of decision-making (Deutsch 1977, Keck 1993).

10. The process of **globalisation of the economy** and the rise of **supra-national institutions** further reduce the autonomy of the nation-state. Nation-states find themselves in increasing inter-dependence with other actors, and as a result, policy-making has to be prepared in collaborative processes with these actors outside the conventional institutions of representative democracy (Kenis & Schneider 1991:27).

I conclude that the increasing functional differentiation within nation-states has gone along with a rise in the number of collective actors. The process of policy-making has been characterised as over-crowded, and coordination between increasingly fragmented sub-systems gets more and more difficult to achieve. Globalisation is just one factor that has transformed the nature of governance and the role of the state therein.

### **2.2.2 From state-centred to network theories**

These trends have also transformed the theorising about the policy making process and in particular, the role of the state therein. Political theories have in the past sought to accommodate these trends by postulating so-called 'steering' problems of the state, the nature of which is the subject of much debate between the various schools. Messner (1998:123) has extracted three 'steering' problems faced by the state from a review of the relevant literatures:

- Complexity - increasing interdependence of decision-making, decreasing autonomy of all actors (Scharpf 1993a & 1993b, Mayntz 1987, neo-corporatist theories)
- Colonising of the state by powerful interest groups (Olson 1968, Nozick 1974)
- Increasing individualisation leads to a decline in solidarity (i.e. moral decline as raised by neo-conservatives).

Newer political theories move beyond a state-centred approach and theorise political decision-making processes in terms of informal, decentralised and horizontal inter-organisational relations. While there are various types of 'network' theories, Kenis and Schneider (1991:26ff) have captured their common ground in the following way:

*"...the network perspective implies a new perception of causal relations in social processes... The core of this perspective is a decentralized concept of social organization and governance: society is no longer exclusively controlled by a central intelligence (e.g. the State); rather, controlling devices are dispersed and intelligence is distributed among a multiplicity of action (or processing) units. The coordination of these action units is no longer the result of 'central steering' or some kind of 'prestabilized harmony' but emerges through the purposeful interactions of individual actors, who themselves are enabled for parallel action by exchanging information and other relevant resources."*

According to Resource Dependence Theory, networks are thought to emerge whenever individual actors lack the necessary resources to achieve an output on their own and are required to collaborate with others to mobilise and pool resources (Messner 1998:197). The state remains an important player in these theories, as the mutual dependence between public and private actors constantly increases through the above listed trends. Policy making is 'socialised', i.e. happens increasingly in forums outside the institutions of representative democracy.

Networks for the purposes of this book shall be understood as coordination mechanisms beyond markets and policy hierarchies, i.e. as qualitatively different from these other two mechanisms of coordination. The workings of networks require according to Messner (1998:287) the building of trust between the actors and are based on the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the outcome of a productive tension between self interests and solidarity in durable social relations. In contrast to markets, exchanges are not based on quantified exchange values but instead are based on a sense of appropriateness. While market transactions are potentially one-off exchanges where a given service or product is exchanged for an equivalent sum of money, reciprocity implies long-term relationships where a favour done at one point in time may pay off years later.

Trust and reciprocity enable two types of network interactions:

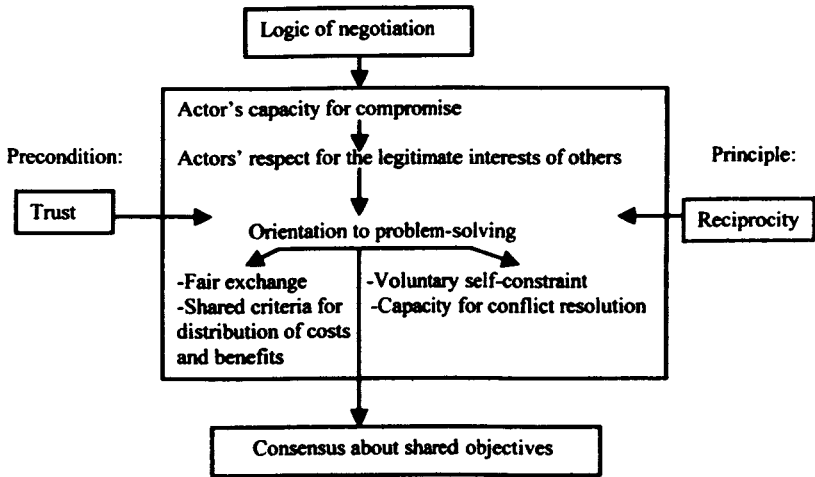
- pooling or exchanging resources in order to achieve commonly desired outcomes
- refraining from individual actions which could harm directly or indirectly the delivery of commonly desired outcomes.

While the first of these interactions depends on a shared understanding of what constitutes 'fair' or 'just' exchanges and distribution of benefits and costs, the second depends on a capacity for conflict resolution.

Finally, agreeing on shared aims in productive networks depends on two preconditions:

- the capacity for compromise by actors
- the actors' respect for the legitimate interests of others.

Within these parameters, diverse policy problems may be productively tackled through network coordination (figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1 : The functioning of productive networks**  
 Source: Messner 1998:287 (my translation)

In networks, coordination between the various actors is a continuous process of

- definition of one's own and shared purposes and identification of appropriate strategies for action
- pro-active behaviour and adjustment to the actions of others
- reflection about the achieved outcomes or lack of outcomes and learning for future action.

### ***2.2.3 Can network coordination solve the three 'steering' problems of the state?***

According to Messner (1998:347), networks of governance are better equipped to deal with the complexity of 'modern' problems and risks. The communication between the various members of a network increases the system's capacity to take notice of, explore and describe new problems. Where the resources for addressing the new problem are dispersed amongst diverse actors, an effective network between them is key to making these resources available for a collectively desired outcome.

With regards to the eroding solidarity in societies dominated by the rationale of flexibility (Sennett 1998), networks can fulfil an integrating function, particularly where there is no way around collaboration in order to achieve collectively desired outcomes. However, networks can also further fragment our societies to the extent that they remain cut off from other networks and preoccupied with themselves.

Finally, networks will not necessarily prevent the **colonising of the state** by lobby groups – they may even facilitate this process. However, to the extent that all actors become more and more interdependent, no single one will be able to control all others. However, there may remain a general bias towards resource-rich groups and the interests they represent.

#### **2.2.4 The problems of network coordination**

Messner (1998:244) has also summarised five key problems of network coordination which result from

- the large number of actors involved in a network
- conflicts between short-term and long-term gains
- processes of institutionalisation of network relations
- the need to agree about the distribution of costs and benefits of collective decisions
- the need of actors to refrain from strategic behaviour in order to foster trust
- asymmetrical power relations between the various actors in a network (and the fact that the most powerful might be able to afford to not have to learn, thereby eroding systemic intelligence)
- the co-existence of cooperation and conflict within networks.

These five ‘core problems’ are:

- non-decision-making due to veto-positions
- collective conservatism i.e. tendency to agree on the lowest common denominator
- a balancing act between too loose or too strong ties, which either disintegrate a network or reduce its capacity for innovation
- difficulty in coming to an agreement in negotiations due to a lack of agreement about how costs and benefits should be distributed
- the danger that the network will externalise costs deliberately or as a side effect.

According to network theories, the capacity of societies to address pressing problems and achieve collectively desired outcomes by drawing on network structures depends crucially on their capacity for collective learning (Messner 1998:370). Secondly, it will depend on the moral resources (Messner 1998:370) or ‘social capital’ (Putnam 1993) available for collective action, including most importantly trust between the actors who are required to coordinate their actions. Finally, the extent to which collectively desired outcomes can be realised through network coordination crucially depends upon cultural factors which form the ground rules within which networks will have to operate or which they will need to challenge to function effectively. Our understanding of what constitutes a successful network can be much enhanced by consulting the ‘whole systems’ branch of the organisational development and management literature. The next section will therefore explore this literature in the quest for principles that should guide governance in networks.



### 2.3 Principles for successful governance in networks

The rising interest in deliberative and inclusionary processes must also be understood before the background of a paradigm shift in management and organisational development theories. In a globalising world, the speed of change has accelerated and some have concluded that change is the only constant (Kühl 1998:44). What allows an organisation or network to survive in a globalising world is its ability to learn – namely to pursue its purpose under changed conditions, with new means and new structures if necessary. This requirement is captured in the notion of the ‘learning organisation’, which is an embodiment of a new organisational development paradigm. The new organisational paradigm is about replacing rigid hierarchies within organisations by loosely coupled networks which are capable of adapting to ever new challenges and transformations while sticking to a collectively defined purpose. The new organisational development paradigm is therefore about working in networks, and a lot can be learned from it for governance in networks.

According to Pratt, Gordon and Plamping (1999:9-14), management theories have shifted from a conceptualisation of organisations as machines to an understanding of organisations as living systems and the design of interventions which act as catalysts in the transition from bureaucratic to ‘learning’ organisations have changed accordingly. The Future Search Conference is one of the new ‘whole systems’ interventions designed to support this transition.

Underlying this new perspective on organisations is a larger paradigm shift towards systems thinking across a number of academic disciplines. In her book ‘Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe’ Margaret J. Wheatley (1992) has pulled together the insights of systems thinking from various academic disciplines and developed recommendations for organisational development theory and practice on that basis.

Systems thinking first emerged to overcome the long-standing scientific obsession with substance (i.e. what is it made of?) in favour of a new focus on form (i.e. what is its pattern?). It was dedicated to the exploration of “*living systems, i.e. integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller parts*” (Capra 1996b:24). The four major breakthroughs of systems theory have been summarised by Capra (1996b):

- Systems are characterised by organizing relations between their components and between system and environment.
- Living systems are open systems operating far from equilibrium.
- Living systems have a capacity to self-organise via feedback loops.
- Open systems are formulated in terms of nonlinear equations.

The emerging influence of systems thinking was first traced across all disciplines by Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) of the Stanford Research Institute. From their massive literature review, Schwartz and Ogilvy have distilled seven new basic beliefs and associated principles of systems thinking, which have

been usefully summarised by Guba (1985:88) in the context of a book which contrasts them with the Weberian model of bureaucracy:

<b>New Paradigm Basic Belief</b>	<b>Associated Principles</b>
Complexity	Real-World entities are a diverse lot of complex systems and organisms.
Heterarchy	Systems and organisms experience many simultaneous and potentially equally dominant orderings - none of which is 'naturally' ordained.
Holography	Images of systems and organisms are created by a dynamic process of interaction that is (metaphorically) similar to the hologram, whose three-dimensional images are stored and recreated by the interference patterns of a split laser beam.
Indeterminacy	Future states of systems and organisms are in principle unpredictable.
Mutual Causality	Systems and organisms evolve and change together in such a way (with feedback and feedforward) as to make the distinction between cause and effect meaningless.
Morphogenesis	New forms of systems and organisms unpredicted (and unpredictable) from any of their parts can arise spontaneously under conditions of diversity, openness, complexity, mutual causality, and indeterminacy.
Perspective	Mental processes, instruments, and even disciplines are not neutral.

**Table 2.2 : Basic beliefs and associated principles of the Schwartz and Ogilvy paradigm**  
Source: Guba 1985:88

A conceptualisation of organisations as machines (Pratt, Gordon, Plamping 1999) or hierarchical bureaucracies is based on the assumption that the whole organisation can be designed and controlled from the top. Each member of the organisation is allocated clearly defined tasks, including in what ways to interact with other members of the organisation. In fulfilling this function, the member of the organisation can easily be made redundant and replaced by somebody else, just like parts of a machine can be replaced and one is as good as another. The organisation resembles a machine in that it is a rigid construction, requiring reengineering from the top in order to adapt to a new purpose or to innovate. Interventions in organisations as machines involve experts who study and learn about the whole and produce a single map about the organisation, its problems and needs for improvement. These suggestions may be imposed by the person on top of the organisation or ignored.

The conceptualisation of organisations based on systems thinking takes the human capacity for purposeful behaviour, reflection and learning as a starting point. Organisations as living organisms have an inbuilt capacity to continuously reinvent themselves, to produce order and to maintain an identity. Pratt, Gordon and Plamping (1999) have identified nine organising principles of organisations as living organisms:

Web of relationships and communication	Each member of a system is connected to others and carries responsibility to contribute to the functioning of each member and of the system as a whole. Relationships are based on reciprocity. Feedback loops enable people to learn about the consequences of their actions and to correct course.
Many perspectives	The system finds ways to draw on the multiple perspectives and 'local' knowledge of its diverse members in order to get the best informed perspective for each task at hand.
Meaning	People in a system need shared purpose and meaning in order to make sure that their individual actions are in tune with the system as a whole.
System that knows itself	The capacity of people to behave responsibly within a system is dramatically enhanced by allowing them to become consciously aware of their shared purpose, the boundaries of the system and the properties of the system as a whole.
Participation	As each part of a system makes an important contribution to the whole, its direct engagement with processes of renewing purpose or of change is required and cannot be substituted by delegating responsibility to representatives.
Trusting local resourcefulness	Each living system has an organic capacity to transform into a new pattern of order to survive under changed circumstances. This new pattern evolves from within to maintain a system's identity and will turn out different from system to system.
Passion	Passion is the source of energy that gets individuals committed to a purpose. Living systems rely on their members' passion for a shared purpose in order to keep them alive.
Here and now	A living system is characterised by a multitude of simultaneous processes in the here and now in order to renew itself. Members of a system come together in order to renew their shared purpose and to build connections that will enhance their capacity to deliver it.
Patterns of order	Patterns of order are not created by design and control but instead emerge from the repeated application of a few principles that guide behaviour. These ground rules need to be unearthed and consciously replaced if change is desired.

**Table 2.3 : Organising principles of organisations as living organisms**

Source: my table on the basis of Pratt, Gordon and Plamping 1999

Peter Senge (1998) has usefully distilled the implications of systems thinking for management practice within an organisation and has described systems thinking as the 'fifth' discipline of a learning organisation. The most challenging aspect of systems thinking is that it demands that we pay attention to dynamic complexity (i.e. how patterns change over time) rather than to detail complexity (i.e. full detail at any one point in time). Senge claims that "[t]he real leverage in most management situations lies in understanding dynamic complexity, not detail complexity." (Senge 1998:72, italics deleted)

To understand the workings of dynamic complexity, our thinking needs to shift in two ways: First of all, we need to understand that interrelationships consist of positive and negative feedback loops and not, as we might have been led to believe, of linear cause-effect chains. Secondly, our attention needs to shift towards an awareness of how effects of our actions change over time, instead of seeing a snap-shot or short-term effects only (Senge 1998:73). To map dynamic complexity, a number of positive and/or negative feedback loops may be linked up, with some of them containing time delays. In an illustration of a 'limits to growth' structure, Senge shows that instead of pushing harder for growth, we can be far more effective by simply tackling whatever it is that is slowing growth: *"To change the behavior of the system, you must identify and change the limiting factor. This may require actions you may not yet have considered, choices you never noticed, or difficult changes in rewards and norms."* (Senge 1998:101, italics deleted). A second example is a 'shifting the burden' structure, where the symptoms of a problem are addressed and disappear for a short time while the underlying fundamental cause remains unaltered or is worsened by the 'quick fix'. Senge concludes that we need to understand these underlying dynamics of systems if we are to design effective 'whole systems' interventions.

A second key aspect of the new organisational paradigm is related to a system's capacity for learning, which is the foundation for self-organisation. Susanne Weber (1998) has contributed much to our understanding of how the learning organisation is held together without steep hierarchies and direct command and control relationships by application of a Foucauldian perspective. According to Weber, in the learning organisation, individuals, teams and organisations receive feedback on their activities and are enabled to learn through the continuous practice of communication. Learning becomes as much a right as an imperative for the individual, teams and the organisation as a whole. The trust built through communication is the core mechanism that ensures compliance and the practice of regular communication operates as a very subtle form of 'surveillance'. The individual is expected to dedicate his or her full resourcefulness to the shared collective aim of the team, organisation and society at large. Instead of limiting his or her awareness to a predetermined task in a hierarchy, the individual is supposed to perform as an 'intrapreneur' who anticipates the consequences of his or her behaviour and behaves to prevent risks of causing damage. Teams unite these intrapreneurs in loose units and involve them in the development and internalisation of shared visions. Members of teams and actors in society at large are supposed to be loosely linked – just enough to influence each other, but too little to cause fatal destruction to each other. Finally, monitoring and review practices at all levels are supposed to enable constant improvements in the self-organisation of the individual, the team and the organisation/ society at large.

A new generation of systems interventions has been developed in line with the ideal of the 'learning organisation' and systems thinking. The aim of these interventions is to act as *"catalysts in the transition from bureaucratic to*

*learning organisations*” (Burow 1996:40 about Future Search Conferences in particular, my translation), i.e. to improve an organisation’s capacity for renewal and reinvention from within on the basis of a whole systems perspective. In their design, these so-called ‘large group interventions’ more or less accommodate elements of the learning organisation and systems thinking. Matthias zur Bonsen (1995) has assembled a list of criteria to which so-called ‘large group interventions’ aspire and contrasted it with conventional interventions in organisations or communities. His classification is echoed by practitioners – a similar table can be found in Martin Leith’s *Guide to large group interventions* (Leith 1997).

<b>Conventional intervention</b>	<b>Large group interventions</b>
sequential change	simultaneous change
only parts of a system in the same room	the whole, open system in one room (including outsiders)
works on single issues	works on whole system (visions, objectives, measures, relationships, values, norms)
often problem-centred	always vision-centred
analysis of the organisation/ system by few (project teams, consultants...)	analysis of the organisation/ system by all
analysis of the system environment by few	analysis of the system environment by all
vision / long-term objectives (if they exist) only top-down	vision / long-term objectives open for contribution by all
change in seemingly controllable, small steps	letting go of control in the traditional sense in order to gain control in a higher sense
slow change	fast change

**Table 2.4 : The difference between ‘whole systems’ large group interventions and conventional interventions**

Source: zur Bonsen 1995:39 (my translation)

Bunker and Alban (1997) introduce 12 large group interventions which supposedly fall into the new paradigm, all of which I have listed in the table below. These large group interventions fulfil the criteria listed by zur Bonsen (1995) above to a different extent. The Future Search Conference can be considered as a prototype of these large group interventions as it neatly complies with all of the criteria listed by zur Bonsen.

<b>Name of Method</b>	<b>Invented by</b>	<b>Key Literature</b>
1. The Search Conference	Merrelyn and Fred Emery	Emery & Purser (1996)
2. Future Search	Weisbord and Janoff	Weisbord & Janoff (1995)
3. Real Time Strategic Change	Dannemiller and Jacobs	Jacobs (1994)
4. ICA Strategic Planning Process	Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA)	Spencer (1989)
5. The Conference Model®	Dick and Emily Axelrod	Axelrod (1992)
6. Fast Cycle Full Participation Work Design	Pasmore, Fitz and Frank	Pasmore (1994)
7. Real Time Work Design	Dannemiller and Tolchinsky	Bunker & Alban (1997: 123-135)
8. Participative Design	Fred and Merrelyn Emery	Emery (1995)
9. Simu-Real	Donald and Alan Klein	Klein (1992)
10. Work-Out	Jack Welch, General Electric	Bunker & Alban (1997:169-176)
12. Open Space	Harrison Owen	Owen 1992

**Table 2.5 : An overview of large group interventions**

Source: my table on the basis of Bunker and Alban 1997

I conclude that an understanding of networks from the perspective of systems thinking leads to clearly defined principles which can be drawn upon to guide network building and interventions in existing networks. The large group intervention Future Search Conference is committed to these principles and aspires to catalysing change towards networks capable of learning and self-organisation.

#### **2.4 Sustainable development fosters stakeholder dialogue**

The recent shift towards governance in networks is not just taking place in theory books. It has most notably transformed the way the United Nations work in their facilitation of international conferences and treaties. The process which led to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, better known as the Rio Earth Summit, was the first that recognised non-governmental actors as important global players and sought their collaboration. Non-governmental organisations had access to the negotiations and the UN accommodated a number of the inputs made by them in the official treaties signed at the summit. The action plan for sustainable development called 'Agenda 21' which was signed in Rio similarly featured stakeholder participation in the quest for meaningful national and local interpretations of 'sustainable development'. I shall argue that the idea of stakeholder participation and governance in networks has been significantly strengthened by Agenda 21. I shall argue moreover that the large group interventions developed as part of the new organisational development paradigm ideally fit the requirement for local consultation around a Local Agenda 21 and have as a result experienced unprecedented popularity in municipalities across Europe.

The following section will introduce the concept of sustainable development and its origins in the 'limits to growth' debate of the early 1970s which linked a concern with global environmental destruction with the South's aspiration to economic growth and material wealth. Secondly, I will trace the institutional processes which gave birth to Agenda 21 at the Rio Earth Summit. Finally, I will argue that the nature of the concept of sustainable development is such that it requires careful deliberation with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in order to take on meaning and to guide action.

#### **2.4.1 The origins of the discourse on sustainable development**

With the gap between rich and poor countries widening despite 'development' efforts and with 'development' being seen as running up against the limits of the carrying capacity of the earth, the discourses on 'development' and 'environment' became suddenly inextricably linked in what appeared to be an inverse relationship:

*"any attempt to ease the crisis of justice threatens to aggravate the crisis of nature; and the reverse: any attempt to ease the crisis of nature threatens to aggravate the crisis of justice."* (Sachs 1995c:7)

The publication of the Club of Rome's Report 'Limits to Growth' in 1972 (Meadows et al 1972) started off two decades of global debate on how to resolve the crisis of nature (environment discourse) and the crisis of justice (development discourse) at once. The nature of those 'limits to growth' remains a controversy even today. While the 'environment' discourse recognised limits in *time* (durability of development with respect to future generations), the 'development' discourse was concerned about limits in *space* (distribution of development amongst present generations). Also, the nature of growth itself became focus of the debate, with some claiming that qualitative, but not quantitative growth could be sustained.

Over the course of numerous international conferences and commissions, 'sustainable development' was conceptualised as 'the' response to the problem of 'limits to growth'. The concept was first introduced in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980), a document jointly created by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 1982, and recently updated by the publication of 'Caring for the Earth. A Strategy for Sustainable Living.' by the same group (IUCN, UNEP & WWF 1991). The concept of sustainable development has later been famously promoted by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) under the leadership of Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland in their report published in 1987. The definition of 'sustainable development' suggested by the Brundtland Commission is still the most widely quoted one: *"development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (WCED 1987:8).

While 'sustainable development' remains a contested concept,

*"at its core, sustainability refers to three simple concerns:*

- \* the need to arrest environmental degradation and ecological imbalance;*
- \* the need not to impoverish future generations;*
- \* the need for quality of life and equity between current generations."*

(European Environment Agency 1997:21)

#### **2.4.2 Agenda 21**

In its report, the Commission called for a 'UN Programme of Action on Sustainable Development' and initiated a process of regional conferences that over the course of five years prepared the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The UNCED was the largest international conference ever organized by the UN up to that point, with delegations from 178 countries, including 120 Heads of State, meeting under the eyes of 8,000 journalists. A major gathering of non-governmental groups took place parallel to the official governmental conference. More than 30,000 people overall were involved in the Rio proceedings. (European Environment Agency 1997:29)

The Brundtland Commission's call for a programme of action gave birth to a Rio Declaration and a programme of 'things to do' for the 21st century called Agenda 21. Moreover, legally binding Conventions on biodiversity and climate change were signed at Rio. In addition, two (rather limited) funding mechanisms for Eastern and Southern countries were put in place, namely the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Capacity 21. In order to monitor progress on the Rio commitments around the world, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established after the Rio Summit and is based in New York.

The most relevant outcome of the Rio process for the context of this book is Agenda 21. This manifesto, which was signed by more than 170 governments, recommends actions in 40 different areas and demands the involvement of nine major groups in order to realise sustainable development. The actions broadly fall into two categories - those with a social and economic dimension (i.e. poverty, health, human settlements) and those concerned with conservation and management of resources (i.e. deforestation, desertification, biodiversity). The nine 'major groups' to be drawn into the task of sustainable development are women, children, indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community and farmers. This list is usually drawn upon to justify the need to involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders in defining a national or local Agenda 21.

Of particular interest for our purposes is chapter 28 of Agenda 21, which is concerned with the role of local authorities. Chapter 28 was included in the Agenda 21 document after intense lobbying by organisations like the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), the United Towns Organization and European Commission delegates, and is considered as



a major breakthrough by those organisations in gaining recognition at the international stage (European Environment Agency 1997:33). Chapter 28 argues that local authorities must play a crucial part in the transition to sustainable development:

*"As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public to promote sustainable development." (UN 1992 - Agenda 21, chapter 28.1)*

Therefore, the document demands no less than that local authorities should produce a local version of Agenda 21 by 1996, in which they interpret the implications of 'sustainable development' for their locality. This however, is to be done in *"a consultative process with their local populations"* leading to *"a consensus on a 'Local Agenda 21' for the community"* (UN 1992, Agenda 21, chapter 28.2). Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 has provided strong new impetus for local experiments with public participation in decision-making.

#### **2.4.3 Defining sustainable development**

Quite a major case has been made that the concept 'sustainable development' draws its very popularity from its ambiguity. Lélé (1991) has pointed out, sustainable development is a *"metafix"*(p.613) and its popularity stems from its multi-interpretability - sustainable development remains an essentially contested concept, which can be draped and stretched to accommodate opposing world views. As Sachs has observed,

*"the formula is designed to maximize consensus rather than clarity. As with any compromise, that is no small achievement, because the definition works like an all-purpose cement which glues all parts together, friends and foes alike. The opponents of the 70's and 80's find themselves pinned down to a common ground, and since then everything revolves around the notion of 'sustainable development'." (Sachs 1995c:8)*

O'Riordan and Voisey (1998a) have convincingly suggested that sustainable development is essentially *"the endless quest for a permanent and habitable planet on which life evolves with reliability and dignity."*(p.3) They have interpreted the multiplicity of definitions surrounding sustainable development as a proof of it being a *"moral ideal, a universally acknowledged goal to strive for, a shared basis for directing the creative and restorative energies that constitute life on Earth"*(O'Riordan & Voisey 1998a:3). Many scholars (Lafferty 1995, Jacobs 1995b, O'Riordan & Voisey 1998a) agree that because sustainable development shares the fate of other moral concepts like 'democracy' and 'liberty', it will forever remain contested:

*"For concepts such as these there is both a readily understood 'first level meaning' and general political acceptance, but around a given set of 'core ideas' there lies a deeper contestation." (Baker et al 1997:7)*

#### **2.4.4 The need for stakeholder participation**

It is rather obvious that there cannot be one universal 'scientific' definition of sustainable development. Definitions of sustainable development will need to be devised to fit diverse local circumstances – for example an emphasis on a 'green' agenda in the North and the need for a 'brown' agenda in the South (Zahidi 1998). Definitions need to be meaningful to local people to take effect in guiding local action. This embraces the need for more civic science in the face of uncertainties. Here, local knowledge is particularly valued, and its diversity is used to argue a case for a devolution of powers to local levels to a much larger degree than at present:

*"This requires a considerable degree of local self-determination, since centralised decision-making structures have difficulty in implementing decisions which respond appropriately to such diversity."* (Satterthwaite 1997:1683)

In order to enable collective action on sustainable development, discursive processes are necessary between actors at all levels, so that eventually shared understandings and interpretations can evolve to guide action.

Discursive processes at all levels are moreover necessary to overcome what O'Riordan and Voisey have called the 'democratic paradox' of sustainable development (1998a:17). O'Riordan and Voisey show that there are bound to be winners and losers from the sustainability transition. The losers might be in a position to effectively block the transition because their losses are real (in monetary terms), while the gains of the common good are usually relatively intangible and cannot be 'cashed in' to compensate the losers. Therefore, a society has to establish a consensus as to how the losers are to be compensated from the shared pot of money in order to protect the common resource base or natural diversity. Also, a discursive process might enable the losers to develop a sense of the common good and more willingly make the sacrifices negotiated with them, instead of experiencing victimisation. O'Riordan and Voisey (1997:10) have discussed this under the appropriate heading of 'revelation'.

#### **2.5 Conclusion: The transformed context of citizen participation**

Deliberative and inclusionary processes are on the rise at a time when attempts at hierarchical steering are prone to failure. Governments, in particular, find their capacity to deliver policies diminished as a result of increasing functional differentiation within nation-states and of growing links which bypass nation-states, resulting in global interdependence. Given that the resources for action are dispersed between ever growing numbers of actors, most actors will depend on collaboration with others in networks in order to pursue their self-interests just as much as in order to work towards the common good. Fragmentation within societies is countered by an increased necessity to collaborate. Networks are channels of continuing communication, allowing shared meaning to evolve. They are based on the principles of trust and reciprocity – both of which require a long-term prospect for social relations. In a world where supposedly 'change is the only constant', those networks and

organisations will be able to survive which have a capacity to learn drawing on a systems perspective, i.e. to pursue their purpose under changing conditions. Such organisations or networks often benefit from a shared vision which guides them through turbulent times of massive change towards a new order which emerges from within. This capacity to self-organise from within is essential to the new organisational development and management paradigm, which has been captured in the metaphor of the 'living organism'.

Governance in networks has been taken up most notably by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the document Agenda 21 produced as a result. Agenda 21 recommends that each local authority should engage in consultation with local stakeholder groups in order to give meaning to 'sustainable development' and in order to agree a common action plan. Large group interventions like Future Search Conferences were discovered by local authorities in Europe as ideal tools to facilitate a Local Agenda 21 process. These large group interventions were originally developed to further the transition from bureaucratic to learning organisations. They are based on systems thinking and demand the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in deliberation. In a next step, I shall take a closer look at the nature of governance in local authorities which attempt to engage with a Local Agenda 21 process.

## Chapter 3

### Local Stakeholder Participation – in Theory and Practice

In this chapter, I will draw on collaborative planning theory in order to spell out the normative case made for the use of deliberative and inclusionary processes at the local level in particular. Moreover, I will review case study evidence in order to provide the reader with an idea of which benefits and costs deliberative and inclusionary processes have delivered in practice. As issues of power are a recurring concern in the literature review, the final section of this chapter will discuss theories of power in participation. It is there that I will argue that a Foucauldian perspective on power matches well with the invisible ties of governance in networks.

What do these global transitions mean for the practice of citizen participation at the local level? A review of the planning literature, known for its interdisciplinary perspective and closeness to local practice, shows that the shift from hierarchical government to network structures of governance has also left its mark in the field of planning theories. The last decade has seen the emergence of normative theories of 'collaborative planning' (Healey 1997, Forester 1993, Innes 1996a) or '*Kooperation*' in German (Selle 1992, 1995, 1996), a normative argument about how local governance in network should ideally be pursued. However, while planning theories proved the most developed on the subject at hand, I have not limited myself to them. Collaborative planning theory goes back to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and I have also drawn on other disciplines which build on the works of Habermas, most notably theories of 'deliberative democracy' (Fishkin 1991, Bohmann 1998) and 'strong democracy' (Barber 1984). I distinguish the collaborative planning theory however from the 'empowerment' literature (Freire 1996, Schwerin 1995), which, in my interpretation, goes much further in facilitating emancipation for the participants in participatory processes.

In the remainder of this section, I shall first introduce the Habermasian origins of collaborative planning theory, most notably the 'ideal speech situation'. Secondly, I will draw on the collaborative planning literature itself to elaborate on its critique of science and the market as methods for deciding upon collective action. Finally, I shall review case study evidence of collaborative planning practice and distil issues requiring further research.

#### 3.1 The foundations of collaborative planning in Habermas' 'ideal speech situation'

For the purposes of this chapter, I will follow Ortwin Renn and his colleagues (1995:40), in defining public participation as no more and no less than the "*interaction among individuals through the medium of language*". At the basis of their approach is the insight, that descriptions of the world that qualify as knowledge have to be communicated by the medium of language. Attaching meaning to words and shaping the way we speak about ourselves and the world

around us is therefore the powerful process of creating 'discourse' and ultimately 'knowledge'.

The starting point for Habermas' work was his observation that the opportunity for efficacious political action by citizens in contemporary Western democracies was severely limited. Habermas – in a similar way to Michel Foucault, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens – located the reason for this limitation in the domination of cognitive-instrumental reason in modern societies, which usually discredits all other modes of making validity claims about the world. Sabine O'Hara (1996) has provided an illuminative account of disciplinary valuation biases in her case study of ecosystems valuation. Dennis Gaffin (1997) makes a similar case in his study of a landfill-siting in a rural Western New York community. He analyses how the definitions of space and land put forward by the developers and the state bureaucracy undermine the experiences of space and land held by the local community: *"This results in a colonial process of domination over large-scale local citizen and government opposition."* (Gaffin 1997: 275)

As a cure to this problem, Habermas developed the concept of 'communicative' rationality, which demands that knowledge claims should be subject to a fair and competent process of deliberation. He expanded on this concept by defining an ideal speech situation in which people are supposed to bring together all strands of discourse in the absence of coercion. Habermas claimed that there are ways of translating discourses into each other, of surmounting perceived exclusionary tendencies and thereby establishing the validity of claims about the world made by competing discourses. By guaranteeing fairness and competence of the shared discourse Habermas believed it to be possible to establish a consensus on what is true about the world (consensus theory of truth) and what is morally right (discourse ethics).

The key question following from this consensus theory of truth is, what type of reasoning or rationality is going to be used in the discourse to make and challenge validity claims. Habermas acknowledges the presence of three basic types of reason, that all have their own logic of making validity claims (Simons 1995: 111-116):

1. cognitive-instrumental reason, which provides information about the external world and can be used to design means for pre-established ends;
2. moral-practical reason, which selects ends;
3. the aesthetic-expressive sphere, which allows for self-assertion and the establishment of authenticity.

Habermas suggests 'communicative reason' as an alternative mode for discourse in which the three (above) modes of reasoning are integrated in an egalitarian manner and argues that this is a first important step in removing coercive modes of communication from the ideal speech situation. (Webler 1995). The second procedural criterion of fairness was to ensure the inclusiveness of the deliberative process and to give equal opportunities for deliberation to the participants.

Webler (1995) has taken Habermas' ideal speech situation as a starting point for developing an evaluation framework for deliberative processes. Habermas' definition of fairness is the absence of coercion. Webler operationalises fairness by saying that each person must be able to attend and initiate discourse, to contribute to it by debating and to make decisions about the nature of the process of the discourse itself. Webler defines three key activities of discourse: (i) agenda and rule making, (ii) moderation and rule enforcement and (iii) discussion itself (table 3.1).

Competence of speech requires, according to Webler, access to information and its interpretations, and the use of the best available procedures for knowledge selection. Competence of speech also aims to establish communicative reason as the mode of making and challenging validity claims. Webler therefore prescribes investigation of all three dimensions of discourse identified earlier to establish the competence of a discourse: theoretical discourse (making epistemic or strategic claims about the nature of the objective world), practical discourse (providing a normative value-basis for judgements and positions) and therapeutic discourse (establishing the authenticity and sincerity of the speaker). In addition, he adds explicative discourse (establishing the comprehensibility of communication) to this list, as it can be found in Habermas' theory of pragmatics. A competent discourse employs cooperative reasoning and instrumental reason as opposed to strategic reasoning. The main tenets of the fair and competent 'ideal speech situation' are summarised in Table 3.1.

<b>Fairness</b>	<b>Competence</b>
Anyone may participate	Minimal standards for cognitive and lingual competence
Assert validity claims	Access to the knowledge
Challenge validity claims	Consensually-approved translation scheme
Influence final determinations of validity	Most reliable methodological techniques available

**Table 3.1: Conditions for the fair and competent ideal speech situation**

Source: Webler 1995:60

Webler and his colleagues have not only pioneered the translation of Habermas' abstract criteria into testable indicators, but also applied them to the evaluation of a wide spectrum of tools for citizen participation in environmental decision-making. For that purpose, they have developed a set of detailed questions to test for the fairness and competence of discourse in the implementation of a tool for citizen participation (Webler 1995: 78-86).

A shortcoming of Webler's work is that the criteria remain process based and make no indication about possible outcomes and benefits that can be expected as a result of the participatory process. The criteria of fairness and competence are too narrow to capture the special qualities of Future Search Conferences like their capacity for generating community spirit. Therefore, Webler's framework

is only used here to foster understanding of the 'ideal speech situation', which shall be subjected to a Foucauldian critique in the final part of this chapter.

### **3.2 Collaborative planning theory**

I will now investigate theories of 'collaborative planning' (Healey 1997, Innes 1996 & 1997, Forester 1996a & b) and political theories of 'strong' or 'deliberative' democracy (Barber 1984, Fishkin 1991, Dryzek 1990). The starting point for all these theories is the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

*"Habermas' practical insight is that societal decisions should be made through a discursive process in which collective preferences, interests, and needs are defined by the participants in accordance with their own free will." (Webler 1995:73)*

The argument for increased and higher quality participation as put forward by these theories rests on two pillars: one is a rejection of the privileged role of experts in favour of civic science, the second in a rejection of the notion of a consumer with fixed preferences in favour of the learning citizen. The following two sections of the chapter will explore these arguments and draw on recently published case study evidence from participatory processes.

#### **3.2.1 From the monopoly of science to a consensus theory of truth**

I will lay down the argument here in two steps: First, the positivist notion that science is able to present an 'objective' account of 'the truth' is fiercely rejected and the alternative of civic science is discussed. Secondly, I will address the question of how - in the absence of a neutral irrefutable ground of universal rights and wrongs - collective action might still be possible.

#### ***Breaking the monopoly of science***

Healey bases 'collaborative' planning firmly in a post-positivist understanding of science, where all knowledge is seen as socially constructed and inherently value-based (Healey 1997:29-30). On the same note, 'deliberative democracy' is positioned in opposition to 'expertocratic' modes of decision-making by elected representatives:

*"By demystifying technocratic decision techniques, postpositivist policy inquiry denies the expert's facile claim that there is only one scientific solution to a pressing social or political problem." (Fischer 1993:167)*

With it goes the privileged position of 'experts', whose knowledge is no longer regarded as automatically superior to other ways of knowing. Experts are to be no more than 'specialized citizen[s]' (Fischer 1993:183).

The Habermasian School has drawn attention to the many subtle ways in which science is perpetuating its hegemony and is actively discrediting non-scientific modes of making validity claims about the world. While the French philosopher Michel Foucault has developed a theory of power that is at odds with the Habermasian School, his analysis of society nevertheless much mirrors Habermasian concerns (Kulynych 1997). A review of the history of science has allowed Foucault to illustrate that experts - far from being neutral - have always

been instrumental in the production of the dominant power / knowledge regime. Science might be seen as a tool for social control, a tool for the reproduction of dominant ways of knowing, that happen to support the interests of currently dominant groups. Foucault has called this process of engraving unquestioned assumptions into people's mindsets 'normalisation'. Foucault does not produce a theory of interests and rejects the idea of a ruling class. According to Foucault, the modern power / knowledge regime has sought out the 'excluded and marginalised' (i.e. the mad, homosexuals) through the activity of experts, in order to objectify and control them. Therefore, for collaborative planners and advocates of deliberative democracy, breaking the hegemony of science requires an end to science's monopoly on knowledge:

*"Democratize language, ... and other forms of equality will follow"*  
(Barber 1984:193).

Collaborative planning also rejects the 'deficit model' according to which the public is considered ignorant and in need of education in scientific ways of knowing. Many recent case studies of participatory processes explicitly refer to this (for example Petts 1997:328, Durant 1995:75, Street 1997:142). Instead, lay people's multiple ways of knowing and communicating knowledge are to be explored, respected and brought together in order to increase the understanding of problematic issues of public concern and to inform action (Innes 1996:171, Burgess 1995 & 1996, Burgess et al 1988c, Harrison & Burgess 1994).

The work of Jacquie Burgess, Carolyn Harrison and their UCL colleagues has pioneered this approach in the area of cultural geography. In three major projects their team explored what 'urban green' (Burgess et al 1988c, Harrison et al 1987), 'urban fringe woodlands' (Burgess 1995), 'nature' and 'nature conservation' (Harrison & Burgess 1994) and 'pro-environmental behaviours' (Harrison et al 1996) mean to various social groups (different from study to study), including specialist nature conservationists, developers, media personnel and different groups of the general public in the Rainham Marshes study (Harrison & Burgess 1994). Their work has also explored how ways of talking about certain issues evolve from the sources (often NGOs) via the media (Burgess 1993) to the 'consumers' of media productions and from there into people's everyday lives (Harrison & Burgess 1994). Their findings demonstrate that local decision-making should be informed by the rich ways of knowing employed by the various stakeholders in a decision rather than upon a single narrow 'scientific truth'. Burgess and colleagues demonstrate in their work on the perception of a video on the Rainham Marshes (Burgess et al 1991) how local people rejected the supposed scientific expertise represented in the video and accused the makers of the video of making the marshes look 'all green' while they perceived it as a rubbish pit. Local people doubted that certain images of wildlife were actually taken from the area. This piece of research demonstrates the ways in which local people resist the constructions made about their place by far away 'experts'. Harrison and Burgess' work has also taken consideration of the cultural context within which rationales about pro-environmental behaviours are formed by contrasting findings in the Dutch city



of Eindhoven with the results of their Nottingham study (Harrison et al 1996). After discarding culture theory as a too undifferentiated way of structuring the constructions encountered in their case studies (Harrison & Burgess 1994), Burgess and Harrison have in their recent report to the Environment Agency proposed to distinguish between a reductionist and a contextualist approach to nature conservation (Agnew et al 1999). While the reductionist approach includes all elements that I have captured under the 'instrumental rationality' discourse, the contextualist approach goes beyond the 'collaborative planning' ideal described earlier in that it includes a normative positioning on the value of social equity (Agnew et al 1999, Appendix p.21). The Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' precludes any normative positioning apart from a commitment to the ideal speech situation itself (Webler 1995).

An impressive example of a victory of civic science over the refusal of established scientific and bureaucratic institutions to act in the citizens' interest has been provided by Frank Fischer (1993). He reports from a case in Woburn, Massachusetts, where a local minister mobilised fellow citizens to investigate the root causes of what seemed to them to be an unusually high number of cases of childhood leukaemia in the area. The citizens engaged in unorthodox methods of gathering data to prove to officials that the number of leukaemia cases required action. Despite the fact that the citizens' perception of a 'problem' was ignored by public authorities and their first set of data was dismissed by state officials as the work of amateurs, the citizens did not give up. The citizens turned to Harvard scientists who then assisted 300 volunteers in gathering data again in unconventional ways that allowed them to show that exposure to drinking water from a polluted well was linked to the leukaemia cases. As it later turned out, the well was polluted by industrial waste carcinogens, and the families of leukaemia victims were able to take one of the companies to court and benefit from an out-of-court settlement (Fischer 1993:178-181). While this might be dismissed as further evidence that without the involvement of Harvard scientists nobody will take notice, the case also exposes the fatal effects that a close link between science and society's elites might have for the citizenry at large.

### *A consensus theory of truth*

How can collective action be made possible in the absence of universal 'truth' and in the presence of multiple conceptualisations of what is morally 'right' or 'wrong'? Far from giving into the relativism of 'anything goes', Habermas and his followers in collaborative planning and deliberative democracy theory subscribe to a procedural norm that guides the deliberation towards a consensus on 'truth' and action thereupon. Habermas provides a clear-cut prescription of what kind of speech acts are sought to be relevant to what he defines as the 'ideal speech situation':

*"Mutual understanding depends on the satisfaction of these four criteria: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy, and accuracy or truth. Without comprehensibility in interaction, we have not meaning but confusion. Without a measure of sincerity, we have manipulation or deceit rather than trust. When a speaker's claims are illegitimately made, we have the abuse rather than the exercise of authority. And when we cannot gauge the truth of what is claimed, we will be unable to tell the difference between reality and propaganda, fact and fantasy."* (Forester 1989:144)

While the above criteria establish the 'competence' of the speakers, the second criterion Habermas wants to see fulfilled is 'fairness' of the discursive process. Renn and colleagues (1995:62) have interpreted 'fairness' as the equal opportunity of all participants to (i) attend, (ii) initiate discourse, (iii) discuss and (iv) decide throughout all of the three stages of a public participation discourse, which they identify as (i) agenda and rule making, (ii) moderation and rule enforcement and (iii) discussion.

The American democratic theorist James Fishkin has termed these requirements of the ideal speech situation as *"purely hypothetical and, in that sense, utterly utopian"* (Fishkin 1991:36). While Fishkin is a strong proponent of deliberative democracy, he simply cannot conceive how the entire citizenry could be involved in such sophisticated processes of deliberation. Instead, he suggests to involve only small samples of the population in processes of 'deliberative opinion polling', the outcomes of which would then reflect *"what the electorate would think if, hypothetically, it could be immersed in intensive deliberative processes. ... if it could be given an opportunity for extensive reflection and access to information."* (Fishkin 1991:81) The outcomes of deliberative opinion polls would be of recommendation status to the policy and decision-makers. Fishkin recognises that his model sacrifices political equality in the name of deliberation, but concludes that

*"Political equality without deliberation is not of much use, for it amounts to nothing more than power without the opportunity to think about how that power ought to be exercised."* (Fishkin 1991:36)

The most popular tools in Europe which operate along the lines put forward by Fishkin are the citizen jury (developed by Ned Crosby /USA) and the planning cell (developed by Peter Dienel / Germany), and variants of it like community advisory forums (Petts 1997). A number of recently published case studies have provided evidence that ordinary citizens are perfectly capable of coming to a conclusive judgement on complex policy issues like biotechnology or waste management if given the appropriate conditions (Joss & Durant 1995, Petts 1997, Kuper 1997, Dienel & Renn 1995, Seiler 1995, Crosby 1995, Armour 1995).

At the other end of the deliberative democracy spectrum is American political theorist and activist Benjamin Barber (1984), who emphasises wide-spread and on-going involvement of the entire citizenry in order to foster genuine public thinking. I will return to this point later on.

### **Legitimacy through fair process**

Deliberation in the 'ideal speech situation' is unavoidably a political process, in the sense that it involves the careful evaluation of conflicting evidence and decision-making on what should guide the action to be taken (Durant 1995:77). *"In a word, politics is not the application of Truth to the problem of human relations but the application of human relations to the problem of truth"*(Barber 1984:64-65). Depending on the frame of reference applied to a real world problem, the solutions - including the distribution of costs and benefits - will differ.

*"Issues of risk assessment, for instance, are not simply a matter of discerning scientific risks, but a matter of determining who should bear the risks or costs of a policy choice."* (Rossi 1997:198)

Because of these policy implications, the success of participatory processes which aim to produce acceptable solutions to pressing problems of public concern depends crucially on their perceived credibility (Durant 1995:77) and legitimacy (O'Riordan 1997). Legitimacy has been defined by Beetham as (i) conformity to rules (legal validity), (ii) justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs and (iii) legitimation through expressed consent (Beetham 1991:20).

The perception of procedural fairness has been identified in recent research on resource management decision-making as the most important rule that influences the perceived legitimacy of a participatory process. In particular, the perception of the outcomes of a participatory process, and interestingly enough the perception of the decision-makers are influenced by the perceived procedural fairness (Lauber & Knuth 1997). With regards to outcomes, Rossi (1997:187) sums up: *"Persons and entities subject to agency regulations are more likely to view agency decisions as legitimate if the procedures leading to their formulation provide for fair consideration of their views."* This has caused much ethical concern about situations where citizens are asked to provide input in the absence of decision-makers' intention to take on board any of the concerns raised. However, Lawrence et al (1997:586) reckon that there is some indication that *"participants might react with a lower degree of satisfaction than if no voice had been provided"* in the case of their input being apparently neglected by decision-makers. Nevertheless, the perceived legitimacy of decision-making processes remains closely linked with the question who was allowed to participate, how they were chosen and if these participants were thought to represent any particular kind of view.

With regards to the link between perception of decision-makers and perception of the issue of concern, Simosi and Allen (1998:319) suggest that *"the degree of confidence placed in the trustworthiness of those responsible for decisionmaking has a significant effect upon public attitudes towards the proposed developments."* They report from a case where the local authority had negotiated with a developer about a publicly owned piece of land in an area of outstanding natural beauty over the period of a year without informing the public at all. When the development plan then went to the statutory public consultation, massive opposition formed, as the local authority was perceived to

be 'in bed with the developer' and therefore not to be trusted to act as guardian of legitimate public interests. Lawrence et al (1997:586) have noted that once trust in decision-makers is lost, it will take a long time to restore it. It might take many more than one positive experience to persuade citizens again of the trustworthiness of decision-makers, and thereby to allow them to perceive processes as fair and legitimate.

### **3.2.2 From consumers to responsible citizens**

#### ***Beyond fixed preferences of self-interested utility-maximising agents***

Theories of 'discursive' (Dryzek 1990), 'deliberative' (Fishkin 1991) or 'strong' (Barber 1984) democracy and of collaborative planning (Healey 1997, Forester 1996a & b, Innes 1996a) reject the pluralist conception of participation which reduces citizens to consumers with fixed preferences who constantly maximise their utility. The consumerist view originates in liberalism's tendency *"to characterize citizens as individuals, first, and members of society, second."* (Lauber & Knuth 1998:413). In liberal conceptualisations, the assumption of pre-determined subjective preferences carries with it the danger of ethical relativism: *"Thus, the desire to preserve endangered species is considered equivalent in kind to the desire to have a cup of coffee."* (Lauber & Knuth 1998:413). In the absence of a neutral ground to judge people's preferences as 'right' or 'wrong', collective action is left to the free play of the political muscles of interest groups.

*"Pluralists see political participation much as market participation, primarily as providing a forum for exchange and bargaining, with the goal of satisfying pre-existing, exogenous preferences."* (Rossi 1997:199, footnote omitted)

This carries with it the danger that some powerful factions of society manage to secure deals in their interest, while the less organised and usually more needy and vulnerable groups are left to look after themselves. The role of government in liberal theory is reduced to that of a neutral facilitator:

*"If citizen participation activities are rooted in the assumption that all citizens' policy preferences are morally equivalent, responsible government agencies will attempt to play a neutral role, and simply measure and amalgamate existing preferences rather than engaging citizens in a process of deliberation about what should be done. This type of process however, opens the door for government policies based on preferences that are rooted in petty prejudices, fleeting whims, incorrect information, or inadequate according to any of a variety of other standards."* (Lauber & Knuth 1998:413-414)

Barber as an advocate of 'strong democracy' criticises this worldview sharply:

*"Interests can all coexist in the world of reflective reason; one is as good as the next. But wills cannot all be equally legitimate in the same sense, because by willing one affects the world, and the world is finally one - our world - and can only be as legitimate as the process that willed it into being."* (Barber 1984:201)

Stoker and his colleagues (1996) have presented a strong argument for the re-location of democracy in the sphere of the political rather than in the private sphere of maximising self-interest. *"Politics presupposes that we are social creatures, living interdependent lives, and therefore requiring common rules and procedures. Politics involves making decisions on behalf of other people and not ourselves alone."* (Stoker 1996:22) Stoker and Barber thereby point towards the need to come to a consensus on how to live together, and to put people's subjective preferences to the scrutiny of public deliberation of shared values. Consulting people without giving them a chance to deliberate can hardly be seen as appropriate. In the best case, Fishkin (1991:81) has argued, *"An ordinary poll models what the electorate thinks, given how little it knows."*

### *The case for widespread and on-going citizen participation*

In opposition to liberal conceptualisations, theories of collaborative planning and deliberative democracy both strongly adhere to the view that people's very consciousnesses and preferences are formed in social interactions with others and are subject to constant review in the light of new experiences (Healey 1997). In this process of constant social learning, self-interests can be modified to accommodate public interests.

*"The affective power of talk is, then, the power to stretch the human imagination so that the I of private self-interest can be reconceptualized and reconstituted as a we that makes possible civility and common political action."* (Barber 1984:189-190)

All that is required according to Barber is on-going and wide-spread processes of face-to-face participation in order to 'train' people's capacity for genuine public thinking and to allow their sense of belonging to a political unit to grow. Barber argues that this process of reconceptualising one's own interests to embrace the common good requires the active participation of each individual citizen, not just the deliberation amongst elected representatives or amongst chosen few in methods of deliberative opinion polling. This type of participation is quite different from party politics which according to Kuper

*"tends to ignore complexity rather than to work through it, reducing public debate to a choice between pre-formed and often unnecessarily antagonistic positions."* (Kuper 1997:142)

However, Barber does envisage a strong role for the state in this. He doubts that market forces alone can generate the shared will and political cooperation necessary to safeguard liberty, and to generate social responsibility and citizenship. *"Deliberation, on the other hand, does require intervention, education, facilitation, and mediation"* (Barber 1998-9:586)

### *Facilitating learning*

The nature of the dialogue that is to facilitate learning amongst the participants has recently been explored by Innes and Booher (1999) in a useful review of the parallels in the disjointed literatures on mediation, the learning organisation, discursive democracy and collaborative planning. They use the metaphor of fantasy role playing to describe the spirit in which deliberation should take place in order to foster learning. They argue that in role playing and consensus building alike, participants *"play with heterogeneous concepts, strategies, and actions with which various individuals in the group have experience, and try combining them until they create a new scenario that they collectively believe will work."* (Innes & Booher 1999:12) Innes and Booher call this process a 'bricolage' which *"produces, rather than a solution to a known problem, a new way of framing the situation and of developing unanticipated combinations of actions that are qualitatively different from the options at the table at the outset."* (Innes & Booher 1999:12)

Barber has similarly characterised the strong democratic talk as *"an unrehearsed intellectual adventure"* drawing on the words of Oakeshott (1962:198). Barber argues that participatory processes must ensure the explorative nature of the discourse: *"Every expression is both legitimate and provisional, a proximate and temporary position of a consciousness in evolution."* (Barber 1984:183) Bricolage and strong democratic talk alike require an open-ended, respectful process of communication, which encourages the exploration of assumptions underlying the arguments made. Innes and Booher (1999:13) follow the 'learning organisation' gurus Peter Senge and David Bohm in arguing for a healthy mixture of dialogue (*"developing a pool of shared meaning"*) and discussion (*"an idea is batted back and forth...and each participant seeks to win"*). They conclude that *"planning through consensus building is not just communication, but learning."* (Innes & Booher 1999:13) This is thought to have a real world impact: *"Since the players often are the people in a position to have an effect on the resource or the problem, change in their attitudes and knowledge matters and in itself is a major part of the long-term consequences."* (Innes & Booher 1999:11)

The literature which emphasises the transformative aspect of mediation (Bush & Folger 1994, Dukes 1996, Folger & Jones 1994) goes a step further by embracing personal development in their conceptualisation of learning. Their vision is that the participants in mediation exercises should benefit from the opportunity for moral development (Bush & Folger 1994:82-83):

*"In the transformative orientation, the ideal response to a conflict is not to solve 'the problem'. Instead, it is to help transform the individuals involved, in both dimensions of moral growth. ...It means bringing out the intrinsic goodness that lies within the parties as human beings. If this is done, then the response to conflict itself helps transform individuals from fearful, defensive, or self-centered beings into confident, responsive, and caring ones, ultimately transforming society as well."*

The point about personal growth is not made as explicitly in the ‘collaborative planning’ literature.

### 3.2.3 Summary

The previous section has introduced the two premises upon which collaborative planning theory is based:

- A consensus theory of truth
- The citizens’ capacity for learning and genuine public thinking if given a chance to deliberate.
- Collaborative planning theory therefore breaks with
- The supremacy of science
- Notions of consumers with fixed preferences.

Consequently, collaborative planning theory rejects ‘deficit models’ according to which citizens need to be educated in scientific ways of knowing. According to collaborative planning theory, a decision can only be as legitimate as the process that willed it into being. A consensus becomes possible as citizens start to listen to each other and to alter own views in the light of their learning.

Deliberative processes which are based on collaborative planning theory should allow for the following process conditions, which originate in the Habermasian criteria of fairness and competence, but have been developed further by Forester, Healey, Innes and others as elaborated in the previous section:

<b>Collaborative planning theory</b>
<b>Process criteria</b>
• Diversity of stakeholders present
• Constructive dialogue
• Fair process
• Transcending egoistic preferences towards the common good
• Participants are experts on their affairs
• Allowing multiple ways of making validity claims
• Scope for innovation
<b>Outcome criteria</b>
• A consensus
<b>Capacity building criteria</b>
• New contacts and partnerships
• Learning amongst the participants
• Systems thinking
• Building trust and reviving local democracy
• Generating community spirit

**Table 3.2 : The essence of collaborative planning theory**  
Source: my table on the basis of the above literature review

### **3.3 A review of case study evidence on collaborative planning practice**

#### **3.3.1 Benefits and pitfalls**

Two themes emerge from a review of case study evidence of local participatory processes hosted in the spirit of collaborative planning theory. The first concerns the benefits participants experience as a direct result of their participation. The second deals with the major pitfall that participatory processes have to cope with, namely the difficult relationship between the formal institutions of representative democracy and the informal arrangements of participatory processes. The following section will address each of these themes in turn.

##### *The immediate benefits of participation*

This section shall present two pieces of research evidence, which document the benefits participants experience as a result of their participation. Judith Innes and her team analysed fourteen participatory processes in California, each of which sought stakeholder consensus on the future of growth and environmental policy. Out of fourteen cases, eight were classified as suitable examples of the 'new planning paradigm'. For these cases, Innes presents evidence that

*"The stakeholders in all cases became better informed through the process, and valued and used their new personal and professional networks to coordinate and collaborate. In five of the cases, groups incorporated systematic technical analysis into their deliberations. The breadth of the collective knowledge and interests of group members and the lengthy periods for discussion meant that they explored a wide range of factors and their interrelationships."* (Innes 1996a:465)

Similar evidence comes from Amy Helling, who found that when participants in Atlanta's Vision 2020 process were asked to list the accomplishments of the process,

*"nearly all pertained to the collaborative process itself, most frequently mentioning networking among diverse people concerned about similar issues. Stakeholders also said that the connections made through VISION 2020 had extended beyond the VISION 2020 meetings themselves, and that they had involved people who had not been active before, or brought together people who had not previously met."* (Helling 1998:340)

I conclude that learning and networking can potentially be results of deliberative and inclusionary processes.

##### *The tension between formal and informal processes of democracy*

The key theme which has emerged from my review of case studies of collaborative planning practice is the difficult relationship between the formal institutions of representative democracy and informal participatory processes. Case study evidence points to the fact that most participatory processes struggle to lead to action on the ground. And those participatory processes which do lead to tangible outcomes rarely do so without entering the formal institutions of representative democracy.



### **3.3.2 Research evidence from reflective deliberative and inclusionary processes (DIPs)**

This section will review evidence in the area of reflective deliberative and inclusionary processes. Quite a few risk and technology assessments which are conducted with citizen participation never enter the institutions of representative government that could turn them into legally binding decisions. The first UK 'National Consensus Conference on Plant Biotechnology' which was hosted by the Science Museum and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) in 1994 in London to allow for a citizen assessment of plant biotechnology, has been evaluated by Robin Grove-White and colleagues (1997:28) as *"something of a political cul-de-sac, principally because it was not thought possible to link its findings into other statutory or Parliamentary processes, or to be more systematically diffused. By contrast, Consensus Conferences in Denmark and the Netherlands (on which features of the UK initiative were modelled) have a statutory basis and have already helped shape public policy towards biotechnology and other ethically contentious issues."* There is no lack of evidence that reports from similar events gather dust on shelves instead of influencing policy-making.

Examples of cases which have been more directly linked with decision-making processes, come from the literature on conflict mediation (Susskind & Cruikshank 1987, Moore 1987, Carpenter & Kennedy 1991; Zilleßen 1998). It is under the weight of high financial (or other) stakes of parties to a multi-party dispute, that the fair and competent exploration of contested issues unfolds its full potential under the strict guidance of a skilled mediator between parties otherwise unable to communicate (Baughman 1995, Nothdurft 1995). As Baughman (1995:264) has pointed out, parties to a mediation exercise (should and usually do) participate in *"full awareness of their best alternative to a negotiated agreement."*

### **3.3.3 Research evidence from civic deliberative and inclusionary processes (DIPs)**

This section will review selected research evidence on civic deliberative and inclusionary processes with regards to delivering any results on the ground. Amy Helling's evaluation of Atlanta's VISION 2020 process can be summed up in the words of one respondent to her survey:

*"This process has given the false impression to the public that something is being done, when in fact, all that has resulted ... has been the agreement that we need to continue to have more meetings."* (Helling 1998:343)

Indeed, Helling found little evidence for progress on the initiatives that originated from the VISION 2020 process *"beyond extending desirable networking by continuing to gather people for discussions, meetings, and presentations"* (Helling 1998:342). Out of 41 projects which were initiated by VISION 2020, only eleven were taken forward at all, and out of these, many had achieved no more than to continue to meet. The prospects for the future were not

good either, as many interviewees "said they were looking forward to reducing their commitment, but they were nearly unanimous in saying that the most important part of the process was still ahead" (Helling 1998:342). A major disappointment had also been that "most of the region's political leaders maintained their distance, and many stakeholders complained of their lack of attention." (Helling 1998:343) Even worse, Atlanta Regional Commission ignored the controversial debates that were led as part of VISION 2020 about Georgia Department of Transportation's plan to build a second, limited-access perimeter highway around Atlanta and simply voted to support this plan (Helling 1998:343). Helling's evaluation does not forget to mention the tremendous costs of the VISION 2020 exercise, particularly when the volunteer person-hours are added up (total of 25,000) and to contrast them with the failure to deliver.

The only published evaluation of a community-based Future Search Conference I have come across makes the absence of some key stakeholders responsible for the failure of the exercise to deliver action on the ground. The evaluative report has been produced by the consultants who were contracted to facilitate a conference in the UK town of Hitchin as part of Hertfordshire's wider Whole Settlement Strategy. While all but one feedback form by participants were very positive, the consultants concluded:

*"The absence of some of the key stakeholders meant that the event functioned more as vehicle for involvement, than as a forum for agreeing joint action. The Action Planning Groups were able to identify some of the next steps that should be taken to implement the Hitchin Vision, but they could make few commitments....However, it is important to bear in mind that the Visioning Conference was just the start of the Whole Settlement Strategy process, and that working partnerships with other groups can evolve later."* (CAG 1995: 18)

The one dissenting participant "felt that consultation without new resources or decision making structures would lead to little change, and argued that there should have been more decision makers present to effect real change." (CAG 1995:18) The consultants conclude that it "is important to ensure that Council Members, and Officers are properly briefed about the Whole Settlement Strategy, and are clear about their roles in, and commitment to the process, and about how they will use its results." (CAG 1995:21)

The key role of the local authority is further illustrated by Penny Street (1997), who reported from a Scenario Workshop used in the UK town of Preston for involving the public in policy formulation on urban sustainable development. As in the case studies presented earlier on, the workshop fell short of enabling participants to make a real input to policy making. Street identifies the danger that high expectations have been raised while

*"there was no clear way for participants to take this initiative forward: it was dependent on the Council itself to take action...it is difficult to see how such a range of issues could be dealt with simultaneously and effectively"* (Street 1997:154).

Street concludes that the Scenario Workshop was an effective means of consultation, but failed to affect policy decisions. While the workshop did provide direct access to policy makers, it was up to them to decide which of the many suggestions they will act upon – a point which is echoed by Kanther (1997). Kanther assessed an open transport policy forum that was initiated by the local authority of Heidelberg / Germany and a Planning Cell that the public transport company of Hanover used to involve its customers in service design. Kanther concludes in both cases, that participatory exercises were used by those initiating the participation to further their interests. He revealed how those in power – Heidelberg's local authority and Hannover's public transport corporation - allowed participants to generate ideas from which they could then choose those they liked and attach to them the legitimation created by the consultation exercise, which would protect their next steps from public opposition.

Steelman and Ascher (1997) have argued that while more and more policies require government agencies to provide for public participation, there is a complete lack of clarity about how to obtain public input into decision-making and *"how much weight these inputs should be given"* (p.72). Left to the discretion of government officials, the scope for manipulation is considerable. Steelman and Ascher (1997) therefore argue for *binding* forms of direct policy making by non-governmental representatives, which avoid the polarisation and simplification associated with (legally binding) referenda while keeping the benefits of more explorative proceedings. Contrary to that, Judith Innes has found evidence in some of her case studies that the process of mobilising the stakeholders to an issue was sufficient in itself to then develop the political clout to force through the conclusions of the participatory process *"even without support from high elected officials"* (Innes 1996a:468) and without any binding mandate. While this possibility of a conflictual strategy always remains, it looks more like a lucky escape from a situation to be avoided in the first place.

The above argument points towards the need for a change in the *formal* structures of governance in order to provide an effective interface for the *informal* processes of participation taking place, to define the latter's place in the institutional setting, and to give them teeth via binding mandates. Hoggett (1995) - with reference to Arnstein's ladder of participation - warns local authorities that *"building a ladder of participation"* is not *"something one can bolt on to or lean against the otherwise unchanged structure of the local authority. Every step up the ladder towards genuine citizen empowerment requires an equivalent change in mainstream practices"* (1995:109). All scholars agree that establishing effective citizen participation requires *"the transformation of structures that inhibit collective decision-making"* (Kearns 1995:171).

O'Riordan (1998a:1) not only argues that the formal structures of governance should be *"widening their scope for sharing power"*. As well, O'Riordan reminds us that formal and informal institutions are – or should be - *interdependent*, and therefore a process of *co-evolution* of formal and informal

governance is required. He argues that the proponents of participatory forms of decision-making are well advised to remain sensitive to the issue of accountability that, according to him, only elected representatives can offer, and the need for transparency of their proceedings. Otherwise, he argues, participatory decision-making processes might in their ignorance reduce the scope for democratic decision-making instead of widening it. I think O'Riordan rightly criticises the fanatic enthusiasm of many proponents of participatory tools who remain unaware of the consequences of their actions with regards to issues of power and democratic accountability. I would argue however, that while the innovation in the informal sphere is well on its way, the holders of formal government power are sitting back to watch it fall on its face or hit the brick wall of their institutions. They are the ones whose turn it is to make the next move.

### *Conditions for success*

Suggestions as to how best to address the inability of deliberative processes to deliver are rare. Innes and her team have identified three conditions for success, upon which the long-lasting impact of the eight successful consensus building exercises mentioned above was built:

*"In all the cases, players were brought to the table and kept there, searching for agreement with their adversaries by external incentives: avoiding the costs of delay, litigation, or inaction, as well as governmental action that might impose undesirable solutions."* (Innes 1996a:465)

Second, it was crucial, that all cases had a clearly defined 'product' in mind at the outset, like "legislation, indicators, scientific descriptions of the problem, lists of issues needing attention, monitoring standards, guidelines for practice, policy principles, or plans" (Innes 1996:465). Finally, this product was in each case submitted "for approval to a formal authority, such as an electorate, a legislature, or a responsible public agency" (Innes 1996:465). I conclude that an effective link between the formal institutions of government and the consensus building processes is key to the implementation of the outcomes of a participatory process.

### **3.3.4 Conclusions**

My review of case study evidence in the area of collaborative planning has shown that the observed deliberative processes were very effective in delivering on the capacity building front, while failing poorly in implementing the consensual outcomes of the process on the ground. A review of the case study work conducted by Judith Innes and Amy Helling showed that the observed processes

- Brought together diverse people who had not met before
- Facilitated constructive dialogue
- Were perceived as fair by those participating in them
- Incorporated systematic technical analysis as one way of making validity claims in some of Innes' cases

And delivered

- A consensus as process outcome.

The observed processes also seemed to deliver well in the area of local capacity building, in particular in the area of

- Network building amongst diverse people which lasted beyond the process.
- Moreover, it allowed for learning amongst the participants.

While Innes distilled conditions for the success of deliberative processes from a set of eight case studies which were mostly successful in delivering change on the ground, Helling, Street and Kanther discussed the reasons for the failure of their case studies to lead to action. The two strands of analysis converged in emphasising the following conditions for success:

- A pressing need to come to an agreement / high incentive to participate (i.e. high costs of delay / inaction / imposed solution)
- Deliberative process must lead to a clearly defined product (i.e. agreed problem definitions, legislation, clear targets and timetables)
- Substantial elements of this product must be formally adopted by the relevant formal political authority.

With regards to the last of these three conditions, a shift in the political culture of authorities tends to be needed for a sincere sharing of power. As Hoggett (1995) and O'Riordan (1998) have pointed out, a process of co-evolution of the formal authorities along with informal bodies is a pre-condition for the success of informal collaborative planning processes. I have argued that formal political authorities should consider to give a clearly defined mandate or to convey a binding status to the outcomes of collaborative planning processes beforehand (Steelman and Ascher 1997). This reduces the scope for manipulation by the formal authorities greatly which is considerable when it is unclear how much weight the inputs from a deliberative process will be given. The issue of power underlying the relationship between formal and informal institutions of democracy shall be further developed in the next section.

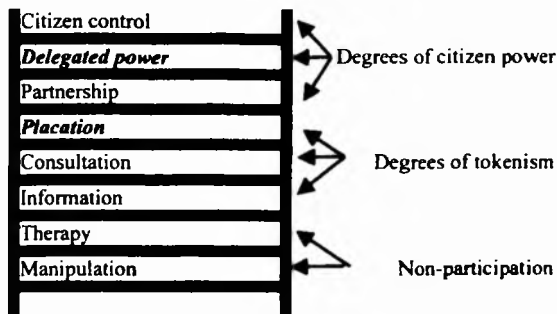
### **3.4 Theorising power in participation**

Similar to theories of participation, theories of power must be reframed in an increasingly interdependent world, where invisible ties and shared meanings bind actors together in networks of power and replace physical means of domination by brute force. I shall argue that the very terms in which issues are framed, the way in which certain issues are purposefully or subconsciously included or excluded is where we need to look when we want to understand the workings of power.

#### ***3.4.1 A one-dimensional conceptualisation of power: Arnstein's ladder***

The tension between local authorities and citizens in participation exercises has been captured in Sherry Arnstein's famous ladder of participation. Arnstein put forward her ladder of participation in an attempt to delineate 'tokenist' approaches to participation from those yielding real citizen power, at a time

when 'maximum feasible participation' was the policy guidance given to local authorities in the United States by the Johnson administration: *"There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process"* (Arnstein 1971:176).



**Figure 3.1: Arnstein's ladder of participation**

Source : Sherry Arnstein 1971:177

Arnstein's basic idea of organising different types of participation along a continuum from non-participation to citizen control has been refined by Burns and colleagues (Burns et al 1994:162-163) to accommodate three more dimensions:

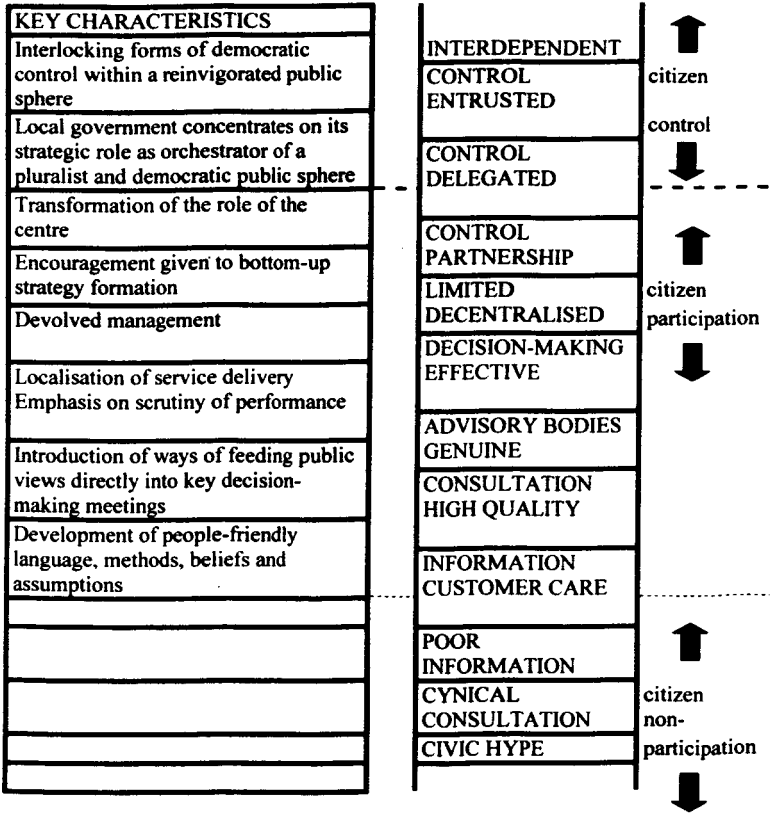
(i) First, Burns *et al* criticise that Arnstein's model does not differentiate between the various spheres of citizen power, in each of which a different rung on the ladder might be reached at any one moment in time. Therefore, they suggest a differentiation between the individual sphere, the community sphere, the sphere of local government and administration and the sphere of national governance. As their core interest lies with the interface of community and local government, their resulting ladder contains these two components.

(ii) Secondly, Burns *et al* suggest distinguishing between three areas of decision-making: operational practices, expenditure decisions and policy-making. While these three areas are closely linked and interdependent, citizens might enjoy quite different degrees of power over each single one.

(iii) Thirdly, Burns *et al* find it important to emphasize that *"the rungs of the ladder should not be considered to be equidistant. The experience of the last twenty years shows that it is far easier to climb the lower rungs of the ladder than to scale the higher ones."* (Burns et al 1994:161)

(iv) Finally, they relativise the prescriptive hierarchy that is often read into the ladder and argue that citizen self-rule is not always desirable, particularly if some redistributive mechanism coordinated by higher levels of governments is to be kept in place. They therefore place the key word 'interdependent' at the top of their ladder of citizen empowerment – not 'citizen control' like Arnstein.

Burns et al have developed a model by which local authorities can be classified and allocated to a certain rung of the ladder (figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2 : An extract from Burns, Hoggett and Hambleton's ladder of citizen empowerment**

Source: Burns, Hoggett and Hambleton 1994:162

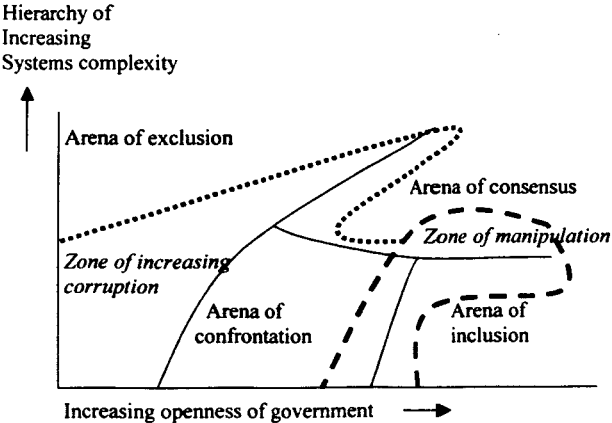
### 3.4.2 A two-dimensional model of power in participation: Abbott's zones of manipulation

The usefulness of Arnstein's ladder of participation has been questioned on a much more fundamental level by several authors on one single count:

*"Valuable as this may be, it is clearly based on a conflict perspective in which real participation involves taking decision making from one group (the elite) and vesting it in another (the citizenry)."* (Kuper 1997:142)

Arnstein is criticised for grounding her ladder in a one-dimensional view of power, namely in the power of the citizenry *to do* whatever it is they want to do (Rocha 1997:32). This not only ignores second (non-decision making) and third dimensional ('false' consciousness) power (Lukes 1974), but also suggests that citizen power actually does increase *continually* up the ladder leaving manipulation at the bottom, while others claim that the zones of potential manipulation come into play at several higher levels of the ladder as well (Abbott 1996).

In the development literature, participation is usually classified as (i) a means to an end (i.e. to increase project efficiency or acceptance) or as (ii) an end in itself (i.e. to further personal development and local democracy). Intrigued by this difference in perspective, John Abbott has set out to develop a new typology for his case study work in South Africa. He developed a two-dimensional classification of participation, in which Arnstein's rungs of the ladder are scattered across this two-dimensional space instead of being neatly organised in a clear-cut hierarchy. Abbott employs a continuum from closed to open government on one axis and a continuum from scientific reductionism to complex systems thinking on the other. While the government axis is modelled closely to Arnstein's hierarchy, Abbott's second axis is supposed to bring into play the nature of the issue under discussion.



**Figure 3.3 : Potential zones of manipulation and corruption in community participation**  
 Source: Abbott 1996:148

What I find most illuminating about Abbott's model are two things. First, it re-introduces the notion of conflict as the empowerment strategy that carries most potential for unimpeded realisation. This shows that even when government is closed, citizen power can be quite massive in a confrontational



stance of effective opposition and might eventually succeed in forcing government to alter its course of policy-making. Secondly, Abbott relocates Arnstein's rung of manipulation as a *zone* at the intersection of the three arenas of confrontation, consensus and inclusion. It is in this zone, that citizens are in danger of being co-opted into decision-making processes without yielding any real influence on the outcomes. Nevertheless, Abbott's model has not found much resonance in the collaborative planning literature with its normative focus.

### **3.4.3 A three-dimensional view of power: Bryson & Crosby's model**

A conceptualisation of power that is enjoying much currency in the field of collaborative planning at the moment (for example Healey 1997, Agnew et al 1999) has been put forward by Bryson and Crosby (1993). Their model is organised along the three dimensions of power as suggested by Lukes (1974). It thereby accommodates the institutional dimension of rules and methods in second dimensional power, and the underlying-belief-system dimension in third dimensional power. It secondly differentiates between three types of public-policy-related action: meaning-making through communication, policy-making through decision-making and legitimation and enforcement through adjudication. This structure helps to locate a participatory process clearly within the sphere of communication and to delineate the institutional linkages (or lack thereof) to the other two. The model also transcends the dichotomy between governments and civil society and instead focuses on the ways in which power is shared between diverse actors.

Bryson and Crosby's model (figure 3.4) is structured along the three dimensions of power which have been suggested by Oxford social theorist Stephen Lukes (1974). Each of these dimensions of power draws our attention to a different level of analysis. First dimension power focuses on the observable behaviour of actors. It analyses interactions between actors, their intentional efforts to change the institutional setting within which they operate and the overt disputes they engage in. Second dimension power brings into awareness the institutions that mediate actors' behaviour. Formal and informal institutions generate the norms and rules that guide actors' behaviour and regulate the distribution of resources between actors. Second dimension power takes an interest in investigating the instances in which institutional design organises some issues 'in' while organising others 'out' (Schattschneider 1960). This means an emphasis on instances of non-decision making.

Third dimension power draws attention to unquestioned sets of assumptions and unconsciously held maps of the world that underlie and inform the design of institutions and the behaviour of actors. For Lukes and the earlier Habermasian School, third dimension power is linked to the notion of 'false consciousness'. False consciousness is defined as an "*ideological distortion of the agents' perception of their real self-interest*" (Hoy 1986:125) caused by oppression.

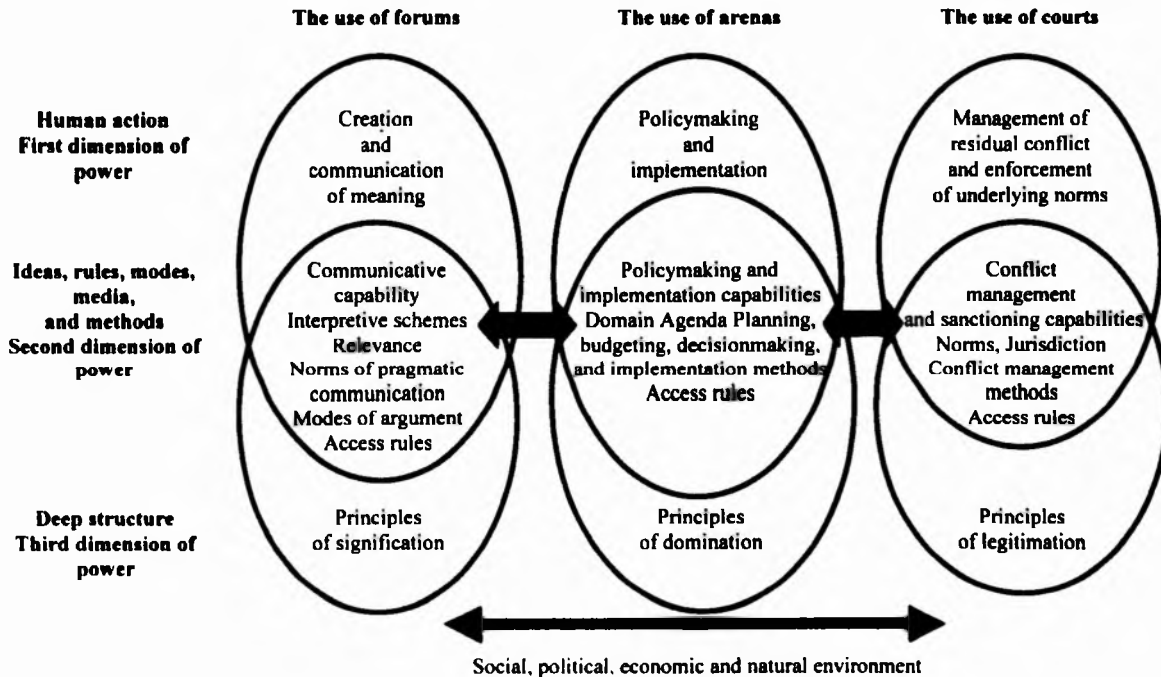


Figure 3.4 : Bryson and Crosby's model of three-dimensional power in participation (Source: Bryson & Crosby 1993:180)

*"What one may have here is a latent conflict, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude. These latter may not express or even be conscious of their interests, but, as I shall argue, the identification of those interests ultimately always rests on empirically supportable and refutable hypotheses."* (Lukes 1974: 24-25)

From an outsider's perspective, how can we differentiate between people's real and perceived interests? Lukes' definition of power suggests that A (in some cases together with other sufficient conditions) acts (or fails to act) in a certain way that gets B to think and act in a way that he or she would not otherwise do. This implies that there is a relevant counterfactual, something that B would have otherwise done. Lukes sums up the task before us: *"In brief, we need to justify our expectation that B would have thought or acted differently; and we also need to specify the means or mechanism by which A has prevented, or else acted (or abstained from acting) in a manner sufficient to prevent B from doing so."* (Lukes 1974:41-42) Lukes has suggested a number of ways of identifying actors' 'real interests' in the absence of their own awareness of them (table 3.3).

To be identified	Clues
What B would have otherwise done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-comparative analysis of cases with different structural conditions and alternative courses of action</li> <li>-check B's actual behaviour against what he says is in his interest especially               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* in abnormal times</li> <li>* when confronted with an opportunity to escape from subordination</li> </ul> </li> <li>-identify 'generalisable interests' that obviously must be in B's interest</li> </ul>
The mechanism by which A prevented B from doing what he would otherwise have done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-specify consequences of inaction and compare to the consequences of potential action</li> <li>-identify available information that was not used</li> <li>-identify those in power as cause agents for 'structural' forces</li> </ul>

**Table 3.3 : Summary of academic procedures for identifying alleged exercise of power**  
Source: my table on the basis of Lukes 1974

### **3.4.4 Foucault and the inseparability of power and knowledge**

While Lukes' conceptualisation of power is highly useful, there are two problems to which I would like to draw attention. First of all, Lukes seems to suggest that power is possessed by the powerful, that power is located with and originates from them. A different perspective on power is suggested by Foucault, who claims that the mechanisms of power are much more subtle, much more invisible in our age.

*"Power, Foucault prefers to say, is a strategy, and the dominated are as much a part of the network of power relations and the particular social matrix as the dominating. As a complex strategy spread throughout the social system in a capillary fashion, power is never manifested globally, but only at local points as 'micro-powers'." (Hoy 1986:134)*

Strategy in Foucault's terminology is not a strategy conducted by a person or agent in the normal sense.

*"Charting these micro-powers will then reveal the more general terrain of the larger social battles taking place. Change does not occur, however, by transforming the whole at once but only by resisting injustices at the particular points where they manifest themselves." (Hoy 1986:143)*

A second point of criticism launched at Lukes' concept concerns the notion of false consciousness. Foucault rejects the concept of false consciousness because it seems to imply the possibility of true consciousness and "implies the traditional view that knowledge must be disinterested, that truth can be ascertained only in the absence of distorting power relations." (Hoy 1986:131) Foucault does not believe that it is possible to define interests in the absence of power relations, quite the opposite, Foucault draws our attention to the fact that power is not always negative, but can also be enabling, productive and thereby positive.

French philosopher Michel Foucault is famous for postulating the inseparability of power and knowledge. Social order and the power differentials enshrined in it are inherent in the discourses that people draw on to make sense of their experiences and the world. Foucault postulated that there is no 'essence' to social actors, that can be distilled in isolation from the actor's social context. Instead their very identity is constituted by the type of discourses they have internalised and draw on to guide their daily lives.

The emphasis of Foucault's work has shifted through his lifetime. The early Foucault carried out historical analysis of how what is accepted as 'truth' and 'knowledge' has shifted over time. The middle-period Foucault was dedicated to an exploration of the social micro-practices by which relations of power are reproduced in daily interactions. The late Foucault investigated the capacity of the individual to overcome the constraints imposed by 'normalisations' through the practice of resistance.

From the perspective of the early Foucault, we are required to *"ask how, why, and by who, truth is attributed to particular arguments and not to others. This insight is of particular relevance to the understanding of the policy process as a political, rather than rational, form of decision making."* (Richardson 1996:283). This requires a clear-cut analytical framework to trace those discourses and their reproduction.

The middle-period Foucault (see for example 1979) developed a genealogical approach and employed it to describe a disciplinary society, in which oppressive relationships are reproduced in daily micro-practices. Foucault claimed that power is manifest in all the unexamined assumptions ('truths') that people hold

and on the basis of which they run their lives. The 'powerful' are only powerful to the extent that the wider public have internalised their submission to the social order and thereby actively and continually transfer power to the 'powerful' in their everyday decision-making. Foucault has paid a lot of attention to the mechanisms of surveillance that are put in place by the 'powerful' to keep a check on those reproducing the discourses and their micro-practices that keep the 'powerful' in power (Foucault 1979). The awareness of being monitored and risking social sanctions in the case of 'misconduct' leads many to join in the reproduction of a social order by behaving in a certain way, not necessarily being aware of the effect of power on them. The power relations therefore depend on their continuous reproduction in everyday practice and discourse. Power will shift to the extent that discourses that justify the legitimacy of certain power regimes are no longer reproduced and are replaced by discourses following other rationales, assigning legitimate power to other actors. The strength of the middle Foucault's 'genealogical approach' is that it places the micro-analysis of people's everyday practices in the context of wider socio-political discourses (Richardson 1996).

As a political practice, the late Foucault emphasised resisting micro-practices of power such as surveillance, and creating counter-discourses, i.e. 'power-fully' producing alternative 'truths' and ways of being. Jessica Kulynych (1997) developed these Foucauldian insights further into the notion of performative action. She argues that in bringing about substantive change, deliberative rationality and persuasion are usually not an option. Genuine change according to her often requires us to break out of the *"confines of that rationality and gesture toward places where words, arguments, and claims are not enough"* (Kulynych 1997:345). Her concept of performative action emphasizes what she calls 'literary aspects' of debate, which *"work precisely on the slippage between what is said and what is meant, or what can be said and what can be conceived"* (Kulynych 1997:345). Only performative tools will enable people in political participation to 'name the world' as Freire (1996) would say and emancipate themselves from oppressive discourses. Change from this perspective will come about through struggle rather than through collaboration. The important thing is to break with conformity in language and behaviour, rather than just reproducing dominant discourse.

### *Implications for theories of collaborative planning*

There are two implications for my study of collaborative planning practice from this discussion of Foucault's works. First, Foucault believes it is impossible that actors could ever find themselves in the Habermasian power-free ideal speech situation. Actors cannot strip themselves of the power-laden discourses that constitute their very identity and are therefore bound to reproduce certain power relations even under the fair and competent proceedings of the ideal speech situation. The Foucauldian perspective is therefore rather pessimistic about the scope for transformation through deliberation.

Secondly, deliberative and inclusionary processes themselves are bound to employ micro-practices of power, even where this is not the intention. A conference situation is a public space in which conference participants are exposed to the surveillance of their peers and of the conference facilitators. As a result they are likely to behave and speak in a manner they have internalised as appropriate for such a public space. Participants might start to behave a bit as if they were at school and worry about delivering 'the right answers' to the tasks given by the facilitators. Conference participants might conform with others if conflict or controversy are labelled as inappropriate by the conference facilitators.

It is interesting to note that proponents of collaborative planning fully acknowledge the Foucauldian nature of power and are quite keen to analyse discourses (Healey & Hillier 1996). Judith Innes has characterised 'information' and its role in participatory planning processes in a way that seems to echo the Foucauldian power-knowledge link:

*"Information influences planning and public action by becoming embedded in the thought, practices, and institutions of a community, and thereby influencing actions. When information is most influential, it is also most invisible. That is, it influences most when it is part of policy participants' assumptions and their problem definitions, which they rarely examine. Thus, rather than saying that policy makers consciously apply information to make a choice, it is more accurate to say that information frames, or in other words limits the available choices in the first place." (Innes 1998:54, emphasis in original)*

Evidence on this count from case studies of participatory processes seems to support Foucault's insights. Rahnema (1995:124) has observed the widespread abuse of participatory tools in a third world development context. He concludes that participation is ineffective unless it succeeds in *"halting the process of domination, manipulation and colonization of the mind"*.

### **3.4.5 Conclusions for the study of power**

My review of theories of power in participation has pointed to the considerable scope for manipulation and co-optation inherent in citizen participation exercises vis-à-vis the state. I have shown that conventional theories of one-, two- or three-dimensional power are based on a conceptualisation of power as something located with and originating from the powerful. In contrast to these concepts, Foucault has suggested that power is manifest in the discourses about what is right, true and legitimate in this world and in associated practices. Foucault suggests that the powerful are powerful only to the extent that the discourses and practices upon which their power is based are reproduced in people's daily micro-practices. Therefore, resisting established discourses and practices and creating new ones is a promising way of shifting power relations. Drawing on Kulynych, I have argued that the Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' might lead to co-optation, and that disruption and conflict might prove more promising strategies of empowerment

than collaboration in some cases. With this word of caution, I shall embark on the task of evaluating two Future Search Conferences in practice.

### 3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has spelled out the theories which underlie the application of deliberative and inclusionary processes at the local level. The first section has introduced the Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' as the normative foundation of collaborative planning theory. In a second step, I have delineated collaborative planning theory from expertocratic and pluralistic accounts of participation, and by doing so, have described the civic benefits which are to be expected of deliberative and inclusionary processes. I have shown that according to collaborative planning theory, collective action should be guided by a consensus theory of truth and a wide-spread and on-going practice of deliberation. As a result, capacity building for local democracy would take place – shared meanings would be formed, learning takes place and people's preferences would transform in order to embrace the common good.

The third section has reviewed case study evidence of collaborative planning practice. I have concluded that deliberative and inclusionary processes seemed to be performing well on the process front, delivering learning and networks amongst process participants as a result. However, the participatory processes tended to fail bitterly on the outcome front, with little action on the ground to show for the invested effort. Those DIPs that tended to lead to tangible outcomes, were those where the stakes for the participants were high, where the process aimed for a tangible product and where at least significant parts of this product were submitted to a formal authority for approval or where a mandate had been given from such an authority.

The tense relationship between formal authorities and institutions of representative democracy on the one hand and deliberative and inclusionary processes on the other proved so significant for success or failure of a participatory process that section four of this chapter reviewed theories of power with respect to this theme. In the final section, I discussed theories of power that could inform the data analysis. I was able to point out the pitfalls of co-optation and manipulation, and argued that in some cases, conflict and disruption might be more effective means of empowerment than collaborative participation. I spelled out the tenets of a Foucauldian conceptualisation of power and pointed out the effectiveness of locating power in discourses about what is right, true and legitimate and in the associated practices.

The next chapter will introduce the Future Search Conference design, its principles and origins as well as research evidence from my pilot survey of ten Future Search Conferences and from the scarce literature on the subject. In my discussion of Future Search, I will return to many issues raised in this chapter, most notably the rejection of science as the only 'truth' and the theme of power in the difficult relationship between the institutions of representative democracy and the Future Search Conference.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Origins and Workings of the Future Search Conference**

The Future Search Conference is a neatly choreographed three-day event, that involves 64 carefully selected stakeholders of a local community or organisation in learning and future planning activities. The Future Search Conference can be used to enable diverse stakeholders of a community or organisation

- to create a shared vision for the future of their organisation or community
- to discover shared intentions and take responsibility for their own plans
- to create an implementation strategy for an existing vision.

The event is carried out over 3 consecutive days, in order to give participants the opportunity to 'sleep twice'. This is supposed to allow new information and new ways of working and being with each other to sink in. The methodology was first developed by the American Marvin Weisbord in 1982, was first published in 1987 (Weisbord 1987) and has gone through a number of minor redesigns since (Weisbord et al 1992). A handbook for Future Search facilitators (Weisbord & Janoff 1995) and a summarising article (Weisbord & Janoff 1996) have been published in 1995 and 1996 respectively, thereby making the methodology available to anyone wishing to use it in their own organisation or community.

This chapter is dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the Future Search Conference method. The first part of the chapter will introduce Future Search, its origins, principles and design. I shall make frequent reference to contested aspects of the Future Search design, in order to point out the need for research evidence to back up claims in one way or another. The second part of the chapter shall introduce the pilot work conducted in summer of 1996, namely a survey of ten UK Future Search Conferences. This section forms the basis upon which I have selected the case studies. The final section of this chapter reviews research evidence published since then, and points out issues requiring particular research attention. In the concluding section, I will demonstrate how the literature survey and pilot study have informed the research questions pursued.

#### **4.1 The origins, principles and working of the Future Search Conference**

##### **4.1.1 The origins of the Future Search Conference**

The new generation of participatory large group interventions has emerged from three intellectual traditions: Kurt Lewin's social psychology, Wilfried Bion's psychoanalytic theory and Ludwig von Bertalanffy's systems theory as applied to organisations (Bunker and Alban 1997:11). Because of its prominent role in the Search Conference design I have added to that Asch's conditions for effective communication. In the following section, I will review each of these traditions in turn and in a final section, spell out the elements that are of particular relevance to understanding the design of the Future Search Conference. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the history of large group interventions on the basis of Bunker and Alban (1997:12-13).



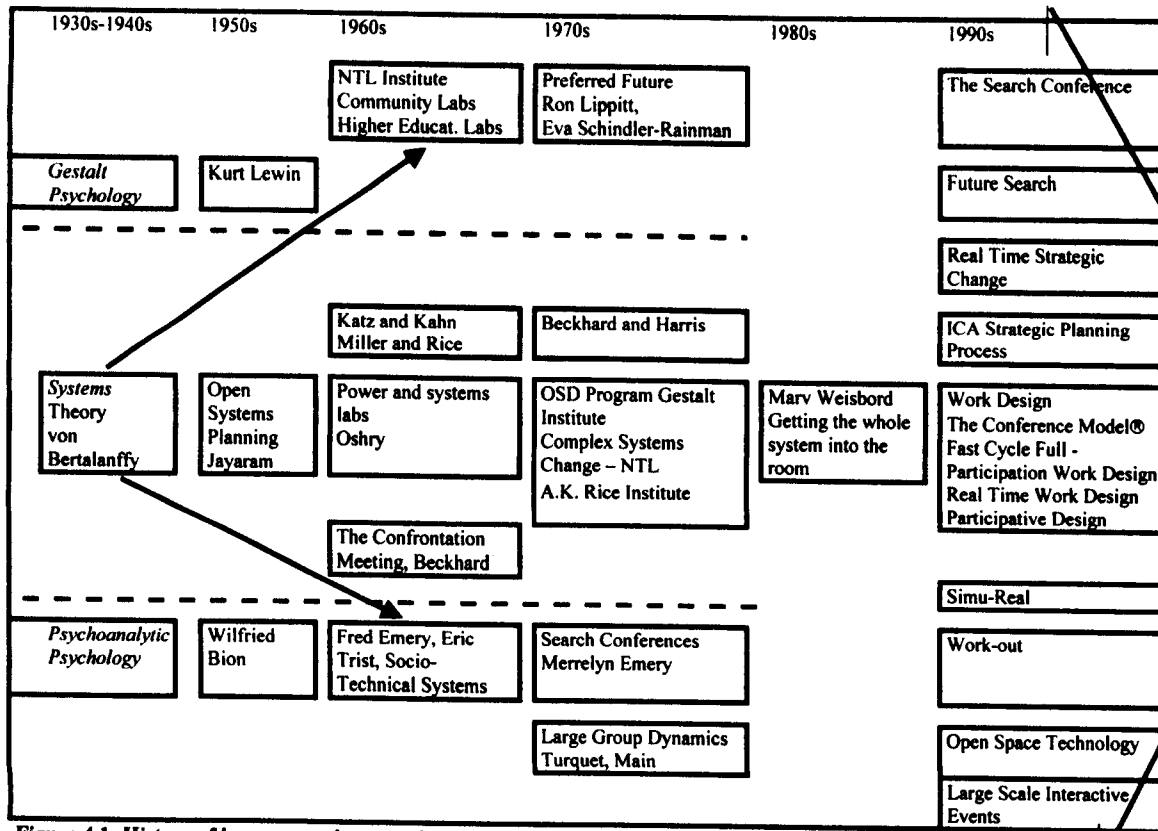


Figure 4.1: History of large group interventions; Source: Bunker & Alban 1997:12-13

### *Kurt Lewin and the NTL-Tradition of group dynamics*

The strong democratic ideal that is at the heart of the Search Conference design as well as of the Future Search Conference goes back to Kurt Lewin's field theory and action research (Lewin 1951). Lewin had been strongly influenced by Gestalt psychology during his time in Germany in the 1930s. Having fled from the Nazi regime to the United States as World War II was beginning, Lewin was keen to make a contribution from his background in psychology towards fostering democracy and social justice. Lewin tried to find out in which ways social scientists could contribute to democratic leadership behaviour in groups. Together with his student Ronald Lippitt and others, Lewin ran a two-week training conference for community leaders on race relations in Connecticut in 1946. The story goes that one evening, participants turned up at the researchers' daily debriefing and asked to attend. The meetings in which participants now reflected themselves about their experience of the discussion groups were so fruitful, that they were turned into the institution 'T-group' or 'sensitivity training group', which were widely used in the following years. Lewin drew together his learnings on individuals in groups drawing on basic concepts from physics under the name of Field Theory (Lewin 1951). There, he interpreted human behaviour as the product of a dynamic field of forces that supposedly influenced it. Lewin was one of the founders of the modern discipline of experimental social psychology.

The focus of Lewin's work was always the individual in the group. His students Bradford, Benne and Lippitt founded the National Training Laboratories (now the NTL Institute) to study this issue further. The NTL tradition has always asked research question that look at how the individual can be assisted to act more effectively in a group setting, for example through becoming more aware of group processes, through learning from feedback, through enhancing the interpersonal skills of individuals. NTL works with the observable communication and decision-making processes as they present themselves in the group setting, and does not aim to unravel what is going on at the subconscious level. NTL has developed a linear development model of groups that suggests that all groups move from a focus on inclusion via one on control towards affection. NTL employs group facilitators as role models for 'good' participation and as sources of security/ protection for individual group members. (Holvino 1998:40-41) Lewin's major finding was that changes in individual behaviour were much more likely to occur if the individual had participated in group discussions or had an opportunity for experiential learning than if the individual had only heard a lecture regarding the same topic (Bunker & Alban 1997:14).

In the 1960s however, the enthusiasm for T-group training in organisations had collapsed with many concluding that T-group training had proved ineffective. Consultants were now called in to analyse organisational deficits through survey feedback and to suggest solutions for the problems identified from their analysis. Ron Lippitt, who was making his living from this approach to consulting like others of his time, got fed up with the draining of everybody's

energy that the problem-solving approach seemed to cause. He thought that one reason why problem-solving was so unattractive was that it was past-oriented, trying to fix what had gone wrong in the past. Lippitt therefore got involved in designing methods that allowed people to explore their 'preferred future' instead (Lippitt 1980 and 1983). The enthusiasm and energy he was able to tap into by focusing on the future confirmed his idea. In the 1970s, Lippitt got involved in working with cities in economic difficulties, and together with his colleague Eva Schindler-Rainman, designed a conference model that allowed people from all parts of the community to agree on a 'preferred future' for their city. (Schindler-Rainman & Lippitt 1980). Lippitt's conference model is one of the two direct ancestors of the Future Search Conference.

### *Bion and the Tavistock-Tradition of group dynamics*

Wilfred Bion was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in Great Britain, who began to experiment with group therapy in an attempt to cope with a caseload of returning World War II veterans that he did not have the capacity to treat on an individual basis. He started with the assumption that treating each person in front of the others might be of benefit to the observing ones as well. However, Bion soon became aware that the group itself unfolded dynamics that assisted or sabotaged his ability to carry out his therapeutical work (Bunker & Alban 1997:18).

Bion was one of the founders of the Tavistock Institute in London, which had set itself the aim of making applicable social science knowledge to individual, group, and system issues. Bion was interested to find out, how he could utilise groups to support people in coping with the experience of war and in rebuilding the nation. The focus of the Tavistock tradition has always been the group, and how it consciously and subconsciously influences individuals to change behaviour. The associates of the Tavistock Institute have studied the roles that people take on in groups. They have investigated how the fantasies, needs and attractions people experience when part of a collective. The Tavistock tradition has studied what is going on at the subconscious level in groups, including projections from family constellations etc. (Holvino 1998:40-41).

Bion observed that all groups were potentially prone to becoming dysfunctional by sliding into dependence, fight or flight, and pairing. A group in dependence mode behaves child-like and hands over all responsibility to its leader. The group members have no inclination to learn from or engage with each other, leading to an apathetic, negative tone in the group. In fight-flight mode, the group feels threatened by outside forces and experiences an adrenalin-rush that distracts them from their original task. In pairing mode, the group has retreated to some fantasy land. By neither coming up with a good idea nor with a leader, the group avoids having to confront the inevitable disappointments associated with reality, and remains hopeful.

While these three patterns which he calls basic assumptions are present in all groups, well-managed 'work groups' can either neutralise or utilise these tendencies productively towards achieving a shared task. In what he calls 'basic

assumption groups' however, these social defences interfere with the achievement of the group task and the group gets stuck in reactive, emotional behaviour. Later followers in the Tavistock tradition, Merrelyn Emery and Ronald Purser (1996:130) claim that only a group process that allows full participation in a democratic way (what they call design principle 2) enables groups to creatively use the basic group assumptions towards accomplishing their primary task.

Bion collaborated in his war-time action research with his colleague Eric Trist, also co-founder of the Tavistock Institute. In the 1950s, Trist conducted research in British coal mines together with his younger colleague Fred Emery, and the two of them developed the concept of Socio-Technical Systems. They developed a process designed to achieve best fit of social and technical systems in organisations, that was widely used across Europe from the 1960s onwards. In 1959, the Tavistock Institute received a contract to design a conference for the top management of two aeronautical engineering companies in the UK that had been merged recently. Instead of following the company's leader's request for a top-down conference with invited speakers, Trist and Emery designed the first version of what is today known as the Search Conference, a process that allows active participation of all invitees in the exploration of the system (in this case the company) and its environment (in this case the aeronautics industry and wider global trends of relevance) and produces a strategic action plan about the future. Before returning to his home country Australia in 1969, Fred Emery ran another 11 Search Conferences. Fred Emery and his wife Merrelyn trained many Australians in the Search Conference method, and they estimate that 300-400 applications of the method occurred in Australia in the 1970s alone (Emery & Purser 1996:299). The Search Conference is the prime ancestor of the Future Search Conference.

### *Asch's conditions for effective communication*

The design of the Search Conference has also been guided by Solomon Asch's four conditions for effective communications (Asch 1952): openness, the presence of a shared field, psychological similarity among the participants and mutual trust. The first condition requires that participants freely share their views, information and purposes with each other and do not hold back or manipulate. This requires that all contributions are regarded as equally valid and worthy of further examination. Emery and Purser interpret openness in the wider sense of fairness of procedure when they claim that "*Openness is a condition that creates an equal playing field for all participants.*" (Emery & Purser 1996:136)

Asch's requirement of a shared field points towards the need for participants to shift their awareness from an obsession with their own petty lives towards the larger world that they co-inhabit with their fellow citizens. Once participants have realised that they do live in the same world - after all - they are ready for planning and carrying out collective action.

The third condition for effective communication is that participants recognise their basic psychological similarity. This means that they realise how similar other people's motives and behaviours are to their own, which makes them feel more connected with others. Finally, mainly as a result of the other three conditions, trust grows between participants. Individuals learn to trust their own perceptions and the group learns to trust its members to act in responsible ways. Trust is the core condition that sets free the energy and commitment needed for successful implementation. (Emery & Purser 1996:134-139)

### *The influence of systems thinking*

Fred Emery also studied Ludwig von Bertalanffy's (1950) work on open systems theory in the field of biology and was amongst the first to grasp its revolutionary implications for working with organisations. Systems thinking requires us to conceptualise organisations as open systems operating far from equilibrium. An organisation is an open system characterised by the organising relations between its components and between organisation and environment. Organisations as open systems are thought to have a capacity to self-organise via feedback loops. This implies that the organisation's environment is key to understanding its behaviour and must be included in any analysis and change process. Capra claims that our core task as human race today is to overcome our believes that we are separate from nature and our fellow human beings: *"To regain our full humanity, we have to regain our experience of connectedness with the entire web of life."* (Capra 1996b:29) I claim that this is what Future Search is essentially after.

These implications of open systems theory for working with organisations were developed further and published in the United States by Eric Miller and A.K. Rice as well as by social psychologists David Katz and Robert Kahn (1978). Richard Beckhard developed one of the first conference designs that aimed to get the 'whole system in the room' and therefore recruited participants from all parts of the organisation to the same meeting in order to facilitate a change process (Beckhard and Harris 1967). The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, Ohio, the NTL Institute and the A.K. Rice Institute were amongst the first to develop training programs for consultants on open systems thinking. Further milestones in the seventies were the publication of Beckhard and Harris' (1977) book on complex systems change; Jayarams's (1977) open systems planning model and Barry Oshry's (1996) development of 'The Power Lab', a three-day simulation that assigns participants roles at the top, middle or bottom of a system and allows them to reflect upon the system dynamics in the large group.

### *The design of the Search Conference*

Weisbord's creation of Future Search was informed and inspired by Eva Schindler-Rainman's and Ronald Lippitt's large-scale community futures conferences in North America in the 1970s and by Eric Trist's and Fred Emery's Search Conference model, first used in 1960. Because of the major influence of

the Search Conference in shaping the Future Search design, I will now briefly introduce the Search Conference design.

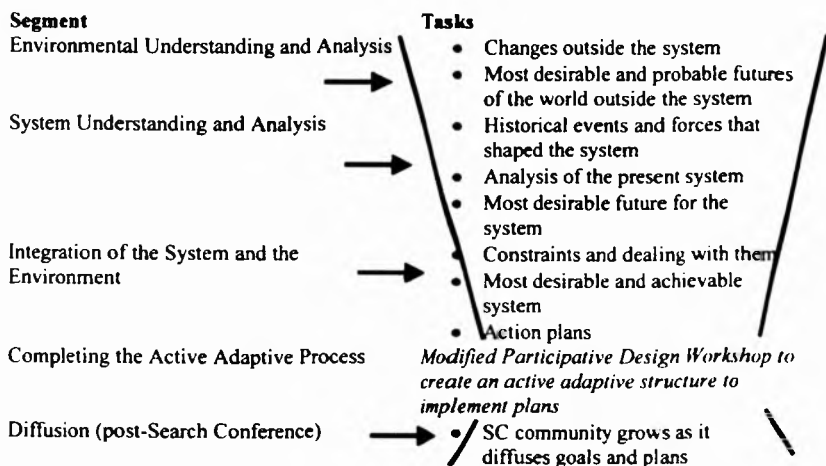
A Search Conference involves 20-35 participants over a period of two consecutive days and nights in creating a vision of a desirable and achievable future as well as action plans for its implementation. The participants are selected on the basis that they are

"-Member of the system

-People responsible and accountable for implementing action plans

-Participants must cover all knowledge needed to develop a systemwide strategic plan" (Holman & Devane 1999:Appendix IV)

A Search Conference moves through the following phases, which may be shuffled around to fit the needs of a particular client:



**Figure 4.2: Search Conference schematic framework (real Search Conferences may vary greatly)**

Source: Emery & Devane 1999

### Key issues in large group dynamics

In the 1980s, Marvin Weisbord drew together the four strands of theory reviewed above in an attempt to spell out the key learnings and implications that should guide the design of large group interventions (Weisbord 1987). Four core issues in large group dynamics have been usefully summarised by Bunker and Alban (1997:201-209):

#### a) The dilemma of voice

Large group meetings are usually too short for everybody to have a say and moreover disadvantage those who feel intimidated when speaking in front of large numbers of people. As a result, the majority usually withdraws into a passive role while a vocal minority leads the discussion on their behalf.

In order to counter these dynamics, the Future Search design uses parallel small groups for the majority of tasks, which feed their results back to the large group. In the small groups, the roles of facilitator, recorder, reporter and timekeeper are rotated for every new assignment in order to spread responsibility evenly. The facilitator is supposed to encourage all small group members to have a say. In the large group sessions, all small groups have an equal voice and sticky dots are used to allow all participants to vote on priorities and to leave a mark on the collectively produced outputs.

b) The dilemma of structure in large groups

Large groups of people can pose a threat when things get out of control and chaos, panic and violence occur. Therefore, many people experience anxiety in the face of large groups. Bunker and Alban have described well the function of structure in reducing anxiety:

*"Structure has the capacity to 'bind' anxiety. It organizes experience and gives it coherence and meaning. Agendas, job descriptions, or organizational charts create a sense, at least symbolically, of order and purpose. The right amount of structure is reassuring and allows people to function in a healthy way."* (Bunker and Alban 1997:204)

The difficulty however is to know which amount of structure is needed – too much structure or too little structure may even increase anxiety. *"So figuring out how much structure is needed is like walking a tightwire – it is possible to fall off on either side"* (Bunker and Alban 1997:205).

The Future Search Conference sets in place a rather rigid structure, which is supposed to draw out participants to undertake personal and collective explorations they may otherwise not feel safe to undertake (Bunker and Alban 1997:206). The Future Search Conference design aims to compensate for the data overload produced in some phases by following these up with well-structured small group tasks (Bunker and Alban 1997:206). The mixed small groups and the fact that participants are never put in the same group with their boss are further factors which are supposed to reduce people's anxiety to engage with unfamiliar tasks and roles (Bunker and Alban 1997:206).

c) The egocentric dilemma

Participants come to a large group meeting with their personal maps of the world, which have been coloured by their position in the organisation or community, by their life experience and a myriad of other factors. This diversity of views is problematic only to the extent that participants insist that their personal view is the only legitimate reference point for acting in the world. The task of a large group meeting must therefore be to acknowledge the existence and legitimacy, but also the limitations of these diverse view points (Bunker and Alban 1997:208). The Future Search Conference asks participants to design ideal future scenarios in small groups of maximum heterogeneity in order to demonstrate to the participants the limitations of

their personal map of the world and the need to widen their perspective to embrace the mental maps of others. This is supposed to allow participants to come to shared views and to get a picture of the community or organisation as a whole.

d) The contagion of affect

Bunker and Alban have characterised the workings of the unconscious affective dimensions in large groups in the following way:

*"The simplest way to say it is that affect, like colds, can be caught. In other words, people begin to experience feelings because they feel them vicariously in others, not because they are all having the same experience. ... The tone or affective center of large groups can be manipulated because affect is contagious"* (Bunker and Alban 1997:208).

They claim that people are particularly prone to catching on to an affect when they lack information to make sense of the situation in a rational way.

This has serious implications for the design of large group interventions: First of all, the large group may be broken up into small groups in order to prevent the spreading of an affect. Secondly, a facilitator must be trained to cope with the intense emotions that may be stirred up by an affect (Bunker and Alban 1997:208). I would like to add to that that responsible facilitation must also prevent that the group is manipulated by use of an affect. Future Search attempts to deal with the dangers posed by the possibility of an affect by conducting much work in small groups and by using professional facilitators.

*The difference between Future Search and Search Conference*

Marvin Weisbord created the Future Search Conference to accommodate these important insights into large group dynamics. Therefore, the Future Search design differs in a number of important aspects from its ancestor, the Search Conference (see table 4.1).



	<b>Search Conference</b>	<b>Future Search Conference</b>
<b>Duration</b>	2,5 days	18 hours over 3 days
<b>Number of participants</b>	35-40	64
<b>Selection of participants</b>	limited to members of the system (those with the power to implement action plans)	broad cross-section of stakeholders from inside and outside the system
<b>Set format</b>	analysing the environment, analysing the system, integrating system and environment, action plans	past, present, future, common ground, action planning
<b>Grouping</b>	most of the work done in the large group	mixture of large and small groups
<b>Methods</b>	emphasis on rational methods	emphasis on evocative methods (e.g. drama)
<b>Handling conflict</b>	'rationalizing conflict', spending time to discuss and clarify	disagreements acknowledged and posted without further discussion
<b>Action planning</b>	one full day spent on action planning	3-4 hours spent on action planning
<b>Long-term aim</b>	democratising the workplace	collaborative action toward a desired future

**Table 4.1: The major differences between Search Conference and Future Search Conference**

Source: my table on the basis of Bunker & Alban 1997:57-60 and Holman & Devane 1999, Appendix IV

### *The origins of Future Search in the private sector – some implications*

It is important to note that the Search Conference design has its origins in the private sector. It seems to me that Search Conferences and Future Search Conferences have been adopted for applications in the public or community sector without sufficient consideration of the differences in context that crucially determine the effectiveness of the method. There are a number of important differences between private and public sector applications of Future Search Conferences, which in my view reduce the effectiveness of the method in community-based settings.

#### a) Getting the whole system in the room

In a corporation, it is still possible to identify and properly represent the 'whole system' in the conference room - from the suppliers along the production chain to the costumers and across the various levels of hierarchies. At the community level however, the boundaries of 'the system' are far less distinct and it seems almost impossible to properly represent the diversity of views across the community. A community-based Future Search Conference will therefore always be prone to attacks that it is not sufficiently 'representative' of the wider community.

b) Decision-making power

While decision-making power within a corporation is firmly within the hands of the top management, it is widely diffused across various layers and institutions of government at the community level. This means that immediate implementation of conference action plans is possible in a corporation – as long as the top management is on board – while it will take a long process of diverse governmental (and non-governmental) actors coordinating their behaviours to trigger change at the community level.

c) Legitimacy of the conference event

Finally, while it is up to a corporation's top management to call meetings as they like and invite whom they choose, calling a meeting on behalf of the wider community takes place within the larger context of representative democracy and its norms. The procedure by which participants to a community-based Future Search Conference are selected – rather than being elected or delegated by their organisations – is potentially at odds with the norms of representative democracy and may lead people to undermine the legitimacy of a Future Search Conference on that count.

#### **4.1.2 The principles of the Future Search Conference**

##### ***Whole system in the room***

A Future Search Conference aims to bring the whole social system into the room. With the recommended number of participants in a Future Search limited to 64 (in a Search Conference 35-40), this necessitates a careful selection of those who will be affected by the outcomes, those who have unusual perspectives on the issue to contribute and those who have the decision-making power to implement the agreed visions. Weisbord and Janoff recommend that the initiating person or group identifies the key eight stakeholder groups that should be invited and then recruits a conference steering group with one influential representative from each of the eight stakeholder groups. This diverse group is asked to oversee the conference planning, to agree on a list of invitees and to mobilise the invitees to attend the three-day conference. Getting the 'right' people to attend is a key issue for the success of the conference and its follow-through action (Weisbord 1996a:13).

In selecting participants, there is a difference in emphasis between Search Conference and Future Search. While the Search Conference insists that all participants must carry some responsibility in the social system that enables them to implement follow-up action plans, Future Search prefers to include as much of the 'whole' system as possible, including some outsiders who might add new perspectives and insights to the insider-system. Emery and Purser (1996:81-82) argue that the presence of outsiders would inhibit open dialogue because *"[f]ew companies are willing to risk exposing strategic information that could make them vulnerable to their competitors. ...The truth is, most organizations are extremely reluctant to share their strategic intentions, hang out their dirty laundry, or discuss proprietary information when customers, suppliers.*

*environmentalists, or government regulators are in the same room.*" This view is significantly different from the philosophy underlying the learning company. Here, even competitors get together for win:win learning, recognising that *"both their interests will be served by increasing the market, bringing in technological advances, establishing joint industry standards, and so on. Rank-Xerox have a slogan 'come and steal shamelessly from us'."* (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 1991:23) Secondly, Emery and Purser (1996:81) claim that the presence of outsiders *"dilutes the discussion: They tend to grow bored and withdrawn, reducing the energy level in the room, or else they raise issues relevant to systems other than the one the conference is supposed to work on, consuming valuable time on matters far from the purpose at hand."* They suggest that if outsider perspectives are desired, they could be gathered during the preparation phase and made available to conference participants. However, there is no reference to empirical research that would back one claim or the other.

### ***Predetermined agenda***

The format of the Future Search Conference is a fixed schedule of pre-determined exercises, all carefully engineered to create conditions for the group to agree on shared visions and commit to action plans. Trained facilitators instruct the group on each of these exercises. The idea is that a tight, non-debatable timetable will provide a secure framework for creative explorations into uncharted territory where vulnerable participants share their dreams and aspirations with each other. Contrary to that, Emery and Purser (199:220) argue that Asch's (1952) condition of openness is undermined when *"small groups are ...preassigned and set to particular tasks with no discussion of group makeup"*. While the Search Conference follows a predetermined agenda of six basic tasks as well, the working structure for each task is not fixed and therefore can be influenced by the participants or the conference manager.

### ***Small group work alternates with large group work***

The seating arrangement features eight round tables spread out throughout the conference room which is without a 'front' or stage. Facilitators are encouraged to position themselves in different corners of the room each time they make an announcement or carry out exercises with the plenary group to enhance this spirit of shared space. Due to the large group size, most of the work in a Future Search Conference is carried out in small groups of eight that report their results to a plenary session. The small groups are either people belonging to the same stakeholder group ('stakeholder groups') or mixtures with just one member of each stakeholder group per table ('mixed groups'). While the stakeholder groups are determined by the steering group, the mixed groups are either determined by lot or are carefully planned to maximize diversity along all lines. The only time that participants work in self-selecting groups is towards the end of the conference when they form action groups. All small group work is self-managed with participants rotating jobs like time-keeping, note-keeping on flipcharts, facilitation and reporting back to the plenary. This is meant to hand

responsibility to the groups and maximise their involvement. Emery and Purser criticise the fact that Future Search draws on the 'stakeholder' terminology. They argue that being labelled as stakeholders would make it difficult for attendees to participate in an individual capacity rather than as representatives of their stakeholder groups (Emery & Purser 1996:220).

#### **4.1.3 The design of the Future Search Conference**

The choreography of the Future Search Conference moves from the past through the present into the future before it returns to the here and now in order to formulate action plans and strategies (figure 4.3).

##### *Clear purpose*

Emery and Purser (1996:136) argue that in order to establish Asch's (1952) conditions for effective communication, any conference event must start with a clear statement of its overall purpose and design, thereby creating a focus throughout the meeting. There is less emphasis on clarifying purpose in a Future Search. Instead, it is regarded as the task of the facilitators to keep the event focused: *"When participants have other agendas, we hear them but don't work with them"* (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:143). In Future Search, a welcome statement by a sponsor is encouraged, who is supposed to talk about *"why the conference matters to them personally and how it could benefit participants"* (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:75). The conference rules are introduced before the conference takes off with a review of the participants' shared past history over the last 3 decades.

##### *The past*

The participants sit in mixed groups after arrival and are given some quiet time for themselves to write down milestones in the development of their personal lives, their community or company and the world at large, before they are asked to get up and write down some of those onto three parallel 'time line' posters in the room. Weisbord and Janoff (1995:75) regard this exercise as an effective way to reinforce the conference rules: *"Within 45 minutes everyone is on their feet writing up their own experiences. We learn very quickly that (a) all views are valued, and (b) everybody owns the markers and flip charts. Moreover, it's okay to get up and move around, and our conference can tolerate a lot of hustle and bustle."* Emery and Purser (1996:220) on the other hand find this procedure *"not conducive to establishing a spirit of openness or community and democratic dialogue right from the start"* because it implies that *"the first thirty to forty-five minutes of the Future Search begin in silence as individuals are absorbed in the task of filling out worksheets, then rewriting their private responses on flip charts for all to see."* Emery and Purser argue that the timeline exercise undermines Asch's (1952) condition of openness instead of establishing it. Again, there is no reference to data to back either view.

## STEPS OF THE FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE

### DAY 1

#### 1. Review the Past

- participants sit in mixed groups and explore milestones of the last three decades in their personal lives, their community or company and the world at large; participants transfer their individual notes onto three huge time-line posters in the room

#### 2. Explore the Present

- participants present to each other in mixed groups a newspaper clipping that represents an important trend that influences their community / company at present
- the large group gathers at one end of the room to record trends affecting the local community or company at present in the form of a mind map

### DAY 2

- continued: trends
- participants gather in their stakeholder groups to explore further trends they consider most important
- participants share and own what they are proud of and sorry about in their own work with the community / company in their stakeholder groups

#### 3. Create Ideal Future Scenarios

- participants form mixed groups to develop concrete images of how they want their community / company to be like in 15-20 years time
- participants identify the barriers they would have to overcome to arrive in the ideal future scenario in the same small groups
- representatives from each scenario group act out their vision in a creative way to the plenary (a play, TV news from the future, poem)

#### 4. Identify Common Ground

- each scenario group works out a shared desirable future, a list of all potential projects they could undertake and a list of unresolved differences
- two scenario groups merge their listings and rearrange them until all members agree on the lists

### DAY 3

- plenary group discussion merges all listings until everyone agrees; contentious items are filed as unresolved differences and not much discussed

#### 5. Make Action Plans

- participants make personal commitments to whatever it is they are ready, willing and able to do now without negotiation or permission from above and report these to their stakeholder groups and / or
- participants form action groups in any way they like to and publicly commit to the follow-up work they want to undertake

**Figure 4.3: The steps of the Future Search Conference (my figure)**

In a next step, the mixed small groups are asked to review the time line and two groups are asked to come up with a 'story' about the history of the people in the room, two tackle the history of the community or company and to address the history of the world at large. Two further groups explore the similarities and differences across all three time lines. After all groups have reported back to the plenary, participants are encouraged to share in the plenary what they have noticed about this exercise. The review of the past is supposed to create Asch's (1952) shared field, i.e. help participants establish that they all live in the same world, and secondly make people aware of their social and psychological similarity, i.e. that they have gone through similar things in their lives (school, marriage, parenting, etc.). Emery and Purser (1996:220) claim that analysing environmental trends, personal history and internal system issues at once is confusing for participants and therefore reduces the chances of establishing a shared field *à la* Asch (1952), but do not give empirical evidence.

### *The present*

Still on the first day of the Future Search Conference, participants reorganise into stakeholder groups to address the present. They present to each other a trend affecting their community or company at present that they spotted in a newspaper clipping, which they had been asked to bring with them to the conference. The large group is then gathered at one end of the room in front of a huge piece of paper in order to identify trends affecting their community or company at present. These trends are written down in the format of a mind map. This is a spider-like diagram, which evolves from the centre and tries to group similar issues next to each other. However, it is the participants alone who decide where their trends should go and how they should be worded. To make sure that all participants understand the issues raised, the speakers are asked to give a concrete example with their trend. Weisbord is used to the fact that often negative trends dominate and that somebody will draw this to the attention of the group (Weisbord 1996b:19).

As a last step for the day all participants have to 'touch' the mind map: they are given seven sticky dots each to mark trends that they consider most important. Each stakeholder group receives dots of one colour, so that it is possible to spot the pet issues of each respective stakeholder group. Emery and Purser (1996:220) have criticised the coloured sticky dots because they seem to reinforce people's otherness as stakeholders instead of fostering the discovery of participants shared humanity and their psychological similarity *à la* Asch (1952).

While Emery and Purser reckon that the anxiety observable in a Future Search Conference at this stage originates from a group operating in Bion's (1961) basic assumption of flight, Weisbord and Janoff welcome some degree of confusion:

*"We want to make it harder for people to hold to the fantasy that 'we' are clear on the situation, and 'they' are confused, or vice versa. The truth is that none of us has the truth. To the extent that we face this fact, we will develop more effective organizations and more liveable communities."*  
(Weisbord & Janoff 1995:85)

Weisbord and Janoff frequently refer to their metaphor of 'seeing the whole elephant', instead of behaving like the three blind men, each of whom is touching a different part of the elephant receiving different impressions of what it is like and insist on their own view. The mind map is supposed to bring all ways of seeing the elephant on to one mind-map, for all to acknowledge and see as their shared reality (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:55).

The group breaks for the night in this state of confusion and returns to have a fresh look at the mind map the next morning. A plenary discussion reviews and comments on the pattern of sticky dots and tries to find shared headings for major groups of trends. Afterwards, participants meet in their stakeholder groups to discuss trends they consider most important and explore those a bit further. The issues are then reported back to the plenary and provide a good overview of the shared concerns across the various stakeholder groups.

### *Owning up*

The stakeholder groups then move on to share with each other their personal contribution to these trends. They give examples of what they have done that they are proud of or sorry about with regards to their company or community. This is a critical moment for participants to own up, to recognise that their personal behaviour matters, to step out of denial and admit frustration. But more than that, the prouds and sorries session is supposed to help them recognise their shared humanity, their vulnerability, the similarity of their ambitions on an emotional level ('others are like me'), thereby establishing one of Asch's (1952) conditions for effective communication. The findings are reported back to the plenary and commented upon briefly by the large group.

### *The future*

The next conference phase features the future. Instead of focusing on solving problems we have created in the past, which Ronald Lippitt had identified as draining energies and depressing people, Future Search looks ahead and excites participants with the possibilities the future holds. Mixed small groups are guided towards dreaming up an ideal future scenario for their community or company 15-30 years from now and to perform that vision in a creative way, i.e. drama, poem, as if it had already happened: *"Creative presentations deeply anchor our hopes and dreams in our bodies and psyches"* (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:90). This gives birth to the creative tension between current reality as explored in the mind-map exercise and the desired future vision, that will help participants carry through action towards realising it. Weisbord claims: *"The collective subconscious is mobilised"* (Weisbord 1996b:22, my translation). The groups are also asked to address obstacles that they would have needed to

overcome on the way towards turning their vision into reality. While all groups act out their visions to each other, the observing groups are asked to keep track of common themes and of innovations that they find particularly appealing.

### *Finding common ground*

Before the second conference day comes to a close, the group tackles the major task of identifying the common ground out of all the future scenarios. This is conducted in three steps. First, each of the mixed groups that just collaborated in presenting their vision is asked to compile lists of (i) the common future, (ii) potential projects and (iii) unresolved differences from what they have observed. In a second step, two neighbouring groups merge and compare their lists, rearranging items until they agree. Weisbord and Janoff recommend that the conference then breaks for the day, allowing time for all the new learning and experiences to sink in over night. Next morning, when participants are refreshed and can concentrate better, the large group gathers at one end of the room to merge the results from the four working groups into one group that all agree with. Whenever a quick exploration of an item leads to no agreement, it is placed on the list of unresolved differences. Weisbord and Janoff (1995:95) discourage exploring divisions or concerns, *"except to understand the issue. Unresolved differences at this point require much more work than we have time for."* Emery and Purser strongly criticise what they consider an 'avoidance of conflict':

*"In our view, discouraging conferees from working their differences prevents them from clearly identifying their areas of agreement. (...) The Future Search builds in procedures designed to promote the avoidance of conflict by shortening the discussion of individual items.(...) Thus the apparent common ground that emerges includes an undifferentiated and unexamined array of data. Discussion flows smoothly over areas of potential disagreement, but the disagreements are still there, and are apt to resurface when the group gets to the action planning phase of the conference."* (Emery & Purser 1996:218-219).

Emery and Purser also believe that the collective upholding of the illusion of a consensus inhibits those who disagree with the majority view to speak out (1996:219). Emery and Purser (1996:92) perceive the danger that the common ground might end up being no more than *"mother and apple pie statements - that nobody would have a problem agreeing with, and nobody could picture bringing into being."* Again, this needs backing with empirical evidence. Weisbord and Janoff (1995:96) defend their method by saying *"We are not advocating burying conflict or denying the need to keep working out our differences."* They argue that exploring unresolved differences and acting on the common ground are both huge tasks, but *"[t]here is not time to do both."* (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:96) They thereby artificially construct a dichotomy to justify their preference not to explore unresolved differences much. Emery and Purser (1996:93) emphasise:



*"The truth is that the task of producing a desirable future is hard work that requires hammering out agreements with people around strategies for action-based change."*

### **Forming action groups**

In a final and most important step, self-selecting action groups are asked to take on responsibility for some concrete action that they are willing to contribute towards the common ground vision. The Future Search Conference leaves it to the very last minute to plan action, because starting with this step too early could imply running into participants resistances and getting lost in details before the overall direction is clear (zur Bonsen 1996:4). While the Future Search Conference spends no more than three to four hours on action planning, the Search Conference spends one full day on preparing actions. Participants in a Future Search are asked to initiate action groups by shouting out a theme in the plenary. The groups then retreat to different corners of the room to develop goals, decide on next steps, decide who else to involve, make a timetable and divide up the work. Each group then makes a public commitment in front of the large group what it is they are intending to do. It is also recommended that a concluding plenary sets in place some follow-up structures, like a review day in 6 months time or a new steering group. But essentially it is up to the participants in terms of what they are willing to commit to. The conference concludes with a last word from the sponsor and single worded comments from participants about how they feel at that moment in time.

#### **4.1.4 Contested issues in the Future Search design**

##### ***Emotional roller-coaster***

A rather significant difference between Search Conference and Future Search lies in the role attributed to emotions. Emery and Purser (1996:217) regard anxiety and tension as avoidable by-products of conference design. Emery and Purser (1996:216) quote Bailey and Dupres (1992:513) who argue that the Future Search "*process is calculated to throw participants into a form of chaos through data overload.*" Emery and Purser (1996:215) accuse Future Search of a psychotherapeutic view of humanity (1996:215) and claim that

*"We view participants in the Search Conference as our fellow citizens, not as our clients, and we believe that the absence of anxiety and tension from the Search Conference environment establishes the soundness of our basic assumptions about human capacity"* (Emery & Purser 1996:217)

Weisbord and Janoff on the other hand believe that "*[t]he passage to renewal leads from denial through confusion. We can't get there by any other route*" (1995:64). They refer to Claes Janssen's (1982) '4-room-apartment' as a metaphor for the emotional dynamics of Future Search. Weisbord and Janoff believe that Future Search must move participants out of their 'contentment' with the status quo. The Future Search design aims to keep participants in the room of confusion roughly half the conference. Future Search beliefs in sticking with uncertainty and uncomfortable emotions, until they self-organise into renewal.

### ***Mixed mode between democratic and hierarchical?***

Emery and Purser consider the overall design of the Future Search Conference as misconceived because they believe it operates in a 'mixed mode' between a democratic design principle and a bureaucratic, hierarchical one. While Bunker and Alban (1992) argue that there are degrees of participation and that the large group intervention methods can be attributed to different levels on a continuum of participation, Emery and Purser argue that *"people either have responsibility for the control and coordination of their own affairs or they do not. If they do not, then someone else does."* (1996:112). For them, there are only two modes of operation - democratic and bureaucratic - and they are considered mutually exclusive. Mixing the modes is to them cheating on the democratic design principle and they expect dysfunctional group dynamics (i.e. basic assumptions) as a result. While Emery and Purser admit that a conference design in mixed mode might have therapeutic value, they doubt it will deliver tangible outcomes. A typical indication of a group operating under mixed mode conditions is when the design *"appears to allow them to participate, but leaves them unclear about just exactly what they are participating in. In other words, it is a work group without a well-defined task"* (1996:134, emphasis in original).

#### ***4.1.5 The promise of Future Search conferencing***

According to Sandra Janoff and Marvin Weisbord (1996:73), Future Search Conferences allow the participants

- To take back responsibility for themselves
- To discover that they can learn from each other
- To accept their differences as a fact of life to be lived with
- To discover resources in themselves and others that they didn't know about
- To enter into new relationships
- To conceive surprising new projects as possible.

Matthias zur Bonsen (1995) adds to that the following expected outcomes of Future Search Conferences:

- shared objectives and measures,
- innovations,
- refuelled energies,
- a change in organisational / community culture,
- a consciousness of underlying value commitments,
- a reduction of prejudices and fear,
- improved capacity for empathy and
- a sense of community.

Weisbord and Janoff (1996:83) make four claims about the superiority of Future Search Conferences as opposed to other conference designs, but immediately admit that these claims have not yet been tested against research evidence:

*"We believe that conferences designed on the principles we have adopted (compared to conferences that omit them) lead to*

- *more participants taking responsibility,*
- *faster implementation of action plans, and*
- *longer-lasting relationships across key boundaries.*

*For now this remains an hypothesis – an unproved theory. The only way to test it is to find out what participants do afterwards that they couldn't do before. To date, our evidence is largely anecdotal. Still, good stories abound, enough to keep us going on this path".*

#### **4.1.6 Conclusions**

It does follow from the review of the literature on Future Search, that there is a real need for some empirical evidence on how participants experience each of the steps. While Weisbord and Janoff have many years of practical experience of working with participants and receiving feedback, there does seem to be a lack of systematic studies and documentation of empirical evidence that might support their claims or those made by Emery and Purser about the Future Search Conference design. In a book review of Marvin Weisbord's 1992 publication about Future Search Conferences, Clark (1994:224) remarks: *"There is still a need for more monitoring and evaluation studies of the short, medium and long term outcomes of search conferences. Visions, strategies and assertions require backing by evidence."* My aim is to make an active contribution to that end. I will address each of the contested points and criticisms raised by Emery and Purser in my discussion of the findings of both case studies in chapter 6 and in particular put to the test Weisbord and Janoff's (1996:83) belief that *"these meetings are good for us and good for society."*

#### **4.2 Pilot phase**

The starting point for me was a research project on Future Search applications in the public sector in the UK which I conducted for the New Economics Foundation (NEF)/ London in August and September 1996. In the UK, the first public sector applications of Future Search Conferences took place in 1995, along with the first UK training for conference facilitators led by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff. In this first nation-wide survey of UK Future Search applications I included completed conferences in Gloucestershire County (July 1996), the town of Grangemouth (August 1996), the town of Hitchin (June 1995), the city of Sheffield (March 1996) and the London Borough of Sutton (autumn 1995). Moreover, it covered conferences in the planning stage in the town of Forres, Gloucestershire county, the town of Wednesbury and in Nottinghamshire County. Three of those conferences were part of a larger process around Local Agenda 21.

I compiled a report for the Future Search Practitioner's Day in Bristol on September 7th, 1996, major parts of which I shall reproduce in the following paragraphs. The report was based on semi-structured telephone interviews with

a small number of practitioners. The interviewees I am indebted to are: Mary Anderson from CAG Consultants, Julie Beedon from Vista Consultants, Chris Blanterm from "Re-View" & "The Learning Company Service", John Colvin and Christina McDonagh from Sustainable Futures, Graham Dean, LA21 Coordinator for the London Borough of Sutton, and Ian Griffith from Open Futures. The interviewees were selected out of those who registered for the Future Search Practitioners' Day on 7 September 1996 with Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff in Bristol on the basis of having completed or planned a Future Search Conference in the UK. Graham Dean was interviewed to provide information on a Future Search that had been facilitated by Perry Walker (NEF) and Jeff Bishop (BDOR) in Sutton. The interviewees were picked following recommendations by NEF's Perry Walker who had heard about their activities. The idea was not to pick a representative sample but rather to conduct a small number of in-depth interviews that would facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns that rise from conducting Future Searches.

Further information was drawn from my attendance at a three hour workshop with 15 officers from Hertfordshire District and County Councils held on 28 August 1996 in Hertford to provide feedback from the officers about materials produced by NEF on visioning. Finally, a letter from Sue Chapman, Jane Hera and Andy Langford about their experiences with Future Search since their training last year provided further valuable material. The one day workshop will be abbreviated as HE and the letter will be referred to as DE in the following text.

The information I asked for turned out to be sensitive for two reasons. First, most interviewees earn their living by selling their visioning expertise to local authorities. There was some sensitivity about honestly sharing experiences in a potentially competitive market. Moreover, it was important to the consultants to see the information they provided associated with their consultancy's name in this report. I have decided to do this indirectly by referencing each case by the name of its locality. However, most consultants stressed they wanted to support each other and work together, as they perceived that there was enough work for all. Secondly, consultants were concerned about the confidentiality of their clients - especially in cases where contracts were not finalised yet. In some localities, the political climate around visioning experiments is very explosive, so that locals are afraid that an external investigation will put oil in the fire and narrow their chances of hosting future visioning events. Therefore, I did not include the names of the localities or organisations where visioning contracts are not yet finalised. For the same reason, I confirmed with each interviewee that the information provided by them could be included in this report. Moreover, the report was presented to the Practitioners' Day first and reworked slightly afterwards.

#### **4.2.1 The cases**

Future Search Conferences with communities in the UK that the interviewees knew of have been completed in

- Gloucestershire (part I, July 1996) - GL
- Grangemouth (August 1996) - GR
- Hitchin (June 1995) -HI
- Sheffield (March 1996) - SH
- Sutton (autumn 1995) - SU.

Future Search Conferences for communities in the UK that the interviewees knew of have entered the planning stage in

- Forres - FO
- Gloucestershire (part II, III)
- Wednesbury - WE
- Nottingham.

The cases will be referred to by the given abbreviations.

#### **4.2.2 Initiating / Marketing**

- It seems that more than half the Future Search Conferences (FSC) take off by consultants approaching potential clients. This happened by random meetings at conferences (FO), by approaching a local authority that seemed prone to visioning (SU, HI, one more confidential case), by the consultants using their personal contacts in the locality they live in (GL, WE). A growing proportion of FSC are set up by local authority officers who have heard about successful Future Search Conferences from the available literature, periodicals or word of mouth (GR, SH and a couple of one-day Mini-Search events).

- All interviewees stressed how important it is to allow local support for the FSC to grow in its own time which can be a lot longer than most consultants and local councillors like. Trying to push a FSC on its way in less than 6 months can mean inbuilt failure (SH, FO, WE, HI). The planning times available to organisers ranged from 2-3 months (HI, SU) via 5-6 months (WE,GR,GL) to 7-8 months (SH,FO).The two cases with extremely short planning times were confronted with big recruitment difficulties (HI,SU), while longer planning times allowed for proper public meetings and wider recruitment (FO,GR,GL).

- One interviewee has devised little exercises to allow people to actually experience certain principles of FS at public open forum meetings. Theorising doesn't usually convince people who are sceptical (FO).

- There seems to be a danger in people pushing for a Future Search Conference in their locality when they are not firmly rooted and respected in the local community. There was one case where a newcomer to the area was discredited in a local media campaign and even lost her lease due to the strong political debate around the idea of hosting a Future Search Conference. The solution for this locality was to wait for a non-threatening local organisation to take over the idea, which eventually happened (FO).

### **4.2.3 Success factors**

Main obstacles in building local support were

- local power brokers afraid of change (FO)
- apathy in the community ("nothing will make a difference") (WE, GR) and lack of enthusiastic people to organise a FSC (SH)
- community council uneasy about the initiative (FO, GR)
- getting financial support for the FSC (GL)
- changing officers (GL) or councillors (HI) lead to discontinuity
- tight time frame determined by local authority (HI, SU)
- negative attitude towards involving non-professionals in consultation (SH)

The main success factors in securing local support were

- the topic for the FSC was bursting for attention (FO) or already high on the public agenda and highly controversial (GL)
- an influential person committed to the success of the FSC (for career advancement, after leaving a highly influential job, to create a beneficial result) (WE, SH, GR)
- a trusting relationship of the initiators with the local authority due to long standing co-operation on LA21 (GL)
- access to groups and networks via LA21 Forum to promote the FSC (GL, SU)
- a larger local group with training in FSC that put their spare time together to make it happen (GL)
- local authority officers were dissatisfied with traditional technical methods of planning (HI)
- FSC was replacing conventional planning process with public participation and therefore causing no extra effort (HI)
- local political parties in favour of community governance and open to experiments in public participation (HI, SU)

### **4.2.4 Planning**

• It was felt that the acceptance of the emerging visions in the wider community and the long term support for the outcomes significantly depends on the extent of public participation prior to the FSC. People will be more likely to commit to actions if they feel they own the process and have been working towards new actions and new links. It was regarded as highly beneficial to embed the conference into a number of larger public meetings, one-day visioning events or to host focus group discussions with a variety of stakeholder groups.

• In Gloucestershire and Sutton, the FSC was embedded in a number of public meetings and conferences around Local Agenda 21, that had been going on for some time. In Forres, three public meetings were held specifically to prepare the FSC of which two were attended by 80 participants. In Grangemouth, there had been ongoing community area forum meetings and four

additional public meetings were attended by about 25 people each in the leading up to the FSC. In both cases, self-management skills and momentum were built up for the FSC. In four cases, no use was made (SH) or could be made (HI,FO,WE) of existing groups and forums.

- It was considered important to have someone "unthreatening" chairing the steering group as to be able to build wider support for the event (FO).
- If a core group of initiating people is too obsessed with having a FSC their way, this can lead to conflicts and splits in a larger steering group of new people with different ideas (SH).
- Communication between consultants and local organisers can be impaired by long travel distances and lead to unwanted design changes (FO).

#### **4.2.5 Funding**

- In three of the cases all (HI,SU,GR) and in one case part (GL) of the finance for the FSC came from local authorities, while the others were co-sponsored by business (SH, GL, WE, outcomes only in FO), the Department of the Environment (GL), a TEC (SH) and community organisations (WE, FO). In three of the cases the costs were lowered by the consultants volunteering (FO,WE,SH). One innovative idea to save money was to have a steering group member volunteering to do all the recording work (GL).

- Total cash needed to run a FSC ranged from £2,500 with consultants volunteering for two conferences that are in the planning stage (WE, FO) to £40,000 including a full evaluation of the entire process by the consultants (HI). In those cases where consultants' fees were charged they ranged from £3000 - £25,000, depending on the tasks required (preparation, facilitation, documentation, evaluation, follow-up support).

- A FSC raises expectations that the local authority or business should provide funds for follow-up action (HI).

#### **4.2.6 Recruiting stakeholders**

- Steering groups tended to be most capable of recruiting a wide range of community representatives if they were composed of active people from a wide range of stakeholder groups (FO, WE), following the recommendation about involving those with power, those with knowledge and local residents (GL). Representative recruitment failed and led to open invitation in one case, where consultants had to do all the planning by themselves due to a restricted planning time (HI). The open invitation led to a domination of white, middle aged, middle class people, who came to push their own agendas. However, consultants tried to balance this by hosting focus group discussions with other stakeholder groups afterwards. In another case, the consultants were supported by two local organisers, and were also unable to recruit certain stakeholder groups for the FSC (SU). Another extreme was a case with a steering group dominated by professionals that insisted on inviting only other professionals to their FSC. However, even this group made sure that representatives of all stakeholder groups they were interested in were represented in their steering group. (SH)

- The method of selecting the stakeholders was in most cases a brainstorming session of the steering group, followed by a first invitation to those people being sent out (GL,SU,SH,FO). In one case, the stakeholder groups and possible representatives were discussed at public open forum meetings (GR) which seemed to work well. In another case, the consultants were charged with the task of recruiting and identifying the stakeholders, including only brief consultations with locals (HI). In one case there were complaints by local people who wanted to participate but were not allowed to. They challenged the recruiting method as non-representative and biased, but could not do anything about it. In the same case, the steering group had been split over who the stakeholders should be and one side's suggestions had been left out (SH).

- It proved necessary to line up carefully selected substitutes for drop-outs before or during the weekend in order to assure proper representation of women, ethnic minorities etc. (SU) Numbers of participants dropped slightly under 60 people in most cases (GL,SU,SH) and in one case down to 43 (GR). In one case, the entire stakeholder group of business people did not turn up (GR) and in another case, an open invitation was sent out because stakeholder group specific people could not be recruited in sufficient numbers (HI). Not everybody attended the FSC until the end (GR).

#### **4.2.7 Design changes**

- Local authorities seem to be hard to persuade to hold three-day visioning events. According to the consultants, shorter sessions (one-day events) are selling much better to them. Several consultants argued that it is better for those sceptical local authorities to get a taste of what visioning has to offer in a one-day event than never getting anything off the ground: *"just offering Future Search as a three day event is not going to attract many opportunities for the methodology to be utilised; at least not at this stage of its introduction."* We try to get *"people to appreciate an alternative approach to thinking and working"* and maybe then *"they will be inclined to give it more time"* (DE, SH). However, the general interest in large group intervention and whole systems approaches is growing rapidly (SH).

- In two cases, the participants were not regarded as sufficient sources of information. Therefore, participants were given the results of a questionnaire and focus group meetings in one case and asked to rank their prouds and sorries from those given (SU) and a number of fact sheets about the locality in another case.

- In one case, an introductory speech of the council leader could not be avoided (GR), but was considered a patronizing gesture by the consultants.

- In one case, the small group sessions were facilitated by trained local authority officers to allow them to gain experience in facilitation. The quality of the facilitation varied a lot, so it was concluded that self-managed groups were preferable. In the same case, facilitators instead of participants summarised discussions over night and suggested a list of actions from that summary.



It was felt that this led to the participants not sufficiently owning the results of the FSC (HI).

- In one case, more stages were added to the action planning session in order to identify obstacles and ways to overcome them (SU).
- In one case, a prouds and sorries session turned into a session where people said what they liked or disliked about their locality rather than them taking responsibility for mistakes or successes. The reason for this was seen in the fact that too few people with real decision making power were present. (HI)
- Report back sessions from small groups to the plenary were experienced as too long by the participants; there was a need identified to look for alternatives. (HI)

#### **4.2.8 Results**

- The most important and reliable result was considered a changed consciousness of the participants, while real long term involvement in the action is harder to achieve and requires more ideas about follow-through support by consultants (GL).

#### **4.2.9 Follow-up**

- Most FSC set up an ongoing forum to co-ordinate the action that was triggered off at the conference (HI,GR) or existing structures will be used to carry on the work (SU,GL).
- Most FSC set up a review day to monitor their progress since the conference. The review day took place between 3 (HI) and 6 (GL, GR) months after the FSC.
- In one case consultants were paid to support the action groups with skills training during a 6-month period after the conference (GL).
- In two cases, reports were planned to monitor and review progress since the FSC (SU,HI), one of which was to be written by the consultants (HI).
- Funds for follow-up action were provided by the council in one case (GR) and by industry in another (FO).
- In one case, there was no mechanism for review set up at all (SH).

### **4.3 Further information about Future Search Conferences gathered since the survey**

Over the years of working on this book I have regularly attended the annual meetings of the Future Search facilitators in the UK and in Germany. At these meetings, I took detailed notes, contributed my own learning and received feedback on my work. I learned about the specific problems and successes of Future Search Conferences elsewhere, and had access to unpublished reports about many conferences. I have also benefited from direct correspondence with Sandra Janoff, Marvin Weisbord and fellow Canadian PhD-student Michael Polanyi, from studying the recent issues of the newsletter of the Future Search Network 'FutureSearching', from carefully skimming the conference reports posted at the Future Search Network's members' section and from following

some of the debates in the U.S., the German and lately the UK listserve. A general phenomenon which reflects the maturing of Future Search applications in the U.S. and the U.K. is that over the years the emphasis of conversations shifted from an early obsession with logistics and planning via the question of how to support follow-up work towards the issue of evaluation, which is still considered 'hot' at the time of completing this book. Also, discussions amongst Future Search practitioners widened to embrace other large group interventions or series of large group interventions within which Future Search would just be one part.

#### ***4.3.1 Building pre-conference support***

There are two well-documented examples of pre-conference work to involve more people than would be able to attend the conference. In Nottinghamshire, Future Search Conferences were used as part of an on-going Council effort to form around 25 Local Area Forums across the county which would bring all local stakeholders of an area together, allow them to identify priority issues for their area, agree on an agenda for action and to plan further outreach to involve more local people. In order to build wide support for the 'visioning conferences' as they were called, the County ran focus groups, mini-visioning conferences and hosted other community events or conducted surveys. While the focus groups and mini-visioning conferences targeted specific groups that would be unable to attend the Future Search Conference and aimed to involve them in ways more appropriate to them (i.e. the elderly, traders, young people), the purpose of community events or surveys (with prize draw and other creative ideas) was to stir up debate about the good and bad things in the local area amongst the wider local population. Nottinghamshire County Council also built pre-conference support for its Future Search events by approaching many organisations – particularly businesses – with requests for sponsorship. Sponsorship was used to pay for everything from conference venue and catering to T-shirts and videos. Finally, Nottinghamshire County Council worked hard to secure good media coverage and to get media collaboration in spreading community questionnaires in order to raise the interest of local people prior to the event. Examples of successful Future Search Conferences in Nottinghamshire County were reported from Hucknall, West Bridgford, Kirkby, Newark, Sutton and Netherfield (S. Jones 1998:2-9).

In Gloucestershire County, earlier visioning exercises hosted in the framework of Gloucestershire's Local Agenda 21 initiative called 'Vision 21' had identified three priority areas requiring further work: housing, the regional economy and transport. The consultancy Sustainable Futures suggested a Future Search Conference on each of the topics and aimed to recruit the specific regional stakeholders to each issue. In order to build widespread support for the Future Search Conference on the regional economy prior to the conference, the consultants hosted a series of approximately eight briefings, each of which was targeted at one of the Future Search Conference's stakeholder groups and was open to anyone from that sector of the community. Each briefing lasted 1.5-3

hours and combined presentations about the planned conference with participative elements (for example creating a mind map of trends). There was a plan to gather the same stakeholder groups 8-9 months later to report back to them from the conference and to allow for rapid learning (Spencer, Porter & Colvin 1996:11).

#### **4.3.2 Getting the right people in the room**

The subject of getting the right people in the room so that the whole system is at least roughly represented continues to trouble conference organisers. The main obstacle appears to be that those at the margins of a system do not feel inclined to make such a massive time commitment to attend a Future Search Conference. In Julie Whittaker's report about Devon County Council's Future Search Conference on community development issues, her brief evaluation of the conference highlights the danger that such conferences might only gather the already converted and therefore fails to achieve breakthroughs.

*"The people who attended the conference were those who were favourably disposed towards community regeneration groups, while the people and organisations who were less 'on board' with this form of development, but nonetheless were important actors, declined the invitation. ...In the case of this conference there was limited diversity and as a result fewer major breakthroughs"* (Whittaker 1998:23).

As getting the right people in the room has been recognised as such an important issue, employing staff to assist with the recruiting has been recommended by some (Hessler 1997: 1).

#### **4.3.3 Design innovations**

Despite Weisbord and Janoff's advice to facilitators to stick exactly to the book, Future Search Conference facilitators keep innovating. I have summarised innovations suggested by Nottinghamshire's Samantha Jones (1998), by CAG's Lesley Williams (1997) and by participants at practitioner days in table 4.2. It is striking that all conference facilitators seemed least happy with the design of the common ground phase and often replaced it by other methods.

#### **4.3.4 Outcomes**

The immediate outcomes of Future Search Conferences have been documented by a number of conference reports. Besides the usual formation of action groups in the last phase of the conference, Vicki Van Zee (1995) and Julie Whittaker (1998) report the following outcomes, which are often considered as 'intangibles':

- energy generated
- commitment expressed
- participants learned very much from each other
- discovery of shared concerns and communality amongst participants
- strong sense of community
- network building

- optimism
- confidence that their own work is valued
- common goals and the beginning of a long-term dialogue.

The Conference Phases	Suggested Changes
The Ground Rules	-replace 4 rooms by roller coaster (Jones 1998)
Object Icebreaker	
Timelines	-encourage participants to bring or select an object that is somehow related to their personal history; have participants tell each their story around this object (German Future Search practitioner day November 1998)
Mind Map	-name collecting (Jones 1998) -use stakeholder symbols to vote (1998) -extract those trends which could be reality within three years (German Future Search practitioner day November 1998)
Stakeholder Trends	
Prouds and Sorries	-support to promote non-blaming (Jones 1998, Williams 1997)
Ideal Future Plan	-clear separation between a 'contents' phase and a 'style of presentation' phase (Williams 1997)
Creative Presentation	-more technical support (Jones 1998)
Group Common Ground	
Creating a Common List	-replaced by quicker methods like bingo, traffic lights, cards/dots (Jones 1998) -more support like theming and ranking by facilitators over night to be reviewed by the group next morning (Jones 1998) -facilitators prepare over night programmatic sentences as suggestions for common ground statements which form the basis of the common ground discussion next morning (Future Search in Penn State Geisinger Health System 1997)
Stakeholder Action Planning	-sometimes replaced by theme groups (Jones 1998) -use Open Space Technology to form action groups (Williams 1997)
Stake in the Ground	-replaced by user friendly method, i.e. pledges (Jones 1998)

**Table 4.2 : Design changes in Future Search Conferences**

Source: my table

#### **4.3.5 Follow-up support**

An issue of real concern however is the conference follow-through. From discussions at practitioner days, it emerged that only those conferences tended to be successful in delivering elements of the conference vision, that managed to turn into an on-going process which provided regular support and renewed the momentum from time to time with reunions and new conferences. A cover article in the Future Search Network's newsletter 'FutureSearching' in summer 1999 suggested that the participants needed support that would *"help people observe the results of their actions, reflect on those results, and create a new round of plans"* (Lent 1999:2), so that they could continually move through new

cycles of learning and change. The author Nick Lent acknowledges the strong forces that get in the way of implementing the action plans

*"when the 'system pushes back' in the weeks that follow the original change effort. No matter how strong the commitment to change, individuals and teams would find their best intentions overcome, and then fall subject to the pattern of denials and avoidance described by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon as organizational defense [sic] routines."* (Lent 1999:2)

Lent himself has tried three things to support the follow-up in two private sector Future Search Conferences held in manufacturing settings. First of all,

*"we asked them all to consider whatever happened in the weeks ahead to be information on how change happens in this- [sic] organization. ... This was direct acknowledgement that some plans would be overcome when the system pushed back, and that this was OK as long as they reported what happened and didn't succumb to the cover-up symptomatic of organizational defense [sic] routines."* (Lent 1999:3)

Secondly, the consultants offered their support to all action teams and met with each of the teams in the first weeks that followed the Future Search. Finally, the consultants hosted a reunion of conference participants only 5-10 weeks after the initial conference to allow participants to share their learning and refocus their energies. This second conference lasted only five hours and ended with new rounds of action planning. Lent also suggests that such an event could be a hand-over point where the consultants transfer their role to the steering group, which is from then on in charge of reconvening the participants and offering support to the action groups. From Lent's experience, the steering group usually suffers from an ill-defined role directly after the original Future Search Conference and usually lacks authority to take on such a leadership role when the 'system pushes back' (Lent 1999:5)

#### **4.3.6 Ripples from Future Search Conferences**

There is no established methodology for tracing the so-called ripple effects of Future Search Conferences. As the Future Search philosophy rejects the supremacy of experts and academic knowledge, Weisbord and Janoff have not specifically encouraged academic research and keep encouraging people to find multiple ways of increasing the pool of knowledge about Future Search conferencing, including anecdotal evidence. In 1998, Janoff and Weisbord launched a collective research efforts to build a database of Future Search Conferences and in particular to trace the ripples of Future Search Conferences. The aim of the project is to produce a book written by Janoff and Weisbord on the basis of the research evidence collected by themselves and others around the world. While I still believe that this effort is worthwhile, I have found myself on a different mission than Weisbord and Janoff in that my purpose has never been "[m]otivating people around the globe to use future search" (Janoff & Weisbord 1999/2000:1) as those who are part of Janoff and Weisbord's Ripple Project subscribe to. There are a number of difficulties particular to the evaluation of transformational processes, a few of which have been discussed by

researchers participating in the Ripples project. Larry Peters, who facilitated a Future Search for Whole Foods Market suggested in his paper in the Ripples library that it might be rather difficult *“to find a ripple in the midst of a rapid”* in an organisation that continually transforms itself – drawing on additional elements considered much more radical than Future Search (Reed 1997:1).

The only academic evaluation of a Future Search Conference I have come across is a health issue-based conference in the province of Ontario in Canada, where ripples were traced up to eight months after the conference. PhD-student Michael Polanyi facilitated and systematically evaluated a Future Search Conference held in Ontario on the contested issue of work-related repetitive strain injuries to stimulate action by involving those with a stake in that issue. For Polanyi, the conference method itself was part of an action research approach, the data from which was qualitatively analysed to form the foundation of his thesis. Polanyi also critically assessed the Future Search Conference method and its capacity for bringing about resolution of ‘wicked issues’. Polanyi video- or audio-taped pre- and post-conference meetings and certain conference sessions. Moreover, he conducted follow-up interviews and focus groups with conference participants. Conference flip chart data was analysed to explore the way that participants reframed the issue and dealt with their differences during the course of the process (Polanyi, personal communication 2000). Polanyi’s findings were not available at the time of completing my research, but have been published in the meantime (Polanyi 2002).

One of the rare examples of a community-based Future Search Conference where some of the long-term ripples have been published by the key organiser and conference facilitator Richard Aronson (Aronson 1999:1,6-8) is the series of three Future Search Conferences run in Milwaukee, Wisconsin / U.S.A. in order to improve the health of children and families in Milwaukee in order to reduce infant mortality. Drawing on interviews with four participants in the process, Aronson points to the following ripple effects:

- the initial Future Search Conference was followed by two further ones
- one participant reported that she felt so much more powerful and confident now that she knew she was not alone in her efforts
- one mother has taken on a series of leadership positions since the first Future Search and through that made the voice of families more heard
- “There is a core group of people who have nurtured the process and each other, and have kept the children and their families at the focus point in order to work though [sic] enormous system barriers.” (participant quoted by Aronson 1999:7)
- spirit of collaboration emerged
- new channels of communication opened up between people
- a participant learned to be more sensitive to the strong feelings the minority population holds with regards to its living environment
- unlikely partnerships evolved
- a new research paradigm is now pursued by the largest health maintenance organisation in Wisconsin, which is community-driven

and involves local people as stakeholders in the design and implementation of the study, and focuses on the positive rather than on the negative aspects, this approach has found funders

- Common Ground allows everyone a say without risking criticism or ridicule
- Data for 1997 showed a significant drop in African-American infant mortality
- (Aronson 1999:8).

Aronson's account nevertheless points to a number of problems encountered. One of the unresolved issues the process encountered is of particular relevance to the theoretical embedding of my research:

*"Some of the original members decided not to continue participating, feeling that certain longstanding issues – such as the inherent imbalance between large institutions and small, minority-run community organizations – required a different forum in which to address matters of race and power." (Aronson 1999:8)*

Aronson's last point is not to be underestimated in its significance as it points to the larger issue of power. His observation seems to suggest that there is empirical evidence that small minority-run community organisations object to the obscuring of power relations as the Foucauldian critique (Richardson 1996) of collaborative planning theory and its practices suggested.

#### **4.3.7 Political culture**

A major barrier to successful follow-through of community-based Future Search Conferences, raised again and again at practitioners' days, in the listserve discussions and at academic conferences is the often difficult relationship between the institutions of representative democracy and its servants (councillors, officers) on the one hand and the Future Search Conference with its ethos of participatory democracy on the other. The members of government find themselves torn between their 'old' role as experts and leaders of the community and the new expectations of them as conveners and enablers of the community as raised in Future Search Conferences.

The consultants Maurice Dubras and Ivar K. Brokhaug reported from their efforts to get a community-based Future Search Conference off the ground on the isle of Jersey, one of the Channel Islands between Britain and France. They account their failure to win sufficient support for the Future Search Conference to a 'cultural gap' between the expert-driven culture on the island and the democratic principles of the Future Search method, namely that *"all 'parties' or constituencies contribute and cooperate in searching for a preferred future, and then share responsibility for creating it"* (Dubras & Brokhaug 1992:369). The authors conclude that *"[t]his concept was unfamiliar to the power structure of Jersey. It represents a cultural gap in understanding that the consultants so far have not succeeded in bridging. In retrospect it appears that people found they could not relate to the concept – how it would work"* (Dubras & Brokhaug 1987:369).

Tom Behr, a community activist and consultant, contributed his experience from a Future Search Conference which successfully ran in Long Hill Township, New Jersey /U.S.A., but encountered many difficulties in the follow-through stages. Behr sketches the scenario of a town where they *"have historically elected officials who then assumed the prerogative to rule for and over the people – with just as little genuine public input as possible."* Drawing on transactional analysis, Behr goes on to argue that *"[m]any elected leaders really feel that they are the parents and we, the people, are the children, who should be seen and not heard, and whose response should, properly be grateful obedience (and re-election)"* (Behr 1999:1). As a result of the apparent unwillingness of government to share power voluntarily with the Future Search process, *"an uneasy collaboration"* between two competing systems of governance seems to have arisen – *"one elected by political process and one self-selected by commitment to the shared vision of the future search"* (Behr 1999:2).

Emery and Purser (1996) have pointed to similar difficulties when using Search Conferences in the business sector. They draw on Jeanne Neumann's (1989) research to point to a host of factors that obstruct Search Conferences from making a difference: *"structural factors like hierarchical control, a culture that traditionally valued rank and status above knowledge and expertise, and prior socialization experiences"* (Emery & Purser 1996:111). Mary Hessler quotes Cheryl Scott, President of the Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, U.S.A., as saying that *"Cultural transformation is a five to ten year process"* [sic] *and doesn't happen overnight – not for the faint of heart – you need to be thinking about this as a part of multiple strategies, not a short-term fix."* (Hessler date unknown: 4)

These comments point towards the crucial importance of the political and corporate culture for the success of a Future Search Conference. I conclude that my evaluation will need to pay particular attention to the potential tension between 'old' and 'new' cultures of decision-making and the implied role models.

#### **4.3.8 Local Agenda 21**

I have got hold of only one written document that discusses the particular challenges that the application of Future Search Conferences poses for Local Agenda 21 processes. This document is a faxed contribution from Lesley Williams of CAG Consultants to a Future Search practitioners' day held in the UK in June 1997. Williams identifies the lack of a shared immediate concern as the core problem for the successful application of Future Search Conferences in Local Agenda 21 processes:

*"LA21 still tends to be an issue driven by a minority of concerned 'greens', but it is not an immediate concern to the majority of people who we will need to influence if we are to move towards more sustainable lifestyles. In other words, the event is driven top-down to some extent."*

(Williams 1997:1)



To support this claim, Williams quotes the Future Search handbook, where one of the common pitfalls

*"is a conference in which the stakeholders have a tenuous 'relationship', say, a common interest in a topic, but no practical reasons for working together."* (Weisbord & Janoff 1995:121-122)

Williams argues that as a result, it would be harder for stakeholders to recognise their common stake. Securing the attendance of the key decision-makers in the three-day conference would require a lot more persuasion under these conditions. Even then, the resulting degree of identification with the assigned stakeholder labels might be small amongst conference participants. To address this problem, Williams suggests the need to carefully clarify the purpose of a community-based Future Search Conference applied in a Local Agenda 21 context.

A second problem which Williams raises concerns the cost-effectiveness of the Future Search Conference design as a launch event for a Local Agenda 21 process. Williams provocatively suggests the following:

*"Suppose an LA21 FS conference takes 30 person days to plan and around £3,000 to run. The key output might be say 8 really good project ideas. However, generally each project group identifies its first action as 'getting the people with clout around the table at the next meeting'. If, instead of an [sic] FS conference the Steering Group had brainstormed 8 really useful project ideas, and then considered who to invite to a meeting to get these underway, you have the same output for a fraction of the cost, AND you would have a very good chance of getting those with influence to attend a half-day meeting to discuss the idea."* (Williams 1999:2)

Williams is quick to admit however, that other outputs from a Future Search "such as raising awareness, rubbing the rough edges off each others parochial views, generating enthusiasm, networking and media profile" (Williams 1999:2) might need to be accounted for as well, despite being less quantifiable. In my two case studies, it will be interesting to analyse

- first, if the nature of the substantive outcomes is limited to further meetings, and
- second, if those constitute the *key* output from the conference or if Williams' *other* outputs might be a lot more essential than she assumes and maybe overtake in importance the action proposals themselves.

#### **4.4 Conclusions: Research objectives**

The research evidence presented in this chapter significantly shaped the research proposal for this book. The first part of the chapter has pointed to a long list of contested issues about the Future Search Conference design, which require backing by research evidence. My pilot survey has shown that facilitators willingly share their perspectives on these issues. However, participants' perspectives have not yet been systematically collected. By filling this gap, this book aims to add to the existing knowledge about the Future Search design and to come up with well-founded recommendations. Mainly for

this reason, but also because it is of wider interest, I aim to explore how the participants experience each of the conference exercises and how they make sense of their conference experience.

Secondly, it is obvious from the literature survey and from my pilot survey, that a key issue which is neither well documented nor well researched is the follow-up of Future Search Conferences over longer periods of time. Do Future Search Conferences in practice live up to the promises spelled out in the theoretical and practitioner literature? If not, why not? What are the surprising side effects of hosting a Future Search Conference? Even up to today I have not come across a single publication of a systematic evaluation of a Future Search Conference and its follow-up. This is where this book is aiming to make an original contribution and to break new ground.

Finally, in order to answer these two broad research questions, I had to pioneer a research methodology appropriate to these two tasks within the time limits of this research project. The next chapter will describe how I have embarked on developing the methodology.

I conclude that the research objectives are:

1. to evaluate two Future Search Conferences from the perspective of participants and organisers, and also to evaluate the achievements of the Future Search Conferences with regard to collaborative planning theory;
2. to investigate the two Future Search Conferences as processes embedded in the wider power relations of society, including a thorough investigation of local politics and a Foucauldian analysis of the conference process;
3. to devise a robust methodology for the evaluation of participatory processes.

## Chapter 5 Methodology

*"Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people."*  
(Janesick 1994:217)

This chapter sets out to develop a methodology capable of delivering answers to the research questions spelled out in the preceding chapter. In section one, it shall be argued that a constructivist research paradigm is best suited to fulfil these requirements. Section two will introduce in more detail naturalistic inquiry in the form of the constructivist research framework that has guided the methodological choices of this research project. In section three, I shall argue that a case study approach forms a promising basis for answering the research questions. I will describe how the two cases of Future Search investigated in this book were selected and which arrangements were made with the local organisers. Section four will introduce the research strategy of stakeholder-based evaluation which was followed in both case study areas. Section five will explain how the criteria for the evaluation were generated via pre-conference, snap-shot interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. Section six explains how data were generated. In the subsections, my use of document research, non-participant observation, questionnaires, focus groups and expert interviews will be discussed. In section seven, I will explain how the diverse data sets were analysed and what mode was chosen for the presentation of the findings. Finally, the last two sections will discuss the validity of the findings and the nature of the case comparison conducted in this research project.

### **5.1 Requirements flowing from the research questions**

From the research questions generated in the previous chapter it followed that the research methodology would need to square a number of requirements:

1. I was required to design a research intervention that caused minimum of disruption in order to convince local organisers to give me access to 'their' Future Search Conference.

2. In order to explore participants' experience of the Future Search Conference, the methods used would need to allow participants to speak about their experience in their own terms, rather than in terms of academic terminology which might be at odds with their own understanding. This requires a choice of people-sensitive or emic (insider) data collection methods as opposed to an etic (outsider) standpoint.

3. Thirdly, as the exact nature of the outcomes and impact of the Future Search Conference was unknown – not least due to a lack of research evidence – it was impossible for me to limit my investigation to a small number of criteria. Instead, I needed an approach that was sensitive to a wide array of potential outcomes.

4. I was required to design a methodology capable of capturing impacts and outcomes of the Future Search Conference as they evolve over time. This required fieldwork in the case study areas at more than one point in time. Given that the developments in a follow-up process of a Future Search Conference are hard to predict, my research approach needed to be designed in a very reflective and flexible way, so that it could adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances (i.e. postponed conference events, illnesses and departures of key players, etc. – all of which I encountered). This also required me to rely upon all my senses—including my intuition—to make decisions upon adjustments in my research strategy. As a result, I turned into a ‘modern nomad’ for the last 2 years of this project, able to move countries (never mind accommodation) on a 48 hours-notice. This was possible, because many people opened their homes to accommodate me for unpredictable periods of time.

5. It was rather clear that no single research method could provide meaningful answers to all three research questions, not least because each question was directed at a different aspect of the Future Search process. While focus groups emerged as an ideal means of allowing participants to discuss their conference experience in their own words, they are rather unsuited to the purpose unravelling relations of power and extracting critical views. People with official hats on could never raise these in the semi-public space of a focus group. Therefore, I had to use a multi-layered approach which combines different research instruments.

To sum up the specific requirements for a research strategy are that it should

- involve research methods which facilitate an emic perspective
- involve different methods that facilitate different perspectives
- use the researcher as sensitive research instrument (i.e. intuition)
- evolve over time on the basis of reflection and adaptation.

With these requirements in mind, I chose naturalistic inquiry as a research paradigm to guide the investigation. Table 5.1 demonstrates why naturalistic inquiry, which is a constructivist research methodology, is well suited to meet the above demands.

## **5.2 Philosophy and principles of naturalistic inquiry**

The following section describes in detail the tenets of naturalistic inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, Denzin & Lincoln 1995, Guba 1990, Guba 1985, Guba & Lincoln 1981, Guba & Lincoln 1989, Guba & Lincoln 1994, Lincoln 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, Lincoln 1991, Lincoln 1994, Lincoln 1998, Lincoln & Guba 1985, Lincoln and Guba 1986), upon which my research project is based and from which I have taken guidance in my research endeavour.

Issue	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical Theory et al.	Constructivism
<b>Inquiry aim</b>	explanation: prediction and control		critique and transformation; restitution and emancipation	understanding; reconstruction
<b>Nature of knowledge</b>	verified hypotheses established as facts or laws	nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws	structural / historical insights	individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus
<b>Knowledge accumulation</b>	accretion - 'building clocks' (sic) adding to 'edifice of knowledge'; generalizations and cause-effect linkages		historical revisionism; generalization by similarity	more informed and sophisticated reconstructions; vicarious experience
<b>Goodness or quality criteria</b>	conventional benchmarks of 'rigor': internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity		historical situatedness; erosion of ignorance	trustworthiness and authenticity and misapprehensions; action stimulus
<b>Values</b>	excluded - influence denied		included - formative	
<b>Ethics</b>	extrinsic; tilt towards deception		intrinsic; moral tilt toward revelation	intrinsic; process tilt toward revelation; special problems
<b>Voice</b>	'disinterested scientist' as informer of decision makers, policy makers, and change agents		'transformative intellectual' as advocate and activist	'passionate participant' as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction
<b>Training</b>	technical and quantitative; substantive theories	technical; quantitative and qualitative; substantive theories	resocialization; qualitative and quantitative; history; values of altruism and empowerment	
<b>Acomodation</b>	commensurable		incommensurable	
<b>Hegemony</b>	in control of publication, funding, promotion, and tenure		seeking recognition and input	

**Table 5.1 : Paradigm positions on selected practical issues**

Source: Guba & Lincoln 1994:112

### **5.2.1 Ontology and epistemology of naturalistic inquiry**

#### ***Ontology of naturalistic inquiry***

Naturalistic inquiry is based on a relativist ontology (Guba & Lincoln 1994). It assumes that all perceptions of 'reality' are mental constructs, which reflect the experiences and social background of an individual. Each perspective on 'reality' emphasizes certain aspects of it, while overlooking others. All social actors

constantly modify their constructions of 'reality' in the light of new experiences. The proponents of naturalistic inquiry claim that it is pointless to struggle to identify one single 'true' construction of 'reality'. The most we can hope to find are consensus versions of 'truth' which are usually specific to certain cultures at certain times and places. Instead, naturalistic inquiry sets out to understand the multiple constructions of 'reality' as held by those who are part of it (Guba & Lincoln 1994). It argues that by drawing together these multiple perceptions we can develop a more sophisticated, more informed and more complete understanding of what is going on. The aim of this process is for the researcher to offer a 'thick description' of his or her own construction of the learning (Geertz 1973). Truth for the proponents of naturalistic inquiry "*is a matter of the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at a given time*" (Schwandt 1994:128).

### *Epistemology of naturalistic inquiry*

Knowledge about these multiple perspectives must be obtained in interaction with those who hold them. Research is conceptualised as an interactive process of mutual learning, in which the researcher is not just influenced by the encounters with his or her respondents, but also in turn influences the respondents (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Both parties bring with them their values, prejudices and lived experiences, which in turn reflects on the conversation. The researcher engages closely with the subject(s) of his/her study. The researcher-researched relationship in naturalistic inquiry is based on a humanistic conception of research (Lincoln 1985c). It demands that I encounter my respondents as equal human subjects, and not as objects of research that may be manipulated or deceived for the purposes of the research. Naturalistic inquiry implies a strong ethical commitment to the respondents who are conceptualised as co-producers of the research findings (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Naturalistic inquiry does not set out to test hypothesis or theoretical models. The generation of hypotheses and findings is supposed to be an iterative process that takes place in an interactive fashion throughout the research project. Existing theories from the literature are used as a backdrop for the researcher, a pool of meanings to be engaged with to the extent that they further understanding throughout the research project (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

### *The issue of transferability*

Naturalistic inquiry seeks to provide a 'thick description' of a case under investigation (Geertz 1973). In the best cases this description will provide 'vicarious experience' (Guba & Lincoln 1994:112) for the reader. However, naturalistic inquiry does not seek to generate a nomothetic body of de-contextualised truth statements. Instead, it seeks to develop an ideographic body of knowledge that will describe the individual case in the most sophisticated way in the form of working hypotheses.

### ***The impossibility of value-free research***

Naturalistic inquiry asserts that value-free research is not possible (Guba & Lincoln 1994). First of all, the researcher brings with him/her his/her values, beliefs and lived experiences. These may shape his/her research interests and questions, and create an affinity to certain research methodologies and theories rather than to others. Secondly, all theories and methodologies are based on assumptions which reflect certain values. In certain academic disciplines, a set of dominant belief systems prevail and these will influence the researcher's positioning. Finally, research always takes place within a wider cultural, economic and political context, and the values inherent in this context will favour certain lines of inquiry while obstructing others. The values at work at all three levels result in a 'mutual simultaneous shaping' of the research project throughout the process of its unfolding (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

#### ***5.2.2 Methodology of naturalistic inquiry***

The word 'naturalistic' (Lincoln & Guba 1985) suggests that the inquiry should take place in its natural setting, and in that sense be contextualised. At the heart of naturalistic methodology is the 'human instrument' - the sensitivity, tacit knowledge and flexibility that a researcher can bring to the research task with his/her humanity (Lincoln 1985c). The main methods recommended for naturalistic inquiry are interviews, observations and document analysis (Guba & Lincoln 1989). These methods are to be employed in a research strategy that features purposive sampling and the development of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1990) based on inductive analysis. Purposive sampling means that the research strategy is developed around a declared research purpose. Interview partners are chosen in a way that provides most insight from the point of view of the research purpose (Stake 1994). In the case of bringing to bear multiple perspectives in an evaluation of an intervention, interviewees are chosen in the hope that their perspective will bring into view a new aspect or insight. The sample size is determined along the way as redundancy is achieved. Inductive data analysis implies that categories of information are allowed to emerge from the raw data (for example interview transcripts) as the researcher constructs his/her meaning from them. Emerging hypotheses or findings are taken back to the respondents throughout the study in order to further increase the sophistication of the constructions made by researcher and respondent. These so-called member checks are essential to naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1986). The design of a naturalistic study is indeterminate and evolves over the course of the research project. The researcher has to adapt to unexpected findings, changed actor constellations etc. throughout and change the course of inquiry to stay on track under changed conditions (Lincoln 1985c).

### **5.3 Case study design, selection and access**

The case study design seemed ideally suited to this task of exploring a Future Search Conference in depth and from a variety of perspectives. Robert K. Yin, who has written the standard textbooks on case study research, defines the approach in the following way:

*"A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."*

(Yin 1994:13)

However, I do not follow Yin's claim that the case study is a fully-fledged methodology. Instead, I agree with Robert E. Stake that a "[c]ase study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study a case. We could study it in many ways" (Stake 1994:236).

#### **5.3.1 Selection of cases**

The major advantage of choosing to study a small number of cases in depth instead of a large quantity of cases superficially is that a much wider range of issues and complex interdependencies can be investigated in an individual case. The study of multiple stakeholder perspectives of the Future Search phenomenon requires extensive qualitative data collection strategies, which allow the respondents to speak about the Future Search process in their own words and mental concepts. Secondly, in the absence of a clearcut notion of what the ripples from a Future Search process might look like, it was important to investigate widely in a rather exploratory fashion, following unexpected leads. In seeking to understand what shaped these ripples, I investigated the multiple interdependencies between the Future Search process, its setting and the wider national and international context. Again, this task would have been impossible to complete for a larger number of cases.

#### **Selection of two sites**

I attended the first Future Search practitioners' day in the UK in September 1996 and conducted the first telephone survey of all Future Search Conferences planned and implemented in the UK for the New Economics Foundations. As a result, I was in a position to know the current status of Future Search Conferencing. My first choice was the series of Future Search Conferences running at the time in Gloucestershire County Council in the UK. However, the organisers those of the conferences had already made their own plans for evaluative research, had applied for funding and had identified researchers to do the job if the funding got through. I discussed the possibilities of co-operation with them at two meetings, but it became very clear that I would not be able to get much access to participants' and stakeholders' views since they were concerned about preventing 'research fatigue' or 'overkill'.

When I was about to give up this line of research altogether for lack of alternative research opportunity, a friend informed me of the Future Search Conference planned in Rushmoor Borough near London as the launch event of



their Local Agenda 21 initiative. However, it was not certain at the time whether it would proceed. I had also initially e-mailed and phoned around in my home country Germany, to find a case along the lines of the Gloucestershire Future Search Conference on the economy, but had found nothing. I had received a reply though from Olching, where the key organiser wrote that 'unfortunately' their Future Search Conference planned for this year was about *all* Local Agenda 21 topics, not about the economy in particular. I was reminded of Olching immediately when I heard about Rushmoor.

In a sense, the two cases 'volunteered' themselves, with my choice severely constrained by the time schedule of this research project and the need to have reasonable access as a researcher. This is not problematic since, in the words of Robert Stake (1994:243):

*"My choice would be to take that case from which we feel we can learn the most. That may mean taking the one that we can spend the most time with. Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness."* (footnote omitted)

The cases share a number of significant similarities. They are both formerly rural areas located outside a major capital, which were transformed into commuter towns as soon as effective transport links to the capital were constructed. Both case study areas are local authorities which consist of two or three smaller towns that were united into one local authority against their wishes in the early 1970s, and still remain jealous of each other. In both areas the demand for housing is rising, while a mismatch between local people and local jobs increases the commuting activity. The two case studies are different in two ways. First, Rushmoor contains four times as many residents as Olching, and as a result, the local authority in Rushmoor is much bigger and much more professional than in Olching. Secondly, and most significantly for my research, the Future Search process was initiated by the local authority in Rushmoor, but by local activists in Olching. Each case is typical for the country in which it is based: in the UK, Local Agenda 21 processes tend to be driven by local authorities, while in Germany, until recently most Local Agenda 21 processes were initiated and dominated by local activists.

### **5.3.2 Self-presentation and role**

I entered my case study areas as an enthusiast of Future Search Conferences, who wanted to explore the benefits and particular problems encountered when this approach is adopted. My role was to learn as much as I could from my respondents about the case study area, its history, the local players and about the Future Search process so that I could make this learning available to the wider Future Search community and other local authorities who are about to embark on a similar exercise. I also expressed throughout my field work that my aim was that my research would be of some use to the local players involved, who would be given an opportunity to reflect on the Future Search process and maybe initiate course-corrections as a result.

In both case study areas, I was a stranger to the local culture. In Rushmoor, I was different because I was (i) German, (ii) I was still not familiar with all aspects of the English (local) government system, (iii) I was a PhD-aspirant, (iv) I came from elsewhere to study Rushmoor and (v) because I did not have a proper job, a mortgage, a pension scheme, a car etc. like other people of my age. The young couple I lodged with called me 'our Dutch au-pair' when introducing me to friends, which demonstrated a good sense of humour but did not exactly make me feel comfortable. My role as a researcher in the local authority was also accompanied by occasional jokes. One officer said twice to others 'Has she put the lamp in your face yet? Tied you to the chair?' which again showed through all the friendliness a degree of intimidation that was experienced by those at risk from my findings.

My German case study, Olching, is located in Bavaria. The local dialect is very different from my own Northern German form, so I had most language problems with Bavarian slang in Olching, rather than English slang in Rushmoor. I frequently had to double-check with certain respondents that I understood correctly what they were saying. Bavaria is also a very conservative part of Germany, where the Catholic Church dominates and the role of women is still closely linked to bringing up a family and being a good wife. In Olching, I was different because (i) I was from Northern Germany, (ii) a woman in a position of (relative) power, and (iii) I had come from as far away as Great Britain to study Olching. It is interesting that in both case study areas, local people were most suspicious about the fact that I had gone through so much trouble to study them and their locality, because they were not aware that the Future Search Conference was such an innovative approach that it would justify a study. Having come from elsewhere I also had the air of being a special and rare guest, so people would be more willing to go out of their way to support me. So at times my 'other-ness' would be an advantage. It also allowed me to ask seemingly 'naive' questions without shame, which nevertheless were of key relevance. In the interview situations I tried to establish a human connection on a deeper level that would help me to transcend some of these differences.

### ***5.3.3 Access and agreement with key people in the case study area***

In both case study areas, my first contact was the key organiser: a volunteer in Olching, a professional LA21 coordinator in Rushmoor. Having just received the information about the Rushmoor Future Search Conference from my friend in spring 1997, I rang up the LA21 officer of Rushmoor Borough Council in order to ask if the conference was going ahead, to find out if other researchers were already at work and if not, if there was any chance that I could do the research. I also rang up one of the two conference facilitators to ask how he would feel about an evaluation. I asked the same questions by e-mail to the key organiser in Olching. In both cases, the responses were promising and it was suggested that I should introduce myself to the steering group of the event and ask for formal permission there.

Only a few days later, I first travelled to Rushmoor Borough, about 6 weeks before the conference. I was introduced to the Future Search Conference steering group by the facilitators, set out my research ideas and asked for their willingness to commit time to the evaluation. The Local Agenda 21 officer made a supportive statement on my behalf, and after I had assured the group that I would not use names in any reports resulting from it, my proposal was accepted as one item on a very long agenda. In Rushmoor, the Local Agenda 21 officer was my strongest ally and supported me wherever he could. Senior professionals drove the entire Rushmoor Future Search process in a quite formal fashion. The formal atmosphere made it harder for me to connect with people and establish trust.

In Olching, the steering group had been asked for general consent in my absence and had shown interest. The first steering group meeting I attended took place three months before the conference event, in October 1997. In a well-structured but very open and informal meeting, a written agreement was reached between me, the steering group and the conference facilitators about commitments to each other (much more strict than those informally agreed in Rushmoor) (box 5.1).

This written agreement and the way it was derived gave my research endeavour in Olching a degree of sincerity and mutual commitment that challenged me to live up to it. It also meant that the steering group and the facilitators reciprocated this commitment throughout. Moreover, the steering group consisted of enthusiastic activists from all sectors, with whom I connected much more easily than with the senior professionals in Rushmoor. This group often went to the pub after their meetings, so I had plenty of opportunity to connect with individuals. It was here, that I was rather challenged to keep some professional distance in order not to start identifying with 'their project' too much. Here, it was helpful that I lived with a local family in a different part of Munich who had nothing to do with the Future Search Conference or Olching, so that I could get this distance. I also kept the polite form 'Sie' (you) in my interactions with Olching's key organiser, which actually was a constant reminder of my role.

I presented myself as a professional research student, albeit with limited resources due to a lack of research grant and therefore in need of support. The staff of both local authorities in particular were extremely generous in providing me with office facilities (printer, telephone, meeting rooms for interviews) and in the case of Rushmoor also helped me to find local accommodation and organised lifts to the office for me. I borrowed a bicycle and recording devices for my interviews for my first round of focus groups in both case study areas. I also had the tapes from my focus groups transcribed by local people (who had nothing to do with the Future Search process or local power broking) at a reduced rate. I negotiated (and at times renegotiated) access and was careful to respect the limits of accessibility signalled to me.

**Agreements with the steering group:**

- my work shall not impair the proceedings of the Future Search Conference event; inquiries during breaks are allowed
- I will not give information about experiences from past Future Search Conferences to the participants; general statements are ok
- participants selected for interviews will be approached by the steering group first, before I may contact them
- I will not refer to specific persons in my reports
- I will not receive any reimbursement for my work
- I will consult the Mayor before publishing findings

**Agreements with the facilitators:**

- I will work out with the facilitators the details of how to fit my research needs into the conference schedule
- I will not give detailed information about other Future Search Conferences to the participants

**Box 5.1 : 'Contract' with the Okhing steering group**

Source: minutes of steering group meeting on 17 October 1997

**5.4 Research strategy: stakeholder-based evaluation**

In the following section, I will describe how I have translated the naturalistic inquiry principles and axioms into a coherent research strategy. Most instructive in this respect has been the social audit methodology as developed by the New Economics Foundation / London (Zadek & Raynard 1995, Zadek & Evans 1993). Guba and Lincoln's insight that stakeholders should be involved not just in the evaluation of a programme, but also in the strategic design of the programme itself, is at the heart of the Social Audit methodology. A Social Audit *"is a means of assessing the social impact and ethical behaviour of an organisation or set of activities in relation to its aims and those of its stakeholders... Stakeholders are individuals and groups who are affected by, or can affect, the activities under review"* (Zadek 1994:632-3). The Social Audit is the most advanced of a number of tools that have been developed in the field of social and ethical accounting. The most frequently used alternatives to the Social Audit are the 'Ethical Accounting Statement' and the 'Social Assessment' (Zadek, Pruzan & Evans 1997).

All three approaches involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders in a very participatory evaluation, carry out the accounting on a regular (usually annual) basis and publish the findings for public scrutiny (Zadek & Raynard 1995). The Social Audit as developed by the New Economics Foundation is moreover committed to target setting, systematic bookkeeping, external benchmarking, the establishment of an audit group and external verification of results. The other two approaches only commit to a few of these criteria. Since the Social Audit has been further adapted and successfully used by The Body Shop plc, Happy Computers, Shared Earth and several non-governmental organisations including the New Economics Foundation themselves, it is fair to say that it is the most advanced of the three approaches. Gill Seyfang (1999) has adapted the Social Audit methodology to assess a local currency system LETS (Local Exchange and Trading System) in a Norfolk community. I have taken courage from her

pioneering work. A Social Audit requires a lot more active involvement of those running an organisation or intervention than I was able to secure, the Social Audit remained a guiding ideal. I will call the research strategy developed over the course of this project stakeholder-based evaluation.

The purpose of my stakeholder-based evaluation was to assess how successful a Future Search Conference was in delivering its stated objectives, perceived both before and after the conference event by those with a stake in its success. A first step is therefore to identify the spectrum of stakeholders that should be involved in the evaluation. According to the Social Audit literature, stakeholders are all those core to the mission and values of an organisation / intervention, those who create and affect the organisation / intervention, and those most affected by it. The same stakeholders may appear in more than one category.

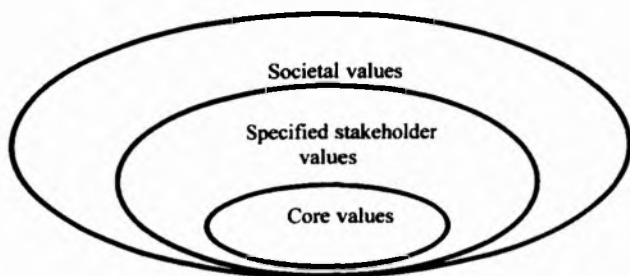
In Rushmoor, the stakeholders to the evaluation were:

Those who affect the intervention	Those core to mission and values of the intervention	Those most affected by the intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Rushmoor Future Search Conference steering group</li> <li>-clerical staff / LA21 officer</li> <li>-conference facilitators</li> <li>-LA21 subcommittee of councillors</li> <li>-Directors Management Board of Rushmoor Borough Council</li> <li>-LA21 officer steering group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-LA21 practitioners</li> <li>-Future Search practitioners</li> <li>-Rushmoor Future Search Conference steering group</li> <li>-LA21 officer</li> <li>-conference facilitators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference participants</li> <li>-the conference participants' organisations and sectors</li> <li>-Rushmoor Borough Council /administration</li> <li>-the wider local community in Rushmoor</li> <li>-the local media</li> </ul>

**Table 5.2 : Stakeholders to the evaluation in Rushmoor**

The Social Audit approach recommends the merging into a single list of criteria put forward by all those with a stake in the organisation / intervention. In the process of doing so, the criteria put forward by those core to mission and values of the organisation / intervention are to be given more weight than the criteria put forward by those at the periphery. Figure 5.1 illustrates this process of weighing criteria.

The major advantage of a single criteria list is that it makes life easier for the researcher and that it makes transparent to all the diverse objectives pursued at the conference event. The downside of merging all criteria into a single list is that it blurs the fact that the stakeholders in the evaluation have different interests and that these interests may be served unequally by the Future Search Conference. A Social Audit methodology directs attention away from a critical assessment of power relations, while emphasising the 'common ground', i.e. those objectives jointly pursued by all. In that regard, the Social Audit methodology is very similar to the Future Search Conference design. Its overall philosophy is very much in line with the values of Future Search conferencing and naturalistic inquiry. This means, however that it has similar blind spots.



**Figure 5.1 Polyvocal three-tier approach as recommended by the Social Audit methodology**

Source: adapted from NEF 1996

John Abbott (1996:134) has suggested as a viable alternative the composition of a grid of the various objectives pursued by diverse actors. Such a grid can help to make transparent which stakeholder groups were particularly strong proponents of certain evaluation criteria (Abbott 1996:135).

I have nevertheless decided to carry out the evaluation along the Social audit ideal, with a joint list of criteria, and the two case study chapters are written up along those lines. The reasons for this decision are two-fold: First of all, it was not practically feasible for me to conduct any thorough analysis of the various stakeholders' objectives *before* each Future Search Conference. I moved to the case study area only 2-4 weeks before the conference took place, which meant that all key stakeholders were frantically busy with preparing the conference and could not spare the time required for a reasonable interview. As an alternative I had to opt for snap-shot interviews, which deliver no more than a rough guide to the interests involved in the conference. Given the superficiality of such snap-shot interviews, I could not safely differentiate the various interest groups' objectives on that basis. Directly after the Future Search Conference, it was my main aim to allow conference participants to reflect upon their experience in their own words. The focus group method which is well suited for doing this was again not a viable tool for revealing power relations. Therefore, the first phase of my research around the conference was characterised by practical constraints and priorities other than capturing power relations.

In my second round of fieldwork I aimed to compensate for the lack of critical distance and differentiation between the holders of diverse interests by conducting individual interviews, which provided a lot more scope for critical assessment of power relations. In that sense, my research strategy has combined two different approaches, which sit rather uneasily with each other. An apparent weakness of the case study chapters is therefore, that their perspective on power relations is not as sharp as it might have been if I had adopted a different approach. I have attempted to compensate for this in my discussion chapter 8,

where all attention is directed at power relations as they could be observed within and around the Future Search Conferences under investigation.

### **5.5 Establishing the criteria to guide the evaluation**

In order to identify names of stakeholders to the evaluation in Rushmoor, I collaborated with the present and previous LA21 coordinator and consulted a member of the LA21 officer steering group. Out of the steering group members, officers and councillors involved, I selected those for my interviews who were confirmed participants at the conference. My choice of participants only was highly restricted because the LA21 coordinator feared that my questions might make certain participants reconsider their intention to participate and to withdraw. Therefore, I was only given names of two people per stakeholder group to contact by telephone before the conference. This is potentially a serious problem for the trustworthiness of my research. However, I worked around this constraint by spending more time with the conference participants at later stages of my research. I was able to ask them about their pre-conference perceptions in retrospective, in order to check if what I gathered prior to the conference was a reasonably valid assessment.

In Olching, I followed a similar procedure. I collaborated with the key organiser in identifying stakeholders for interviews, and double-checked them with the extensive mapping of stakeholders that the steering group had done. The steering group in Olching insisted that participants to the conference should not be contacted by me before they had declared their willingness to be interviewed and signed a written agreement that their contact details could be passed on to me. Each conference participant received a return postcard from the steering group, where they had to tick several boxes with regards to their attendance of the conference, and one of the boxes was their agreement to be interviewed. Only 10 days before the Future Search Conference, I received a list of those who had agreed to be interviewed.

In the last two to four weeks before the conference, I carried out snap-shot interviews with a broad sample of key stakeholders, following the agreed list. Table 5.3 provides an overview of the categories of stakeholders with whom snap-shot interviews were conducted.

Category	No. of interviewees in Rushmoor	out of which the following were FSC participants	No. of interviewees in Olching	out of which the following were FSC participants
Steering Group	5	5	8	7
LA21/ environment -Officer	2	N/A	1	1
Future Search Facilitators	2	N/A	2	N/A
Future Search practitioners	3	N/A	0	N/A
Conference Participants	4	4	13	13
Sponsors / Donator of Venue	0	N/A	1	0
former and present chief executive, directors	2	1	1	1
heads of service	2	1	1	0
other officers	1	0	0	0
Elected Members	4	2	5	4

**Table 5.3 : Listing of stakeholders interviewed in the process of establishing criteria for the evaluation of the Future Search Conference**

Each interview lasted 15-20 minutes and followed the outline reproduced in Box 5.2. As I had been given a list of all interviewees' occupations and positions (most of them were senior members of their organisations), there was no need for thorough 'locating questions' at this stage. I asked the interviewees to define for themselves what would constitute success of the conference (criteria), and also asked how I as a researcher might be able to tell if these objectives were achieved (indicators). I promised non-attributability, thereby encouraging a few respondents to speak about their 'hidden' agendas as well. The key interviews in Rushmoor took place face-to-face with the previous and present LA21 officer and other Council staff. In Olching, I also benefited from face-to-face interviews with the key organiser, the Mayor and some local authority staff. Due to shortage of time, I carried out the remaining part of the interviews by telephone.

It proved advantageous if not essential, that I had introduced myself to the steering group and established first relations with them at a steering group meeting, so that they were actually quite forthcoming in the telephone interviews. The least effective were the interviews with the future conference participants, who lacked a trusting relationship with me and as a result made quite unspecific remarks about their expectations. This was compensated for by the multiple opportunities for face-to-face contact with participants at later stages of my research.



**A) Semi-structured interview questions for steering group members, LA21 co-ordinators and council officers**

- Why have you chosen to contribute to getting the Future Search Conference off the ground?
- What would make the conference a success from your point of view?
- How would this manifest itself?
- What do you hope the local community as a whole will gain from the conference?
- How would this manifest itself?
- Have you got any concerns regarding the conference? for example that it might not live up to any of your expectations? How would that manifest itself?
- (only for key organiser(s)) Why did you select the Future Search method as means for these ends? What are its strong sides? What would indicate that the conference is actually 'doing the job', do what it is supposed to do?
- What do you know about LA21? How do you think the conference relates to the LA21 strategy?

**B) Semi-structured interview questions for conference participants**

- What made you choose to attend the Future Search Conference?
- What would make the conference a success from your point of view? How would this manifest itself?
- What do you hope the local community as a whole will gain from the conference? How would this manifest itself?
- Have you got any concerns regarding the conference? for example that it might not live up to any of your expectations? How would that manifest itself?
- (What) do you know about LA21? How do you think the conference relates to Rushmoor's LA21 strategy?

**C) Semi-structured interview with Future Search facilitators (and other practitioners in the UK only)**

- What is Future Search good at (outcomes and process/conduct) in general compared to other methods?
- What would indicate that these benefits are occurring?
- What are the method's weaknesses? What would reveal those failures / deficiencies?
- What constitutes good practice in organising a Future Search? What are common pitfalls?
- For which steps in the LA21 process does it seem most suited ?
- Which benefits can you see from using the Future Search in a LA21 process? Which outcomes can you see for the local community? What would indicate that these benefits / outcomes are occurring?
- What are the weaknesses of Future Search / most likely misunderstandings in using it for LA21? What would reveal those failures / deficiencies?

**Box 5.2 Guidance for semi-structured interviews prior to the Future Search Conference**

I transcribed the outcomes of each interview in a separate table. Each single line spelled out one criterion and one or more indicators that would measure the criterion roughly in the wording that had been used by the interviewee. I colour-coded the criteria put forward by certain stakeholder groups in the evaluation before cutting all tables apart. I sorted the individual lines on the floor and formed headings for the most frequently mentioned criteria. Each of the

categories was defined neatly by a whole set of indicators, suggested by different interviewees. Using the colour-coding, I attributed more weight to the criteria put forward by those core to the mission as opposed to those put forward by those at the periphery. Finally, I identified how and when I would need to collect data for each indicator. A first version of the indicator table was used for the non-participant observation at the Future Search Conference.

Over the years, I rearranged the criteria a couple of times to do justice to the emerging importance of the individual criteria and also added some that were mentioned to me later in the process. In the process of writing up and trying to link theory and data more, I sorted the main criteria from the 6-7 page long table under headings which I borrowed from the theoretical literature. In the process of condensing the evaluation criteria onto one page for each case study, I noticed that the tables started to look very much alike. I carefully checked if anything significant would be lost by creating one joint table for the evaluation of both case studies, and did not find anything. To my own surprise, there were no gaps or major differences between the criteria suggested to me in both case study areas. Table 5.4 is the final version of the evaluation criteria I arrived at. Nuances were preserved though in that my first draft of each case study chapter was written before the joint table had been created.

My explanation for the striking similarity is twofold. On the one hand, I assume that a process of what Foucault would call 'normalisation' took place, in which those with a stake in the conference caught on to the new jargon of Future Search in particular and normative ideas captured by collaborative planning theory in general. Both conferences were advocated by people who from a theoretical perspective must be classified as champions of collaborative planning theory. Their main source of information seems to have been the Future Search handbook and their participation in a facilitation training for Future Search Conferences. The facilitators' and initiators' input at steering group meetings and the mailings to conference participants spread the new vocabulary and objectives of collaborative planning. One example for the workings of this mechanism is that a couple of conference participants who I interviewed via the telephone asked me to ring back again later, so that they would have a chance to read through the conference mailings once more before being interviewed. In that sense, the evaluation criteria reflect the extent to which the aims of Future Search conferencing in particular and collaborative planning in general have been absorbed and internalised by those with a stake in the Future Search process. A second explanation lies in the fact that both Future Search Conferences were used for the objective of launching a Local Agenda 21 process. This similarity of purpose is reflected in the similarity of evaluation criteria.

Audit Area	Criteria	Data Sources
<b>PROCESS</b>		
1. inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-broad spectrum of stakeholders present</li> <li>-many people who have not met before, not only the 'usual suspects'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-FSC participant list over time</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
2. collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participants able to put forward their heartfelt concerns</li> <li>-all views heard and respected</li> <li>-absence of domination, axe-grinding and polarisation</li> <li>-participants support each other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
3. competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participants treated as experts in their own right -required expertise is in the room</li> <li>-discussions go deeper than headline level</li> <li>-all local key issues are put on the table</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-conference documentation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>OUTCOMES</b>		
4. consensus about coherent, innovative vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the vision should be capable of guiding action</li> <li>-clear priorities are identified</li> <li>-new solutions for old problems identified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-conference documentation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-focus groups with non-participants</li> <li>-stakeholder interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
5. action groups deliver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participants take responsibility for seeing their project ideas through</li> <li>-action plans are specific and practical</li> <li>-active Council support for at least some conference outcomes and action plans</li> <li>-visible change on the ground</li> <li>-action groups attract resources</li> <li>-regular progress review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-non-participant observation of action groups</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> <li>-stakeholder interviews</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-document research</li> <li>-follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul>
6. effective outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-each participant gets their organisation and contacts involved in the FSC follow-through</li> <li>-extensive media coverage</li> <li>-some new people join the process</li> <li>-different form of consultation reaches out to the wider community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-document research</li> <li>-stakeholder interviews</li> <li>-follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul>

7. Local Agenda 21 strengthened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-FSC is a demonstration of sustainable development; increased environmental awareness amongst participants</li> <li>-participants carry LA21 into their organisations</li> <li>-media coverage for LA21</li> <li>-LA21 becomes true umbrella</li> <li>-LA21 gains more influence within the Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-conference documentation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-stakeholder interviews</li> <li>-follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul>
<b>CAPACITY BUILDING</b>		
8. networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-cross-sectoral action groups</li> <li>-new contacts formed across stakeholder group boundaries and valued</li> <li>-new joint projects / alliances set up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference documentation</li> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
9. learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participants genuinely engage with those holding opposite views</li> <li>-participants learn from and with each other</li> <li>-participants let go of prejudices and stereotypes</li> <li>-participants challenge each others' world views</li> <li>-participants recognise the systemic interdependence of their own and others' actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-conference observation</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant interviews</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>
10. building trust and community spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-more trust between local authority and citizens</li> <li>-participants more optimistic, capable and willing to take on responsibility for local affairs</li> <li>-more things are done 'with' the people, not 'for' or 'to' them</li> <li>-participation methods like Future Search become a common practice locally</li> <li>-community spirit is generated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-stakeholder interviews</li> <li>-document research</li> <li>-non-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant focus groups</li> <li>-participant questionnaire</li> </ul>

**Table 5.4 : Evaluation criteria of those with a stake in the Future Search Conference**  
Source: my data

## **5.6 Generating data for the evaluation**

### **5.6.1 Overview**

I used a whole range of methods to create and collect data for the evaluation consistent with the criteria listed in table 5.4. Table 5.5 provides an overview of the strategies employed over the duration of this research endeavour.

<b>Research method</b>	<b>Collection of essential documents for archive</b>	<b>Non-participant observation</b>	<b>Written questionnaire with mostly open questions</b>	<b>Focus group discussions</b>	<b>Individual interviews</b>
<b>Timing</b>					
<b>Prior to the Future Search Conference</b>	-complete documentation of the Future Search planning	of steering group meetings only	1x to the steering group		
<b>During the Future Search Conference</b>	-conference materials and documentation of conference proceedings	of the entire conference proceedings, including small group work	1x to all conference participants		
<b>10-14 days after the Future Search Conference</b>	-newspaper clippings			3x with mix of conference participants 3-4x with non-participants	
<b>11-14 months after the Future Search Conference</b>	-Local Plan -newspaper clippings -minutes of action groups and steering group meetings	of steering group, action group and other relevant local meetings			30 in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the evaluation
<b>25-31 months after the Future Search Conference</b>	-minutes of steering group meetings -documentation of follow-up conference -newspaper clippings about follow-up conference				-1-2 in-depth telephone interviews with the key organiser to discuss their comments on my written drafts and to update my account

**Table 5.5 : Overview of research methods employed to generate data for the evaluation in each case study area**

### 5.6.2 Archive, non-participant observation and conference questionnaire

I compiled a systematic archive of all essential documents and media articles dealing with the Future Search Conferences since the idea to host one was first born. However, there was so little documentation about each conference that the archive was the least important component of my research. I attended steering group meetings before and after the conference as a non-participant observer and asked the steering group to fill in a questionnaire prior to the conference. In the questionnaire, which was to be returned to me anonymously in a pre-stamped envelope, I asked three open-ended questions about the steering group members' hopes and fears with regards to the conference and why they had chosen Future Search over alternative tools. I also attended the Future Search Conference itself as a non-participant observer, keeping a written record of the contents of the conference proceedings and of semi-structured observations. A full listing of all observed meetings can be found in Appendix 1. For my non-participant observation of the Future Search Conference, I used the criteria list to guide my observations. At the last day of the conference, I asked the participants to fill in an evaluation form with mainly open questions, and recruited a cross-section of participants for focus group sessions.

#### Participant questionnaire

1. My stakeholder group:
2. My age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please tick if appropriate:  
 I do several hours voluntary work each week.  
 I am retired.  
 I do not have a paid job at the moment.  
 I have a job outside Rushmoor.  
 I have a job in Rushmoor.  
 I live in Rushmoor.
4. What have you gained from attending the conference?
5. What will you do to follow up the outcomes of the conference?
6. What worked for you about the conference method?
7. What didn't work for you about the conference method?
8. What could be done differently next time?

Box 5.3: Conference participant questionnaire

### 5.6.3 Focus groups

The focus group sessions ten days after the Future Search Conference were my major data source for the process criteria of the evaluation. They also provided first clues with regards to the many outcome criteria of the evaluation, which would later be confirmed by other data sources. A straight-forward and often cited definition of the focus group has been put forward by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990:10):

*"The contemporary focus group interview generally involves 8 to 12 individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and assures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest."*

I chose focus groups over other methods for a number of reasons. The core strength of the focus group is that it offers insights into the way focus group participants conceptualise certain phenomena (emic approach), which might be at variance with how the researcher conceptualises them (etic approach). From focus groups, the researcher can learn:

- how participants talk about a certain topic
- what their views are with regard to that topic
- why they hold those views (how they conceptualise the world) (Johnson 1996).

Indeed, Morgan (1988:25) emphasised this last point over the other two:

*"Focus groups are useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering why participants think as they do."*

The focus group explicitly uses *"group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group"* (Morgan 1988:12, original in italics). Morgan has emphasised that *"[w]ithout the interaction around a researcher-supplied topic, individuals are often safely unaware of their own perspective, and even when they do contemplate their world view, there is not the same effort needed to explain or defend it to someone who sees the world differently."* (Morgan 1988:55) This exploration of views is not conducted in a setting where the individual is isolated from his/her context, but instead is carried out in *"a social setting which in many ways mirrors those outside the group. The group enables researchers and group members to explore together the embeddedness of environmental experiences and values within different cultural contexts."* (Burgess et al 1988a:310). Finally, the group setting can constitute an effective tool for conference participants to make sense of their experience in a way that can lead to action (Johnson 1996).

However, Morgan (1988:15-24) also mentions certain limitations to the use of focus groups:

- they are not based on natural settings as in the case of participant observation (and this may lead to inaccuracies)
- they provide less control over the data that is generated than an individual interview (which might lead to less comparability)
- it is not straightforward to infer from the group setting to individual behaviour / attitudes because of group dynamics
- they fail if participants have insufficient knowledge of the topic under discussion or no strong views on it
- it is impossible to draw conclusions, if participants disagree too strongly.

However, in the case of my focus groups with Future Search participants, the focus groups resembled rather closely the Future Search setting, thereby remaining very close to the 'natural' setting. Secondly, it is true that some of my focus groups spent a long time on certain topics which other focus groups only

mentioned in passing. However, again given that the group discussions draw their very fuel from their passion for certain topics, it was important for me not to stifle the groups too greatly and instead allow the conversation to keep flowing to some extent. Finally, as the participants all shared the experience of the Future Search Conference, they all had (i) sufficient knowledge about it and (ii) some motivation to reflect on their experience with fellow participants. Some participants even thanked me later for the opportunity to reflect on the Future Search event. And while views often diverged on certain topics, the discussion never became polarised in any inhibitive fashion.

Another key issue that has been raised with regards to the validity of focus groups is the danger that participants will only say what they think (i) the researcher wants to hear, (ii) what is socially acceptable to say or (iii) that they do not want to run the risk of disagreeing with somebody else and have to defend their view. As Morgan has summarised, "*focus groups rely on self-reported data, so they have limitations whenever people have a poor ability to report on a topic or have reasons to conceal things*" (Morgan 1993:228). However, I consider the actual threat to the validity of the focus groups originating from the fact that some people wanted to seem to be saying the 'right' things, especially those wearing 'official hats'. I compensated for this by running individual interviews in the second round of field work and by analysing the focus group transcripts with an awareness of this limitation.

While the focus group is liable to the same ethical constraints as other research methods, i.e. protecting those who might be at risk from a disclosure of information they have volunteered, a particular difficulty of the focus group method is that "*it is impossible to ensure complete confidentiality because the researchers cannot control what other participants will disclose outside the focus group.*" (Marris & Simmons 1995:11) This places a larger responsibility on the facilitator to protect participants from inappropriate self-disclosure, which might also be triggered by group dynamics.

### ***Focus groups with conference participants***

There are a number of design decisions I had to take with regards to running the focus groups. I considered using the small group format pioneered by Burgess et al (1988a & 1988b), which would mean a series of up to five consecutive sessions with the same focus group. However, the fact that the conference participants were senior people with demanding jobs meant that I had already a lot of trouble recruiting them to a one-off focus group session. Secondly, the fact that the focus group participants had already spent an entire weekend with each other meant that a basic relationship of trust and more or less open communication had already been established, which in turn meant that there was less danger of completely superficial outcomes from a one-off focus group.

In each case study area, I hosted a total of three focus group discussions of 1.5 hours to allow participants to evaluate their experience of the Future Search Conference process. I recruited a good mix of stakeholders and action group



representatives into each focus group instead of inviting 'homogenous' stakeholder groups. I opted for the mixed participant composition, (i) because I was limited to three focus group sessions but wanted to speak to more than three stakeholder groups and (ii) because it was unrealistic to recruit more than 3-4 members of the *same* stakeholder group to any single focus group session. The focus groups were attended by 5-8 participants each, including some steering group members who had also been to the conference (see table 5.6). I hosted the focus groups in a meeting room in Rushmoor Borough Council and in a meeting room of the local adult education institute in Olching respectively. Each of these locations reflected where the Future Search Conference had originated and was centrally located and well accessible. I was not able to offer any reimbursement of costs or payment for attending to the participants. However, this did not seem to affect attendance, as most participants were highly motivated to attend. I was unable to pay a co-facilitator, and could not persuade any researchers I knew to travel to my case study area and attend more than one of my focus groups in a voluntary capacity, let alone spend sufficient time to make themselves familiar with my research objectives. Even though I had another researcher present at one of my three focus groups in order to give me feedback, she could not fulfil the role of a co-facilitator because she knew too little about the background and objectives of my research. I facilitated all three focus group sessions myself and taped the discussions.

	RUSHMOOR			OLCHING		
<b>Date</b>	Wed 16 July 97	Thu 17 July 97	Mo 21 July 97	Mon 26 January 98	Wed 28 January 98	Thu 29 January 98
<b>Time</b>	5pm	7pm	7pm	7pm	7pm	5pm
<b>Number of Participants</b>	8	6	5	8	8	8
<b>Co-facilitator present</b>	no	yes	no	yes	no	no

**Table 5.6 : Details of the Focus groups with Future Search Conference participants in Rushmoor and Olching**

The participants were allowed to carry out an evaluation from their point of view, without me bringing up any of the evaluation criteria compiled beforehand (see box 5.4). I wanted to accommodate the fact that the Future Search methodology by its nature leads to many unexpected outcomes which might remain undiscovered if only the pre-conference evaluation criteria were applied. After an introductory round, focus group participants were asked to reflect a moment individually on their Future Search memories by drawing a curve that reflects how they had felt over the course of the weekend, and secondly, to rate the usefulness of each conference task with a number between one and five, with one meaning a waste of time and five meaning very useful. Participants were

then asked to transfer their individual impressions onto two posters at the wall to aggregate results. The focus group discussion then followed chronologically from the opening scenes of the conference to an evaluation of the conference outcomes and action groups and I used the posters on the wall as prompts for the discussion.

#### **Focus group protocol**

*I introduce myself, the purpose of my research, the purpose of this meeting, the rules of the game, confidentiality issues, encouragement to voice views which contradict what others are saying.*

*Introductory round:*

Tell us your name, organisation/stakeholder group and one thing you remember most about the Future Search Conference. What were your impressions/expectations before the conference?

*Quiet working period: participants draw a curve that reflects their mood during the conference and rank the usefulness of each conference task (first on a worksheet, then onto a poster on the wall, where all views are aggregated)*

The conference method *(to be discussed along the posters)*

- opening & time lines
- mind map
- (only in Rushmoor: trends in stakeholder groups)
- prouds & sorries
- ideal future groups
- common ground
- action planning groups

How has the conference affected you or your outlook on things?

What are outcomes of the conference?

The conference - an opportunity to contribute to Rushmoor's/Olching's future?

*Final round:* What would be your advice to a local authority that was considering to run a Future Search Conference?

#### **Box 5.4 Protocol of the focus group discussions with Future Search participants**

Despite the fact that the focus group sessions were quite short, they benefited highly from the fact that the attendees had spent a whole weekend together just 10 days previously. In actual fact, participants seemed to enjoy this timely reunion and the opportunity to reflect on what had been going on at the conference. While the participants were generally very forthcoming, some felt inhibited by the semi-public context that the focus group creates. This was especially true for people in very senior positions who admitted in the individual interviews later, that in their official capacity as representatives of their organisations, they needed to be seen to be saying the 'right' things in the public space of a focus group. I compensated for this in the individual interviews. I had few problems with inappropriate self-disclosure of participants, but where it occurred, I applied strategies of deflecting participants therapeutic needs as recommended by Burgess et al (1988a:319). One example of this was a focus group participant who, in justifying why she had resigned as a chair of her working group less than 10 days after the conference, started to go deeply into her problem of being a workaholic. I intervened gently and persistently to move

the group's focus of attention away from her need for attention and consolation and back towards the Future Search follow-through.

### *Focus group discussions with non-participants to the Future Search Conference*

One of the main shortcomings of both Future Search Conferences was the lack of attendance by young people in Rushmoor and by parents of young children in Olching. To compensate I ran a second set of focus groups with young people / parents of young children living or working in the area. I asked the focus group participants what they liked about living in their community and what they disliked, what they would improve if they could and where they saw their own role in bringing about changes. I also wanted to know if they would have been interested in attending the Future Search Conference and for what reasons. My purpose in running these focus groups was two-fold: I wanted to find out what those people who were underrepresented at the conference desired for their (present and) future and to compare that with the conference results. A second objective was to investigate the attitudes of non-participants towards participating in local decision-making and politics in general and a Future Search Conference in particular.

For the focus group discussions with non-participants I chose meetings of pre-existing groups. This choice benefited from the struggles of former Cambridge PhD student Anna Davies, who had found the recruitment of participants for her own focus groups almost impossible and had adjusted her strategy to work with existing groups. The fact that participants knew each other well meant that the group dynamics were established and the focus group would not be inhibited by phases of group formation. However, a pre-existing group requires a particular extra-effort on the side of the facilitator to draw out the underlying assumptions and the shared background knowledge of the group, which might be too taken for granted for the participants themselves to explicitly refer to it. I selected the 3-4 focus groups with young people / mothers of young children in each case study area to represent a good spectrum of young people / mothers of young children (see table 5.7 and 5.8) and used the contacts of the Future Search Conference and the local authority to identify pre-existing groups. As usually only the leader of the group had agreed for me to attend the group's next meeting, the participants of each session were usually taken by surprise to have me at their meeting. They could opt to participate in my discussion, or abstain, which some opted for as well. Each discussion took no longer than 45 minutes, usually because the participants did not have more time to give me. I ran the focus groups myself and used the meeting rooms of the groups. This meant that sometimes dish-washers and crying children in the background made recording difficult. The discussion remained rather superficial, but did unravel a good cross-section of issues which had not been addressed by the Future Search Conference and also gave me a first impression of people's views on citizen participation.

<b>RUSHMOOR</b>				
<b>Date</b>	Wed 16 July 1997	Fri 18 July 1997	Tue 22 July 1997	Thu 24 July 1997
<b>Time</b>	10.40-11.15am	6.30-7.30pm	9.40-10.20pm	11am-11.40am
<b>Did they know I was coming?</b>	no (only group leader)	no (only group leader)	no	yes
<b>Number of Participants</b>	10	6	16	7
<b>Group characteristics</b>	mothers of 2-4 year-olds	14-year-old girls	young adults in their twenties, members of a youth organisation	young employees of an organisation

**Table 5.7 : Focus group discussions with non-participants to the Future Search Conference in Rushmoor**

<b>OLCHING</b>			
<b>Date</b>	Wed 21 January 98	Thu 22 January 98	Tue 27 January 98
<b>Time</b>	9.20-10 am	2.45-4 pm	3-5 pm
<b>Did mothers know I was coming?</b>	no (only the group leaders)	yes (some prepared themselves)	no (only the group leader)
<b>Number of Participants</b>	5 (out of 14 present)	7	6
<b>Characteristics of participants</b>	mothers with children of 18 months to 3 years	mothers of teenagers, one with young children	mothers of children of 10 weeks to four years

**Table 5.8 : Focus group discussions with non-participants to the Future Search Conference in Olching**

A major difficulty for me in running these groups was finding the right tone and way of addressing participants, who were usually of a different social class (very poor and low education level) or mothers (an experience I have not had) or much younger than myself (14-year olds). The participants and myself were equally insecure with each other at the beginning, but established reasonable rapport within the first fifteen minutes. The results of these groups were rather poor, and therefore, I did not even transcribe them verbatim. Instead I took notes from listening to the tapes. I would not run this kind of groups again without major preparation, and I am also not sure if focus groups are actually the right method to tease out the views of these people. I think a lot more could be revealed by simply spending a lot of time with a few selected individuals and sharing in their daily lives. These participants were unused to speaking up in a rather formal group situation, and were not very articulate about their views. Also many seemed not to have had much of a chance for reflecting on issues, so

that a series of meetings would have been necessary to gently move them towards the issues of interest for my research.

Nevertheless, these focus groups were excellent for giving me a feel for the kind of people in the community of each case study area, their style of talking about things, and most of all, how far away their thinking was from anything like Future Search conferencing. A few key sentences from the focus group discussions have stayed with me until today and made me a lot less judgemental about 'ordinary' people's attitudes and behaviour. So possibly the major benefit of these focus groups with non-participants was my own personal growth.

#### ***5.6.4 Expert interviews with local stakeholders***

I returned 14 months after the Future Search Conference for a 4-week period to Rushmoor and 11 months after the conference to Olching, in order to assess the long-term impacts of the intervention. Besides evaluating activities that had been directly initiated by Future Search, I also aimed to evaluate its impact on the wider political scene, not least because these were part of the criteria developed by the stakeholders. Out of the criteria developed by the stakeholders, I was particularly keen to investigate issues of public participation, local democracy and Local Agenda 21 and their standing in the local political scene.

Again, I gathered all documentary evidence I could find about what had happened since the Future Search Conference, mostly in the form of minutes of steering group and action group meetings. As these were not very informative or revealing at all about the diverse stakeholders' views (i.e. the topic of my research), I opted again for an interview strategy. This time, I decided to do individual interviews rather than group interviews, because I hoped (i) that the privacy of a one-to-one interview would be more revelatory than the semi-public situation of a focus group - particularly for those wearing official hats, and (ii) to get a more detailed understanding of certain key actors' motivations and actions, and how these are influenced by their background and worldviews.

As I selected interviewees "*because of who they are or what they did*" (Seldon 1988:3), the strategy chosen resembled elite interviewing, but it should be more correctly called 'expert interviewing'. While it was true that most of my interviewees also held "*a privileged position in society*" and "*are likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public*" (Richards 1996:199), this was not the selection criterion. As Meuser and Nagel (1991) have pointed out, 'expert' is a status that is relational to the research question. According to Meuser and Nagel, experts are those (i) who carry responsibility for the design, implementation or control of a problem or programme under investigation and (ii) who have privileged access to information about actor groups or decision-making processes of concern to the research.

The time and resources available allowed me to carry out a maximum of 30 semi-structured individual interviews with the 'experts' of relevance to my research interest: (i) the conference participants and (ii) a wide range of key people in local politics. I aimed to get as many diverse, but well-informed angles

on the Future Search process as I could. Again, all members of the steering group and the LA21 officer were at the heart of my inquiry. Also, I selected for the interviews a broad range of conference participants, some of whom were still active in the conference follow-through and some not. To assess the wider impact of Future Search, I interviewed the chief executive (and in Rushmoor also the two directors), and a range of council officers who were involved with public consultation and participation beyond Future Search. I also recruited councillors from all major parties, some of whom participated in the conference and some of whom sit on the LA21 subcommittee. As Rushmoor Borough Council seemed to be run to a larger extent by the officers, while *Gemeinde Olching* was much more under the influence of the local councillors, the number of interviewees selected from each grouping is different in each case study area. A second difference was that the *Landkreis Fürstenfeldbruck* in which Olching is located had a rather active Local Agenda 21 process which required investigation, while Hampshire County Council had not got started on its Local Agenda 21 process at the time when I conducted my fieldwork. Therefore, I interviewed two members of the *Landkreis* Local Agenda 21 process in Olching while not making a similar attempt in Rushmoor.

However, I was not able to interview all those who featured highly on my list. I was least successful in ensuring access to the business community and securing them for an interview. First of all, those people I had access to (for example a shop keeper in Olching) were too busy to offer me an interview appointment and were only willing to give me some brief comments on the phone. Secondly, I did not have a 'door opener' who could introduce me to the business representatives and add their weight and influence to my request for a research appointment. Both Future Search processes had suffered from a lack of business support from early on, so if the conference organisers were not able to claim the business people's time for their own purposes, they similarly were not able to do so for me. Therefore, my findings suffer from a slight lack of representativeness of the views recorded, which is not an uncommon problem in elite interviewing (Seldon 1988:7). A full listing of all interviews conducted can be found in tables 5.9 and 5.10.

A second problem area in elite interviewing that must be addressed is the reliability of what interviewees tell the interviewer. David Richards comments that "*elite interviewing should not be conducted with a view to establishing 'the truth', in a crude, positivist manner*" (Richards 1996:200). "*Thus, the interviewer must constantly be aware that the information the interviewee is supplying, can often be of a highly subjective nature*" (Richards 1996:201). From a constructivist perspective, we are bound to expect that. With regards to establishing external 'events' like if a meeting took place or not, if two people communicated or not, my strategy has been throughout all interviews to double-check with the interviewee themselves or with other parties closer to the source.

Classification of interviewee	No. of interviewees in Rushmoor	...out of whom the following were FSC participants	...out of whom the following attended a focus group
Steering group members	7	6	1
Members of active working groups from the FSC	3	3	3
FSC participants who are no longer actively involved	3	3	2
Sponsors	1	0	0
Chief executive and directors	3	1	0
Heads of service	4	1	1
LA21/ environment officer	1	0	0
other Council officers	3	0	0
Councillors of all major political parties	5	1	0
Coordinators of the LA21 process of the region	0	0	0

**Table 5.9 : Listing of expert interviews conducted for the Rushmoor case study**

Classification of interviewee	No. of interviewees in Olching	...out of whom the following were FSC participants	...out of whom the following attended a focus group
Steering group members	6	5	4
Members of active working groups from the FSC	2	2	2
FSC participants who are no longer actively involved	1	1	0
Sponsors	1	0	0
Chief executive and directors	1	1	0
Heads of service	1	0	0
LA21/ environment officer	1	1	0
other Council officers	3	2	0
Councillors of all major political parties (including 2 members of active FSC groups)	9	3	2
Coordinators of the LA21 process of the County / <i>Landkreis</i>	2	0	0

**Table 5.10 : Listing of expert interviews conducted for the Olching case study**

A third problem area is the researcher-respondent relationship itself. Here, I tried to strike a balance between treating each interviewee as a human being and establishing some common ground at the beginning of the interview and this way winning their trust. At the same time I gained enough distance so that I would not feel I owed them a favourable interpretation of their role in the scheme of things (Richards 1996:203). This required constant alertness and

adaptation of strategy - for example a more critical or otherwise distancing question in an interview where trust had grown excessive. A second strategy that I followed in the interviews wherever I could was to give the respondents an opportunity to respond to any critique about their personal role in the scheme of things that had come to my attention. The result was (i) to make them aware that I might raise such critique in my report and (ii) to give them a chance to correct any 'false' information I might hold about them and their role. I found this a liberating step, as I no longer carried around with me the secret knowledge of some dramatic critique which I was to unravel in my report, but instead already enhanced everybody's learning along the way. Both steps also helped to keep a balance of power between me and the interviewee. Only on rare occasions, for example with the chief executives of both local authorities, was there a clear sense of power differential which made me experience clearly that *"it is the interviewee who has the power. They control the information the interviewer is trying to eke out"* (Richards 1996:201).

I arranged most interviews with conference participants myself quite informally on the telephone. The interviewees still knew me from my last visit to the case study area and responded favourably throughout. Appointments with other local key players who I had not met before were usually arranged with the help of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 officer and Olching's Mayor. The weight they could add to my request for an interview usually helped. I also attended a broad range of local meeting and approached a few local players at these meetings myself (full listing in Appendix 1).

While it is strongly recommended to research the interviewee's background when elite interviewing (Richards 1996, Seldon 1988), it was not possible for me to do thorough research on each interviewee's background, usually for a lack of materials (publications etc.). In addition I did not feel that extraordinary research efforts were justified to prepare me for each of these quite large number of interviews (60 altogether). I felt justified in not doing the research throughout my interviews, and there was only one occasion where the lack of background knowledge about a person led to some embarrassment.

I asked each interviewee for 40-60 minutes. I tried hard to stick to one hour, however, some interviews with key people took up to 2 hours. I also interviewed two key people several times in order to get the huge amount of relevant information they were willing to share with me. Interviews took place in a small meeting room in Rushmoor Borough Council or in rare cases in the office of the interviewee or on one occasion on a walk. After starting the interview off with some warm-up questions, I allowed the subjects to emerge gradually from the interviewee's narrative rather than asking questions directly. I made an effort to appear informed, to probe in an uncompromising manner in the search for the best informed view, while not revealing my own opinion. Instead, I would refer to the critique others had raised (even when I shared this critique) and asked the respondent sincerely to let me know what they thought of this critique. I did check the interview guide about three quarters of the way through each interview, to make sure I had not lost sight of any major issues. I presented each



interviewee with evidence from earlier interviews to probe and deepen my understanding, but also to establish myself as a knowledgeable interviewer. I left tricky and critical questions until later on in the interviews, so that some rapport could develop first. I always asked the interviewees towards the end if there was anything they wanted me to know which I had not asked about, and sometimes some quite amazing conversations took off from there. My interview guide is reproduced in box 5.5.

#### **Interview guide**

1. How do you evaluate the Future Search process, looking back on it now?
2. (for members of the steering group) What was your experience of being a member of the steering group?
3. Do you feel the outcomes of the Future Search Conference have legitimacy?
4. What is the relationship between the Future Search activities and the Council (members and officers)?
5. What is your experience of the action group(s)?
6. What is the general line of the Council on consultation and participation?
7. What is the influence of central / federal & state government policies on consultation and local democracy?
8. What is your perception of LA21 in Rushmoor/ Olching?
9. (for members of LA21 officer steering group or members subcommittee: ) what has your group been up to?
10. What do you feel are the key issues facing Rushmoor/ Olching at present?
11. (for participants of my focus groups:) What was your experience of participating in the group discussion?

#### **Box 5.5 : Guide for expert interviews**

I assured all interviewees that what they said would not appear in direct connection with their name in my reports and that I would moreover take care to make it non-attributable wherever possible, for example by making sure that there were several sources to a certain piece of information. I tape-recorded all interviews and also typed along into my laptop computer. I asked each interviewee for permission to record and also asked if the typing would distract them. While all agreed to the recording and to the typing, the fact that a few people later made comments about how well and how extraordinarily fast I type signalled to me that it was not without impact, and possibly distraction. However, as I type without looking at the keyboard and so automatically that I can still think about things - at least to some extent - whilst typing, the interviews did not suffer from a lack of flow and liveliness. By the end of my research, I was able to catch 70-80% word-by-word of what the interviewees had said while they were talking. I later added in the missing words from the tapes, so that I had full verbatim transcripts within one week of each interview.

In order to review the effectiveness of the focus group methodology, I asked those interviewees for feedback who had attended the focus group discussions. It was interesting that most of them had enjoyed the focus group setting as more stimulating and interesting compared to a one-to-one interview. However, respondents in senior positions and official capacities in particular felt inhibited by the 'public' setting of the focus group.

### **5.6.5 Research on the follow-up conferences**

Finally, I also attended the follow-through evening to the Rushmoor Future Search Conference, which was held 17 months after the conference, as a participant-observer. I wrote up my impressions as a memo afterwards. However, while attending the meeting gave me a feel for where the follow-through was at, this did not justify the effort and resources required for me to attend it. I decided not to attend the follow-up conference in Olching in February 2000, but attained the detailed documentation of the event instead. I updated each case study chapter to include the new information in March 2000.

### **5.7 Data analysis and report writing**

My data analysis was inspired by the grounded theory approach, but did not attempt to resemble closely the mechanistic procedures prescribed by it. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) a grounded theory "*is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents*". As Yin (1993:62) pointedly summarises about grounded theory: "*The whole point of the method is to identify emergent categories from empirical data, by using qualitative data analysis methods.*" I did not follow the procedure recommended by Strauss and Corbin, because it seemed to me to seek a mechanistic escape from (inherent) subjectivity of the process of identifying the 'truth' as defined by the 'scientific method'. Instead, I remained faithful to the naturalistic inquiry paradigm chosen for this research project, which replaces mechanistic procedures by the reflectiveness of the 'human instrument' involved in the data production and analysis.

#### **5.7.1 Analysis of the focus groups with Future Search participants**

The tape recordings of the focus group discussions with conference participants were later transcribed by a typist and checked and edited by myself. In the Rushmoor case study, I spent a lot of time adding in the names of the speakers and passages which had been too hard to catch for the person paid to do the transcription. However, the improvements in the analysis derived did not seem justified by the enormous amount of time consumed. As the quality of the transcripts from Olching was much better (also due to better recording devices), and as I was already struggling with time constraints, I did not carry out a similarly thorough edit of the Olching transcripts.

I read thoroughly through each of the transcripts of the focus groups with participants, and wrote summary key words for each point made at the margins of each page. I made a conscious effort to stay as close as possible to their own wording to lose as little of the original data as possible. I then developed headings for the topics discussed and arranged them into an A3 mind map. I photocopied the empty map three times and filled in the details of what was said about each topic (including the page number of the transcript). With the three mind maps spread out on my table, I drafted a first integrated analysis. I also used the posters of the drawing exercises while writing the first draft.

In reporting the findings of the focus groups in a separate document, I summarised the multiple views offered by the stakeholders into a pluralist account that emphasises areas of agreement just as much as areas of divergence. I distinguished speakers as members of stakeholder groups, gender or age groups, wherever this seemed to add to the explanatory power of the statements made. I gave no indication of a person's grouping where what was said reflected an impression shared by members of all stakeholder or age groups. A second challenge in writing the draft was how to handle numbers. While I would have been able to list exactly how many people raised a certain point in a focus group discussion, mentioning this number in the report would miss the whole point of the focus group exercise, namely that one person often speaks for many others present and that others indicate their agreement by nodding. My purpose in writing up for this book has therefore been to indicate the overall tone of an issue. I have distinguished areas of overall agreement amongst focus group participants ('a majority of focus group participants thought...'), from those where opinions were divided ('a few / a number of / some conference participants said...'). I also documented some views held by single individuals ('one individual felt...').

### *5.7.2 Analysis of the interviews*

The interviews (and the transcripts) covered a wide range of issues, including huge amounts of background information about each interviewee's organisation, interests and opinion. This required a one-by-one in-depth analysis of the transcripts, where full attention is paid to the fact that who is saying certain things is usually more important than the fact that they were said. Nevertheless, I extracted from each interview the passages of relevance to the evaluation of the Future Search Conference. I coded up to 80% of each interview using the categories suggested by my evaluation criteria, but also by adding others which emerged from the text. In the process of coding, I merged categories and divided them. The final coding list can be found in table 5.11.

<b>PROCESS</b> inclusive fair competent collaborative innovative empowered participants cross-sectoral enjoyable sustainable	<b>OUTCOMES</b> a vision that will carry through multiplier effect wider public reached action groups follow through with their plans Council supports the implementation of conference visions and proposals for action Local Agenda 21 strengthened resources for follow-through attracted regular progress review	<b>CAPACITY BUILDING</b> trust revival of local democracy new & strengthened partnerships revival of local democracy increased environmental awareness commitment / hope
<b>LOCAL ISSUES</b> (many sub-headings, i.e. transport)	<b>OTHER CITIZEN PARTICIPATION</b> (many sub-headings, i.e. annual citizen gathering)	<b>INTEREST / POWER REVELATIONS</b> (many subheadings, i.e. motivation for conference attendance)

**Table 5.11 : Coding categories which emerged in the interview analysis**

### **5.7.3 Integrated analysis**

I used the same coding process for the notes of my non-participant observation of the conference and for the report I had written on the basis of the conference questionnaires. I also went over my in-depth report of all focus group discussions with participants and applied the same coding procedure. I then drafted a passage at a time for each coding criterion on the basis of all available data for that respective criterion. From the focus group discussions, the individual interviews, the questionnaires and the non-participant observation, a polyvocal chorus of sometimes diverging and sometimes converging voices arose. In writing my first draft, I followed Zadek and Raynard (1995) who point out that *"social auditing does not seek to judge the relative relevance of these different views, many of which in practice can offer very different accounts and judgements of the same set of events. Rather, it seeks to report these different viewpoints, and where possible to contextualise them with other information in a manner that allows the audience to come to a view as to how to deal with the various perspectives."* (p.169-170). In reporting the findings of my evaluation, I tried to do justice to this requirement of highlighting areas of convergence just as much as areas of divergence. The first draft was still very 'raw', in that it was rich in quotes and weak in analysis. This long draft was used as raw material for the analysis of power conducted in chapter 8. When drafting the case study chapters, I narrowed down the criteria to those ten listed in table 5.4, and wrote a much shorter narrative adding more reflection and analysis. I have listed the abbreviations used to indicate the data source in table 5.12.

Abbreviation	Data source
NP O	non-participant observation at the Future Search Conference (followed by page no.)
FG or RFG	focus groups with conference participants (followed by group no. and page no.)
T	posters with aggregated ratings of usefulness, which I employed in all focus groups with conference participants (followed by a group no.)
NFG	focus groups with non-participants (followed by group no. and page no.)
I	interviews with stakeholders in the evaluation (followed by interview no., at times a letter to indicate a repeat interview, and page no.)
U	update telephone interview with a key person in each case study area (followed by page no.)
BV	non-participant observation at citizen gatherings in Olching (followed by letter which indicates date and location and page no. where appropriate)
Q or QN	summary report on conference questionnaire (followed by a page no.)
K I	pre-conference interview with key person (followed by page no.)

**Table 5.12 : Abbreviations used to indicate data sources**

#### **5.7.4 Data reduction**

In a final step, I ranked the performance of each Future Search Conference with regards to each of the ten criteria on a five-point scale. The rating spans from double minus (- -) via zero (0) to double plus (+ +). The process of reducing the rich complexity of the qualitative data presented in this book to such crude figures is necessarily highly subjective and contestable. My main motivation for nevertheless making the effort of reducing data was my desire to make available the main findings 'at one glance'. The justification for each rating is found in the passage written on each criterion. Table 5.13 defines each rating given.

Rating	Meaning
- -	complete failure to deliver
-	slightly negative overall judgement, some complaints, failure in some areas
0	a mix of slight failure in some areas and modest achievement in others
+	modest achievement
++	a performance that completely fulfils or exceeds expectations

**Table 5.13 : Ratings used in the data reduction phase of the evaluation**

#### **5.7.5 Linking the findings back to the theories**

The two case study chapters will present the emic view of the Future Search experience, namely (i) how conference participants experienced each step of the Future Search Conference and (ii) secondly the evaluation along the criteria proposed by those with a stake in the conference. In chapter 8, an etic perspective is taken upon the findings. The findings will be linked back to the

theories introduced in chapter 3 and chapter 4. The implications for the Future Search design on the one hand and for theories of collaborative planning on the other will be discussed. I will draw on the theories of power introduced in chapter 3 in order to explain the findings of each case study evaluation.

## 5.8 Establishing validity

### 5.8.1 Conventional validity criteria

The classic social sciences refer to four criteria to establish the validity of a research project: (i) construct validity, (ii) internal validity, (iii) external validity and (iv) reliability. Yin (1994:33-37) has explicitly applied those to case study work. Construct validity is given where the research question can actually be answered by measuring the empirical dimensions/ indicators suggested. It suggests some kind of causality between research themes and observed variables. Internal validity requires the critical examination of the link between empirical evidence gathered and explanations / conclusions derived from it. Internal validity is given where alternative explanations to those supported by the evidence have been successfully ruled out. External validity establishes the extent to which the findings of a case study can be generalised beyond the immediate case, either to other cases, or to a broader theory. Finally, reliability demands that the research procedures are explicitly described, so that if somebody else followed the same procedure, the person would obtain the same empirical evidence.

Yin (1994:33) has suggested a number of case study tactics in order to achieve validity in case study work. These are summarised in table 5.14.

Tests	Case study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct validity	-use multiple sources of evidence -establish chain of evidence -have key informants review draft case study report	data collection data collection composition
Internal validity	-do pattern-matching -do explanation-building -do time-series analysis	data analysis data analysis data analysis
External validity	-use replication logic in multiple-case studies	research design
Reliability	-use case study protocol -develop case study data base	data collection data collection

**Table 5.14 : Conventional case study tactics to establish validity**

Source: COSMOS Corporation ( in: Yin 1994:33)

### 5.8.2 Validity in naturalistic inquiry

However, the applicability of these classic criteria to the research I conducted is limited. These classic criteria originate from an ontological assumption of "a single objective reality that can be investigated by following the traditional rules of scientific inquiry" (Yin 1993:64, table 4.1). The research approach I apply

builds on Egon Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln's 'naturalistic inquiry' as elaborated above. Lincoln and Guba (1986) have followed two approaches towards defining validity criteria which resonate with the assumptions and ethics of their research approach. The first takes the four criteria above as a starting point and develops the four 'equivalent' criteria of (i) credibility, (ii) transferability, (iii) dependability and (iv) confirmability. I have summarised their case study tactics with regards to each in table 5.15.

Tests	Case study tactics	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
[No equivalent to construct validity]		
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-prolonged engagement with respondents/ phenomena</li> <li>-persistent observation</li> <li>-cross-checking of data by use of different sources, methods, and investigators</li> <li>-debriefing with disinterested peer</li> <li>-negative case analysis</li> <li>-member checks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-data collection</li> <li>-data collection</li> <li>-data collection</li> <li>-data analysis / throughout</li> <li>-data analysis / research design</li> <li>-data collection / analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Transferability</b>	-thick descriptive data	-composition
<b>Dependability</b>	-external audit by disinterested auditor	-throughout
<b>Confirmability</b>		

**Table 5.15 : Case study tactics of naturalistic inquiry to establish validity**

Source: own table on the basis of Lincoln & Guba 1986

It is interesting to note some overlaps between the tables - despite the fact that they are based on such contrasting epistemologies: Both tables emphasize the idea of allowing respondents to check the researcher's reconstruction of their account ('member checks'). Also, both of them recommend the use of multiple / diverse sources of evidence. They differ of course widely on the other strategies recommended for validation, with Yin emphasizing theory-guided checklists and mechanistic procedures and Lincoln and Guba recommending human interaction - in the field, or by consulting peers or auditors.

In addition, Lincoln (1994) has linked validity claims to a number of ethical issues and is not alone in doing so. Altheide and Johnson (1994) claim that "[v]alidity will be quite different for different audiences" (Altheide & Johnson 1994:488) and have delineated seven 'radically qualified' or 'hyphenated' categories of validity, each of which implies a different purpose of the research undertaking in the first place. Guba and Lincoln's approach is classified as 'Validity-as-reflexive-accounting (VARA)' (Altheide & Johnson 1994:489). Guba and Lincoln frame research first and foremost as an interactive process, and are mostly concerned about the ethical implications of the researcher-respondent relationship. Lincoln (1994:304) suggests two additional challenges resulting from the ethical obligation implied by the researcher-respondent

relationship (which in her eyes must be resolved in some way by *all* research approaches): (i) legitimisation and (ii) representation. Legitimation for Lincoln is achieved when *"the text is faithful to the context and the individuals it is supposed to represent."* (Lincoln 1994:304). Lincoln's main response to this challenge has been to allow *"stakeholders [to] validate - or legitimate - the stories which were being presented as authentically theirs."* (Lincoln 1994:304) Secondly, representation for Lincoln is speaking authentically of the experience of the research subjects. However, Lincoln doubts that this may ever be possible. She recommends instead a number of strategies to approximate authentic representation, which I have included in the table below. (Lincoln 1994:305). I have summarised the research tactics recommended by Lincoln (1994:304-305) with regards to these new criteria in table 5.16.

Tests	Case study tactics	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
<b>Legitimation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-seek out the views of <b>all possible stakeholders to an intervention</b></li> <li>-allow respondents to see and suggest <b>changes to the researcher's reconstruction of their responses</b></li> <li>-use of a hermeneutic circle to display and debate all stakeholder constructions</li> <li>-negotiate between and among the various stakeholders what should be said for public consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-research design / data collection</li> <li>-composition</li> <li>-data analysis</li> <li>-composition</li> </ul>
<b>Representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<b>participatory / collaborative research</b></li> <li>-train the research subjects to analyse their own situation</li> <li>-allow research subject to co-author</li> <li>-<b>construct research reports where multiple, conflicting voices speak</b></li> <li>-<b>allow research subjects to speak for itself by presenting original narratives / stories</b></li> <li>-ensure access of research subjects to academia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-throughout</li> <li>-at the outset</li> <li>-composition / data-analysis</li> <li>-composition / data-analysis</li> <li>-composition / data-analysis</li> <li>-at the outset</li> </ul>

Table 5.16 : Case study tactics to establish legitimisation and representation

Source: my table on the basis of Lincoln 1994

I have used bold print in both above tables to highlight the recommendations that I have followed at least to some extent in my methodology. I will refer to these criteria throughout my methodology chapter, but summarise the main validity safeguards I used in the next section.



### **5.8.3 Validity of the research conducted**

#### **Credibility**

##### ***Prolonged engagement***

I have spent a total of 10 weeks in each case study area, working from a desk within the local authority building. This has allowed me to follow up many unexpected routes of investigation, to attend local meetings just out of curiosity and to learn from informal lunch conversations just as much as from my carefully prepared interviews. I lived with local people, used the local utilities and read the local papers.

##### ***Cross-checking data by use of different sources, methods, and investigators***

I combined two main research tools, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Almost half of my individual interviewees were focus group participants as well, which gave me an opportunity to contrast how people presented themselves and their views in the group and in the individual interview. I also attended a wide range of meetings (including the Future Search Conference) as a non-participant observer and kept written records of these. A minor additional source of data were publications and official documents (like the documentation of the Future Search Conference, the Local Plan, minutes from committee meetings) and newspaper clippings. I tried to enrol colleagues and friends as co-facilitators for my focus group sessions, but was not able to get support.

##### ***Member checks***

I did not consider it necessary to allow for extensive member checks by all my interviewees. I felt that the time, effort and resources required to coordinate such an attempt would be disproportionate in comparison to the benefits gained. I have done the hard work already in the interviewing, where I asked respondents to clarify ambiguous statements or checked by rephrasing if I had grasped what they were trying to get across. In the focus groups, the participants of the group have often taken on a very similar role by probing each other's views and contrasting it with their own. The most significant feedback was obtained in interviews with the key organisers towards the end of each field work period, where I would present an account of my findings to these key people in order to (i) inform them and (ii) give them an opportunity to give me a different angle on what I had reconstructed from the interviews. In addition, I have allowed the key organiser of each Future Search Conference of each case authority to check my written accounts for accuracy before they were finalised. I would have liked to return for a third and final visit to each of my case study areas, to report what I considered my findings and to get the local people's response to that (which naturalistic inquiry promotes as the biggest learning of the entire case study work). However, I was already running out of time and money, and it was simply not possible for me to realise this step.

### *Debriefing with disinterested peer*

Throughout the four years of working on this research project, I have always sought discussion with peers, most notably at conferences, where I have presented early findings. Of particular significance were much more personal connections (i) at UK and German Future Search practitioners' days, which I attended regularly and often sought feedback on my work and (ii) with the consultancy 'Sustainable Futures' in Gloucestershire, with whom I made sense of observations, research experiences and from whom I sought advice on the phone and during several visits. I have also kept in touch over the four years with a couple of research students and colleagues from other universities who work on similar issues (LA21 and participation), and many of the conversations I have had with these people have significantly altered the light in which I see my own research evidence. A full listing of these important 'peer debriefings' can be found in Appendix 2.

### *Transferability*

These peer dialogues also helped me to recognise the particularities of my cases just as much as those observations of wider interest to the research community and practitioners elsewhere. In the introduction to each case study, I have aimed to give a thick (as opposed to a standardised) description of the wider cultural, political, social, geographical context and processes within which the case is based.

### *Dependability / Confirmability*

The research findings have not been submitted to the scrutiny of a formal auditing process. However, my supervisory committee has fulfilled a strikingly similar function. They have continually questioned my plans, probed by justifications and made me aware of potential loopholes in my methodology. I have provided to them in the form of successive drafts of this methodology chapter an account that supports the dependability and confirmability of the findings - including an awareness of the limitations.

### *Legitimation*

I have sought the views on evaluation criteria from *all* those who - after consulting with local key people - I considered to have a stake in the Future Search Conference. I even included the views of 'ordinary' residents of both case study areas who had not attended (and usually not even heard about) the Future Search Conference. The starting point for my inquiry was therefore informed by interviews (or focus groups) with *all* stakeholders, even though I was not able to call a meeting to have them jointly define the criteria as collaborative research would have required.

### *Representation*

Using quotations extensively is my way of allowing the people to represent themselves. I would have liked to engage in a more collaborative research approach. However, this would have required a much earlier entry into the

Future Search planning process, namely at a time when the steering group was under much less pressure. Secondly, it would have required a commitment by the steering group to spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on what they were doing, in addition to the time they spent doing things. When I first met each steering group, they were already so tied up with the conference preparation that I was urged by the key organiser not to ask for any of their joint meeting time for reflective tasks. It proved difficult enough to get to speak to them at all prior to the conference.

### **5.9 The nature of the case comparison**

According to Hambleton, a comparison of local experiences across countries is useful where the problems and challenges faced locally are similar (Hambleton 1995:225). My two case studies are both struggling to implement Local Agenda 21 and to get more of their citizens involved in local politics. Both have chosen to experiment with a new participation tool from the US called Future Search Conference. Both are commuter villages outside a major urban congregation, both face a number of very similar challenges.

However, "[t]he apparently beguiling similarities dissolve on closer inspection into a host of differences, as other research has demonstrated" (Green & Booth 1995:215). There are a number of benefits from choosing to study cases which are located in two different countries. First, the contrast between two social systems enables one to recognise much more clearly the particularities of each, some of which might otherwise have been taken for granted and overlooked (Hambleton 1995:227, Green & Booth 1995:216). I have certainly much enhanced my understanding of German and British society, and the Bavarian and English versions in particular, simply through a hands-on experience of the contrast. This has helped me to 'see' more vividly, to what extent and in what ways the reception of the Future Search Conference was 'biased' (i.e. influenced in one particular way rather than in another) because of national particularities. Secondly, a country comparison enhances the scope for policy learning. What works well elsewhere might inspire changes to one's own practice. One reason for my insisting on doing a British and a German case study was the desire to allow the Germans to learn from the widespread UK experience with Future Search. (My German case study was the first application of a Future Search Conference design in the public sector in Germany.)

However, there are serious limitations to the assumption that what works well in one country can be recommended for another. An acute sensitivity is required to those aspects of the setting within which the intervention takes place which are critical to its success, and which might not be present in another country, or might be present in a different form. This requires us to look beneath the surface of policy institutions and social organisations and to identify those elements which might take widely differing shapes but fulfil a similar function in the local system. A similar warning applies to the description of the wider case setting. What might be an indication of a vibrant civil society in one country is by no means necessarily the form and shape that civil activism takes in another society.

Wolman (1993) has usefully delineated two further dimensions along which an acute awareness of cross-country-differences is required. First of all, it cannot be assumed that the purpose of the same intervention is similar in each country. Therefore, it is essential to identify the purpose of an intervention as defined by those designing it. What exactly are the expected benefits and do those differ between the two countries? Secondly, Wolman argues that success in the eyes of the observers from one country may constitute failure in the eyes of analysts from another country. He recommends that when the success of the intervention is measured, we need to be very clear who defines what constitutes success. The fact that my evaluation grid is based on the criteria and indicators suggested by those with a stake in the Future Search Conference is a clear indication that my analysis is sensitive to these issues. However, this is potentially achieved at the cost of comparability. The indicators are 'local' and in that sense unique and do not necessarily lend themselves to a cross-case comparison (Voluntary Activity Unit 1997:36). To my surprise, the criteria which emerged in both case study areas resembled each other so closely, that a joint table could be constructed without losing anything. Nevertheless, I was forced to remain highly sensitive to the particularities of each case and its national context.

### **5.10 Summary**

This chapter has introduced the methodology which was pursued in order to provide answers to the research questions spelled out at the end of chapter 4. I have explained that the tenets of naturalistic inquiry and the principles of Social Auditing have informed the stakeholder-based evaluation methodology developed for this project. Two case study areas were selected in order to study the phenomenon Future Search Conference in its rich context. The criteria for evaluation were initially gathered by a round of snap-shot interviews with stakeholders in the evaluation, but were later modified in the light of emerging research evidence. The research methodology featured focus group discussions ten days after each Future Search Conference and expert interviews 11-14 months after each conference. In addition, document research, non-participant observation and two questionnaires were carried out. I have explained that the data analysis has taken inspiration from grounded theory, while not following the mechanistic procedures suggested by the proponents of this theory. In a final section, I have explained in what ways I have aimed to enhance the validity of my research findings and have discussed the expected benefits from choosing case studies in two different European countries.

The reader is now well-prepared for the presentation of the findings from each case study area. Chapter 6 will present the Rushmoor case study, chapter 7 the Olching case study. Each case study chapter will begin with a link to theory chapter 2: I will describe how the UNCED conference and its outcome Agenda 21 was received in Great Britain and Germany respectively. Moreover, I will provide background information on the local government structures in each country to the extent that they are relevant to making sense of the case study

findings. The context information has also been selected to allow the reader to judge how 'typical' each of the case studies is before the background of the wider national context.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Evaluation of the Future Search Conference in Rushmoor Borough Council's Local Agenda 21 Process**

Rushmoor Borough Council carried out a Future Search Conference as a launch event of their Local Agenda 21 process in July 1997. The first part of this chapter introduces the British policy context which crucially influenced the developments in Rushmoor. I will argue that the weak standing of local authorities in central-local government relations in the UK is a prime reason that explains why Local Agenda 21 is so popular with British local authorities in the first place, including Rushmoor. I will present some statistical evidence that helps us to recognise that Rushmoor Borough Council was amongst the avantgarde of local authorities that experimented with unconventional tools of citizen participation.

The second part of this chapter will introduce Rushmoor Borough as an area economically dependent upon the military and extremely vulnerable to cuts in the defence budget. The end of the Cold War has meant that the area is in need of a vision for a civic future beyond the military. I will introduce the strong local influence of the Liberal Democrats, who have piloted innovative approaches to citizen participation in all departments over the last years. Key players like a visionary former chief executive will be introduced and an overview of the Local Agenda 21 process will be presented, including the Future Search Conference.

The third part of this chapter turns to the Future Search event itself, which took place from 14-16 July 1997. On the basis of my non-participant observation, focus group discussions and interviews with conference participants and a conference questionnaire, I will report how the conference participants experienced each stage of the conference even.

The fourth part of this chapter will present the findings of my stakeholder-based evaluation of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference. Drawing on the criteria list developed with the stakeholders and presented in chapter 5, I will report how the conference performed with regards to process criteria, outcomes criteria and capacity building criteria. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings and present a best case and a worst case scenario for the future development of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process.

#### **6.1 The UK national context**

This introductory section will set the scene for my UK case study. First, I shall describe how the Rio Earth Summit influenced national policy making in the UK. Secondly, I will discuss the difficult situation of local authorities in the UK that made them prone to pick up on Local Agenda 21 as an opportunity to justify their very existence. Given their weak powers, establishing network structures around a Local Agenda 21 process made much sense for UK local authorities, and as a result, 'whole systems' tools for citizen participation played a major role in the UK's Local Agenda 21 processes. The drive for stakeholder

participation was much speeded up by New Labour's election into power. I shall describe New Labour's policy initiatives, which were aimed at enhancing local democracy and local people's capacity for citizenship. Finally, I shall explain how New Labour's strategy document on sustainable development gives impetus to sustainability activities by suggesting that it be part of local authorities' duty to prove they are delivering "Best Value" to their citizens.

### **6.1.1 Defining sustainable development**

The Tory government responded to the challenge posed by the Brundtland report with a document called 'Sustaining Our Common Future' (DoE 1989). In this first position statement on the issue of sustainable development, the Tory government put a clear priority on economic development, a fact later to be endorsed by the selection of the growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as one of the UK's sustainability indicators. In response to the Rio Earth Summit, the Tory government was prompt (compared to other nations) to produce 'Sustainable Development: A UK strategy' (HM Government 1994b). But again, this document was criticised *"for having no targets or clear vision of the future, no sense of urgency, and no inspirational capacity. Although it exhorted action from many other groups and stakeholders, action by the government itself was lacking."* (Voisey & O'Riordan 1998:162). Consultation processes with NGOs and the public were conducted in a rather ad-hoc fashion. The Government's Panel on Sustainable Development and the UK Roundtable on Sustainable development were created by the government, both designed to advise the government on its policies with regards to sustainable development in the form of written reports to which the government responds. The more exclusive Panel consisted of only a handful of highly influential personalities from business and academia, while the Roundtable includes long lists of members from all walks of life, working in a number of sub-groups. However, there was no commitment from the government to implement any recommendations and both bodies have been hard pressed to point to anything specific they have influenced (Voisey & O'Riordan 1998). The intra-generational justice dimension of sustainable development never featured highly. Where it did, economic development was regarded as the solution for easing inequalities, and its fruits were to be protected from excessive environmental degradation and population increases.

### **6.1.2 Sustainability indicators**

The set of sustainability indicators introduced by the DoE and Government Statistical Service in 1996 were considered a real achievement of the otherwise rather weak Department of the Environment. Roger Levett (1996) has celebrated the indicator document for a number of reasons: First of all, he praises the introductory essay as *"one of the best short overviews yet of the whys and wherefores of the sustainability indicators topic"* (1996:8). Secondly, the indicators included in the document have actually been measured over twenty years or more and therefore allow clear statements about trends. This evidence

tends to back up 'in black and white' a lot of the demands made by NGOs over the decades. However, Levett joins the critique put forward by others, that the report features economic growth and fails to produce indicators that measure how economic and environmental needs could be 'reconciled', as the introduction recommends. A second strand of criticism is raised by Bond and colleagues who have attested the set of sustainability indicators an environmental bias. They developed a typology to delineate the socio-economic from the environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and according to their typology, only 13 out of 118 indicators developed by the DoE are of socio-economic character (Bond et al 1998:774). Again, this seems to imply a lack of integration of environmental concerns with socio-economic ones.

### **6.1.3 Central-local government relations in the UK**

I will now turn to a discussion of the desperate situation of local authorities in the UK that made them more likely to pick up on Local Agenda 21. In order to make sense of UK local authorities' situation, it is important to understand the development of UK central-local government relations over the last decades. Britain is a constitutional monarchy, where power is still firmly based at the centre and around a notion of parliamentary sovereignty. In the absence of a written constitution, the distribution of power between diverse levels of government and ad-hoc bodies is subject to constant revision, with a simple majority in the House of Commons sufficient to wipe out or re-create institutions. In this context, it is easy to see why the history of local government is one of struggles with central government: *"Because local government has no legal basis other than that defined in Acts of Parliament, it is possible for central government, through its control of the legislature, to make any changes it wishes to its structure and functions."* (Kingdon 1993:21) In 1985, the Thatcher government used this power to eliminate strong Labour councils by the simple means of an Act of Parliament. Labour dominated all metropolitan areas at the time and pursued policies that contradicted the neo-liberal ideology of central government. The abolition of all Metropolitan Council authorities and of the Greater London Council proved the most effective way of wiping out Labour's power base.

For the remaining local authorities, the Thatcher era has meant a drastic reduction in their powers as well. Central government substantially undermined local authorities' capacity to shape local policies in a comprehensive way on a strategic level and implement them. This has occurred in a number of ways. Many functions have been successively taken away from local governments over the Thatcher years and given to newly created ad-hoc bodies, usually known as quangos or 'extra government organisations' (Weir 1995). The creation of quangos was *"a matter of concern for anyone committed to democratic accountability, for they place public money and government functions in the hands of unelected persons whose links to the elected bodies that supervise government are tenuous at best"* (Hirst 1995:341). Secondly, local authorities have become required to subject the remaining services to a process of



compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and were obliged to opt for the cheapest offer. This meant that those who used to provide services directly as part of the local authorities were now required to compete with others for a contract. If their offer was not the cheapest, the local authority was required to contract the service out. However, as Voisey has remarked, 62% of contracts have been awarded to local authority in-house staff and there is a lack of evidence to show that CCT has improved the quality of services in any significant way or helped to cut costs, because a lot of administrative effort had to go into the tendering process itself (Voisey 1998:236).

Along with many of their policy-making capacities, local authorities also lost the financial basis to affect change. Local authorities draw their finance from three sources: grants from central government, local taxation and income generated directly from charging the users of local services. Over the history of local government, fees and charges have decreased, as Labour-led councils have insisted that local services should be available for all and not just for those who could afford to pay a fee. The importance of central government grants has grown continuously, to the extent that local finances are less and less locally controlled: *"Increasingly, however, the system has become an instrument whereby central government can exert political control over the activities of local government through the principle of paying the piper"* (Kingdon 1993:14). In 1980, the Local Government Planning and Land Act marked a first step towards centralisation. The block grant system now meant that the Secretary of State for the Environment would assess the so-called Grant Related Expenditure for each authority and determine the grant size accordingly. Overspending could be punished by withholding of part of the grant. At the same time, local authorities' capacity to raise taxes has been reduced to a level of almost non-existence. Before the Thatcher era, local authorities collected taxes on property in a so-called rates system, with higher taxes to be paid for bigger properties. Under Conservative rule, 'rate capping' was introduced in the 1984 Local Government Finance Act, which meant that central government set a maximum limit to the rate that could be set by a local authority. This was intended to limit the expenditures by local governments, but did not have the intended effects. In a second attempt, the poll tax was introduced, which set a fixed rate to be paid by each adult independent of their financial situation (with some reductions for the poorest), and again, the maximum possible level was defined by central government. This system proved so unpopular however, that it was replaced by the council tax system after Mrs. Thatcher fell from power. Nonetheless, central government still sets the level of taxes a local authority may raise. Finally, the ability of local authorities to collect rates on commercial and industrial property was transferred to central government, which set a uniform rate nationally, collects the money and then redistributes it to local authorities according to its own rules. For financially desperate local authorities, borrowing money from the government, private banks etc. had been a last reserve. However, there is now a limit set by the government each year on the amount that may be borrowed for particular activities or services (Kingdon 1993:14-15).

A further factor that significantly weakened local authorities in recent years was the local government reorganisation. In order to increase the effectiveness of local government in the long run, the two-tiered system of district and county councils was reviewed and the option of creating unitary authorities evaluated. While most rural areas in England were allowed to keep their two-tiered structure, many English urban areas as well as all Scottish and Welsh authorities gained unitary status. The process of merging two levels of government into one, caused a lot of rivalry and protective behaviour in the face of redundancy and redistribution of functions between remaining staff. In many areas, staff were pre-occupied with the reorganisation for up to 12 months to cope with the dramatic transition (Buchanan & Oels 1998: section 5). The reorganisation missed the opportunity to address the lack of strategic planning capacity of local authorities and the fragmentation of service provision (Wilson 1993, Chisholm 1995).

#### **6.1.4 Local Agenda 21**

It has been suggested that it is as a direct result of this desperate situation that local authorities have sought to justify their very existence and to revamp their image by associating themselves with Local Agenda 21 (Voisey 1998:247). The LGMB has estimated that 40% of the European Union Fifth's Action Plan 'Towards Sustainability' (CEC 1992) requires action at the local level (LGMB 1993a & b). The mere fact that a Local Agenda 21 process should be required to implement the outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit is regarded as a clear indication of the importance of local government, a reminder of the justification for its very existence. Even more, the European context allows UK local authorities to demand powers similar to those of other European nations, so that they would be equipped to rise to the challenge of sustainable development. It has also been suggested that involving all local stakeholder groups and the wider public into the development of a strategy for Local Agenda 21 is one of the most effective ways for a local authority to regain its status and claim to power.

In the Tory years, Local Agenda 21 was driven mainly by networks of local authorities. Most influentially, the Local Government Management Board published guidance documents, held training workshops, carried out innovative pilot projects and hosted conferences where experiences could be exchanged. A networking role was also fulfilled by UNED-UK, which hosted annual conferences and produced newsletters. Most experience on the ground in environmental matters that could now be spread as best practice for Local Agenda 21 came from the so-called 'Environment Cities', a network of cities committed to 'green management' and the use of business sponsorship (Parker & Selman 1996:23). On an international level, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), a membership organisation of environmentally ambitious towns and cities around the world, fulfilled a similar function. Other active networks included the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, the Climate Alliance and the network of signatories to the Aalborg Charta (for a recent overview see European Environment Agency 1997,

part II). The materials produced by the LGMB were in the UK more popular than those produced by the Department of the Environment. A recent survey showed that 89% of local authorities were aware of the LGMB's work on indicators, and slightly less, namely 83% were aware of the DoE indicators (Bond et al 1998:774).

Out of 297 UK local authorities which replied to a survey of the Environmental Resource and Information Centre by the University of Westminster in November 1996 (LGMB 1997), 96% said that their local authority was committed to the Local Agenda 21 process and my English case study, Rushmoor Borough Council, was one of those. The latest available survey on Local Agenda 21 in the UK (IDeA Sustainable Development Unit 1999), reveals that only 130 out of 293 responding local authorities (which equals 36% of all survey respondents and 27.7% of all local authorities) have produced a Local Agenda 21 strategy in the meantime (IDeA 1999:2). Rushmoor's LA21 strategy is amongst those still in draft version. Rushmoor is one of 50.4% of local authorities which had appointed a new LA21 officer to take care of the task (IDeA 1999:9). Elected members had chosen to create a new committee for LA21 purposes in 36% of the local authorities, again including Rushmoor, while 19.9% used existing committees (IDeA 1999:9). I conclude that the commitment of Rushmoor Borough Council to Local Agenda 21 was average in 1999.

### ***6.1.5 Citizen participation in Local Agenda 21***

In their attempt to win back the trust of local people and to re-establish their coordinating role in local politics, a central activity of UK local authorities was engaging the public in participatory processes. In 1996, many UK local authorities were still adapting existing structures to accommodate Local Agenda 21 like

- community forums (49% of respondents),
- area local service committees (10% of respondents),
- tenant consultation (30% of respondents) or
- planning consultation procedures (38% of respondents)
- (LGMB 1997:7).

The most recent Local Agenda 21 survey points to the rising importance of innovative participation methods, with which local authorities were experimenting in their Local Agenda 21 process:

- Focus Group discussions (31.3% of respondents),
- Planning for real exercises (24.7% of respondents),
- Parish maps (20.2% of respondents) and
- Visioning exercises/Future Search Conferences (24.7% of respondents) (IDeA 1999:14).

By November 1998, a total of 15 Future Search Conferences had been captured by the IDeA survey (IDeA 1999:6). I conclude that Rushmoor Borough Council with its Future Search Conference was definitely amongst the avant-garde of local authorities in the UK which experimented with citizen participation in Local Agenda 21.

In the survey, local authorities claimed that they had integrated sustainability principles mainly into waste and energy management (almost 80%), into their land use planning and biodiversity action plans (more than 60%), and hardly at all into their investment strategies (~5%), social services, budget making (less than 15%) and education services (20%) (IDeA 1999:13). In Rushmoor, the situation was similar, with the negative exception of planning, where sustainability was included in the rhetoric but not yet in planning practice, and with the positive exception of education, where the LA21 coordinator was proactively involved in a best practice pilot project. This is mirrored in the fact that 70% of responding local authorities indicated a positive impact of LA21 work on topic areas in the environmental field (resource use, pollution, biodiversity) rather than in the socio-economic field (IDeA 1999:8). Bond et al have attributed the environmental bias in the UK's LA21 work to the strong role of environmental groups in the process and to the fact that most LA21 coordinators are placed within an environmental department or similarly oriented unit (Bond et al 1998). This claim is certainly true for Rushmoor Borough Council, where the present Local Agenda 21 coordinator is a committed environmental activist who used to work in the environmental health department. Moreover, in Rushmoor, it was the LA21 coordinator's duty to draft the Council's Environmental Policy Statement as well as to take care of LA21 related activities.

### **6.1.6 New Labour**

The election of the New Labour government in May 1997 has marked a turning point in British politics and placed a renewed emphasis on citizen participation at the local level. New Labour has associated itself with an ideology called the 'third way', which is supposed to transcend the dichotomy between neo-liberal laissez-faire as fostered by the Thatcher government, and the old-style social democratic doctrine. The third way mixes together elements from both of the other two ideologies, but also reinterprets elements of both of them in a new way. At the core of the third way is its embrace of the free market, which is no longer regarded as an enemy to be tamed but as a friend to be nurtured. Economic globalisation is accepted as a matter-of-fact and New Labour's policies are geared towards serving the 'needs' of UK corporations and employees for conditions which will enhance their competitiveness in the global market. This unquestioning acceptance of globalisation has been a matter of much criticism (for example Stuart Hall 1998, Hall & Jacques 1997) that accuses New Labour of shying away from the opportunity to re-regulate trade in collaboration with the other Social Democratic governments at a European level (Martell 1999:853):

*"The state is reduced to one actor among many, both internationally and domestically, appearing as pathetically subservient to global economic forces, unwilling to generate policies through its bureaucracies because it no longer believes in the power of politics as a central force for change."*  
(Freeden 1999:42)

It is New Labour's declared aim to revive local democracy and to enable decisions to be taken at the level closest to the people so that they can be responsive to the very diverse needs (DETR 1998a,b,c & d). New Labour is engaged in a process of devolution of powers to lower level governments and institutions. One of the most dramatic steps in this regard has been the establishment of a directly elected parliament in Scotland and Wales with proportional representation. While the taxing powers of these bodies are still rather limited and their status (or for that matter, their very existence) is not constitutionally protected, the competences of these bodies are supposed to increase with the level of political clout they can gain from being the legitimate representatives of their people. While some have argued that "[f]or the Labour Party, devolution is one way of keeping the Union together" (Nash 1998:370) in the face of rising nationalisms in Scotland and Wales, others see the beginning of a new federal and constitutionally secured structure that will in the long run succeed in undermining Westminster's monopoly on 'sovereign' power.

Also, the introduction of proportional representation is regarded by optimists as leading the way for the House of Commons (as advocated in New Labour's election campaign) and promises a much bigger role for small parties like the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. As these parties tend to have much stronger views on sustainable development and environmental protection in particular, this might in the long run contribute to the success of Agenda 21 (O'Riordan 1997).

Local government's role is dramatically revamped by New Labour. Some strategic planning capacity is to be recreated through the instalment of regional development agencies, which will be given coordinating and integrating functions. As the level of government closest to the people, responsibility is handed to local government to break the popular disenchantment with all government institutions, in particular their lack of trust and faith in the ability of government institutions to respond to their needs (Macnaghten et al 1995). This is to be done in a number of ways which have been discussed in several consultation papers on 'Modernising local government' (i.e. DETR 1998c, 1998d), which led to the White Paper 'Modern Local Government - In Touch with the People' (DETR 1998b). However, this increase in responsibilities has so far not been matched by a devolution of financial resources and constitutional standing. The New Labour central government is keeping local government at arm's length and uses the threat of central government sanctions to keep local governments in check and on their superimposed course.

This course includes three major innovations. First of all, local authorities must choose a new executive leadership structure from a number of options (DETR 1998b, Hambleton 1998), all of which are supposed to make local

authorities more directly and visibly accountable to the public vote. These include the option of a directly elected mayor. The Local Government Management Board has called for this (relative) freedom of local authorities to experiment with new structures to find out which ones best meet their needs for many years, and the need to reform inefficient committee structures has recently been confirmed by the Audit Commission (1997). Secondly, the services provided by local authorities or its contractors are to be subjected to a major performance review, on the basis of which they shall be revamped to secure "Best Value" to the users and taxpayers. Part of this "Best Value" exercise is a comprehensive consultation exercise with the public, from which the indicators to guide what constitutes "Best Value" to the local population are to be derived. Here, the emphasis is again on "*economy, efficiency and effectiveness*" (1998 Local government Bill, preamble), and as Thomas and Lo Piccolo have noted "*[e]quity is notably absent*" (Thomas & Lo Piccolo 1999:7). It has been suggested that the comprehensiveness of "Best Value", the need to engage in widespread public consultation and the fact that it is a statutory duty present a real chance for Local Agenda 21 to ride on this wave and give 'Best Value' a sustainability twist (Knowland 1999). I will say more about this in the next section.

Finally, local government is supposed to deliberately seek to involve local people in decision-making across a whole range of issues for the purpose of 'deepening' and 'widening' participative democracy (DETR 1998d:chapter 1.2). The government has issued a 'Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government', where a range of key issues with regards to the tense relationship between local authority officers and the public are raised and helpful strategies for its transformation are presented (DETR 1998a).

But there is even more going on to strengthen citizenship in the UK. One important move has been the publication of a White Paper setting out the government's plan for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Bill in December 1997. The bill will strengthen people's access to formerly undisclosed information. However, by November 1998, it was thought that the draft bill would be published no earlier than 1999, "*with no commitment to legislate even in the next parliamentary session*" (ENDS 1998d:29) The government has also piloted and launched under much controversy citizenship education in schools, to equip youngsters with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens (Smithers 1998).

### **6.1.7 New Labour and sustainable development**

Local Agenda 21 has experienced unprecedented attention from the Prime Minister since New Labour came into power. In June 1997, the newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair attended UNGASS, the five year review of the Rio Earth Summit in New York. His speech in New York was marked by the bold statements that by the year 2000, all UK local authorities would have a Local Agenda 21 strategy to show. While no new funding or other resources have been provided to support local authorities in this task, a number of elements of New

Labour's policies might strengthen Local Agenda 21 initiatives. In its new strategy document on sustainable development (DETR 1999), the government itself links LA21 to 'Best Value' (ch.7.80), reforms in the planning system (ch.7.86) and to a new duty that will commit local authorities *"to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas"* (ch.7.80). This includes a duty to consult with all other governmental bodies, voluntary organisations and the wider public in order to agree a comprehensive strategy. The Government emphasises that *"Local Agenda 21 strategies should also inform all other local plans, policies and programmes, including local development plans."* (ch.7.80) This would indeed be a major achievement if implemented.

The new strategy document defines sustainable development as *"the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come"* (DETR 1999, ch.1.1). The government identifies four objectives for sustainable development:

- *"social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;*
- *effective protection of the environment;*
- *prudent use of natural resources; and*
- *maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment."* (DETR 1999, summary)

The last objective is a clear hint, that economic growth features prominently in the sustainable development strategy and is still regarded as an indicator of sustainability:

*"Our economy must continue to grow. We need increased prosperity, so that everyone can share in higher living standards and job opportunities in a fairer society. ... Abandoning economic growth is not a sustainable development option: to do so would close off opportunities to improve quality of life through better healthcare, education, and housing; to combat social exclusion; to revitalise our cities, towns and rural areas; and to protect and enhance our environment."* (DETR 1999, ch.3.12)

This is clearly no major departure from the Tory's interpretation. It is also in fact very much in line with New Labour's overall ideology, as described above. In response to much criticism raised by environmental NGOs about economic growth as an indicator in the consultation document, the government promises in the final document *"to make sure that the price of growth is not environmental decline or social injustice."* (DETR 1999, 3.13) A major improvement in the set of indicators administered by the government, now up to 150, has been the introduction of a larger number of socio-economic ones, compensating for the old set's bias towards the environment. The indicators have been reduced to a set of so-called headline indicators, which now number only 14. These clearly reflect the new balance between environmental, economic and social indicators. However, while a few proposals in the socio-economic area have already been implemented (for example the welfare to-work programme), there is a lack of nation-wide legislation to back implementation in the environmental area.

Also, it became clear in December 1998, that there would *"no new money available to pay for initiatives under the Government's sustainable development strategy"* (ENDS 1998c:30).

## **6.2 Tracing the origins of Rushmoor Borough Council's Future Search Conference**

This section shall introduce my English case study area Rushmoor Borough Council. In a first section, I will characterise Rushmoor Borough as a commuter area West of London, which is economically highly dependent upon the military. Since the end of the Cold War, the area has been threatened by economic decline and in need of a new strategic vision. A second section will introduce the strong influence of the Liberal Democrats in Rushmoor, who were instrumental in initiating a number of innovative pilot projects in the area of citizen participation, including the Future Search Conference. An overview of citizen participation activities in Rushmoor is presented in section three. A fourth section will trace the origins of the Future Search Conference to a former chief executive, who considered Local Agenda 21 as the way forward for local government in the UK and therefore created the post of a Local Agenda 21 officer working directly for him. The initiative for the Future Search Conference came from Rushmoor's first Local Agenda 21 officer, and over a period of two years, the councillors were persuaded to agree to a budget of 10,000 pounds for the planning of the event. The Future Search Conference lost its two strongest supporters shortly before taking place in 1997, after the former chief executive and the former Local Agenda 21 officer left for other jobs. Priorities shifted in the Council as a new chief executive took control and removed the Local Agenda 21 post from working directly for him. This introductory part of the case study chapter will conclude with a chronology of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process and a figure of all key players in the Future Search Conference.

### **6.2.1 Setting**

Rushmoor is a commuter area 30 miles West of London, consisting of the two towns Aldershot and Farnborough with a total of 86,250 inhabitants. Rushmoor is located in the North-East of Hampshire, bordering Surrey and Berkshire. A key characteristic of the area is its military legacy, with Aldershot labelled 'the home of the British Army' and Farnborough famous for its bi-annual international air shows. I shall argue that the high dependence of the area on the military made Rushmoor economically vulnerable in times of frequent Defence Reviews and budget cuts. It could be argued that a vision for the civic transformation of the area was needed and a Future Search Conference could be considered a pro-active and much needed response in such times of daunting uncertainty.

When the Government decided to establish large, permanent military bases in 1853, it purchased the 25,000 acres of heath land called Rushmoor between the two villages of Aldershot and Farnborough and established barracks for a brigade of cavalry, infantry and artillery. At the same time, the introduction of



the railways also turned the two towns into commuter settlements for people working in London. By 1861, there were more than 15,000 army personnel in the area (most of whom were located near Aldershot), and by the end of the century, Aldershot and Farnborough were the largest towns in northern Hampshire. At the beginning of the 20th century, 'His Majesty's Balloon Factory' was set up and established the area's strong link with aviation. In 1908, the first recorded flight in a powered aircraft in Britain took place in Rushmoor (by the American S.F. Cody). The local government reorganisation of 1974 united Aldershot and Farnborough into a single Borough, named Rushmoor after some remaining heath land in the west of the Borough (RBC 1997:18-19).

Today, Aldershot is still 'home of the British Army', but the numbers of personnel have decreased to 4,500-6,500 and the future plans of the Ministry of Defence are uncertain. Aldershot used to be a wealthy Victorian town, but the departure of the army has brought economic decline and deterioration. A new Tesco's superstore has recently opened its gates within walking distance of the city centre and is transforming the retail-landscape. The local shopping centre Wellington Centre is struggling to fill its shop units as many quickly go bust. Farnborough is home to the defence industry, as well as many related high-tech and finance companies. Farnborough town centre was created from scratch and consists of three massive shopping malls and with a pedestrianised area linking them, and a Recreation Centre.

Unemployment has traditionally been very low in Rushmoor, but reached a peak of 7.6% in 1993. In 1995, the unemployment rate was back to 3.2% (compared to a national average of 9.1%). Besides the army personnel and ~4,200 self-employed, there are 37,100 jobs in Rushmoor. 47% of the jobs in Rushmoor are defence related, and the Ministry of Defence is the largest employer in the area – two facts which make Rushmoor economically vulnerable to Defence reviews. Other major employers are British Aerospace Defence, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), Data Sciences, Telecom and Zurich. (RBC 1996:91-92)

Rushmoor is a commuter area - 2,500 people commute to Rushmoor for work (RBC 1996:91) and a large number of Rushmoor residents commute to London and elsewhere for their work. The excellent road and rail links to London, the South coast and other regional centres are crucial to the attractiveness of living in Rushmoor. Within Rushmoor Borough itself, public transport, which is run on a commercial basis by Stagecoach and Tillingbourne, is expensive and its availability is poor (Social Needs Meeting 1996:3).

Aldershot and Farnborough are still separated by vast stretches of green open space, owned by the MoD. Outside the military land, Rushmoor is densely developed and accommodates 32,000 homes (RBC 1996:47) The most recent residential development was built in Cove / Farnborough. (RBC 1997:17,23) To cover the housing needs in the area, including the need for affordable housing for young people, 2,900 new dwellings are planned for the period until 2011, most of which will have to replace existing properties in the process of redevelopment, unless MoD land is released. (RBC 1996:47-48) This indicates

that development pressures on the remaining open space are high, and that a possible release of land by the MoD will significantly impact the scope for housing and economic development in Rushmoor. I conclude that Rushmoor's future is closely linked with defence-related decisions of the MoD. Moreover, there was considerable uncertainty about significant issues like the possible release of MoD land.

### ***6.2.2 Party politics***

In this section I shall introduce the political situation in Rushmoor Borough Council. I shall argue that the strong influence of the Liberal Democrats in the Borough Council and their commitment to strengthening citizenship and local democracy contributed decisively to building support for the Future Search Conference. Party support for community governance is one of the success factors identified in my pilot survey of community-based Future Search Conferences (chapter 4) and was certainly apparent in Rushmoor.

A Conservative majority had in the past governed Rushmoor. Only a few years ago, all three parties – Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour – had roughly the same number of councillors elected. As a result, the three parties decided to run all Committees in collaboration – with one chair and two co-chairs from each party, a model which worked extremely well. In the year before the general election in 1997 though, nobody wanted to be seen to collaborate with anybody else. As a result, due to their slight majority in the Council, the Liberal Democrats were chairing all Committees and put forward the Leader of the Council. After the general election in May 1997, an informal pact between Liberal Democrats and Labour emerged in the process of voting in Committee Chairs. The Tories remained on the opposition benches.

### ***6.2.3 Citizen participation in Rushmoor***

The strong influence of the Liberal Democrats and their keen interest in strengthening citizenship led to a number of pilot schemes, most notably a Community Governance Pilot Scheme in three wards. Other projects which fostered citizen input in Council decision-making included a Social Needs Forum that hosted discussion groups with initiatives working on anti-poverty, a residents' opinion survey that used a questionnaire to measure satisfaction and importance of the local authority's key service areas and a local network of tenants' associations that was being developed as a means of informing policy about tenants' needs and implementing improvements. The local response to the World Health Organisations' initiative 'Health for All' was being created by a very active cross-sectoral steering group with a number of local initiatives involving citizens. Another project in evolution was a cross-sectoral Community Safety Group. While all initiatives were aware of each other, there was no mechanism established to ensure an exchange of information, cross-fertilisation and a coherent common strategy to be followed by the Council.

As I learned in my interviews with the various heads of services, each department followed its own philosophy of what constituted good practice in the

area of participation. These philosophies can be conceptualised as Foucauldian 'discourses' in that they constitute a rationale with related practices each, often under exclusion of other rationales and their related practices.

- Leisure aims to consult customers of their services to make sure that what they provide is what the customer wants (I 1-3, I 1-2). The pressure to consult originates from the fact that leisure competes with other service providers in market arrangements (I 1-4).
- Planning hosts consultation procedures where a ready-made plan or application for planning permission is presented to the citizens. Objectors to these plans or planning permissions are provided with an opportunity to raise a limited range of concerns within a certain time span in a process which is heavily regulated by law (I 30-9, I 30-6). The objections will then be evaluated by the planners who may or may not consider these concerns in revising the plans (I 30-7).
- The Council's community governance scheme is directed at 'real' communities within the local area (I 6-15) and aims to build trust and promote partnership between those communities and the Council (I 6-10). The Council aims to find out those communities' needs and to prove that it can be responsive to these needs (I 6-3).
- A fourth strategy was pursued by Voluntary Services, which aims to set up local neighbourhood groups and to empower the members of those groups to find a voice for their concerns (I 26-11). Often, Council officers found themselves 'badgered' as a result (I 26-4).

These four types of community involvement all co-exist within the Council and all address local citizens in a different capacity.

#### **6.2.4 Future Search origins**

At the time of its birth, the idea of hosting a Future Search Conference found a very supportive institutional structure in Rushmoor Borough Council in which to flourish. A number of influential personalities were committed to the Future Search Conference in Rushmoor – a success factor I mentioned in my pilot survey of community-based Future Search Conferences in the UK (chapter 4). Rushmoor Borough's former Chief Executive created the job of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) coordinator working directly under him in 1995, because he recognised a huge potential for Local Agenda 21 in local government. He employed a highly capable young woman who possessed the assertiveness and charisma required to build support for Local Agenda 21. The Chief Executive also initiated a LA21 Subcommittee of Councillors, consisting of all the chairs of the other service committees, in order to give LA21 adequate weight and credibility. Also, a LA21 officer steering group within Rushmoor Borough Council was set up. The newly appointed LA21 coordinator was the one who first heard about Future Search Conferences at the UK annual environmental coordinators forum. As the design seemed to her ideally suited for starting Local Agenda 21 in Rushmoor, she invited a local Future Search facilitator to a meeting with the Chief Executive and the three of them agreed to take the

project further. In my diagram of key players, I have used red arrows to trace how support was built for the Future Search Conference in a top-down fashion. This is rather typical for UK-based Future Search Conferences, as my survey of the ten first public sector conferences in the UK showed (chapter 4).

The proposal for a Future Search Conference was then brought up at the LA21 subcommittee meetings and was finally approved. In the summer 1996, after having attended an educational briefing, the councillors took a full Council vote in favour of providing £10,000 to host a Future Search Conference that was 'to be owned by the community' and not to be controlled by the Council. The LA21 Subcommittee and the LA21 Officer Steering Group nominated a broad cross-section of local 'movers and shakers' from diverse backgrounds that could oversee the conference planning and assist with recruiting participants from their spheres of influence. The final steering group consisted of 14 people representing the sectors of environment, youth, housing, health, business, education, voluntary groups and statutory bodies, and first met in December 1996. The steering group included the Leader of the Council (a Liberal Democrat), who played a key role in winning support for the conference. The organisation and administration of the conference was to be carried out by the LA21 coordinator. Two consultants were hired from the budget to run half a dozen steering group meetings and to facilitate the conference itself.

As I have found in my pilot survey of community-based Future Search Conferences in the UK (chapter 4), a factor that severely endangers the success of a community-based Future Search Conference is turnover in key personnel. Rushmoor suffered a series of such blows, but nevertheless succeeded in getting the Future Search Conference off the ground, which is rather remarkable. The chief executive that had so much supported the project of the Future Search Conference left Rushmoor Borough Council for a job with the Royal Town Planning Institute by the end of 1996. The new chief executive aimed to leave a mark by initiating a grandiose public consultation exercise in Aldershot in order to prioritise projects for 'Aldershot Regeneration'. This project became the new focus of attention and officers' energies. Local Agenda 21 was no longer regarded as a corporate priority and this was reflected in the removal of the Local Agenda 21 coordinator from the chief executive's direct responsibility and her re-location under a 'policy and review unit' at the other end of the building. The Local Agenda 21 coordinator resigned shortly after for a job with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives.

These two departures significantly weakened the support for the Future Search endeavour. The LA21 officer was replaced by an internal candidate from environmental health and a former consultant, who had to take over the project management of the Future Search Conference on a very short notice. With recruitment of participants proving to be very difficult, the entire project was up for reconsideration under these changed conditions in May 1997. However, a 'now or never' mentality took over and the new Local Agenda 21 coordinator worked flat out for two months to make the conference happen. He was given full-time administrative support during that period. The former Leader of the

Council, who had been replaced in May 1997, used his networks and good reputation effectively in order to assist with the recruitment of participants. However, he suffered a heart attack shortly before the conference and could not attend. The Local Agenda 21 coordinator was seriously ill - including hospital treatment - for two weeks after the conference. These two health-related absences meant that the conference could not be followed up with appropriate public relations work..

### **6.2.5 Chronology of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process**

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe the LA21 activities of Rushmoor Borough Council in much detail, the following table provides an overview of the milestones for Rushmoor's LA21.

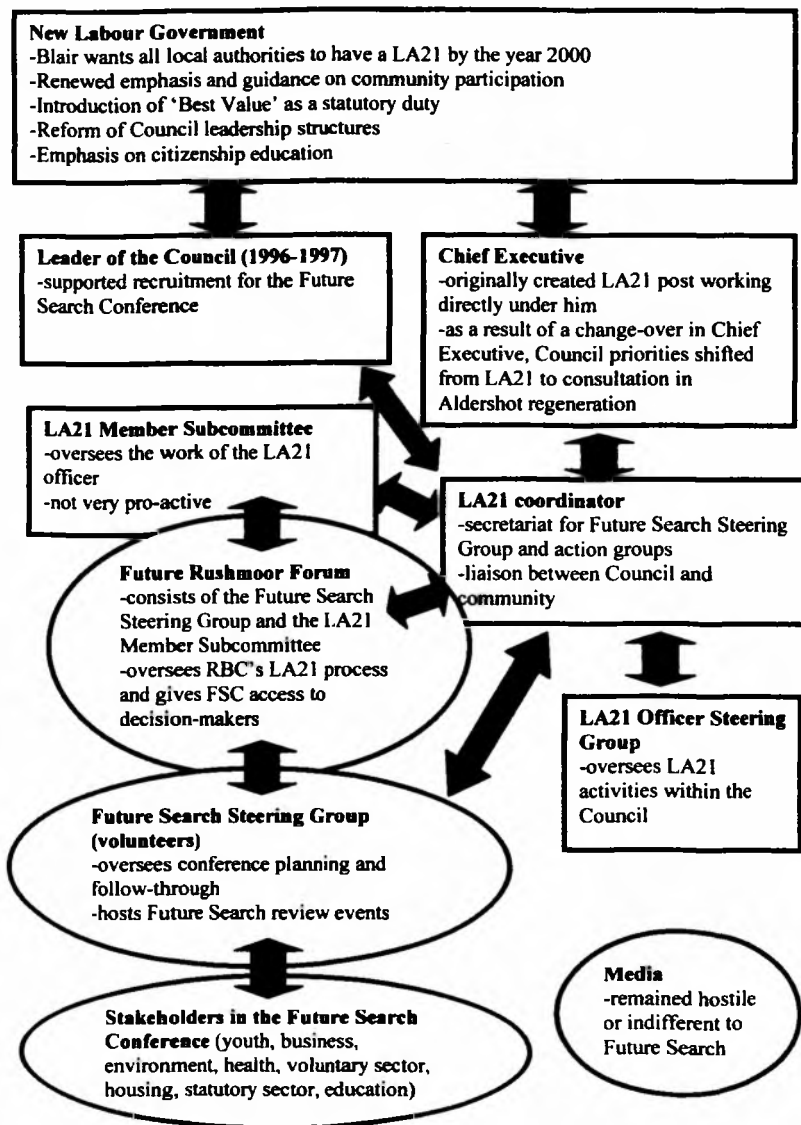
<b>Year</b>	<b>Strategy &amp; consultation</b>	<b>Key projects</b>
<b>1995</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LA21 coordinator post created</li> <li>- Idea to host a Future Search Conference approved by Chief Executive</li> </ul>	
<b>1996</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full Council vote in favour of providing a budget of 10,000 pounds for the Future Search Conference</li> <li>- Appointment of the steering group</li> <li>- late 1996: supportive chief executive leaves</li> </ul>	
<b>1997</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- early 1997: former LA21 coordinator leaves</li> <li>- supportive Mayor out of action due to health problem</li> <li>- July: 3 day Future Search Conference</li> <li>- Youth focus groups to compensate for lack of young people at the conference</li> <li>- LA21 formally incorporated in Council strategic objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LA21 training for all Council staff</li> <li>- Transport &amp; Environment Day</li> <li>- First water awareness campaign</li> </ul>
<b>1998</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Council review of current LA21 activities</li> <li>- Community 'quality of life' questionnaire survey (including aims of the FSC)</li> <li>- Sustainability indicators project and consultations</li> <li>- Future Search Review conference</li> <li>- LA21 Youth action forum prepared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Green Family Fun Day'</li> <li>- Bus surgery conducted by LA21 coordinator</li> <li>- First Council LPG vehicle</li> <li>- EMAS pilot study completed, full EMAS put on ice</li> <li>- Local Environmental Award Scheme launched as a result of the Future Search Conference</li> </ul>

1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Launch of Future Rushmoor Forum, which is a new body of councillors and community activists to oversee the Local Agenda 21 process</li> <li>-draft LA21 strategy &amp; action plan distributed to all households, 50 returns</li> <li>-24 sustainability indicators agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RBC Environmental Policy Statement launched</li> <li>- Bigger 'Green Family Fun Day &amp; Flower Festival'</li> <li>- Sustainability criteria included in 'Rushmoor in Bloom' competition and Rushmoor won 'Britain in Bloom' city category for the first time</li> <li>- Eco-house visited by 350 school children</li> <li>-Schools Environmental Education Resource Pack launched</li> <li>- LA21 information leaflet series published</li> <li>- LA 21 Councillors' Seminar</li> </ul>
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-LA21 coordinator is consulted on how Local Agenda 21 objectives can be incorporated in the Council's 'Best Value' programme</li> <li>-Head of Planning offers to involve the Future Rushmoor Forum in giving sustainability advice to those submitting planning applications to the Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LA21 community 'Question Time' attracts more than 160 participants</li> <li>-the annual 'Green Family Fun Day' widens the base of its supporters and attracts more sponsorship</li> </ul>

**Table 6.1 : Some milestones for Rushmoor Local Agenda 21**

Source: my table on the basis of Rushmoor Borough Council 1999 and some of my research evidence

**Figure 6.1 : Key players in the Rushmoor case study**  
 Source: my figure



### 6.3 The Future Search Conference process and how it was experienced by conference participants

This section will report how the participants of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference experienced each stage of the Future Search Conference event. In reporting these findings, I will work chronologically from the conference opening to its close. The substantive debates of the conference will be discussed in the conference evaluation in section 6.4, while this part of the chapter aims to extract implications for the Future Search Conference design on the basis of the participants' experience.

#### 6.3.1 Profile of the conference participants

Rushmoor Borough Council's Future Search Conference started on Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1997 at 5.30pm in a sports hall of the Farnborough College of Technology with 45 participants and closed on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1997 at 1pm with 42 participants.

<b>AGE PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 30 respondents there were...		<b>STAKEHOLDER PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source : non-participant observation Out of 43 participants there were...	
-under the age of 20	0	youth sector	5
-aged 20-29	1	environment sector	8
-aged 30-39	4	business sector	4
-aged 40-49	10	health sector	5
-aged 50-59	9	voluntary sector	7
-aged 60-69	2	education sector	6
-aged 71	1	statutory sector	5
-aged 72 and beyond	0	housing sector	3
<b>WORK PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 30 respondents there were...		<b>PLACE PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 30 respondents there were...	
-retired	7	-living in Rushmoor	14
-without paid work at the moment	5	-living and working in Rushmoor	9
-working	25	-job outside Rushmoor	6
-does several hours voluntary work each week	15	-job in Rushmoor	19

**Table 6.2 : Profile of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference participants**

The conference hours were 5.30-9pm on Friday, 9am-6pm on Saturday and 9am-1pm on Sunday. The conference was staffed with two facilitators, the present LA21 coordinator who acted as conference manager and took care of all logistics, a secretary from Rushmoor Borough Council who kept the minutes, the former LA21 officer who attended as an assistant and observer, a video-team



of two people, a photographer (who attended on Sunday at lunch time) and myself as conference evaluator. The social profile of the conference participants, which was assessed by the conference questionnaire (30 responses out of 42 participants on Sunday) and by non-participant observation, is presented in table 6.2.

The conference, which had aimed for 64 participants started with 46, of which all but 3 participated till the end. Nine participants unexpectedly did not turn up and three sent last minute excuses. My research suggested that a prime reason why participants might have dropped out last minute or turned up on the conference days less fired up than expected was that the purpose of the conference was not entirely clear to a significant number of participants, a fact which my pre-conference interview with invitees revealed and which was later backed up by the participant focus groups. This indicates that the mailing to the participants and the phone conversations with the conference organisers had not been effective in clarifying the conference process and its purpose. Those who still chose to attend agreed that more time should have been spent at the beginning of the conference explaining exactly what it was trying to achieve. Feeling left in the dark, several participants had on-going doubts about the effectiveness of the conference during and after the event:

*"You know, often I asked the question for myself, the question of what am I really doing here, and is what I am saying or contributing going to be effective at all?" (FG 1-18) (member of a conservation group)*

*"I remember thinking at the time, half a day after, what were we there for? As I remember it, I don't think anybody stood up and said what it was all about. We got that invitation through the post, went along, I didn't know what the format would be. ... I wasn't clear at the start what we were hoping to get out of it by the end." (I 18-6)*

(member of an advisory panel to the Council)

A member of the steering group who was present in one of the focus groups thought that a lot of the context and direction of the conference had been lost when the former LA21 co-ordinator left just three months before the actual conference and just before the recruitment started on the ground. The steering group member felt that the steering group had spent many hours clarifying the aims of the conference and that the new LA21 co-ordinator simply did not have a chance to catch up with that debate. The steering group member believes that a conference risks failure the key organiser changes at the height of the process (FG 1-16).

In the absence of a clear understanding of what the conference was about, it is intriguing to ask why participants chose to give up a full weekend (many in their unpaid time) to attend. The motives ranged from curiosity via genuine commitment to wanting to please the Council, the later motive was only unravelled in one of the interviews with an environmental activist:

*"A few were the committed - environmentalists to one degree or another - ...some came out of curiosity; others were wondering why they were there - they turned up simply because they had been asked to come, they hadn't got*

*any ideas what was supposed to be happening or their part in it. So it's a range of different reasons for being there."* (I 22-2) (a councillor and community activist)

*"I think possibly a lot of the people there wanted to be seen to be doing the right thing by the Council, at the time it was the Leader of the Council who invited."* (I 25-10) (an environmentalist)

I conclude that participants felt left in the dark about the purpose of the Future Search Conference, and that as a consequence, their motivation and sense of efficacy suffered.

### **6.3.2 Opening**

The beginning on Friday at 5.30pm was generally perceived as a disaster. The conference organisers had decided that the participants should spend the first hour of the conference in silence, doing the time line exercise on their own, and that only then, the official welcome speeches would be given. This was intended to allow participants who finish from work later to drift in until 6.40pm and not miss the introduction. As a result, the majority who were there on time felt insecure (FG 2-11), were bored (FG 1-17) or disappointed (FG 1-12). The opportunity for framing the conference was missed (FG 1-17).

*"I sort of rushed to get to this kind of magical mystery tour - there was nobody there to say hello, welcome to and what it's about. We sort of dithered about and I thought, oh God, I could have gone home, but curiosity took over."* (FG 1-11) (woman from the education sector)

*"I felt pretty angry at around about 6 o'clock when I was moving around and having nothing to do. It was really putting me off, and I wished I had gone home."* (FG 1-17) (member of the statutory sector)

It seemed that the more high-powered the conference participants were, the more annoyed they were about the lack of welcome and instruction. I know that the last speaker had not picked up his folder and therefore did not know that everyone was supposed to complete an exercise.

### **6.3.3 Time lines**

Views about the time line exercise itself were diverse. The two groups that discussed this exercise in more detail agreed that the time lines fulfilled their purpose of breaking the ice and bringing the group together (FG 3-8, FG 3-8, FG 2-22). However, the experience of the time lines seemed to be highly dependent on age. Younger participants stressed that they learned a lot from the older generation, filling in their knowledge about the history of Rushmoor (FG 2-21) or imagining what their personal future might look like in the light of the older generations life experience (FG 2-21). The middle-aged majority of the conference were pleased to discover their shared life experience, only complaining about why the 1960s were not represented, as they had been so important to their lives. They enjoyed the aesthetics of it, and discovering commonality.

*"P1: I found it interesting just to go quiet. Sometimes when I was feeling reflective, I actually went and read them. And it was like picking up a novel and reading it.*

*P2: Wasn't it interesting that often people went through the same thing. You found it and oh yes ! It wasn't always the obvious ones, like Hong Kong, there were others as well. But it was the same again.*

*P1: And <<How could I have forgotten that !>>*

*ALL: yes, yes*

*P1: I loved it !*

*P3: I found it, I really enjoyed that because it made you feel part of the group. You know, how we all like feeling part of a group? We all came as individuals, we were told we were individuals despite where we were coming from. And we went through it and you thought, <<gosh, I thought I was the only one>>. All these people had, when you looked at it, had very similar things and issues, what was a reflection - and I am sad to say that...There were too many people of a middle age there." (FG 2-21&22)*

A participant from the oldest generation present at the conference could not relate to the exercise at all and felt that her expertise about the earlier decades was not valued.

*"I couldn't think of anything actually except housework, children, bringing up children. That was it....I mean, my memories and knowledge of things going on in the world goes back to the nineteen fifties, which the time lines didn't go back to. I could have taught them a lot about what was going on in the world in the fifties, but not the seventies....I could go back to the nineteen forties if you wanted to." (FG 2-21)*

There seemed to be an overall sense that the time lines exercise had taken up too much time compared to the action planning phase. The following member of the voluntary sector spoke for many:

*"I am fully supportive of the idea to have some sort of group thing to get people together. But I actually, I think as that went on and now when I look back on it, it was a waste of time actually, not a total waste of time, it started people focussing. I am still not at all sure of the value [of it]." (FG 3-8)*

The feeling that it was a waste of time was often fuelled by the impression that time was lacking at the end of the conference.

Dinner made a huge impact on people's mood and is the most unanimous high point in the curves (FG 3-6). Dinner was referred to as "excellent"(FG 2-3) and "enjoyable" (FG 2-9). The value of dinner was seen in the opportunity to relax and to connect with people. As a woman from the health sector remarked:

*"There was a high spot, there was a lot of chattering going on. People were very vocal at dinner on Friday night. You could hear that buzz, buzz going round the room" (FG 1-11)*

#### **6.3.4 Mind map**

The mind map exercise led to a drastic mood swing in all three focus groups, with only one group having a majority of people who were not dragged down by it (FG 3). The ratings for the usefulness of the mind map exercise were very diverse across all groups, with a slight majority thinking it was useful. The main memories brought up about the mind map were frustration (FG 3-7, FG 1-11, FG 2-20), anger about competitiveness and domination by a minority (FG 2-7, FG 2-8, FG 1-18, FG 3-5), a dislike for having to stand up (FG 1-11, FG 2-2, FG 2-8) and disengagement from the large group (FG 3-20, FG 2-6, FG 2-9). There were complaints that throughout the conference, a minority had dominated. Amongst those accused of dominating were the education and the health sector and councillors in particular. In rare cases, officers were judged for not listening enough. There were also a few individuals who were accused of having a personality unsuitable to group work, because they seemed too obsessed with themselves to notice the needs of the larger group.

A councillor who was very committed to the success of the process worried *"that suddenly the bottom was going to fall out of it if they didn't get back together"* (FG 2-7). This perception resulted from the observation that the high-powered people had disconnected from participating in the exercise and were chatting about the other things they urgently needed to do instead of wasting their time at the conference. However, a woman from the health sector did not think that it was a bad sign that people disconnected from the main exercise. She made key contacts in the safe 'standing around' environment (FG 2-8+9).

Despite the criticism raised about a minority dominating the mind map session, all three groups felt that views had been balanced out by everybody placing the same amount of sticky dots on the mind map (FG 2-11, FG 3-9). A few felt though that the dots should have been allocated per stakeholder group, so that groups with fewer representatives would get to place more dots (FG 2-11). This stems from the observation, that people at the mind map tended to place their dots in strict loyalty to *"their own sectional interests"* (FG 2-11). Overall though, it seems that one achievement of the conference was to prepare a representative overview of the trends affecting Rushmoor at present.

#### **6.3.5 Trends in stakeholder groups**

Several participants reported, that they felt much more comfortable in their stakeholder groups as opposed to other group sessions.

*"I think when we moved into our own group, I thought of all the groups that I went to, that we seemed to have like-mindedness - mine was the statutory bodies - and you feel more comfortable related to that approach"*  
(FG 3-10)

*"And as I said, that's when my heart sort of came into [it], the stakeholder bit. Because when we got into our own group, the youth group, I just had to outline straight away that I felt just naff about Friday evening....People started to listen then."* (FG 2-19) (young member of the youth stakeholder group)

This was also reflected in the curves. For many participants, meeting their fellow stakeholders created a genuine high point after the frustrations of the mind map. The session was generally rated useful across all groups, with only two people giving it a rating below neutral. It seems that the stakeholder groups fulfil the important function of re-assuring participants about the legitimacy of their interests and backgrounds, and thereby strengthening and soothing them.

### **6.3.6 Prouds and sorries in stakeholder groups**

The 'prouds and sorries' session was not brought up for discussion by any of the groups. In one group, the prouds and sorries session collapsed all curves into an unprecedented low. This sent a clear signal that it was considered a waste of time (only one person rated above neutral). I asked for an explanation. Participants explained that the exercise had been too personal, had alienated those who did not live in the area or had only worked or lived there a short while and failed completely to generate ownership. These explanations were given with a sense of resentment for the exercise.

*"I think it was just too personal, you know. In that kind of setting, then you end up with some fairly bland remarks, I think." (FG 1-20) (long-serving leader, voluntary sector)*

*"all this proud and sorry stuff is all a bit sort of not for me. I don't think it achieved anything...I mean one of the things I am proud of is catching an 18 pound salmon, but what relevance has that to the other 59 people in the room? None at all. So why spend any time on it?" (I 21-6) (senior Council officer)*

The uneasiness about this exercise might originate in an important cultural difference between the United States and Britain, with the British finding it inappropriate to tap into personal dimensions while in a public situation. The group giving this impression consisted of professionals in senior positions (the 5pm group). However, the other two groups rated the prouds and sorries session as useful, with only one person giving a rating below neutral. Also their mood does not seem to be affected by the prouds and sorries session at all (which might indicate lack of memory of the exercise).

### **6.3.7 Ideal future groups**

People seemed to embark on the ideal future groups with enthusiasm, with their mood declining gradually towards the end of the day. Those people who thought the exercise was a waste of time tended to disengage or get frustrated. However, the majority found the exercise useful, with only two people giving ratings below neutral and a few top ratings on the very useful side. Participants referred to two parts of this exercise-working out concepts for an ideal future and preparing a presentation-and described a tension between them (FG 2-10, FG 2-11, FG 3-4, FG 3-10, FG 2-1).

*"And although three hours was a long time, we found we were strapped for time. And so we had a little battle in our group, with one saying, <<come on, can't we just do this presentation>> and other people saying <<to hell with the presentation, the purpose of this is to come up with something useful. Just because they told us not to give a speech, we will give a speech.>>" (FG 3-11) (member of the voluntary sector)*

In the small group I observed, the more articulate people – mostly officers from diverse agencies - preferred the intellectual challenge, while the more practical people – in that case environmental activists and relatively speaking younger group members - took a lead in preparing the presentations hands-on. Looking back over the outcomes of that session, all groups agreed that they were *"grandiose ideas"* (FG 1-4, FG 3-11) and *"pie in the sky"*(FG 2-2). This was meant as a criticism.

Several people mentioned that they thought the ideas were ill-thought through (3-2), financial constraints left unconsidered (FG 3-8, FG 3-10, FG 1-13) and that necessary trade-offs (FG 1-13) and real world conditions (statistics) were not addressed (FG 3-5, FG 3-10). It was also felt that no energy was invested into thinking through the steps over the next couple of years that could lead to the realisation of the identified plans (FG 3-10). However, participants did acknowledge that *"some practical ideas did seem to emerge from some fairly grandiose initial suggestions"* (FG 3-11). Also, even those critical of its usefulness admitted that the drama had been good fun (FG 2-10, FG 2-6).

Another thing people enjoyed about the ideal futures group was the mix of interests represented, which widened their perspective, triggered learning and fostered a sense of being in the same boat. A young environmentalist said:

*"I think I enjoyed the drama thing, I think for once because it was just good fun... I was getting an idea of what the interests of different sort of sectors were and so I think that was new to me...I think that was the best thing...it is useful for me to be in such a group, sort of thinking, well hey people here are working towards a sort of common future. That's what it's about." (FG 2-10&11)*

I conclude that the ideal future session was a real highlight of the participants' conference experience. Participants willingly acknowledged the shortcomings in the visions they generated.

### **6.3.8 Common ground**

People's mood shifted towards a unanimous low across all three groups approaching Saturday evening. This can be explained to a large extent by people's complaints about the long conference hours on Saturday, which surfaced in my conference questionnaire. This is reinforced by the fact that the vast majority of conference participants found the exercise useful, but also painful. All three groups raised disappointment about the way the exercise of merging common ground, unresolved differences and potential actions across the mixed groups had been conducted. As one person loaded with the groups'

slips of paper did the bargaining on behalf of each group, the rest of the group felt quite disconnected and some raised concern that their ownership of the issues was compromised or lost. A young man from the environmental sector complained:

*"I also think you lost control of what you decided in small groups, because what you decided... then became what a spokesperson feel who is bargaining on your behalf. So in fact you weren't even sure what your group effectively decided what was happening to it at that stage.... It wasn't so much that I disagreed with the person, I just didn't understand what was happening to our sort of stakes as it were. So that's why I didn't find it very useful."* (FG 2-7)

It was pointed out that opposition had not been settled (FG 1-12) and that too much time was wasted arguing about issues that were out of any participant's control anyway, like the future of the military (FG 3-12). Also, the element of competition (FG 3-12) and the issue of vocal minorities (see section 6.3.2) was raised again in relation to this particular session. In this case, those who dominated were a few individuals who were fighting for their pet issues while the rest could not be bothered to put much effort into the exercise.

I conclude that people recognised the importance of working towards a shared vision, but that they were not particularly happy with the way it happened. It seems that not everybody felt they owned or were part of the outcomes of that session. This is critical as the action groups were founded on the basis of the common ground and potential actions agreed upon in that session.

### **6.3.9 Action planning groups**

The action planning groups did constitute a clearly 'useful' element of the conference for the vast majority of conference participants and one group rated it unanimously 'very useful' (FG 2). The majority of curves showed a clear uplifting of moods as a result of the action group session.

For those people who had been particularly critical of the earlier conference proceedings *"Sunday morning saved it"* (FG 1-18). Finally participants were back to a way of working they are familiar with, they felt confident about and they saw it as leading to results:

*"Certainly I felt that last session, we were actually doing some work. I felt there was the protein. At last you were coming together, you had deadlines, short term, long term actions."* (FG 3-12) (middle-aged man from the environmental sector)

*"Because it was very business like and very crisp. And people made notes of action and somebody followed it up two or three days after the conference with a list...it was good."* (FG 3-12) (middle-aged man from the voluntary sector)

*"You tended to think, well ok you can't do something about everything, but at least you can do something about some of the things. Well that's what I felt."* (FG 2-9) (female councillor)

There was a general feeling that the action group session had been too short and people just had a chance to work on the tip of the iceberg (FG 1-4, FG 3-12).

*"You must perhaps start off with these type of grandiose plan. But then you must start fleshing it out and putting some building blocks in it. And that is where, you know, when we got to that stage, I thought <<oops, time to go home>>. That was the view I got."* (FG 1-4)

(man from the environment sector)

This account also made some participants question the effectiveness of the earlier conference proceedings (FG 3-12):

*"I would put forward that we could have probably reached the 7 [key areas of common ground] quite early on, if we had gone in more task orientated. The process was all important because it aimed for everyone to talk in groups. ... we could have got further in some ways if we got a more direct approach."* (FG 3-4&5) (young member of the statutory sector)

### **Final plenary**

All action groups reported back to a final plenary and announced what they intended to do in order to follow-up the conference (overview of the pledges in Annex 1). Most people left the conference in a good mood, with a couple of people feeling unimpressed and a few obviously frustrated. Participants felt that an opportunity was missed to spell out a clear framework for the follow-up action from the conference.

The conference facilitators were generally perceived as enabling the work of the participants (FG 2-27). However, a few participants thought that the facilitation was patronising in the sense that there seemed to be a right and a wrong answer and in that it reminded them of school (I 4-4, I 21-5). A small number of participants in senior positions complained that the image the facilitators gave was sad, namely that anything to do with the environment 'has to involve yoghurt and sandals' (I 4-4, I 21-5). Others criticised them for dragging on with exercises as set out in the schedule as opposed to being more responsive to the group (FG 2-29 & 30).

### **6.3.10 Summary**

I conclude that the participants experienced the Future Search Conference throughout as useful and mostly enjoyable. Overall, the small group work was much preferred to the plenary sessions, where a minority dominated and the majority disengaged. The highlights of the conference were the ideal futures groups, which generated a lot of enthusiasm and bonding. Most criticised was the design of the phase where common ground was separated from unresolved differences. This phase was experienced as particularly painful, partly because this session was held at the end of a long conference day. Many conference participants disengaged and as a result, lacked ownership of the derived common ground. Secondly, a number of participants had a particular dislike for the prouds and sorries exercise, arguing that it was too personal for a



professional setting. The time lines exercise was experienced as too long compared to the action group phase, which was thought to have been too short.

I have summarised the participants' conference experience in the following table:

Conference phase	Usefulness Rating	Mood Rating	Comments
1. Time lines	diverse	diverse	-was effective in bringing the group together -particularly enjoyed by the middle-aged majority who discovered many commonalities -was considered too long compared to the action planning
2. Mind map	+	-	-was experienced as competitive -dominated by a vocal minority -a large number of people disengaged from this exercise
3. Trends in stakeholder groups	+	+	-participants enjoyed the like-mindedness of the groups -session was experienced as reassuring and soothing
4. Prouds and sorries	diverse	diverse	-some people found this exercise too personal -some thought the result were 'some fairly bland remarks' -others were neutral about this session
5. Ideal future groups	+	++	-time pressure created tension between intellectual ideas and the practicalities of a presentation -participants learned a lot about other sectors' perspectives -the outcomes were considered 'pie in the sky'
6. Common ground	+	--	-ownership was lost as one person negotiated on behalf of each of the four merged small group -people were tired as the merging was done in the last hour of a 9-hour conference day
7. Action planning groups	++	+	-participants enjoyed the familiarity of working with short term and long term objectives -there was too little time to flesh out project ideas and to decide upon manageable first steps

Table 6.3 : Participants' experience of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference  
Source: my data

#### 6.4 Evaluation of the Future Search Conference with the stakeholders' evaluation criteria

This section assesses the success of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference on the basis of the stakeholder-based evaluation criteria introduced in chapter 5. The first part will assess the Future Search *process*. The stakeholders in the Future Search Conference wanted the process to be inclusive, collaborative and competent. The second section will assess the extent to which the Future Search

Conference delivered the desired *outcomes*. Those with a stake in the conference aimed for a consensus about a coherent, innovative vision, and hoped that action groups would be formed at the end of the conference and would deliver upon the pledges made at the conference. Moreover, it was hoped that the conference would facilitate effective outreach to more citizens and strengthen the Local Agenda 21 process. The third and final section of the evaluation addresses *capacity building* criteria. The stakeholders in the Rushmoor Future Search Conference hoped that networking, learning and the building of trust would take place during the Future Search Conference and that community spirit would result from the conference. The findings will be pulled together in the conclusions section to this entire case study chapter.

#### **6.4.1 Process criteria**

##### ***Inclusive***

A first criterion for the success of the Future Search Conference was that it should bring together a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including many people who have not met before. Moreover, these conference participants should feel motivated and empowered to participate.

Rushmoor's Future Search Conference brought together a rather homogenous group of senior professionals in their forties and fifties who nevertheless represented a wide range of sectors (health, education, environment, statutory bodies, voluntary sector, housing). These movers and shakers present at the conference were from a rather narrow socio-economic range, as a Council officer who I interviewed remarked:

*"First of all, they were all white, secondly middle-aged, thirdly middle-class, I reckon a good 80-90% of that group, you weren't picking up the old nor the young, not the economically disadvantaged, those with disabilities."*  
(I 11-2)

A few very active individuals even claimed that there were few people there they didn't know. As a councillor and community activist pointedly said:

*"there were many I wasn't surprised were there, because you expect x number of people who were there to be there; the difficulty in any borough is there are only a few movers and shakers, and that is a frustration"*  
(I 22-1)

The presence of a quite homogenous spectrum of stakeholders at the Future Search Conference was explained by interviewees as being a consequence of the way in which they were selected and recruited. The steering group which was appointed by the Council to oversee the selection and recruitment of conference participants consisted of influential, senior professionals from a wide range of sectors. These steering group members recruited participants through their networks (I 26-8). They selected people they had heard of (I 19-1):

*"Inevitably, if you want something like this up and running, you go for people who are prepared to be active in whatever sphere it is...because...that's how you hear about them, because they are active people, they tend to come to the fore" (I 3-3&4)*

Secondly, the very conference format (i.e. participants must be in a position to participate for 2.5 days) was thought to imply a bias towards a certain kind of attitudes and issues, namely those of the middle-classes.

Notably underrepresented at the Future Search Conference were delegates from the business sector and the younger generation. My interviewees – particularly those from the business sector – unanimously agreed that the uncertain return on their investment was the key reason that kept businesses from participating:

*"Businesses really got one question to ask you and that's: What 's in it for me? ...whether it's pure cash terms or whether it's one of their employees on a committee during working hours, it's an investment, and they want to see a return on their investment; it's very difficult to convince them that there is a return on their investment because it has a very long term payback."* (I 3-1)

Some doubted that there was any sufficient payback for businesses in attending the Future Search process (I 21-4). Moreover, the structure of the Future Search Conference was considered by business people I interviewed as not conducive to their involvement for two reasons: first, because the conference process takes up too much time at once and secondly, because it is open-ended without predictable outcomes:

*"But realistically, most of the business people these days in a modern business world are probably working between 50-75 hours a week, so a) we are unlikely to get them for two days of their business week, b) unlikely to get them to give up their weekend."* (I 12-11)

*"The private sector is averse to committee structures, ongoing meetings, woolly agendas, and very vague charitable aims. they want to get up and do something, if they see there is something in it for them."* (I 12-15)

The members of the business sector suggested that a better working mode for business involvement might be a task-force structure, where they "come together, face a particular issue for a defined time, do what it is they want to do, and once that's done, disappear." (I 12-14)

Secondly, there was a lack of young people at the Future Search Conference. My conference questionnaire showed that there were only five participants under the age of 40 at the conference. This was considered problematic, because "we find we speak on behalf of the next generation, but they are not there." (I 22-2) Secondly, it was a widely-known problem in Rushmoor that young people "feel that they haven't got anything to do or anywhere to go and feel quite isolated." (FG 3-19, similar FG 1-8, FG 2-19) All participants acknowledged that the steering group obviously had invited a few young people who did not attend (FG 1-7), with some concluding "so that's the fault on their part" (FG 2-19).

In reflecting on the underrepresentation of youth at the conference, a significant number of conference participants doubted in general, that the Future Search Conference format was conducive to involving young people. This male member of a focus group discussion spoke for many:

*"But I think the problem with youth organisations generally speaking is they don't come to things like this. Getting a bunch of youth organisations together is actually very, very difficult ... they are all independent people."* (FG 3-15)

As a result of the homogeneity of the conference participants and the lack of youth and business representatives, there were concerns raised by Council officers (participants and non-participants alike) that the outcomes of the Future Search Conference could not be considered representative of wider community interests:

*"I can always engage the do-gooders and the busy-bodies, they are not difficult to engage, but they don't necessarily represent the community or wider community interests"* (I 21-4)

*"I am not sure it was such a good cross-section, and because they are white, middle-class, middle-aged, they tend to be somewhat idealistic, in some areas, they will have their own prejudices"* (I 1-2)

I conclude that the Future Search Conference successfully gathered the 'usual activists' of the borough apart from the business and the youth sector. However, due to the group's socio-economic homogeneity, the participants could not be considered representative of the wider citizenry.

### **Collaborative**

A second objective listed by those with a stake in the Future Search Conference was that the conference deliberations should be constructive and collaborative rather than adversarial. Moreover, the conference proceedings should be experienced as fair by the participants. This was supposed to mean that all views should be equally heard and respected and that domination and axe-grinding should be absent. Some participants praised the Future Search method as conducive to fair deliberation. First of all, Future Search establishes rules of fair conduct at the beginning, which really influenced some participants' behaviour including this woman from the voluntary sector:

*"One thing that came out of the Future Search Conference which keeps coming back to me, is [the facilitator]'s statement 'all opinions are valid'. I think I have tended to listen more carefully to other people's opinions, and not go 'well, what do they know about it'. So it's made me a little more able and willing to listen."* (I 23-1)

This shows that the new norm imposed by the Future Search Conference that 'all views are valid' actually made some people take more notice of others' view than they tend to do outside the conference room. A woman from the education sector praised the work with flip charts as enabling contributions by all:

*"I think the effectiveness of getting people to put things on paper and stick it on the wall for everybody to see, I think that's a very good technique...you feel you can contribute, it doesn't intimidate you so much when you see the patchwork up on the wall"* (I 17-3&4)

This seems to suggest that the conditions created by the Future Search Conference were conducive to fairer production of knowledge than outside the

conference room. Similarly, according to the conference questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of conference participants praised the small group work (I 9-2). Participants were impressed how a group of people from diverse professions and backgrounds could work together in such a constructive, positive and responsible way. They described it as reassuring (FG 1-2) or simply as a refreshing experience (FG 3-18).

*"Two and a half days of debates shows that people coming together in the right mood and right attitude achieve quite a lot."* (FG 3-1) (male, statutory sector)

*"there was a lot of good work and a lot of constructive thinking... My last and enduring impression is the willingness of all the people contributing something constructive ..."* (FG 3-2) (male, business sector)

The constructive atmosphere was attributed by conference participants to the careful recruitment strategy:

*"Certainly the conference brought together everybody who by implication had a sense of civic responsibility and that needs flagging. Because if nothing else out of two days, it certainly showed me that that was a great big asset, civic responsibility, all these people getting together and saying, yes, we want a better Rushmoor."* (FG 3-18) (male, business sector)

However, the constructive atmosphere was at times impeded by people who were pushing their stakeholder group's self-interests. Especially the youngest and oldest conference participants complained about the domination of others:

*"some of them had axes to grind too much...they were not looking at the whole picture, just looking at one little bit"* (I 17-2) (older woman, education sector)

*"there were certain agencies there who were going to try and be louder than others throughout the whole thing. Health and Education were two I found particularly, ...I thought they are pushing so hard for what they want...and I found it a bit frustrating at times"* (FG 3-4) (young man, statutory sector)

This can be seen as evidence that outside power relations extended into the conference room by being reproduced by the conference participants. The domination can be explained by the fact that some were actually there to represent their organisations and push their pet issues. Moreover, the education sector tried to compensate for their smaller number of delegates by showing verbal presence. There was a general feeling amongst the participants of the focus groups that the plenary sessions of the conference had been competitive (*"pushing and shouting"* (FG 3-6)) and at times was dominated by a *"vocal minority"* (FG 1-17). The less forceful participants felt angry and frustrated about that. For most participants that had the effect of disengaging from the plenary session:

*"But I felt it was a competitive element that was already present there. And I found that in the end, I had [to] go and have a sit down and wait for everyone to finish their competition."* (FG 3-7) (young conference participant, statutory sector)

*"And some people went on a bit and became a bit boring and therefore you lost your interest in it."* (FG 2-7) (young conference participant, business sector)

*"I didn't like when we had big riots between people. I felt on the periphery and I think I ended up having a chat about some[thing] entirely different and let people at the front get on with it."* (FG 2-6) (female councillor)

The main groups accused of dominating were councillors, delegates from the health and education sector and people who appeared to be insensitive to the needs of the wider group. As a result, the more vocal participants seemed to dominate the agenda at least to some extent:

*"I did feel that the more forceful members of the group got their bits in more, when the final diagram...with priorities was put up, the more forceful groups seemed to get stuff stuck on there"* (I 17-4) (female, education sector)

This seems to indicate that the less articulate and less forceful conference participants tended to defer to the dominant people – which might be a replication of power patterns similarly at work outside the conference room.

A few participants referred directly to the facilitators when describing their frustration about being *"captured by a voracious minority"* (FG 1-18), saying that the facilitators *"cowed out too much"* (FG 1-18) to the minority on a couple of occasions. However, one participant felt: *"Maybe it was just inexperience"* (FG 2-28). It is true that while both facilitators have quite considerable experience in facilitation, for one of the facilitators it was their first Future Search Conference and for the other their second. A few people felt that even their small group sessions were dominated by vocal people (FG 3-19, I 9-2, FG 3-9). A member of the voluntary sector described his frustration about working with two or three councillors in a small group in the following way:

*"I got particularly cross because they kept on saying, you will have to be careful who dominates it. And I did say at one time, 'it's too late, you just have and you are, you know. Just shut up for five minutes', but they couldn't."* (FG 3-9)

Two reasons were given by participants to explain the domination of certain people. First, participants were recruited from the movers and shakers of the local community, amongst whom there are some who are quite forceful, quite vocal and self-important people. Some people felt that councillors in particular were not listening to what others were saying (FG 1-7, FG 1-16, FG 3-20). One focus group felt it was in the nature of the councillor to *"feel a need to say something"* because *"otherwise they wouldn't be a councillor"* (FG 3-9). This is an indication that 'normalisations' which are at work outside the conference room were replicated within the conference room. Councillors, who are used to talking with authority tend to continue to do so. I conclude, that while the conference format was generally perceived to be conducive to fairness and equal participation opportunities, in practice, quite a number of conference participants suffered from one form of domination or another, and were therefore unable to have as much of a say as they would have liked.

### *Competent*

A third criterion to measure the success of the Future Search Conference as defined by those with a stake in it is that the proceedings should be competent. This means that the required expertise should be in the room and available information shared freely. An indication of competent proceedings would be that discussions go deeper than headline level and that a duplication of existing initiatives is avoided. The participants also hoped that the conference would address all local key issues.

Prior to the Future Search Conference, I had asked those with a stake in its success or failure to list the local key issues that they felt the conference should address. In the course of the Future Search Conference, about half of these listed issues were at least raised: the jealousies between Aldershot and Farnborough, the empty shop units in Aldershot and Farnborough town centres, local environmental issues like recycling and noise found their way onto the mind map as did juvenile crime, drug, alcohol and anti-social behaviour which by some participants was associated with a lack of opportunity and rise in youth homelessness due to lack of affordable housing. The environmental issues were later taken on board by the environment action group and the lack of affordable housing for young people in the borough later informed the work of the housing action group. While the issue of vibrant town centres made it into the common ground list produced by the conference, no action group formed to follow up this item. The limited options for land and infrastructure development were reflected in items like rising development pressures and threat to open space in the mind map. Advances in information technology were reflected in mind map items like 'tele-working' and 'change in service industries' and in the frequent references made to the internet in the ideal future scenario presentations (NP O-15). However, the change towards internet shopping was filed away as unresolved difference in the common ground session.

The two most decisive issues for the future of Rushmoor - namely the future of the airfield and the future of the army - also featured highly on the mind map but ended up as 'unresolved differences' in the common ground session and therefore were not addressed by any of the action groups. One conference participant nevertheless committed in the final conference session to look into the latest developments surrounding the airfield and to make that information available to others (NP O-23). Global environmental problems, the future of small businesses and employment for semi- and non-skilled workforce were issues that did not attract much attention at the Rushmoor Future Search Conference.

A second key issue that participants treated as a 'standard' problem in the area, but which did not find its way in my pre-conference evaluation criteria list and therefore had to be added later on, is the issue of transport. This issue emerged early on in the conference, with items like 'car dependency', 'withdrawal of public transport', 'increased pollution', 'lack of Government transport policy' and 'increased traffic congestion' accumulating on the mind

map. The future vision phase was then full of images of monorails connecting all parts of the borough and the action planning phase gave birth to a transport group with a long list of tasks. The transport issue also featured highly in the non-participant focus groups which I conducted with young mothers and youth – two groups notably under represented at the conference. A key finding of these group discussions was that the accessibility of all kinds of facilities in the borough and beyond depended crucially upon access to a car. Focus group participants claimed that using public transport was “*much too expensive and takes three times as long as walking*” (NFG-2). The perspective of the young mothers in my focus groups also drew attention to the need for traffic calming and road humps in their neighbourhoods in order to secure the safety of their children from speeding cars. This perspective also reflects the fact that most of the young mothers had no access to a car, while all but two Future Search Conference participants had travelled to the conference by car.

Predictably, the young schoolgirls also paid a lot of attention to improvements required in schools, an issue which was hardly mentioned at all in the Future Search Conference (NFG-5). Vandalism and crime affected the young mothers who lived in deprived neighbourhoods much more directly than any Future Search Conference participants and therefore featured much higher in their focus group conversation (NFG-3&4). However, the issues raised in the focus group discussions with young employees and the members of the Aldershot youth club were all raised by the Future Search Conference – for example the decline of Aldershot town centre of the threat to open spaces from development pressure (NFG-2). One conference participant remarked that inevitably, the conference views were a ‘middle-class position’ (I 25-12). In that sense, the visions are representative of the group of conference participants, but not necessarily of the wider public. In conclusion, the conference worked quite well in raising all the key issues of concern to people in the borough. However, the resulting action groups only address about half of the local key issues, leaving some key issues unresolved or neglected.

The issue of the overall competence of the conference participants to address the local key issues was also topic of debate in my focus group discussions with conference participants. An environmentalist doubted if

*“we were professionally confident enough to actually think through some of these solutions to somebody...It needs that sort of a professional sort of view.”* (FG 1-13)

As not all conference participants had the same knowledge about the area, some participants were not able to follow some of the discussions, like this member of the voluntary sector:

*“From time to time that did show in the small group discussion - because people were talking about things that I simply didn't know about. And then this, I was unwilling to slow the whole thing down very badly, because I just had to ride with that on a few occasions...They were talking about the Bureau for young people in homelessness, and I still don't entirely understand what it is, but it was a key point. And at one point I did say*



*'what is the Bureau?'*, but everybody else in the group knew immediately what was being talked about." (FG 3-3)

As a senior participant from the youth sector emphasised, the blank sheet of paper approach can only take you part of the way. If you then fail to put some parameters of reality in place, you risk not achieving anything and losing people (I 19-13). Too little time seems to have been spent during the Future Search Conference placing the visions into a strategic perspective and homing in on very specific, manageable first tasks (I 19-2). People in positions of responsibility felt that factual information should have been circulated before the conference, like a list of key organisations in the area (FG 3-3) or statistical and demographic trends (FG 3-5, FG 3-20). A leader from the business sector even thought that a menu of future scenarios should have been compiled before the conference in order to guide and inform the discussions (FG 3-4, FG 3-20&21), while others strongly opposed this idea (FG 3-21). Most of all, participants would have liked an update on the two key issues that will very much determine the future of the area: the future of the British army and the future of the local airfield (FG 3-5).

*"We spent a lot of time talking about getting rid of the airfield, getting rid of the Army. There is no way that will happen anyway, we spent a lot of time talking about that area. I think some bump should have been given about the intentions of the MoD in the next ten years, intention of the Airport for the next ten years. You could have stopped a lot of useless squabble."* (FG 3-5) (male, business sector)

For fear of 'swamping' the conference with Council officials and councillors, only two officers and three councillors were invited to take part. The two officers made a considerable contribution to updating their action groups on the status quo in their particular field. This made some participants who are used to cooperating with officers suggest that it would have been good to have officers from some other key areas as well:

*"the transport one [group] disappeared over the horizon, with the monorail and all that, quite complex and difficult, you needed experts there"* (I 19-2) (female, education sector)

*"certainly planning control could have had a larger part, because a lot of the aspirations, ideas, brain storming that we mangled would have received immediate death of planning control"* (I 12-7) (male, business sector)

I conclude that a number of conference participants felt that the competence of the conference proceedings suffered from a lack of factual input and competent people in the room. Also, those who had more knowledge about what was going on in the borough did not always use this knowledge in a way that would make it accessible to all.

### **Summary**

As the evaluation along the process criteria shows, the Rushmoor Future Search Conference as a process overall worked well. The conference created a collaborative working atmosphere and allowed for constructive, fair deliberation

which was only at times impeded by axe-grinding individuals. Only a minority of participants complained that the conference participants had lacked professional confidence to address the tasks put before them, while the majority thought that Rushmoor's key issues had been properly addressed. The main weakness of the Future Search Conference was the representativeness of the participants. As the steering group had aimed to recruit the local 'movers and shakers' as recommended in the Future Search handbook, the conference ended up with a very narrow socio-economic range. The candidates who had been recruited to represent the business and the youth community largely failed to turn up at the conference – a fact which was thought to prove that the conference format was not suitable for these two target groups.

Process criteria	Rating	Comments
1. inclusive	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participants were largely an elite of 'do-gooders and busy bodies' from a narrow socio-economic range (white, middle-class, middle-aged)</li> <li>-youth and business community underrepresented</li> <li>-participants were not considered representative of the wider community</li> </ul>
2. collaborative	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-FSC method found conducive to fair deliberation (rule that all views are valid, keeping a written record of all contributions, small group work)</li> <li>-overall very constructive working atmosphere</li> <li>-nevertheless, a few people dominated in the plenary sessions (and some small groups) with the result that others disengaged</li> <li>-councillors were perceived as particularly unable to listen to others</li> </ul>
3. competent	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-most of Rushmoor's key issues were properly addressed</li> <li>-lack of factual knowledge about two key issues (airfield, future of the army)</li> <li>-some participants missed 'factual' input and doubted their professional competence; more officer participation might have provided support in the implementation phase of the conference</li> </ul>

**Table 6.4 : Evaluation of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference –**

**Part 1: Process criteria**

Source: my data

**6.4.2 Outcome criteria**

*Consensus about coherent, innovative vision*

A core aim - particularly for the conference organisers - was to produce a consensus on a vision for Rushmoor's future that will be instructive and carry through to practice. This meant to them that a consensus on an overarching, inspiring vision should result from the conference, and one that goes beyond what could have been predicted using common sense. The visions produced by the small groups included some more or less innovative ideas, like Expo 2010 in Rushmoor, the 3-day working week, spiritual training and one small group

discussed but did not present a Euro star Terminal in Aldershot. Moreover, some futuristic stereotypes were reproduced such as a visitor from Mars, monorails going down all major roads and a Sunshine Dome above the borough. Other typical but more realistic elements of future visions were solar power and home shopping. Ideas which projected existing bad practice into future best practice were 100% response to the Local Plan, 90% recycling rate and the two football clubs merging into Rushmoor FC which would then play premier league. The borough's two most pressing problems were resolved in a refreshingly simple way: the airfield was turned into Aerospace Forest and the army left, releasing lots of open space for housing, leisure and new business developments. Also some more gradual improvements were envisioned like the College becoming a University, the building of a new community centre, the construction of a community square in the town centre and joint governance by stakeholders. Also larger leisure facilities, better education provision, and composting of wastes were suggested. Most presentations referred in one way or another to the rising importance of the internet, for example through the issue of internet shopping.

However, after having been merged into 'common ground', the visions were less daring, less inspiring and more common-place. A very local activist felt that *"anyone who takes an interest in the local area could have come up with those... in 5 minutes"* (I 25-11)

A non-participating councillor from the Liberal Democrats commented on the conference outcomes that *"there wasn't enough radical thinking"* (I 5-1). With developments in the aerospace industry threatening the continuation of the bi-annual Farnborough Air Show, and with the Strategic Defence Review cutting military expenditure in Aldershot, *"we've got to have a vision of what we are going to have in its place, what the community is going to be about"* (I 5-2). And this person did not find many answers to this question in the outcomes of the conference.

From my non-participant observation of the Future Search proceedings, it was apparent that in the tedious process of merging the visions into common ground statements, a lot of the innovative ideas were declared 'unresolved differences' (for example closing down the airfield, monorail, Rushmoor football club). While the majority of visionary presentations included these innovative elements, one person's veto is sufficient to cancel the item from the common ground listing and thereby from further work on it. I think that a second reason for the gap between innovative visions and rather common-place actions was a lack of time for the action groups to develop more than rudimentary project ideas. This observation was echoed by my focus groups, where I found a general feeling that the action group session had been too short and people had just had a chance to work on the tip of the iceberg (FG 3-12, FG 1-4).

Secondly, it was recognised by participants and non-participants alike that the conference process had failed to resolve contradictions in the overall vision. One person raised concern, that separate action groups would pursue contradicting purposes (FG 1-12). There was an overall feeling that the ideas were ill thought through (FG 3-2), financial constraints were left unconsidered (FG 3-8, FG 3-10,

FG 1-13) and that necessary trade-offs (FG 1-13) and real world conditions were not addressed (FG 3-5, FG 3-10).

*"I even think the railway is a ...idea. Everybody would like to wake up in the morning and it's there. But if you said there was going to be a three year building scheme, all the roads up, smash houses etc, to put the railway in - oh you don't want to do that. We want the railway but we don't want to take any of the pain or anguish or the costs."* (FG 1-13) (male, environment sector)

It was also pointed out that not enough energy had been invested into thinking through the steps over the next couple of years that could lead to the realisation of the identified plans (FG 3-10).

A third critical point was made by participants about a failure to realise that there was a need for careful prioritisation in order to ensure that scarce resources are used for maximum benefit. Participants doubted the desirability of certain identified actions in the light of their costs and when prioritised against other projects. An explanation for the incoherence and vagueness of the conference outcomes was given by the participants themselves. They felt that the lack of actual implementation power allowed them to keep indulging into utopian demands which, when faced with real world conditions, would actually falter on the spot. An environmentalist suggested that it might have made a huge difference if the participants had actually been granted a budget to allocate for their diverse visions (FG 1-6).

Finally, the identification with the common ground suffered from the process by which it was derived. In the Rushmoor conference, the common ground was negotiated by a few group representatives who took care of their group's slips of paper while the majority of conference participants stood back and switched off. Despite the fact that the large group was asked to have a thorough look at the common ground visions before it was finalised, a lot of participants felt cut off from the process and as a result, identified less strongly with the agreed vision (FG 2-7).

I conclude that the conference failed to translate the quite innovative visions generated in the creative phase into inspiring new projects on the ground. The consensus vision produced at the Future Search Conference was considered of less use than expected because it included contradictory aims and ill-thought-through ideas and because it failed to set clear priorities and to address financial implications.

### ***Action groups deliver***

A main criterion for the success of the Future Search Conference as defined by the conference organisers and steering group was the hope that the conference would be followed by action taken by the participants. While councillors and officers emphasised that the conference's success depended crucially upon avoiding the false expectation that the Council would do all the follow-up work, community-based stakeholders were clear that the Council would have to play a strong role in implementing the things which the

community simply cannot do for itself. The conference participants hoped that the attending councillors and officers would use their influence to make sure that conference outcomes were integrated into the Council's policies, spending patterns and the Local Plan. Moreover, the Council should offer administrative support, rooms and small grants to the action groups.

Fourteen months after the Future Search Conference, those I interviewed struggled to point to anything concrete that had happened as a result of the Future Search Conference:

*"On the surface, what has the Future Search achieved for the betterment of the environment, for the social and economic well-being of the borough?*

*...Show me one thing that it has achieved, that has furthered these things, I don't believe you will find anything!" (I 21-9) (person in a senior position)*

*"What has happened? Visibly not a lot." (I 12-1) (male, business sector)*

*"The conference has not achieved much new stuff on the ground, in terms of actual projects in Rushmoor, really. A lot of what has happened, a lot of the groups set up were happening anyway" (I 25-1) (male, environment sector)*

Table 6.5 provides an overview of the activities of the action groups since the Future Search Conference. The table shows that only two groups were still active fourteen months after the conference, and the majority of groups had folded. Moreover, even though some groups had initiated new projects, there were no visible changes on the ground as a result of these initiatives.

Council support was given to the action groups in the form of administrative support by the Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator and by providing meeting rooms. The LA21 coordinator played a key role in keeping the conference follow-through process together. He was regularly in touch with members of the action groups, acted as secretariat for some and took over a project of one action group which collapsed. The officers who attended the conference have supported one action group each, making those two groups the most successful ones. In both cases, the officer had taken on a strong role in linking the group's ideas to Council staff and policies, and in one case even provided regular input by Council professionals to the group.

The Council's policy-making however seemed to have remained unaffected by the Future Search Conference. The Council had sponsored the conference event with £10,000 (I 12-5), but did not commit any further money to the follow-through process apart from a small contribution to the environmental award scheme. There was no evidence that policies, budgets or the Local Plan have been altered to accommodate visions and action plans from the conference.

Action group	Status of the action groups 14 months after the conference
Integrated transport in Rushmoor	Met a few times, disagreed about priorities for action and folded after membership decreased Initiated a bus surgery, which was later completed by the LA21 coordinator in collaboration with a major local bus operator
A better environment	Turned into a consultative body to the Council and an educative forum for its members, attracting new members all the time Initiated a 'Local Environmental Award Scheme' which encourages local people to undertake projects which are of benefit to the local environment; a total sponsorship of £1,000 has been provided by the Environment Agency, Hampshire Waste Services and Rushmoor Borough Council for the award scheme In November 1999, the first taker of the award scheme was a local group in Cove, which converted some waste land into a wildlife public garden
Lifelong learning	The group never met, but as one of its members admitted at the focus group session, it actually never had any serious intention of meeting again. Instead of working out action proposals, the group " <i>just had a chat</i> " during the action planning phase of the conference (FG 1-19).
Improved housing	The members of the housing group carried their issues into an already existing forum on housing and were still actively involved 14 months later, but didn't meet as a separate group. I was told by one person that one group member had implemented a scheme for affordable housing for the young in his housing company (I 14-4). However, there was little interaction with the LA21 coordinator.
Better arts and leisure in Rushmoor	The group's core project was to secure an empty shop unit in one of Farnborough's big malls for a community arts centre, which the group would like to turn into " <i>a venue, where we can let people put up paintings, sculptures, a variety, less performing art, more visual arts</i> " (I 3-3) and a " <i>centre for the minor arts, like woodworking, needlework, painting, and pottery</i> " (I 18-3). The group ensured that Rushmoor Borough Council's new 'Arts Strategy' was developed in collaboration with all the local arts providers (I 11-1). By March 2000, the group had still not secured an empty shop unit for an arts facility.
Building a better community	Group folded after one well-attended meeting, where targets were set. The group leader felt that the group members had been tied up by other priorities - work pressures and other commitments. The group's co-ordinator was still aiming to install notice boards in all twelve post offices in Rushmoor, which was one of the tasks the group had set itself.
Better planning, health, tourism and town centres	Never intended to meet again as a group. It was claimed that single individuals were still engaged in following up issues fourteen months later (I 12-12).

**Table 6.5 : Status of the action groups 14 months after the Rushmoor Future Search Conference**

Source: my research

Neither Council officers nor councillors were thought to be familiar with the outcomes of the Future Search Conference, unless they had participated themselves or were a member of the Local Agenda 21 subcommittee or the officer steering group:

*"if the Future Search was shaping the direction of the borough, and the direction of the services we provide...they [officers] would know, but it isn't, so they don't know, it's an irrelevancy, it bypasses them" (I 21-10).*

I conclude that while the Council had generously sponsored the conference and given secretarial support to the action groups and the steering group, there has been little impact on the Council's policy and decision-making as a result of the conference. Overall, the conference and its outcomes are only known to a few people in the Council who had direct involvement with the conference process.

Six reasons were suggested by my interviewees as to why the action groups largely failed to sustain their efforts and to deliver action on the ground:

#### ***Participants surprised that follow-up action is expected of them***

Apparently it had not been sufficiently clear to all conference participants, that they were supposed to take responsibility for follow-up action from the Future Search Conference. This delegate from the business sector spoke for many:

*"I was a bit surprised that anything was expected of us afterwards, I must confess, that it was going to go any further forward. I thought that perhaps there would be a final document prepared, conclusions which might be of use to the Councillors who hold the political power here." (FG 2-25)*

A few claimed that they felt a genuine desire to take things forward and that they had freely chosen to do so – amongst those a committed councillor (FG 2-26). Nevertheless, a few people experienced peer pressure to get involved in the follow-up action, and certainly the Lifelong learning action group did not dare to confess in public that they had no intention of meeting ever again (NP O-24).

#### ***Action groups failed to narrow down to manageable plans***

Another reason for failure was that at least some of the action groups had not narrowed down their action plans sufficiently in the last phase of the conference. As a result, their first meetings were spent quarrelling about priorities for action, with each person trying to push their pet issues. The integrated transport group seemed to suffer more than the other groups from a lack of direction after the conference :

*"P1: But like in our group, we still have a huge plan of things to do for the meeting. We got this great grid, a huge list of things, you can't do it all. You can't do it all. Do lots of things badly or a few things good, that's the danger I could see.*

*P2: You haven't got time to do them." (FG 1-12)*

### **Lack of short-term success**

A third explanation for the rapid decline in commitment to the follow-up action offered to me by my interviewees was that people would need to see quick successes to sustain their enthusiasm. An officer felt that:

*"I suppose people have to see some achievements to feel enthused, empowered and encouraged to go on."* (I 10-5)

Another officer thought that the nature of many objectives aimed for at the Future Search Conference was that they required *"incredibly hard work"* (I 11-5) over a long period of time. A member of the business sector thought that enthusiasm had waned because:

*"They went away from the conference and nothing seemed to really happen very much. Most of the things we were talking about couldn't really happen very quickly, because they are long term projects, so maybe they lost interest because it was all too long a duration."* (I 3-3)

### **Members of action groups over committed**

A core challenge faced by all action groups was that by their very selection, the movers and shakers present at the conference were highly active people, involved in many activities and often already over committed:

*"I suspect people there are already in lots of other groups."* (FG 1-12)  
(female, education sector)

*"people do tend to take on things very easily and willingly, and it's usually people who like to get involved, and they just take on too much"* (I 23-3)  
(female, voluntary sector)

In my one-to-one interviews with those still active and those who had dropped out since, I listened to a lot of apologetic statements by people who would have liked to contribute more to the conference follow-through, but weren't in a position to do so (I 25-6, I 17-2, I 9-1).

### **Lack of learning from failures**

A number of steering group members regretted in the interviews that their group had not taken on a more proactive role in supporting the action groups and preventing their collapse. These steering group members recognised their responsibility for the groups, saying that one cannot set up groups and expect them to work without any support (I 19-12). They felt that a lot could have been learned by enforcing the requirement that the action groups should report to the steering group:

*Not only "would we have understood what people were doing and where they were going but also would we have been able to understand where people have failed and why they failed (...) why haven't they made it, was the target wrong in the first place, wasn't the resources there to carry it out, wasn't there the right attitude among people to carry it out"* (I 3-7)

However, the steering group suffered from a lack of direction after the Future Search Conference and therefore was not in a strong position to offer support.



The group redefined their role in spring 1998 as "*collating information, promoting action, being a sort of clearing-house for complaints and ideas*" (I 23-4). The steering group's new purpose was to host a Future Search review conference in order to revive the follow-up process.

#### *Lack of Council support*

The members of the action groups would have liked more recognition for their work by the Council. This would have included more officers involved in action groups (I 23-5), but also a more formal recognition of the Future Search process. The only formal link established between the Future Search Conference and the Council is the joint meeting between the Future Search team and the Council's LA21 subcommittee, which was first held in summer 1998, a year after the conference. The liaison meetings, the LA21 subcommittee and the Future Search steering group have all been replaced by the 'Future Rushmoor Forum', which now oversees Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process.

When the first liaison meeting was held, Future Search steering group members attached strong hopes to this institution as a mechanism for providing an inroad for Future Search activists to the Council:

*"I think that the Future Search action team meetings with the LA21 subcommittee is good, to have that interface is good for both sides...because it gives the community access to the Council and to a certain extent to the Council's funding; it certainly will help the Council determine funding priorities" (I 21-6)*

I conclude that the action groups would have needed more members with time on their hands motivated to take on new tasks, more guidance in clarifying their aims and working towards short term successes and more support in order to be enabled to learn from their mistakes.

The failure of the Council to consider even a few of the Future Search outcomes in its policy-making process seems to be down to three major problems:

#### *Ill-defined status of the Future Search Conference*

The origins of the Council's inaction following the Future Search Conference can be found in the ill-defined status of the conference itself. The Council made no prior commitment to pay attention to the conference outcomes or even to select and support those outcomes it approved of. Instead, the conference was defined very much as an exercise in facilitating action by the community for the community, which would not have much to do with the Council (K I-1). The conference participants however expected Rushmoor Borough Council to take a lead in the follow-through process (FG 2-10, FG 3-17, FG 1-3, FG 1-14). All three focus groups concluded that the "*weight*"(FG 1-5) of Rushmoor Borough Council was needed to make the action groups effective. Fourteen months after the conference, in a one-to-one interview, an officer agreed that the Council had missed its opportunity to create a link between Future Search and the Council's decision-making structures:

*"I think that we haven't really given a clear status to the Future Search group as a local authority. We should have decided at the start how the Future Search was to link in with the future of the borough. It may be too late now. It may be worth raising it with the strategic plan review and with the government White Paper on local government and with visioning for local pilot areas." (I 6-16)*

#### *Lack of translation of conference outcomes into formal demands and structures*

A second fact that made it difficult to link the outcomes of the Future Search Conference with the Council's work originates from the difficulty of translating the outcomes of the informal Future Search process into a format suitable for the requirements of the formal decision-making structure of the Council. An officer suggested that the introduction of more informal modes of operation within the Council might enable easier integration of outcomes from informal public participation exercises:

*"I think the difficulty that we have with the decision-making structure of the Council is that it is very formal, and Future Search relies almost on the informality but extremely clever processes, those are two fundamentally different styles of working, and to make progress, we need to use more of that informal workshop style" (I 11-6)*

#### *Future Search no more than one of many consultation processes*

Finally, a massive problem was perceived by my interviewees in the fact that Future Search and Local Agenda 21 were no more than one amongst many consultation exercises and initiatives carried out by the Council in parallel. Asked about how Local Agenda 21 (including the Future Search effort) links in with the multitude of parallel, quite similar activities being carried out by the Council at present, two senior Council officers admitted in September 1998:

*"Well, this is a very good question, at present, to be absolutely blunt, it doesn't." (I 29-3)*

*"given the wide range of things that are going on, it just dilutes resources, it's very easy that amongst all those things LA21 will get lost" (I 6-13)*

Part of this problem was that these initiatives were all run by different departments - even an initiative like Healthy Rushmoor, which is very similar to Local Agenda 21, was carried out under a different management than Local Agenda 21 (I 7-8). However, I was informed that a first meeting of senior officers had taken place in September 1998 to discuss ways of integrating the initiatives, so that less meetings would be needed and duplication was avoided.

I conclude that the Future Search Conference was largely cut off from the Council's decision-making structure - for a lack of mandate, for its different mode of working and for its lack of status amongst the large number of other consultation exercises.

### ***Effective outreach***

The outreach to the wider public via the media, the Local Agenda 21 officer and the participants was a further criterion for the success of the Future Search Conference as established by those with a stake in it. The aim was to get appropriate media coverage and to reach out to the wider community with a different form of consultation. As a result, the borough's residents would have heard about the conference and its follow-through activities and some new people would join the process. An interviewee from the business sector effectively summed up my findings with regards to this criterion:

*"I think it ... went through tremendous difficulty in getting the attention of anybody who hadn't attended" (I 3-1)*

The group dynamics of the Future Search Conference are carefully designed to generate bonding and mutual commitment. This commitment cannot easily be extended to outsiders, who have not shared the original experience. I found no evidence that any conference participant successfully enrolled somebody else into the follow-through process. The Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator was the only person who recruited new members into the process, because he never tired of inviting anyone who contacted him to come along to a Future Search related meeting. As a result, the environment action group membership kept rising continually.

Out of those who attended the conference, some actually used the newsletters of their organisations and networks in an attempt to raise awareness about the Future Search process and Local Agenda 21 in particular (I 14-12, I 25-6). Unfortunately, the organisation with the strongest network of community and self-help groups, Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), was no longer actively engaged in the conference follow-through process. None of the groups that are part of the RVS networks have joined in the Future Search activities as a result. The withdrawal of RVS was supposed to be down to a 'personality thing' (I 25-8, I 23-7). There also seemed to be a power (and funding) issue involved, in that RVS was trying to make sure that it remained 'the' link between Council and community, and that this position was not undermined by the LA21 coordinator.

Media coverage after the conference was scarce. None of the local media turned up at the Future Search Conference, despite the fact that they had been invited to a press conference at the beginning. The participants of my focus groups, which took place 10-14 days after the original conference were quite alarmed that they had not come across any news item about the conference (FG 3-2). Eventually, two press articles appeared with considerable delay in two local newspapers about the conference.

One reason for the lack of publicity work lies in the change-over between Local Agenda 21 officers and the fact that participant recruitment lasted virtually until the last minute. Due to the serious illness of the LA21 coordinator directly after the conference, no further publicity work was done until weeks later. In addition, the relationship between the Council and the local papers is not positive. According to an officer, one free newspaper in particular is rather hostile to anything the Council does (I 14-3) and according to one participant

from the business sector it is *"so unbelievably anti-LA21"* and considers it *"a waste of time"* (I 3-1). The other two papers publish Local Agenda 21 matters when it suits them (I 14-3).

The main outreach to the wider public was a questionnaire, which was designed by the Local Agenda 21 coordinator. The questionnaire was included in the Council's Arena magazine, which is delivered free of charge to all households in the borough: a total of 32,000 copies. All respondents were entered into a prize draw, including tickets for the air show donated by an aerospace company. The printing of the four-page colour questionnaire itself was sponsored by 1000 pounds from another large local company. Many participants and steering group members welcomed the questionnaire. A leader of a youth group spoke for many:

*"putting out the questionnaire in the Arena, ...even if they don't actually respond to the questionnaire, it's bringing it to their notice that the future search thing not just happened some weekend with an elite group of people but that they are now trying to involve the wider community"* (I 9-3)

Despite the fact that it is delivered to all households in the borough, the Arena magazine does not necessarily reach the wider public. Councillors and officers told me that getting something in Arena is not the same as getting the message across (I 22-8). Nevertheless, about 320 people replied to the questionnaire which is a higher response rate than usually achieved with the Arena magazine. The findings were aggregated and fed into the borough's Local Agenda 21 strategy - as one amongst many other inputs. The LA21 coordinator recruited 17 local residents to the Future Search follow-up evening from those who had indicated their interest in getting involved.

A second element of outreach that worked well was the Future Search review evening, organised by the steering group and held on 1 December 1998 to which all conference participants and a large number of local residents who had replied to the questionnaire were invited. The aim of the evening was to reinvigorate Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21. For that purpose, the Local Agenda 21 coordinator used a number of displays, amongst them a voting exercise on LA21 indicators, had a role play explaining the origins and purpose of Local Agenda 21 written and performed by two actresses and allowed four successful local groups to present their activities as an inspiration for others. A nice meal provided by the army helped to attract about 83 participants and gave them space to reconnect with each other. While the follow-up evening 17 months after the initial conference provided a platform to celebrate what had been achieved, there was no acknowledgement or analysis of why other projects had failed.

I conclude that the Future Search Conference failed to win the attention of the wider public. Apart from the respondents to the LA21 questionnaire, there was little indication that the conference outcomes had reached the wider public. As one steering group member summarised:

*"let's say unless I was a member of the Future Search team, I wouldn't know they existed, there isn't enough publicity, advertising"* (I 23-8)

### **Local Agenda 21 strengthened**

Another criterion for the success of the Future Search Conference as defined by those with a stake in it, was to strengthen Local Agenda 21 in Rushmoor. It was hoped that Local Agenda 21 would become a true umbrella of all initiatives which enhance sustainability in the borough. The conference itself hoped to provide new contacts for the Local Agenda 21 coordinator to that end and to achieve widespread media coverage to spread the word about Local Agenda 21. The outcomes of the conference should adhere to the principles of sustainability and not duplicate any existing initiatives. A long term process on Local Agenda 21 should begin with the conference, involving not just the usual environmentalists but a broad cross-section of the community in setting the direction for Local Agenda 21.

The entire conference preparation required a huge amount of building support for Local Agenda 21 and the Future Search Conference within the Council (to secure the core funding) and across the various sectors of the community, thereby strengthening the LA21 officer's networks significantly. Unfortunately, a change-over of Local Agenda 21 officers meant that a lot of this networking had to be done over again (I 14-12).

During the conference, little time was spent explaining the concept and its origins, thereby leaving some participants in the dark, like this delegate from the voluntary sector:

*"Well, I would have said that this LA21, that wasn't explained at the conference. That was thrown up at the start. ...And I still don't know what LA21 is." (FG 1-17)*

Quite a few of conference participants who are members of community groups were similarly unaware when I asked them what the essence of Local Agenda 21 was for them (I 17-6, I 9-6, I 8-5, I 18-6&7). However, Council officers and steering group members were better informed and offered me a wide range of definitions, all of which combined caring for the environment and caring for future generations (I 30-4, I 4-3, I 16-13, I 15-5). The Future Search Conference method strongly opposes any longer theoretical inputs in the form of speeches into the conference, as this would undermine the spirit of the conference according to which all those present are experts in their own right. According to the Local Agenda 21 officer, this was the reason why Local Agenda 21 was not more pro-actively promoted during the conference in the form of theoretical inputs. With regards to the logistics and practicalities, the Future Search Conference was not really a demonstration of sustainability at work either. While there were reusable folders and name badges and excellent catering - including vegetarian choices, the transport arrangements in particular were rather unsustainable in a large Borough with little provision of public transport (NP O-4).

Fourteen months after the conference, most stakeholders I interviewed commented that Local Agenda 21 had not achieved any profile in the local media (I 5-4):

*"I don't think I have ever heard any mention of LA21 on the radio, TV or any other medium; even the odd story that has gone in the local press has never really emphasised LA21; they've always been about a particular thing that was happening"* (I 3-8) (male, business sector)

As a consequence, Local Agenda 21 was still considered unknown to the wider public by a diverse range of interviewees:

*"you got a vast majority of the population who doesn't know what it's about"* (I 21-1) (senior Council officer)

*"out in the general public they have not heard of it, you have to start small and it's up to each individual group to try to get the people around them aware of it...but the ordinary man in the street hasn't got the faintest idea what LA21 is or was"* (I 17-6) (female, voluntary sector)

Local Agenda 21 had moreover not succeeded in linking with the Borough's other partnership projects like the Social Needs Forum and the Healthy Rushmoor initiative. The absence of the Local Agenda 21 coordinator from these meetings did not just imply a lack of representation of LA21 initiatives, but also meant that the Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator was not aware of other initiatives with which his own efforts would need to be coordinated or of opportunities to be exploited by LA21 projects and the conference action groups. As one active networker concluded:

*"none of the fora we go to, nobody of LA21 comes along to, so technically they don't exist, you see what I mean, they just don't exist, if they are not coming to the things where decisions are made, they are not having any effect, people can say about LA21 what they like, but unless [the LA21 coordinator] were to turn up to virtually all the fora that concern Rushmoor, they have no input,"* (I 26-6)

An additional problem for some organisations was that they were not interested in having their own work appear under the Local Agenda 21 banner, because they feared this would take away kudos from their own organisation and might even undermine their own funding base:

*"there is a Political aspect with a big P, it comes down to money. We have to be seen to be doing things to justify the money we get. If we start labelling everything LA21, people are gonna say: 'why are we giving them money?' Which is another way of looking at it, given current decline in local government monies. LA21 as it is constituted could no way take over what we do, it wouldn't work."* (I 26-10)

Also, within Rushmoor Borough Council itself, Local Agenda 21 was still fighting for attention. The fact that the Local Agenda 21 coordinator was no longer working directly for the Chief Executive but had been placed under the management of a policy department was regarded as a clear indication of the lack of senior support Local Agenda 21 received in Rushmoor.

One steering group member argued that:

*"[the LA21 coordinator] is in many ways at the bottom... He is answering to many people, but no-one is really answering to him. He is very much on his own. ... He is not involved with any of the other departments of the local authority enough to actually have a huge impact himself."*

However, I was also told that the chief executive had recently been more willing to act as a figurehead for a number of meetings and thereby strengthened Local Agenda 21 within the Council (I 14-5).

Departmentalism was also referred to as another explanation for the difficulties encountered by Local Agenda 21. Several officers thought that the problem was that Local Agenda 21 was regarded as the job of the co-ordinator alone:

*"I think LA21 is seen as a service in its own right, when I am not sure that's the right way of doing that...[the LA21 coordinator] is seen as Local Agenda 21, so he gets on and does it" (I 6-13)*

*"Generally it's fair to say that there is not much capacity within the other services for working on LA21 projects. They got their strategic role, their statutory role... to fulfil, and LA21 will be seen as a kind of luxury when they got time to do it" (I 14-7)*

The officer steering group, which was installed in 1996 to oversee the implementation of Local Agenda 21 within the Council, had suffered from a lack of senior level support since a change-over of chief executives. However, the group was reinvigorated by one newly appointed Director from early 1998 onwards and seemed to attract more senior people once more. The Local Agenda 21 officer collaborated with all heads of services to assess each department's contribution to Local Agenda 21 in the form of an internal audit. The integration of Local Agenda 21 varied significantly from department to department. While integration was considered fully achieved in the area of Environmental Health, the lowest understanding of LA21 was found in the finance department (I 4-5, I 14-10). The housing department was quite advanced on energy efficiency issues (I 14-20), the leisure department had most experience with innovative forms of community participation (I 14-21). A core department that was identified as needing to devote more time to LA21 was planning (I 25-7, I 14-21). By September 1998 the planning department had started to look into issuing a sustainability checklist for developers. However, it seemed that the officer steering group's work was not influenced by the outcomes of the Future Search Conference. The biggest 'corporate' success that Local Agenda 21 had to show in the first year after the conference did not originate from the Future Search Conference but in the 'Green Family Fun' day which raised environmental awareness on a range of issues and took place in summer 1998. This event was built through hands-on support from seven Council departments and 35 voluntary organisations.

There seemed to be even less active interest from the councillors. The LA21 subcommittee was reported to be rather passive in general despite the high ambitions of its chair. The Local Agenda 21 coordinator would present a report

to each meeting and which would be endorsed by the members. While the Local Agenda 21 coordinator was happy that none of his proposals had been turned down yet, other officers complained that those in charge would:

*"struggle in providing the members of the LA21 subcommittee with enough to do. The meetings are short, their agendas are contrived. I don't think they provide the members with enough material for them to challenge them, or to make them feel they are making a real contribution" (I 6-12)*

Some councillors did not seem content with their role:

*"If all we do is come along once every two months and talk about [the Local Agenda 21 coordinator's] written reports and say great, we endorse it, then there is no point being there." (I 24-2)*

It was this state of the LA21 subcommittee that led officers to suggest joint meetings with the Future Search Team (new name of the steering group), as the Future Search Team was struggling for a role as well. The first joint meeting took place at the time when I completed my second round of field work. Apparently, a Future Rushmoor Forum, consisting of councillors, Future Search stakeholders and new members has replaced the liaison meeting.

I conclude that the Future Search Conference failed to create a critical mass for a Local Agenda 21 breakthrough in the borough. Fourteen months after the conference, Local Agenda 21 was still struggling to become more widely known and to gain influence. The biggest successes of LA21 on the ground did not originate from the Future Search Conference.

### **Summary**

I conclude from the evaluation along the outcome criteria, that the Future Search Conference overall failed to produce tangible outcomes. The painfully negotiated common ground statement was considered as of little use, as it left financial implications unconsidered, included contradictory aims and failed to identify clear priorities for action. Out of six action groups which pledged to take action after the conference, only two were still active 14 months after the conference. Apart from an award scheme, a bus surgery conducted by the LA21 coordinator and a good possibility of securing an arts unit in a local shopping mall, the action groups had little to show for their efforts. Interviewees thought that the action groups could have done with a lot more support from the steering group in learning from their mistakes and in staying on track, and from Council officers in empowering some of the changes envisaged. An inbuilt mechanism for failure was that most conference participants were already so busy that they had no capacity to take on new tasks, but nevertheless felt obliged at the conference to make a pledge to take action. Finally, the fact that the Council's policy making had not been affected by the Future Search Conference was subject of much frustration. As my research reveals, there was a lack of interface between the Council and the Future Search Conference until 14 months after the conference, apart from the three council officers who attended the conference. The conference triggered little media resonance and therefore had little impact on the wider public. A Local Agenda 21 questionnaire and a Future Search



review evening were the main outreach from the Future Search Conference and did most to promote Local Agenda 21. The conference contributed little to strengthening the position of Local Agenda 21 within the Council.

Outcome criteria	Rating	Comments
4. consensus about coherent, innovative vision	-	-innovative ideas generated by the ideal future groups were eliminated from the common ground -financial implications not considered, contradictions unresolved, lack of clear priorities
5. action groups deliver	-	-only two action groups were still active 14 months after the conference -an award scheme for neighbourhood initiatives was implemented by the environment group, an arts unit in a shopping mall was in the process of being organised by the arts group -there was no evidence that the conference had had any impact on Council policy making, budgets or the Local Plan, an official interface between Council and Future Search activists was not created until 14 months after the conference
6. effective outreach	-	-participants failed to enrol any of their friends or colleagues in the conference follow-through -extremely little media coverage of the conference and its follow-up -a questionnaire in the Council's magazine triggered 320 responses and mobilised 17 new people to a Future Search review evening
7. Local Agenda 21 strengthened	0/+	-the process of winning support and funding for the Future Search Conference made Local Agenda 21 known within the Council -Local Agenda 21 was not sufficiently explained at the conference -the conference event and follow-up did not contribute much to the strengthening of Local Agenda 21's position in the Council -the questionnaire and the Future Search review evening promoted Local Agenda 21 to more people

**Table 6.6 : Evaluation of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference –**

**Part 2 : Outcome criteria**

Source: my data

### **6.4.3 Capacity building criteria**

#### **Networking**

Another aim of the Future Search Conference as defined by those with a stake in it was that new contacts should be formed and existing ones strengthened. An indication of that would be new joint projects being run by conference participants or formal alliances set up between organisations whose representatives attended the conference. Moreover, a cross-sectoral membership of the action groups would indicate that the boundaries of departmentalism had been broken open.

Across all focus groups, there was genuine agreement that the mix of people attending the conference had been valuable. Participants from all sectors said that they were grateful for having been given the opportunity to meet people they would never have come across in their own circles (FG 2-8, FG 2-29). Participants enjoyed the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives of the other participants (FG 2-2, FG 2-23). A pensioner who was an active local wildlife volunteer also enjoyed being amongst "high powered" people (FG 2-2). Participants gave the impression that they had all made some "useful contacts" (FG 3-2, FG 1-4, FG 1-18). Even if they had not used these contacts yet, participants emphasised that it felt different to know that the people they had met were within their reach anytime:

*"It's been helpful in establishing contacts with people within the Council but also within the local community, so that you got a name that you can contact if you got a query, a point that you want to raise, information you want on anything"* (I 23-3) (female, voluntary sector)

*"it's more an issue if I now got a problem with something in the military estate, I know a man I can talk to fix it, we haven't done any joint projects or anything"* (I 21-3) (male, statutory sector)

It is in the networking, that the conference participants could pursue the interests of their organisations. A few gave personal examples how contacts made at the conference were highly relevant to their job (FG 1-14, FG 2-8&9). I can list a few examples which I came across in the interviews, but there must certainly be more that I simply do not know about, because I only interviewed a small sample of conference participants. One participant reported that she was successful in getting a grant from a company present at the conference for one of the work-related projects she is involved in, and that the link to that company originated from the conference (I 4-2). Moreover, the housing society and the army linked up at the conference and had reportedly set out to tackle housing issues (I 25-5). Also, an environmentalist became a school governor for sustainability issues at the school of another participant (I 25-7). A researcher from the local College was asked to give some advice on environmental management systems to one of the companies represented in the steering group (I 2-4). Also the link made into a certain Council departments as a result of being a member of the steering group was considered highly advantageous by a participant for their organisation (I 25-10).

With regards to breaking departmentalism in the action groups, the conference was partly successful. About half of the action groups were quite homogenous in their membership (environment, education, housing, a health-centred planning group), while the others had a good mix of members (source: listing of action group members and their sectors).

I conclude that the Future Search Conference provided an effective forum where new contacts across stakeholder boundaries could be made and old ones revived. There was evidence that participants had used these contacts for collaborative endeavours and a few long-term partnerships had formed.

## Learning

That participants should benefit from cross-sectoral learning was another objective put forward by those with a stake in the Future Search Conference. This was supposed to include that participants would let go of stereotypes and appreciate other sectors' concerns more than before. Also, self-interested thinking should be widened to embrace the 'common good', as participants realise the interdependence of all sectors.

Participants of all three focus group sessions from all sectors said that the conference had broadened their outlook (FG 1-18, FG 2-27, FG 3-18) by listening to other stakeholders' point of view. During the conference substantial reference was made to the fact that all issues and sectors are interdependent. In the visions, this was represented by the word 'integrated' as in 'integrated transport', 'integrated leisure plan' etc. Participants realised the consequences of their own activities on other groups (FG 3-10), like this delegate from the voluntary sector:

*"all these problems with housing and open space; housing people would have liked to cover the whole borough with houses to satisfy the housing shortage in the borough; the sports people want open space; there were conflicting things that had to be harmonised, and I thought they were brought out alright."* (I 18-6)

The cross-sectoral learning was facilitated (i) by the range of stakeholders selected to participate and (ii) the constant change-over in membership of the small groups:

*"I think it was a very broad group of people. And they were obviously carefully selected. And it was very useful to get a wider look on things really."* (FG 3-18)

*"Rotating amongst a group of mixed individuals of stakeholders, what did come up positively is a lot of people realised the consequences of what they were going to do would have on others: Education on health, housing on health, housing, health, statutory bodies and so on."* (FG 3-10)

Particularly the mixed scenario groups were quite effective in unearthing unquestioned assumptions (FG 2-10&11). The scenario group which I observed was repeatedly surprised that what seemed desirable to some was a horror-scenario to other group members (NP O-12). One group member thought a high-tech hospital was desirable while another person wanted decentralised community health centres instead. A group member wanted closed circuit cameras for all inner-city areas to tackle crime, while another strongly argued for tackling the causes of crime instead. This way, the entire visioning process became a major challenge to each person's taken for granted ideas.

Participants unanimously reported that they had learned a lot from each other, with only a few people going into personal examples. The environmentalists showed themselves surprised about the high level of environmental awareness amongst conference participants. Particularly community members said they had discovered organisations they didn't know existed (FG 2-24, FG 3-4, FG 3-17), learned about the structure of the planning system (FG 2-20&25) and picked up

on the conflict between Aldershot and Farnborough (FG 2-15). Someone learned that people would like the service their organisation was providing to be more localised and reconsidered more localised decision-making (FG 2-14, FG 2-17). Community members said they learned why certain things were not happening (FG 3-17, FG 2-18&19) and improved their understanding of "what's going on" locally (FG 1-14) and "what's available - not just here, but in the county as a whole" (FG 3-18).

A senior delegate from the education sector felt that education issues were still not much appreciated by others, and doubted that a significant amount of learning had taken place:

*"I am still not totally convinced that people's ideas have changed."*  
(FG 1-4)

I nevertheless conclude that cross-sectoral learning constituted an important achievement of the conference.

### ***Building trust and community spirit***

Furthermore, an aim of the councillors, officers and steering group members involved in the conference preparation was that the Future Search Conference should help to build trust between the wider community and its local authority. The local authority wanted to be seen as enabler and partner and to be trusted by the community. The councillors were expected to redefine their role and act as guardians of the people's expressed needs. On the side of the citizens, it was hoped that community spirit would be generated as a result of the conference. It was hoped that conference participants would be more willing and capable than before of doing things (for) themselves instead of passing the buck and blaming others. Overall, more things would be done 'with' the community, not 'for' them. The Council would reach out and engage the public in further innovative participation exercises. As a result, the whole of local democracy should be revived: More local residents should want to be involved in local decision-making and more people would be motivated to vote in local elections.

### ***Community spirit***

Several participants reported that the conference helped them to be more proactive rather than reactive (FG 2-23). A woman from the health sector reported that being a participant to the conference made her feel a valued member of the local community and thereby increased her sense of belonging, her commitment and her willingness to make a contribution (FG 2-23, FG 2-11, FG 2-25):

*"At the beginning I felt extremely vulnerable and under pressure thinking I don't know anything about Rushmoor very much. As it went on somehow it figured to myself that I belonged in Rushmoor, belonged in Farnborough [laughs]. Yes it was just a cosy warmth, don't know what happened."*  
(FG 2-11)

Joining forces with like-minded people made participants more hopeful that things could change for the better. Community activists felt that their motivation was renewed:

*"Overall, it's just heightened awareness. When you hear something on the radio, you pick up your ears, and listen carefully, and wonder how it could be applied in your local area, so that you can go to somebody and say: 'Look, can we do this?'" (I 23-3) (female, voluntary sector)*

*"This [Future Search Conference] was just another push... All the problems that we highlighted didn't suddenly appear, they have been there. But we brought them together, and it gave everybody a feeling that you weren't alone. And everybody needed a push really." (I 18-4) (male, voluntary sector)*

I conclude that participants were now more motivated than before the conference to pay attention to local issues and to make a contribution, because the conference had made them feel a valued member of the local community.

#### *Trust between local authority and citizens*

It seems that for officers and councillors alike, the Future Search Conference did play a minor role in reminding them of the value of community consultation and in demonstrating that participation exercises can take place in quite a constructive atmosphere.

*"Future Search gave me as an officer an extremely good understanding of what were the views of the public...cause it affects what I do and what my views are on particular aspects" (I 11-1)*

Similarly, a few participants reported that their willingness to participate in more and other consultative meetings had increased through the positive conference experience:

*"I have personally been a lot more aware, ... whenever we had information through from the Council asking us to attend a particular meeting, it made me more aware that we must find somebody to attend that meeting, and not go: oh dear, another meeting, and straight into the bin" (I 23-2)*

However, at least one conference participants had found their prejudices reinforced that at least those councillors and Council officers represented at the conference were not interested in the citizens' views (I 9-5).

#### *More acceptance of innovative citizen participation*

The fact that the Future Search Conference actually ran and was considered a success has made the family of new participation tools a viable option for all council operations. As one officer reported:

*"I can see really rapid changes, things like focus groups becoming common practice. We are doing proper consultation now, using all the tools that LA21 has been using for the last 5-6 years, that were quite revolutionary [back then]. Future Search and visioning aren't now very revolutionary...They don't see it as some weird flung idea by some ancient hippy, they actually see this as a useful tool they could possibly use" (I 14-24)*

I found plenty of evidence for this in my interviews with Council officers from diverse departments. The arts forum was influenced by conference participants to invite a broader range of stakeholders in the field of arts and to

use elements of Future Search to run a workshop (I 11-1). Similarly, the methods used to run the sports forum were described by one of its participants as strikingly similar to Future Search (I 18-1). Even the community governance group was looking into visioning to follow-up their questionnaire survey of residents in three pilot wards (I 6-15). I conclude that the success of the Future Search Conference event established the method as a mainstream tool for citizen consultation in Rushmoor Borough Council. There was plenty of evidence, that elements of the method were used in other Council contexts.

However, this is also very much down to New Labour's emphasis on citizen participation. I found a striking difference in officers' attitudes to citizen participation between my first visit to the case study area in spring 1997 and my second stay in September 1998. While many were sceptical or indifferent towards citizen participation in early 1997, by late 1998, they were all keen proponents of best practice. Many were still not fully convinced of the benefits of participation but concluded that 'we will have to do it'.

However, there was no evidence yet of a large-scale revival of local democracy. As I have shown in section 6.4.2 ('effective outreach'), the Future Search Conference was still far from having had any impact on the wider public. Those recruited to the conference were a homogenous local elite (see 'inclusive'), and certainly not members of the much referred to 'apathetic public'. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect any revival of local democracy as a result of a single Future Search and its review evening.

I conclude that the Future Search Conference has been very effective in generating community spirit and motivating participants to make a contribution and that it has very successfully established the Future Search method as a participation method in the Council. However, the Future Search Conference did little to build trust between the Council and the citizenry at large – at least partially because it had little outreach beyond the circle of the activist participants.

### *Summary*

I conclude from this part of the evaluation of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference that the conference performed extremely well on the capacity building criteria. The conference provided excellent conditions for participants to meet and to connect across stakeholder group boundaries. As a result, the majority of conference participants said that they had made useful contacts and many had already engaged in one-to-one collaborations. Secondly, the conference provided extremely favourable conditions for learning. Participants realised the interdependence of their sectors and gained a new perspective on their own position within this larger web of relations. The small group discussions in particular forced participants to listen to many perspectives different from their own and to question their taken for granted assumptions. Finally, participants' sense of belonging to the community and their willingness and motivation to make an active contribution rose as a result of the conference. Many of those involved with the Future Search Conference continued to use

elements of the method in their own work, and the Council was considering to use the Future Search format for further citizen participation in local governance.

Capacity building criteria	Rating	Comments
8. networking	++	-participants made useful contacts across stakeholder group boundaries -participants reported from a number of one-to-one collaborations which had originated from the conference
9. learning	++	-participants broadened their outlook, learned from each other and realised the interdependence of their sectors -participants found themselves questioning taken-for-granted assumptions
10. building trust and community spirit	+	-participants felt a stronger sense of belonging as a result of the conference, were paying more attention to local issues and were more willing to make a contribution -participants experienced the conference as a reminder that it was very productive to involve stakeholders / citizens in local decision-making -the Future Search method was considered as a method for further citizen participation exercises run by the Council

**Table 6.7 : Evaluation of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference – Part 3: Capacity building criteria**

Source: my data

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the Rushmoor Future Search Conference, its origins and its wider embeddedness in the UK policy context. I have shown that Rushmoor Borough's economy was threatened by further cuts in military spending and was facing new opportunities with the prospect of military land releases and potential civic uses of the military airfield. As a number of interviewees argued, a vision was needed for what the community was going to be about if it lost its military focus. At the same time, the chief executive and the Leader of the Council were running Rushmoor Borough Council were both enthused by the concept of Local Agenda 21 and very much supported the idea of creating a closer link with the local community and involving them in creating visions for the future of Rushmoor. This was the fertile ground upon which the initiative of the capable and committed Local Agenda 21 coordinator fell, to host a Future Search Conference in order to launch Local Agenda 21 in the Borough.

It took two years of building support, securing a budget, working with a steering group and recruiting participants, before the Future Search Conference took place from 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> July 1997. In the meantime, the conference had lost all of its original supporters – the chief executive and the LA21 coordinator left for other jobs, and the Leader of the Council was replaced after the elections in May 1997. The new chief executive shifted priorities to an Aldershot regeneration

project, and the new Local Agenda 21 coordinator simply needed time to catch up with two years of process that gave birth to the Future Search Conference. Six weeks before the conference took place, it was almost cancelled due to a lack of participants and enthusiasm. The main problem was that the long-term purpose of the conference was lost as its supporters left. The opportunity was missed by the new players to redefine the purpose and to give the conference a status that would match this. As a result, the relationship between Council and Future Search Conference remained ill-defined and led to much frustration on the side of conference participants.

As my research shows, the conference itself was experienced as useful and mostly enjoyable by those present. Most enjoyable were the ideal future groups, where participants acted out their ideal future scenarios in creative ways to each other. This session was the most drastic departure from conventional ways of running meetings, as participants created funny costumes for each other, devised a short play, wrote poems and most importantly laughed a lot with each other. The bonding and trust generated in this session was the basis for the desire to engage in long term working groups with each other. Least enthusiasm was generated by the session in which the common ground statement was derived. Here, participants complained that spokespeople were doing the negotiation on their behalf while they themselves lost their 'stakes'. Moreover, participants were tired after a long day, detested having to stand up and were angry that some people dominated. Overall, participants thought that the conference had devoted too much time to the past and too little on the concrete action planning. They felt that the quality of the outcomes and action plans had suffered as a result.

As my evaluation along the process criteria shows, all participants were impressed with how people from such diverse backgrounds could work together in such a constructive way. Participants praised the Future Search design for emphasizing that 'all views are valid' and thought that people were listening more to each other as a result. However, the plenary sessions of the large group in particular were still dominated by a 'voracious minority' and the mind map exercise was experienced as 'competitive'. Participants were happy to be 'experts in their own right' and only very few argued that the conference could have benefited from some factual inputs and statistics as well as more Council officer presence. As my research demonstrated, the conference at least raised most of Rushmoor's key issues, despite the fact that it was not able to resolve or address all of them – most notably the future of the military and the airfield. The results of the Future Search Conference however were not considered as 'representative' of the wider community, because those gathered at the conference were an elite of local activists and senior professionals from a rather narrow socio-economic range.

The outcomes of the conference themselves were the subject of much disappointment as my evaluation along the outcome criteria showed. The consensus, which was difficult to generate at the conference, was thought to be of little practical use, as it left financial implications unaddressed, included



contradictory aims and failed to set clear priorities between those. A number of highly innovative ideas which had been generated by the ideal future groups were eliminated from the common ground because a few people used their veto power. The action groups which formed in the final phase of the conference had too little time to develop sufficiently concrete action plans. Moreover, quite a number of participants were surprised that follow-up action was expected of them, given that many of them were already highly active individuals. As a result of these two factors, and in the absence of guidance and support from the steering group or officers, all but two groups collapsed shortly after the conference. The two groups which kept meeting were those who had strong officer leadership and access to Council resources as a result. The environment group secured funding for an award scheme for local groups while the arts group was close to opening an arts centre in an empty shop unit of a shopping mall. The Council's policy making at large however remained unaffected by the Future Search Conference and it took until 14 months after the conference for an official interface between councillors and Future Search steering group members to be created.

The Future Search Conference event also failed to reach the wider public and thereby, to make Local Agenda 21 known to the local community. Only two articles about the Future Search Conference appeared in the local press a long time after the original conference. A year later, the Local Agenda 21 officer secured sponsorship to produce a colour Local Agenda 21 questionnaire which included some outcomes of the Future Search Conference and had it distributed to all households with the Council's Arena magazine. As a result of an attractive prize draw, 320 local people returned the questionnaire. 16 months after the Future Search Conference, a review day was hosted, to which all original participants and those questionnaire respondents who had indicated their interest in getting involved were invited. While the LA21 coordinator has mobilised a few new faces for the conference follow-through, conference participants themselves were unable to enrol even a single new person into the conference follow-up process. I conclude that the Future Search Conference was only to a limited extent successful in reaching out and winning support for Local Agenda 21.

Within the Council itself after the change-over of chief executive, Local Agenda 21 was still struggling for influence and status. A LA21 officer steering group was in the process of conducting an internal Local Agenda 21 audit, but this work remained separate from the Future Search process. The LA21 member subcommittee was doing little more than endorsing reports by the LA21 officer and took little interest in the Future Search Conference until regular liaison meetings with the Future Search Team (former steering group) were proposed to them and successfully hosted. However, due to their lack of effectiveness, the Local Agenda 21 officer steering group and the Local Agenda 21 subcommittee were abolished. Instead, a Future Rushmoor Forum was created, consisting of genuinely interested councillors and Future Search activists, which at the time of writing, was still struggling to define its role. The Council provided little in the

way of staff resources to advance LA21 across all departments, and even the environmental management system (EMAS) process had to be aborted for a lack of staff capacity to complete it.

Despite this disappointment on the outcome front, many participants were still positive about the Future Search experience a year later. The reason for this was often related to the benefits participants had experienced in the area of capacity building. Participants found the Future Search environment very safe for learning, and many had dared to question some taken-for-granted assumptions. The diversity of stakeholder groups and views represented at the Future Search Conference allowed participants a new perspective on their own organisation. It helped them to recognise the interdependence of all local sectors and to identify their own contribution in the context of the larger whole. All participants praised the web of contacts which had formed across stakeholder group boundaries, and many had engaged in collaborative projects with others on a one-to-one basis as a result of the conference. For many, their sense of belonging to a shared local community increased as a result of the conference. Participants showed themselves more interested in local affairs and more willing and capable of making a contribution.

The Future Search Conference was also considered as a living demonstration that involving local stakeholders and citizens in local decision-making is productive and works well. Council officers informed me that they had already used elements of the Future Search design for other participation processes they were involved in and were considering the full conference format for future uses.

## **6.6 Outlook**

By March 2000, the future of the Farnborough airfield and the possibility of military land releases were still up in the air and it looked as if the process of decision-making would still take a couple of years. In the case of the airfield, there was a tension between the economic benefits of a private airfield with limited flight capacities, which were mostly recognised by the councillors and the noise pollution on the other side, mostly felt by the local population. In the case of military land releases, it was not expected that there would be major releases in the short term.

Since I completed my last round of data collection in Rushmoor, one-and-a-half years have passed in which Local Agenda 21 has gained further ground. The main opportunity that has opened up in the meantime is the Labour government's "Best Value" policy. The Local Agenda 21 coordinator had for the first time a serious chance of getting sustainable development adopted as a corporate objective. If sustainability targets were adopted as binding for all service departments, the role of the Local Agenda 21 coordinator could potentially change dramatically. Instead of being a lonely advocate of Local Agenda 21 within the Council, the LA21 coordinator's role could change to that of a consultant to other departments which needed advice on how best to meet their (then established) sustainability targets. In the worst case however, the low

priority attributed to Local Agenda 21 within the Council would be reflected in the 'Best Value' objectives and sustainability aims would feature little if at all.

A 'Community Policy Group', which consists of the relevant officers from all departments running public consultation exercises, has in the meantime met twice to coordinate the diverse consultation processes which used to run in parallel. The idea was in the air, that all these consultation processes could contribute to a joint 'Quality of Life Strategy' for the Borough, but at the moment, the strategy documents (i.e. Healthy Rushmoor, Community Safety) remained separate.

The Local Agenda 21 coordinator continued to build support for Local Agenda 21 by running highly successful projects with the local community. Councillors in particular, but also officers from other departments were grateful for 'looking good' in the media thanks to these initiatives. In 1999, Rushmoor's long-standing tradition of participating in the 'Britain in Bloom' competition involved the Local Agenda 21 coordinator and was combined with the environmental awareness raising event 'Green Family Fun Day'. As a result, sustainability criteria (i.e. making an effort to involve deprived sectors of the community, saving water in gardening) were promoted in the local competition. As the national jury had also for the first time included sustainability criteria – a move not many competitors had anticipated - Rushmoor won the 'Britain in Bloom' city category for the first time ever, a fact which generated much local pride. A second high profile project run by the LA21 coordinator was an eco-house that was temporarily set up in an empty house. Thanks to much sponsorship and cooperation of local businesses, 350 school children could explore the promises of solar and wind power over a period of two months. As an unexpected knock-on effect, the LA21 coordinator was invited to advise the MoD on the renovation policies for its housing associations.

By March 2000, the Future Rushmoor Forum – consisting of genuinely committed councillors and some members of the former steering group of the Future Search Conference – was the main coordinating body for Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process. However the Future Rushmoor Forum was suffering from the fact that its members had very busy professional lives and seemed unable to make any contribution apart from attending meetings. In March 2000, the head of the planning department was trying to involve group members in advising and monitoring sustainability issues in planning applications, but there were doubts that sufficient numbers of the group would be willing to commit to such a task. The long-term hope was that the Future Rushmoor Forum could take on the task of monitoring Rushmoor's performance with regards to the sustainability objectives and targets included in its 'Best Value' policy.

While few of the former Future Search participants were still actively contributing to the Local Agenda 21 process, they were part of a growing network of Local Agenda 21 supporters which the Local Agenda 21 officer could draw upon with concrete requests for support. The LA21 coordinator had added all people who had ever shown an interest to a mailing list and was able to attract more than 160 participants to a 'Millennium Question Time' event

featuring Local Agenda 21 by using the mailing list. According to the LA21 officer, the main achievement of the Future Search Conference had been that its outcomes formed the basis of the Local Agenda 21 draft strategy, which had been sent out for consultation to all households and was awaiting its final drafting in spring 2000.

The Rushmoor Environment Forum which originated from the Future Search Conference was still meeting and the arts facility group which had merged with the Council's existing arts forum, was still pursuing its plan to secure an empty shop unit for its purposes – though without success so far. There was no evidence of other conference action groups having made a further contribution to local sustainable development.

The youth action forum which had been created in response to the lack of involvement of youths in the Future Search Conference and Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process in general, had kept a number of youths involved over one year before it dissolved because the youth involvement could not be sustained. One project which originated from the youth action forum – a youth café – was still being pursued by a group consisting of officers and some youths who were jointly planning the café. The new Mayor had in the meantime initiated a Youth Council, consisting of 2 delegates from all secondary schools in the borough, which meets six times a year to push their own issues and to advise Council policy making. As delegates were only sent for a year at a time, and a mechanism was established for ensuring that each school would send new (or the same) delegates for each following year, the Youth Council was expected to be a lasting institutional innovation.

I conclude that the fate of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process was married closely to the 'Best Value' process. An integration of Local Agenda 21 objectives into the corporate strategy would mark the transition of Rushmoor's Local Agenda 21 process from an awareness raising process to an implementation process that actually re-aligns Council policy making with sustainability aims.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Evaluation of the Future Search Conference in Gemeinde Olching's Local Agenda 21 Process**

Olching's local adult education institute initiated a Local Agenda 21 process and won the Mayor's support for a special course programme on the subject. One of the workshops held as part of this programme brought together the group that later initiated the Olching Future Search Conference, which was held in January 1998. The first part of this chapter explores the national context within which the Olching Future Search Conference took place. I shall argue that it is typical for the early German Local Agenda 21 processes that they were initiated by non-governmental actors, because German governments at all levels failed to take interest in Local Agenda 21 until this failure turned into official embarrassment at the Rio-plus-five summit in 1997.

The second part of this chapter introduces Olching as a commuter area outside the Bavarian capital Munich, characterised by explosive housing development ever since an effective railway link into the capital was completed in 1972. The dramatic construction activities of the last three decades have created a borough fragmented into three former villages with little social cohesion. The Future Search Conference created a rare opportunity for public debate beyond party politics and egoisms of the former villages.

The third part of this chapter will turn to the Future Search Conference event itself. Drawing on data gathered by non-participant observation during the conference, in focus group discussions and interviews with conference participants and by a conference questionnaire, I will describe how participants experienced each stage of the Future Search Conference. The fourth part of this chapter assesses the success of the Olching Future Search Conference with the criteria developed with the local stakeholders and presented in chapter 5. I will draw on these process, outcome and capacity building criteria in order to evaluate the performance of the Olching Future Search Conference. The findings of the Olching case study will be pulled together in a fifth part of this chapter. The sixth and final part of the chapter is dedicated to an outlook into the future and will discuss the prospects of Olching's Local Agenda 21 process 2 years after the Future Search Conference.

#### **7.1 The German national context**

I will argue that governments in Germany took little notice of Agenda 21 until the Rio-plus-five summit in summer 1997, when the federal government was shown to lag way behind other European countries in the implementation of Agenda 21. Until 1997, the small number of unfolding Local Agenda 21 processes were usually initiated by non-governmental actors. If there was experimentation with innovative forms of citizen involvement at all, usually Robert Jungk's well-known Futures Workshop was used, which is in some ways similar to the Future Search Conference but does not insist on involving a broad range of stakeholders. As my description of the German system of local

government will show, the autonomy of local government is legally well-protected, but in practice much constrained by a continuous financial squeeze that does not leave much scope for non-statutory duties like Local Agenda 21. A final section will discuss the prospects for Local Agenda 21 under the newly elected red-green coalition government, and point to the failure of the new government to take any action with regards to Local Agenda 21 so far.

### **7.1.1 Defining sustainable development**

In preparing for the Rio Earth Summit, the German government installed a 'National Committee for Sustainable Development' (*Nationales Komitee für Nachhaltige Entwicklung*), which is supposed to be a forum for dialogue amongst the major groups. The Department of the Environment (BMU) has endorsed the principle of sustainable development in all its documents since Rio, and used the following definition in the draft for its strategy document on sustainable development: "*The objective is to combine economic strength, social responsibility and environmental protection, in order to provide fair development opportunities for all countries and to preserve our natural life support system for future generations*" (BMU 1998:8, my translation). But apart from the introduction of new vocabulary, the German federal government has decided that 'progressing' with its existing environmental strategies and policies would be its major follow-up from the Rio Summit (BMU 1994:7). The federal government has made no attempt to develop sustainability indicators on its own, but instead is one of around 20 countries that are piloting the 130 Commission for Sustainable Development indicators (BMU 1997:17).

The German public debate on sustainable development had its break-through with the publication of the study 'Sustainable Germany', which the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Energy and Environment wrote under contract for Friends of the Earth Germany *BUND* and the Catholic third world group *Misereor* (BUND & Misereor 1995). The attractiveness of the study resulted (i) from the fact that it had quantified the reductions in resource use and emissions necessary in Germany if the Germans were to live within their 'environmental space' and (ii) that it had developed guiding principles (i.e. living better on less, from linear to cyclical production processes) and scenarios of how these reductions could be achieved in selected sectors (energy, industry, transport, agriculture & forestry). The almost 350 page study was an excellent basis for discussion, and within no time, environmental groups, churches, trade unions and even political parties hosted seminars and conferences on the topic, contributed to the debate with their own positions, and newspapers willingly covered the nation-wide pre-occupation with the new concept.

### **7.1.2 Dialogue process on a strategy for sustainable development**

It was not before June 1996 that the German Environment Secretary Angela Merkel presented a draft document entitled 'Steps towards a sustainable, environmentally friendly development' and invited representatives of all major groups to join in a one-year process of dialogue around the issue of sustainable

development. Hundreds of representatives attended the opening session and many continued to participate in one of the six pre-determined working groups on the issues of climate & ozone layer, natural habitat protection, resource management, health, mobility and ecological ethics. The working groups came together for about 8 sessions each over the course of a year and concluded with a 10-30 page consensus reports which were written under the auspices of the Department of the Environment. The Environment Secretary kept her options open however, to what ends the outcomes would be used, and did not involve the Government Cabinet in the initiation of this process.

The dialogue process has been considered a failure for a number of reasons (Hertin 1998:38). First of all, the process never gained a high public profile or a status within Government that would give it much influence on policy-making. Secondly, the working groups failed to agree on substantial recommendations for targets and policies in their reports. If quantitative environmental targets were mentioned at all, they usually endorsed existing legal obligations at the national or international level, otherwise, the demands remained rather abstract and avoided reference to deadlines. In the case of an objective for CO2 reductions, the *BMU* almost failed to win the support for the existing environmental target of -25% on 1990 levels by 2005, because the interest groups of major CO2-emitters considered the target as too tight. Overall, the reports were very different in style and contents and added up to no more than an eclectic collection of objectives and proposals. Most action proposals were directed towards the federal government, and there was little evidence (apart from a few commitments from industry representatives) that the participating major groups were willing to shoulder part of the sustainability burden. In April 1998, the Department of the Environment published a draft strategy programme on the basis of the reports called 'Sustainable Development in Germany. Draft environmental priority programme.' (BMU 1998). However, it did not seem likely that the dialogue process would have much influence on future policy making, despite the high expectations created on the side of the participating groups (Hertin 1998:ch.4.3).

The German report to the CSD in 1997 (BMU 1997) as well as the *BMU*'s strategy document on sustainable development (BMU 1998) almost exclusively cover existing environmental policies and discuss the need for integration of environmental issues into other policy fields. The socio-economic dimension of sustainable development is not explored and no objectives are set for this area. The integration of the concept of sustainable development is most advanced in the policy and research programmes of the Department of Spatial Planning, Housing and Urban Planning (*BMBau*) (Buchanan & Oels 1998, Oels 1998), which was run by former Environment Secretary Klaus Töpfer from 1994 until 1998, when he became director general of the UN Environment Programme. In 1997, 'sustainable spatial development' was elevated to a guiding principle in the revised 'Spatial Planning Act' (§1 (2) *Raumordnungsgesetz*) (Lendi 1998:23).

### 7.1.3 Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 was a non-topic at the federal government level until 1997. Germany's report to the CSD five years after Rio did not even mention the word Local Agenda 21 once. An international survey of Local Agenda 21 activities world-wide conducted by ICLEI and published in March 1997 listed only 30 out of 16,121 German municipalities to be engaged in Local Agenda 21 activities (ICLEI 1997:7). This placed Germany way behind countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the UK, where a majority of local authorities had taken up Local Agenda 21 activities (ICLEI 1997:7). Apparently, the study together with the public shame created by the German government having nothing to show at the five year review (UNGASS) of the Rio process in New York, angered the German federal government to an extent that led to real action. Only three months after UNGASS, on 10th September 1997, the Secretary of the Environment Angela Merkel publicly declared her support for Local Agenda 21 in a joint statement with the Presidents of all municipal associations. Next, she awarded a contract to ICLEI (of all bidding organisations) (i) to produce a 'how to'-handbook on Local Agenda 21 for all German Mayors, which was published in June 1998 (BMU & UBA 1998a), and (ii) to produce a comparative survey of all Local Agenda 21 activities in Europe by 1999 (BMU 1999) in order to rescue the German reputation. The survey would not just count the number of Local Agenda 21 *declarations*, but also take into account the level of municipal environmental activities on the ground.

In June 1998, the Department of the Environment and Federal Environment Agency (*Umweltbundesamt*) hosted the first nation-wide conference on Local Agenda 21 in Bonn. The aim of the conference was an exchange of experiences in Germany and abroad, and the participant list included more than 600 participants, most of whom were representatives of German municipalities, but academia, press, environmental groups and the Department of the Environment were also well represented (BMU & UBA 1998b). The conference was organised by the environmental consultancy *Bundesdeutscher Arbeitskreis für umweltbewußtes Management - B.A.U.M. Consult München GmbH*, which has played a major role in shaping model Local Agenda 21 processes in Bavaria, including the *Landkreis Fürstentfeldbrück*, the rural county within which my German case study is located. In the absence of any national coordinating body on Local Agenda 21, the *Clearinghouse for Applied Futures (CAF)/Agenda-transfer*, which is financed by and located in the *Land Northrhine-Westphalia*, has played a crucial role in spreading best practice across Germany. Since February 1996, *CAF* regularly produced the newsletter *Stadtgespräche. Nachrichten zur Lokalen Agenda 21 in Deutschland*. and offered training workshops. The *Land Northrhine-Westphalia* also offered 0.50 DM per citizen to each municipality for Local Agenda 21 and North-South activities since December 1996. Between July 1996 and September 1997, the number of municipalities with a Council vote for a Local Agenda 21 process in Northrhine-Westphalia rose from 3 to 29, including many large cities (Hoffmann 1997:219).



In December 1999, more than 1,300 out of 16,121 municipal councils across Germany had voted to engage in a process of creating a Local Agenda 21 (*Aufstellungsbeschluß des Gemeinderates*) (CAF/ Agendatransfer 1999c), and my German case study area *Gemeinde Olching* was amongst those. This number is a dramatic increase from ICLEI's (1997:7) thirty in November 1996 and DIFU's fifty-six in spring 1997 (Rösler 1997b:219). The only qualitative studies of Local Agenda 21 in Germany published at the moment are the ones conducted by the 'German Institut for Urban Affairs' (*Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik DIFU*) (Rösler 1997b:218), which conducted a regular survey amongst the members of the 'Association of German Cities' (*Deutscher Städtetag*). 167 member cities out of 262 responded to the third survey in May 1999. Out of the 167 cities which responded to the survey in 1999, 90% regarded Local Agenda 21 as a municipal duty and were either preparing a Council vote on the issue or had already passed one (Rösler 1999:19). This figure has gone up from 53% in DIFU's 1996 survey, which shows that the learning curve is steep. Initially, far more German LA21 processes have been initiated by the voluntary sector, churches and committed individuals than by local authorities (Mittler 1998:8, Beuermann 1998:255), and this was certainly the case in my German case study area *Gemeinde Olching*. However, this balance is now shifting, as the DIFU study indicates (Rösler 1999:20): 128 cities out of the surveyed 167 had installed Local Agenda 21 offices or coordinators in the city administration. Most involved in Local Agenda 21 activities were the environment and planning units, and less often the economic development units. The social services were hardly involved at all. Similarly, the LA21 activities were biased towards environmental issues, with energy & climate followed by transport, publicity & consultation and nature conservation at the top of the list. In the middle range of issues addressed were third world / North-South and health issues, and - striking from a UK point of view - waste issues. The lack of interest in waste issues reflects the high degree of federal regulation and the widespread recycling facilities in Germany. Most neglected were the municipality's purchasing policies, noise, health and soil protection. *Gemeinde Olching* is unfortunately amongst those local authorities who have added the task of Local Agenda 21 to the burden of a junior environment officer and not made available any budget for Local Agenda 21 purposes.

The majority of German Local Agenda 21s worked through the media, hosted public talks, distributed information brochures, worked through the local adult education institutes and held exhibitions. In 1996, less than 15% of municipalities had round tables and citizen gatherings (*Bürgerversammlungen*) and less than 5% were involved in future workshops (~4%) (*Zukunftswerkstatt*), mediation (~3%) or citizen juries (~1%) (*Planungszelle / Bürgergutachten*) (Rösler 1996:52). These figures show that *Gemeinde Olching* with its Future Search Conference in January 1998 was amongst the avantgarde of local authorities in Germany. By 1999, this situation had changed dramatically. Almost half of the responding cities had Local Agenda 21 forums of one kind or another, about 40% had round tables, 27% had citizen gatherings and 24% had

used a future workshop (*Zukunftswerkstatt*) design (Rösler 1999:25). The future workshop is a design quite similar to the Future Search Conference developed almost thirty years ago by the Austrian Robert Jungk and his colleague Norbert Müllert (Jungk & Müllert 1991). This design was originally used in the citizen movements of the seventies and has since conquered the mainstream in German speaking Europe (Burow 1998 & 1999b). By 1999, less than twenty cities altogether had embarked upon other innovative citizen participation tools like planning cells (less than 10 cities) or mediation (~5 cities). The major obstacles that the surveyed cities mentioned to the success of their LA21 activities in 1997 were (i) a lack of finance, (ii) a lack of staff and (iii) other priorities within their local authority. A lack of information was rarely mentioned as a cause of problems (Rösler 1997b:219). By 1999, 85% of the cities had staff which deals exclusively with Local Agenda 21, and the problem perception shifted as a result. In 1999, the surveyed cities ranked (i) support from senior officers and politicians, (ii) realisation of concrete projects and (iii) collaboration between administration and external actors as the major conditions for the success of their Local Agenda 21 process (Rösler 1999:30).

#### **7.1.4 Central-local government relations**

West Germany's federal system of states (*Länder*) and municipalities (*Gemeinden*) was created after the Second World War and is protected by the constitution (*Grundgesetz*), which was agreed by a Constituent Assembly in 1948. In the process of unification with East Germany on 3 October 1990, the West German system was only slightly changed and extended to the East German area. After a process of local government reorganisation in East Germany, there are now a total of 16,121 municipalities in 16 federal German states (Wehling 1994:13).

The constitution divides the legislative and administrative competences between the federal government (*Bund*) and the federal states (*Länder*) in a way that grants quite a large degree of autonomy to the state level. Article 73 of the *Grundgesetz* gives the *Bund* exclusive powers to legislation in areas like foreign affairs, defence, currency control, rail traffic, postal services and telecommunications. The *Länder* hold exclusive rights to legislate in a limited number of areas like education, control of the police and the organisation of local government. In addition, the *Bund* has the right to legislate in all areas of national interest. The *Länder* are technically free to create legislation in all other areas - given that the *Bund* has not yet regulated them. In reality however, most areas which are not the exclusive domain of the *Länder* have seen central government legislation that usually determines a broad policy framework, within which the *Länder* can use their discretion to legislate. In particular, the *Bund* has regulated the areas of social welfare, the legal system, economic management, higher education and land use (Peters 1993:99). The German federal system has also created an avenue of direct influence for the *Länder* on federal policies. Besides the directly elected federal chamber *Bundestag*, there is a second chamber on the national level (*Bundesrat*) to which the elected governments of

the *Länder* send their appointed representatives. The *Bundesrat* has extensive powers to assess and reject federal legislation in a large number of areas, particularly those that will have financial implications or seek constitutional changes. A Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) was created to make sure that the words of the *Grundgesetz* are lived practice and to rule in the case of queries.

### 7.1.5 Strong legal standing of municipalities

The *Gemeinden* enjoy a particularly strong standing in the *Grundgesetz*. Their autonomy is protected by article 28 which guarantees them "the right to regulate under their own responsibility and within the limits of the laws all the affairs of the local community." (*Grundgesetz*, article 28, translated by Peters 1993:101) This gives local authorities the freedom to legislate in all areas which have not been reserved by the *Grundgesetz* for the *Bund* or the *Länder*. The German municipalities are nevertheless creatures of the *Länder*, which determine in their state constitutions the organisational structure of local government within their territory. Besides the directly elected state parliament (*Landtag*) and the directly elected councils of the municipalities (*Gemeinderat*), there is a third tier of directly elected government, namely the county parliament (*Kreistag*). Cities of sufficient size which have been able to gain county status are called *Kreisfreie Städte* to distinguish them from their rural counterparts which are called *Landkreise*. As Peters (1993:103) has pointed out, "[u]nlike the *Gemeinden*, the *Kreis* can only administer those services assigned to it by law." However, as many municipalities are too small to run hospitals, provide secondary education or ensure a supply of water, gas and electricity, the *Kreise* have gained a rather important role, despite their narrow legal roam.

While according to the constitution German municipalities enjoy budgetary autonomy, in reality it is the respective *Land* which frame the financial base of all municipalities in its territory. The municipalities have three sources of income: taxes levied locally on property (*Grundsteuer*) and on production and capital investment of local business (*Gewerbesteuer*), fees charged for services like electricity, water, transport and sanitation and finally grants by the *Bund* or *Land* for services that the municipality provides directly on their behalf. In addition, there is a wider system of grants and subsidies through which *Bund* and *Länder* directly support the municipalities in their education, housing and welfare programmes. After a revision of the taxation system in 1969, the municipalities now have to surrender 40 per cent of the *Gewerbesteuer* to the federal and state government (which receive half of it each). In return, the municipalities are allowed to keep 15 per cent of the locally raised income tax. However, the *Gewerbesteuer* remains a major source of finance for most municipalities (40% of their taxation revenue), so attracting business into their (sometimes) tiny or remote territory is the key aim of most municipalities, despite the fact that this is not always useful from a regional perspective. Over the years, the financial situation in the *Länder* and the *Gemeinden* has become increasingly tight, with the consequence that the *Bund* has increased its

involvement via national grant schemes and co-financing of investments, further reducing the autonomy of the *Gemeinden* (Peters 1993:106). As part of the 1969 fiscal reform and in order to control overall public sector expenditure levels, the *Bund* has also introduced spending guidelines for the municipalities. While these are not legally enforceable, they are a clear indication of the federal government's desire to control municipalities' finances more tightly.

#### **7.1.6 Financial squeeze**

Over the last decade, the financial situation in the majority of German municipalities has reached a state of crisis, with many running into heavy debt. The Association of German Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) has suggested three main causes of the financial crisis (DSt 1995). First of all, the economic recession caused a decline in receipts from the *Gewerbesteuer*, a major income source for municipalities. Secondly, municipalities were forced to cater for a growing number of recipients of welfare payments (*Sozialhilfe*). This was not only due to the rise in unemployment, caused by the recession, but was also the result of cut-backs in the unemployment benefits offered by the federal government. The *Bund* was perceived to move the financial burden of rising unemployment from the federal level to the municipal level. The town of Frankfurt a.M. took the federal government to the Federal Constitutional Court over this matter in 1996 (Kreuder 1997:33). Finally, German unification meant that a lot of money was now flowing towards the new states in the East, and less was redistributed to the poorer states in the West. This was felt most at the municipal level. In 1994, the Mayors of the biggest German cities went public with the dramatic appeal to 'Save our cities now !' They explicitly blamed the federal government for transferring the financial burden of German unification to the municipal level and warned that ecological and social conflict would increase as a consequence of further cut-backs and thus lead to the further fragmentation of German society (Kronawitter 1994).

Germany's aim to join the European single currency in 1999 meant a further squeeze on local finance, this time on the side of borrowing. Germany will have to comply with the criteria for economic convergence (Article 104c of the EC-Treaty), one of which requires it to keep the increase in net public debt below three per cent annually and another which demands the total public debt be kept below 60 per cent. Achieving this requires the co-operation of the *Länder* and *Gemeinden*. As Germany failed to meet either criterion in 1995 and 1996, and was in trouble in 1997, pressure was high to limit the debt of *Länder* and *Gemeinden*. The Treasury was trying to introduce a capping to the borrowing of the *Länder*, but the *Länder* argued that only a change in the constitution could allow the *Bund* to limit the financial autonomy of the *Länder* in such a drastic way (Kreuder 1996:35). With Germany running the risk of sanction payments that will need to be made in the case of non-compliance with the criteria, a discussion continues between *Bund*, *Länder* and *Gemeinden* about how such an additional financial burden would be split between all layers of government,

while still attributing an element of responsibility to the player that has caused the punishment by overspending / over-borrowing.

### **7.1.7 The 'New Steering Model'**

In such time of crisis, talk about a complete reorganisation of public service provision is never far away. Despite the fact that in Germany public spending and the quota of employment in the public sector are below the OECD average (Naschold 1995), Germany has recently opened up to the debate about new public management, which has occupied the English-speaking nations for the last decade, if not longer. At the heart of this debate is the demand to restructure public administration along the lines of entrepreneurialism. Elements of the new public management paradigm are

- a general reduction of the public sector
- privatisation
- the introduction of markets and competition into public service provision
- increased opportunities for citizen participation
- a reduction of red tape
- goal-oriented budgeting
- performance orientation and
- policy making that shapes long-term strategies and decisions instead of focussing on minutiae and detail (Budäus 1994:46).

In Germany, new public management is at the moment being introduced under the name of 'New Steering Model' (NSM) (KGSt 1993). A central element of the NSM is the separation of policy making and administration in order to increase accountability and transparency of the political process. Politicians should focus on strategic planning and determine desired outcomes, and but leave the details of implementation to the administration. Two tools are supposed to facilitate this separation of tasks: goal-oriented budgeting and contract management. Goal-oriented budgeting requires the identification of clear-cut products and performance levels of services. Politicians are then supposed to determine desired performance standards and then award a contract to the unit of the administration that will deliver the desired 'product' within a given budget. There are a number of concerns associated with the introduction of the New Steering Model:

- the definition of products and performance indicators and the data management required for controlling might cause costs that exceed any savings that might result from the reorganisation;
- benchmarking leads to standardisation, which might disadvantage local needs;
- citizens are reduced to consumers, which narrows the scope of their influence on public life.

However, there is also great potential for the integration of sustainable development into the strategic objectives for all service provision, as was recently advocated by *CAF/Agendatransfer* (1999b). Yet, very little seems to

have happened so far along these lines. ICLEI is exploring an environmental management system with four German local authorities, in which accounts of the 'natural capital stock' and its depletion or restoration are kept. ICLEI sees great potential for the widespread introduction of this *ökoBudget®* together with the New Steering Model (ICLEI 1999:14-15).

There is now a process of transition in German public administration at all levels, where the old bureaucratic *modus operandi* co-exists with elements of new public management. As the chief executive of Gießen summed up: "*One third is moaning, one third is thinking let's wait-and-see and one third is joining in*" (CAF/ Agendatransfer 1999b, my translation). The prospect of an increasing degree of budget autonomy attracted much enthusiasm from senior civil servants, who joined training courses on the New Steering Model. Enthusiasm is vanishing however with the realisation that benchmarking will impose even more rigid straight-jackets on their activities than before. Others fear that the New Steering Model is being used to push through privatisation and a further cut-back of public service levels under the cover of cutting red tape (Klie & Meysen (1998:453-6).

### **7.1.8 Participation in environmental decision-making**

There is a wide range of rights to be informed, heard and involved into environmental decision-making for various actors (interest groups, the wider public, the directly affected) enshrined in German environmental law (i.e. §29 *Bundesnaturschutzgesetz*, §9 *Gesetz über die Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfung*, §18 *Gentechnikgesetz*, §39 *Kreislaufwirtschafts- und Abfallgesetz*). In the aftermath of German unification however, the effectiveness of these participatory rights have been drastically reduced by the so-called 'Acceleration Act' (*Beschleunigungsgesetz*). At a time when pressure was high to reconstruct a major part of the East German road and rail infrastructure, the Government wanted to avoid delays from legal interventions of environmental (and other) interest groups. The new law significantly weakened the environmental organisations' ability to hold up construction works in environmentally sensitive areas. Also, environmental pressure groups have, despite long years of fighting for it, still not been allocated a right to sue (*Verbandsklagerecht*) where they perceive a violation of their interests. Recent innovations from the European Unions - the directives on environmental information and on environmental impact assessment - were both delayed and partly watered down by the German government (Hertin 1998:ch5.3).

By the end of 1995, 11 out of 13 non-city states of Germany had introduced the tool of referenda at the level of the *Gemeinde*, and in 8 out of 13 non-city states at the level of the *Kreise* (Henneke 1996). In October 1995, *Mehr Demokratie e.V.* won the battle for referenda in Bavaria, where my German case study is located, against the will of the elected conservative majority. By October 1996, 55 referenda had taken place, and more than 100 were in preparation. Turnout to the votes was an average of 52% (25-82%) and proved wrong the Conservatives' fear that only one person would turn out to vote.

However, the pressure group *Mehr Demokratie e.V.* is now campaigning for the right to referenda on the level of the *Bund* (Mayer 1996). Unfortunately, more innovative participatory tools like mediation and round tables as promoted by Gessenharter (1996) are not yet wide-spread practice in Germany (Eberhardt 1996:216-226).

### **7.1.9 Prospects for Agenda 21 under the red-green coalition government**

Just before the end of my field work period, Germany's general elections brought into power a new government coalition between Social Democrats and the Green Party under the new Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. While the German Green Party has been represented in the German federal parliament *Bundestag* since 1983, is widely represented in the Councils of the municipalities (*Gemeinderäte*) and joined in government coalitions in many states over the years, it is the first time they are in government at the federal level. The victory for the red-green coalition was slight and even unexpected for some, which shows that there was no public pressure for drastic policy change (Mittler 1999:461). Schröder started on the slogan "*We will not do other things, but do the same things better*", which was very much in line with this public mood. The left-wing ideas of Germany's Treasurer and former chancellor candidate Oskar Lafontaine, which were aimed at strengthening the role of the state in relation to global markets and towards redistribution, hit brick-walls of neo-liberal ideology at all levels, particularly at the EU level. With the resignation of Lafontaine in March 1999, the government relocated itself further on the right (Bredthauer 1999) and temporarily sided with Britain's 'third way' in a joint declaration with Blair in June 1999 (Schröder & Blair 1999).

The coalition contract between Social Democrats and Green Party announces with regards to Agenda 21 in their chapter IV on 'ecological modernisation' in section (2) 'Environmental Protection: effective, efficient and democratic':

*"The new federal government will produce a national strategy document on sustainable development including concrete targets. This shall be done in dialogue with the major groups. The national sustainability strategy is an important instrument to support ecological innovations and to implement Agenda 21. The consulting mechanisms will be revised and tightened."* (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen 1998:18, my translation).

There is no reference to Local Agenda 21 throughout the entire document. But even on the promised national sustainability strategy nothing has happened so far, and Michael Frein concludes for the environmental NGOs that the issue seems to be on the 'back burner' (Frein 1999:6).

### **7.2 Tracing the origins of Olching's Future Search Conference**

This part of the chapter will introduce my German case study area *Gemeinde Olching*, a commuter area West of Munich, in the *Land* Bavaria. In an introductory section, I will point out that the Bavarian government has been one of the few German *Länder* which have pro-actively supported Agenda 21 for example by providing financial incentives. This fact did however not become

relevant for the Olching case study until one year after the Future Search Conference. Olching is a borough which consists of three formerly rural villages and is characterised by explosive housing development over the last three decades. While Olching's citizens are organised in 140 associations, which are financially supported by the Council, there is little communication across the associations and across the egoisms of the three former villages that constitute the borough. The Future Search Conference created such an opportunity for communication. I will introduce the important influence of the Free Voters' Association in local politics and their affinity to citizen initiative which they prefer to what they conceive as a system of self-serving political parties. The Future Search Conference was designed to create a sphere of political debate beyond the confines of party politics. I shall elaborate on the resulting tensions between 'self-selected' conference organisers and elected councillors prior to the conference. A final section will provide a chronology of Olching's Local Agenda 21 process and a figure with the key players in the Olching Future Search Conference.

### **7.2.1 Setting: Bavaria and Landkreis Fürstentfeldbrück**

In the federal state of Bavaria, where my German case study is based, there are 25 *Kreisfreie Städte*, 71 *Landkreise* and 2,026 *Gemeinden* (Wehling 1994:13). The Department of Regional Development and Environmental Affairs of the Bavarian state government has actively supported Local Agenda 21 activities in its *Kreise* and *Gemeinden*. As part of the department's programme, two 'best practice' authorities received professional coaching and facilitation of their Local Agenda 21 processes by the consultancy B.A.U.M. Consult. One of these 'best practice' processes took place in *Landkreis Fürstentfeldbrück*, where my German case study is based (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen 1998a:33-35). However, my interviewees in Olching were clear that they did in no way benefit from this best practice programme – the *Landkreis* even refused to send their video team to the Olching Future Search Conference. As a result, only an amateur video could be produced for promotional purposes (U-1).

The Bavarian government has also produced a series of guidance documents on Local Agenda 21 for local authorities, again with the help of B.A.U.M. Consult (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen 1997 and 1998a&b). Most importantly, the Bavarian government has also offered financial support to small *Gemeinden* with less than 20,000 inhabitants for Local Agenda 21 projects if a series of conditions are met (Bayerisches Landesamt für Umweltschutz 1997). In 1998, the German Federal Department of Spatial Planning, Construction and Urban Planning (*BMBau*) awarded the wider Munich region - including the rural LA21-model- *Landkreis Fürstentfeldbrück* - the title 'Region of the Future', a programme I have mentioned in the preceding section.



### 7.2.2 *Gemeinde Olching*

My case study area, *Gemeinde Olching* is a commuter area 20 km North-West of the Bavarian capital Munich, consisting of the three small towns Esting, Geiselbullach and Olching with a total population of 22,014 in 1998 (Waibel 1998b:1). In the following passage I shall argue that the unwanted unification of the three former municipalities into a single one and the exponential growth in residents over the last three decades created a real need for social integration in *Gemeinde Olching*. I shall argue that this need for integration provided the fertile ground upon which the idea of the Future Search Conference fell.

Within the last 150 years, what is today *Gemeinde Olching* transformed from a couple of rural villages into an industrial area and has today become a suburban commuter town with a specialised retail sector. In 1839, when there were still no more than 300 inhabitants in the rural agricultural village Olching, the railway from Munich to Augsburg was constructed, including a station in Olching. Shortly later, a paper mill was located at the local river Amper and attracted many workers. In the 1920s and 1930s, Olching's public life was dominated by Social Democrats who fought for the rights of their working class members. Olching suffered from major destruction during the Second World War and had to accommodate 2,000 German refugees at that time (28% of the population) from what is now Polish territory (*Sudetenland, Schlesien*).

*Gemeinde Olching* has moved through a rapid transformation from a rural to a suburban area. The three villages used to be dominated by agriculture in the 1950s and still today, 60% of the land is used for agricultural purposes (Kirstein 1998:3). However, only 1% of Olching's jobs are still in the agricultural sector. Most jobs today are in the area of construction and its related industries like gravel and soil extraction etc. (Kirstein 1998:10) and in the retail sector. Olching is today a well-known shopping area, easily accessible from the close-by motorway, offering a wide range of specialised stores (192 altogether – Kirstein 1998:9) in Olching city centre and a major shopping centre in Geiselbullach. The retail and transport sector provides a quarter of the jobs in *Gemeinde Olching* (Kirstein 1998:9).

In 1972, the opening of a new railway track to Munich offered trains to the city centre every twenty minutes from two stations in *Gemeinde Olching*. This attracted thousands of young families and couples in just a few years after the railway opening (*Gemeinde Olching* 1993:66). By 1980, only 28% of Olching's working population held a local job, while 72% commuted to other places (out of the commuters, 82% commuted to Munich) (*Gemeinde Olching* 1993:74). In return, 40% of Olching's local jobs were held by commuters from the wider region in 1982 (*Gemeinde Olching* 1993:74). Olching has attracted people with an above-average income - in 1997, 34,2% of Olching's households had an income of 5,000 DM per month or more (Heckner & Partner 1997). Sixty percent of the population are a member of the Catholic Church (Waibel 1998a:12), a fact which explains that the church is an important stakeholder group in the area. While there are effective transport links to Munich and other places, getting around *Gemeinde Olching* by public transport is almost

impossible and rather expensive - 53,3% of the population never use it (Heckner & Partner 1997). The area, especially the close-by motorways suffer from serious congestion, and the local residents suffer from air and noise pollution.

Pressure is still high for new housing developments, with a total of 5,300 new inhabitants to be accommodated within the next ten years, and at the moment, housing for 2,500-3,000 people is being built in the Schwaigfeld (Waibel 1998a:13). The financial situation of the local authority is tight as everywhere in Germany. Olching's debt was 23.9 Mio DM in January 1998, which is slightly less than the average of debt-per-capita across Bavaria (Waibel 1998a:9) The *Gemeinde* is therefore raising the fees it takes for its services (i.e. public libraries, adult education, swimming pool, cemeteries) to cover more of the costs of the services. At the moment, the coverage of real costs is far below the West German average (Waibel 1998a:9).

### **7.2.3 Citizen participation in Olching**

In this section, I shall argue that the Future Search Conference opened a public sphere beyond the more than 130 associations which dominate the borough's public life and which have in the past fulfilled the function of integrating new residents of this ever-growing commuter community into the social life of the borough (I 11-3). The Future Search Conference held the promise of building a bridge between the associations themselves, but moreover between the associations and the wider citizenry who prefer to stay away from the associations. The 130 associations (Kirstein 1998:13) enjoy a privileged treatment by the Council in Olching. The leaders of these associations enjoy regular dinner parties with the Mayor and have a strong influence on the Council (I 25-7&8, I 4-10, I 8-4). The influence of the associations was in fact so strong that they were called 'the citizenry', despite the fact that a lot of citizens were not at all organised in associations (I 4-7). Still, there were a number of citizen consultation exercises carried out on a regular basis, but their influence on local politics was considered rather small (I 1-9, I 16-8).

In the German federal state of Bavaria, the Mayors are obliged to host a well-publicised citizen gathering once a year (I 12-3, I 7-15). The format of these meetings is such that the Mayor reports on the municipality's work and the citizenry has the right to demand that the Council take a vote on any issue(s) of concern to them (I 12-3, I 7-15). In Olching, the tradition has been to hold a citizen gathering for each of the three towns of the borough separately to do justice to the particular needs of each town. However, the structure and atmosphere of these citizen gatherings is not conducive to any sincere deliberation of issues (I 8-9), as the range of issues covered is too broad to go into specifics and as proponents of minority views are often shouted down in a football-match like atmosphere (I 7-16). Interviewees described the citizen gatherings as 'rituals' (I 28-11), where the same 60-100 people (I 2-1) from a narrow socio-economic range (I 7-15&16) went through the same motions each year, moaning about the same issues and being consoled for another year (I 23-7, I 27-9&10) (BV-E, BV-O, BV-G).

The former Mayor had hosted extraordinary citizen gatherings on a number of highly contested issues (bypass road, new housing development), and the focus and immediacy of the meeting had attracted several hundred participants from a much wider range of backgrounds each time (I 9-9&10). However, there were also accusations that the Mayor had abused these gatherings to mobilise opinion in his favoured direction. Secondly, there is a tradition in Olching that the Mayor hosts a meal for all those who turn 18 (I 24-6) and for all new residents of the borough (I 11-3).

A second tool of citizen consultation which is guaranteed by law in Bavaria are referenda, which can be initiated at the local and state level given the required number of signatures to support the wish that a vote be held (I 29-2). However, this tool had not been of much significance in resolving local issues in Olching. Thirdly, Bavarian law enables the Councils to install advisory panels that oversee the Council's work from often overlooked perspectives, i.e. disability and youth. In Olching however, the Council feared potential constraints which might be imposed on their decision-making power if such advisory boards were given veto-power (which is not necessarily the case). As well, some councillors feared that the Council would hide behind the supposed expertise of these panels instead of displaying leadership (I 28-15&16). Therefore, no advisory panels were at work, though there were constant efforts from citizen groups to establish some.

As citizen participation had become more and more common in Olching, those opposed to certain Council motions had started to suggest a consultation exercise whenever such a move was likely to bring the motion to a grinding hold (I 19-5). I was given three examples by my interviewees where the consultation of the residents of a certain street had led to a result that was not considered in the interest of the wider citizenry of the borough (I 12-4, I 19-4&5, I 8-8, I 5-3&4).

#### **7.2.4 Party politics**

Politics in Olching was originally dominated by the Social Democrats and later by a safe majority of the Conservatives (CSU). A very popular candidate for the position of the Mayor was launched as a figurehead of the Free Voters' Association in the 1984 elections and thereby transformed the political landscape completely. In the first six years, the Free Voters' Association formed a coalition with the Social Democrats, but in the 1990 elections, they gained 41% of the votes, which means that they had more seats than Social Democrats and Conservatives taken together. It was only in 1996, that the still very popular Mayor decided to run for a higher political post at the level of the *Land* and the person who is now Mayor – also from the Free Voters' Association, but a former Social Democrat and former competitor for the post of the Mayor - was elected with the previous Mayor's support. However, the Free Voters' Association lost strength as a result of the former Mayor's departure. Also, despite the unification of the three villages into one *Gemeinde*, there are still two separate factions of the Free Voters' Association, one of which is more

conservative than the other one. One of those factions has 7 seats, the other 5 out of 30 seats. The Conservatives have gathered strength and have 9 seats, the Social Democrats have 4 seats, the Green party 3 seats and two other parties one seat each. This means that there are no safe majorities for anyone in Olching's Council and coalition building is required each time a decision is to be made. The new Mayor was therefore not only facing the challenge of filling the gap left by the popular, rhetorically brilliant, visionary and charismatic former Mayor, but also had to work with unpredictable Council majorities.

Originally, there had been a lack of interest in Olching's Council as to the possibility of initiating a Local Agenda 21 process. One councillor had put a motion before the Council suggesting engagement in a Local Agenda 21 process as early as 1994 (I 5-13, I 28-15). At that time, the former Mayor recommended to await the results of a study on best practice in citizen participation in Local Agenda 21, which was being carried out for the German Town Association ('Deutscher Städtetag') at its institute DIFU (I 5-13). By the time the findings arrived, it was election time and Local Agenda 21 was not regarded as an issue to win votes with and therefore not taken up by any of the major parties (I 28-15).

The councillors were also said to be wary that any environmental regulation might inhibit their own and their voters' construction activity in the borough (I 5-14). The 'construction lobby' was said to be a major power broker in the borough, most of which was put down to the fact that a lot of farmers had become extremely rich over the last decades by building on their former agricultural land or by selling it to developers (I 5-14). A councillor and environmentalist claimed that

*"Most of the councillors are afraid that Agenda 21 is closely linked to the environment. That it will mean constraints, constraints on construction activities, the need to be considerate of nature reserves etc."* (I 5-14)

When the newly elected Mayor received an invitation from the local adult education institute to become the patron of the Local Agenda 21 special programme shortly after his election, and one year later, to become patron of the Future Search Conference, the new Mayor must have recognised an opportunity to be associated with something that would distinguish him from his predecessor.

### **7.2.5 The origins of Olching's Local Agenda 21 process**

As already mentioned, Local Agenda 21 originates from Olching's civil society and has been struggling ever since to make its way into the institutions of the Council. A member of the local adult education institute called a meeting in spring 1996 and invited a wide range of local actors - mostly from the environment movement - to design a workshop programme on Local Agenda 21 for the autumn term. Twenty people from fourteen organisations attended and developed a programme of 23 events. A 'start workshop' on Local Agenda 21 took place in autumn 1996, but despite an open invitation, only eight people attended. These eight people however formed a committed team and called

themselves *Agenda-Treff*, and they continue to meet once a month until today. A member of the *Agenda-Treff* works as a professional consultant. He proposed to the others that running a Future Search Conference might be the best option the group had to get a wide range of local actors involved in the Local Agenda 21 process. He had been at the first nation-wide training workshop on Future Search Conferences run by two German consultants, who have played a key role in making this method accessible in Germany by teaching it and writing about it in German.

### **7.2.6 The origins of Olching's Future Search Conference**

In January 1997, the *Agenda-Treff* went public with their idea to host a Future Search Conference. They put a mailing into the pigeonholes of all councillors and held a press conference, achieving good media coverage, but little response. The group's next step was therefore, to win the support of a number of local people in influential positions. The Mayor agreed to act as patron of the Future Search Conference early on, and became a member of the steering group for the preparation of the conference (*Planungsgruppe*). The *Agenda-Treff* people nominated three of their members for the steering group and selected a number of additional local movers and shakers. The aim was to create a well-balanced steering group that mirrored the wide range of local groups and interests. The steering group included representatives from the public sector, the business community, the churches, social and environmental NGOs, agriculture, education and (disabled) sport clubs.

The steering group was not happy with the team of consultants they started off with, and at the cost of an element of discontinuity hired two new consultants who had not been trained in Future Search, but had an excellent local reputation for running similar workshops. The Mayor managed to attract business sponsorship to cover part of the consultants' costs, while the consultants agreed to work pro bono (expenses covered only). The steering group carefully selected 64 participants for the conference to reflect the diversity of Olching's public life, making sure those included members of all parties, people of all age groups, from all three towns in the *Gemeinde* and a balance of male and female attendants, including people of non-German ethnicity and people with disabilities.

The relationship between steering group / Future Search Conference and Council (*Gemeinderat*) was a tense one from early on. Background to this was that the *Gemeinderat* had not so long ago defeated a councillor's motion that Olching should join the *Climate Alliance of the Cities* and start a Local Agenda 21 process. The steering group feared that if the Council would be asked to decide about a 'no-or-go' for the Future Search Conference at a point in time, when it would still be possible to stop the event, it would never take place. Therefore, the tactic was to march ahead as far as possible, building up widespread support outside the Council. The organisers of the Olching conference had no budget as such to start from. The conference organisers never asked for Council money, first of all because they feared their efforts would be

stopped, but secondly, because there seemed little hope that the Council would be in a position to commit any moneys given the financially tight situation. Instead, most organisational work was done by volunteers, the Mayor was able to provide limited administrative support via his department in the Council and attracted a small business donation to compensate the conference facilitators for their expenses, but not really to pay them an appropriate salary. One of the initiating steering group members in particular committed a lot of time and energy to the process and drew on the professional equipment of his consulting business to address Future Search tasks. However, these volunteers were hoping that a paid Council officer would take over their coordinating role after the conference, because they did not feel able to sustain their voluntary efforts forever.

In summer 1997, a member of the Green Party who found her invitation to the Future Search Conference in her pigeonhole brought it with her to a 'holiday-committee' meeting of the Council. As none of the other 'holiday-committee' members had received an invitation and the Mayor was on holiday, those present formed the view that the Future Search Conference was a 'green' event from which they had been deliberately excluded. At the next 'holiday committee' meeting of the Council, the Mayor fought hard to persuade the councillors otherwise, but did not succeed in clearing the air.

The steering group decided to seek a word with the 'Committee on Planning, the Environment and Economic Development' of the Council in October, in order to win support for the Future Search Conference. The Mayor proposed a motion whereby the Committee (i) welcomes the Future Search Conference, (ii) will consider the outcomes of the conference and (iii) will use them as guideline for its future action. The Mayor's third point was not supported and caused much uproar. The committee session ended in shouting and hurt, with the councillors trying to force the steering group to change the modus of invitation. The uproar from that committee session was featured in the local press under the heading "*Agenda-conference from January 1998 throws shadow in advance: Politicians feel excluded. Council only willing to recognise outcomes of the conference as initiatives*" (SZ -FFB NN 21.11.1997, my translation). The steering group did not give in however, and went ahead with the originally selected conference participants in January 1998.

Year	Civic activities	Council activities
1994		-Council postpones a vote on Local Agenda 21 and membership in the Climate Alliance
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-April: the local adult education institute invites a broad cross-section of local organisations to make a contribution to a special course programme on Local Agenda 21</li> <li>-the Mayor is won as patron of the Local Agenda 21 course programme</li> <li>-November: a Local Agenda 21 start workshop is hosted as part of the LA21 course programme; as a result, the <i>Agendatreff</i> is formed and its eight members meet regularly ever since</li> </ul>	
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-January: the <i>Agendatreff</i> goes public with its idea to host a Future Search Conference in Olching</li> <li>-the Mayor and the adult education institute are won as patrons of the Future Search Conference</li> <li>-April: Members of the Steering group are being recruited by the Local Agenda 21 Forum</li> <li>-July: the selected participants receive a first invitation to the Future Search Conference, which was supposed to take place in October</li> <li>-the Future Search Conference is postponed to January 1998</li> <li>-October: the Future Search steering group takes on board new conference facilitators after they had lost faith in the previous ones</li> <li>-November: the steering group makes a presentation about the planned Future Search Conference to the Committee on Planning, Environment and Development</li> <li>-the steering group sticks with the selected participants and ignores Council demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-August: uproar in the Council as councillors discover that only a Green Party representative seems to have received an invitation to the Future Search Conference</li> <li>-November: Committee on Planning, Environment and Development refuses to support a motion suggested by the Mayor to give the Future Search Conference binding status; the committee demands that the mode of invitation is changed so that the parties could send their own representatives</li> </ul>

1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-January: 3 day Future Search Conference with 56 participants</li> <li>-May to July: every Saturday morning, an 'info-point' stall was hosted to feature an action group from the Future Search Conference or to build support for Local Agenda 21 in general, including a questionnaire survey with a prize draw</li> <li>-action groups on youth, 'Growing old in Olching', arts, organic farming, traffic calming, citizen participation and renewable energies all met at least once, and half of these groups participated in the info-point with a display they designed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-April: all councillors are invited to a presentation about the Rushmoor Future Search Conference</li> <li>-September: the Committee on Planning, Environment and Development votes to assess what the Council is already doing towards the aims of the Future Search Conference, to assess which of the conference outcomes should be supported and to get in touch with the action groups</li> </ul>
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-arts action group fails to secure funding to restore a suitable building in Council possession as an arts centre</li> <li>-youth action group turns into a formal association and continues to look for a suitable room for a self-managed youth club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Council votes to officially enter into a Local Agenda 21 process; Council receives funding from the State Environment Ministry as a direct result</li> <li>-Council's environment officer supports the preparation of the follow-up conference</li> </ul>
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-February: first one-day follow-up conference to the Future Search event attended by 70 participants</li> </ul>	

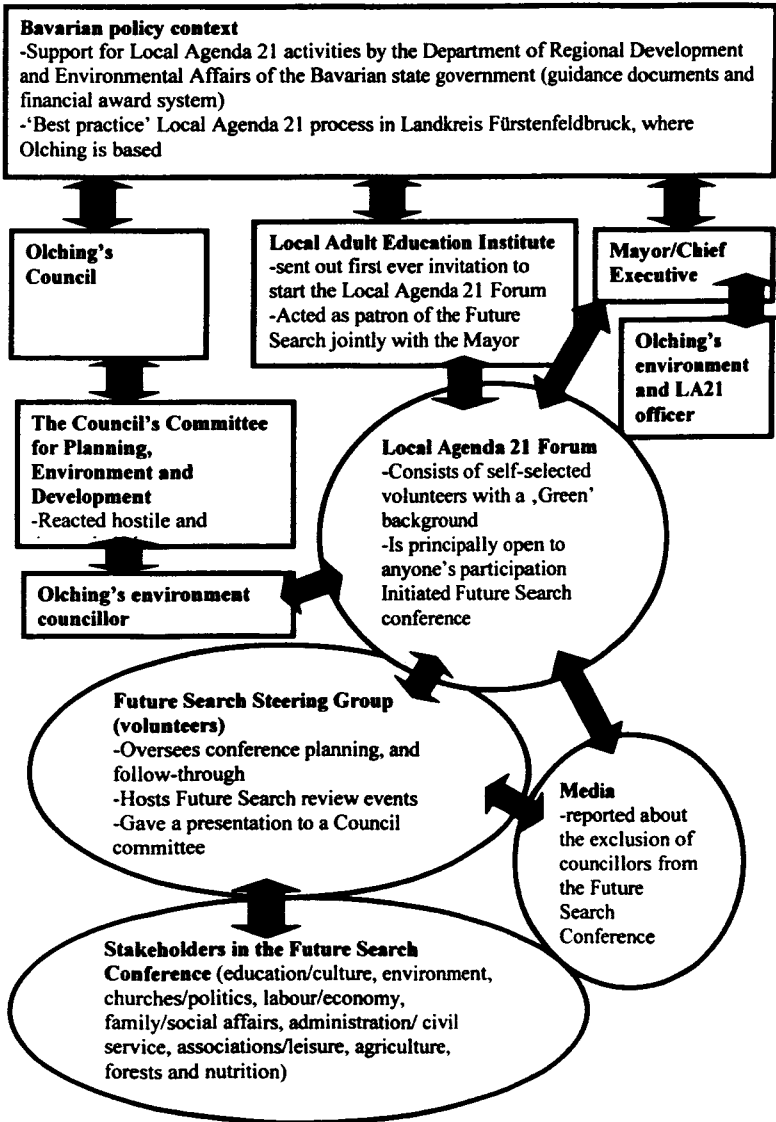
**Table 7.1 : Some milestones for Olching's Local Agenda 21**

Source: my data



**Figure 7.2 : Key players in the Olching case study**

Source: my figure



### **7.3 The Future Search Conference process and how it was experienced by conference participants**

This section will report how the participants experienced each stage of the Olching Future Search Conference by drawing on the focus group discussions and interviews with participants as well as on the conference questionnaire and my non-participant observation. The aim is to provide research evidence on the basis of which implications for the Future Search Conference design may be inferred.

#### ***7.3.1 Profile of the conference participants***

The Olching Future Search Conference started on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1998 at 4pm in a cosy, wooden meeting room provided by the Catholic Church with 58 participants and closed on Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1998 at lunchtime with 56 participants. The conference hours were 4-9pm on Friday, 9am-6pm on Saturday and 9am until lunchtime on Sunday. Out of 59 recruited and confirmed conference participants, 57 turned up and 56 stayed for the full three conference days. All focus group participants acknowledged themselves and the other conference participants for staying for the full conference hours and for contributing most willingly (FG 2-2). Overall, participants had not found it easy to sacrifice one full weekend to participate in the conference, a theme which recurred in the individual interviews 11 months later (I 20-10). The social profile of the conference participants which was assessed by the conference questionnaire (53 responses out of 56 participants on Sunday) and by non-participant observation is presented in table 7.2.

The high motivation of conference participants seems to originate from the careful recruitment strategy employed by the steering group. Steering group members used their networks to identify suitable participants. Most conference participants were approached by a member of the steering group which discussed with them the wider aims of the conference and the mutual benefits of their attendance of the event. As most of the steering group members participated in the conference as well, a mutual commitment was in the room to contribute to the conference's success. While again it was officially the Mayor who issued the invitation, it was very clear that the initiative for the conference had come from the community rather than from the Council and that there was a conflict surrounding the political status of the conference.

<b>AGE PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 53 respondents there were...		<b>STAKEHOLDER PROFILE</b> (on Saturday) Source : non-participant observation Out of 59 participants there were...	
-aged 17-19	5	churches	7
-aged 20-29	2	environment sector	8
-aged 30-39	8	business sector	6
-aged 40-49	16	agricultural sector	8
-aged 50-59	15	voluntary sector	8
-aged 60-69	7	education & arts sector	8
-aged 70 and beyond	0	statutory sector	6
-have children under the age of 5	2	family & social services	8
<b>WORK PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 53 respondents there were...		<b>PLACE PROFILE</b> (on Sunday) Source: conference questionnaire Out of 53 respondents there were...	
-retired	5	-living in Gemeinde Olching	42
-without paid work at the moment	5	-job outside Gemeinde Olching	12
-working	41	-job in Gemeinde Olching	29
-does several hours voluntary work each week	30		

**Table 7.2 : Profile of the Olching Future Search participants**

Nevertheless, a small number of participants from diverse sectors complained that the aim of the conference had not been transparent to them (FG 1-1, FG 1-2, FG 1-16), including one person who had been recruited at the last minute. Afterwards, in the focus group discussions, some participants showed themselves unpleasantly surprised that their participation in follow-through activities seemed to be implicitly expected of them by the organisers. A member of the agricultural sector described the formation of action groups in the last phase of the conference as a "surprise attack" (I 26-4). However, a few of those complaining had been recruited at the last minute or had been 'volunteered' to attend by their bosses – including public sector employees - and therefore had no intrinsic motivation for being at the event - as I learned confidentially in my interviews (I 11-5, I 20-10, I 2-2). A public sector employee also admitted to feeling reluctant to attend because they knew the Council's capacity for change was tiny, so that all the conference could produce was a wish-list (I 2-2).

### **7.3.2 Opening**

The Olching Future Search Conference started on the right foot. The Mayor welcomed the participants with a short speech, in which he emphasized that his experience was that 'more eyes see more' and therefore welcomed the participants' willingness to create a vision for the future of their community – a task usually reserved for elected representatives as he admitted. He also referred to the uproar caused by some councillors who felt excluded from the conference and asked the participants not to take this uproar too seriously. The conference facilitators then explained the conference programme, made housekeeping announcements and introduced the photographers and myself as evaluator. The facilitators added two small group sessions as a warming-up, in which conference participants introduced themselves to their fellow stakeholders and shared their expectations and motivations in a mixed stakeholder group.

### **7.3.3 Time lines**

Views were extremely diverse about the time lines exercise. Those who enjoyed the time lines exercise said that they found it a good opportunity to take stock (FG 1-19) and "*dig in the past*" (FG 2-6) which they consider as a precondition for envisioning a desirable future (FG 2-6). Also, it made everybody aware that participants of the conference had been living in Olching for very different time spans (FG 3-4). Those who had just moved to Olching more recently were particularly grateful for the comprehensive overview of Olching's history (FG 3-2, FG 3-6). Going over Olching's past made several people realise that very drastic changes indeed had taken place in Olching over the last three decades (FG 3-8) and that it was amazing how the community had coped with its exponential growth (FG 3-7). It was generally recognised that the purpose of the exercise had been to bond with each other (FG 3-6) "*because everybody has a past*" and that it was a standard thing to do in the private sector (FG 2-5).

Those who most disliked the exercise said they experienced a panic of not being able to remember anything (FG 2-6, FG 3-6), with one reporting that she was not able to sleep afterwards because she did not want to believe that her whole life actually added up to so little (FG 2-6). Secondly, several focus group participants across all groups and from diverse sectors complained that they felt that the private past was too personal to be shared with strangers and that they felt uncomfortable and embarrassed for having to do so (FG 1-19, FG 3-7). This problem was particularly severe as the facilitators made the small groups report from their own experiences only and did not allow them or encourage them to use the whole group's time line posters. One participant from the business sector reported that for his group on the private past, it meant that participants were highly embarrassed and started counting each others' houses, dogs and cats, in order to avoid having to tell the real stuff about themselves (FG 1-18). Overall, a majority felt that the time lines exercise had been too long (FG 1-19, FG 3-7), given that the results did not seem to get used in any of the other sessions (FG 2-4) and were considered by some – for example, a councillor – to be of no

relevance to Local Agenda 21 (FG 2-6). Especially the youths found the exercise too long, considering how little they could contribute (FG 2-1, FG 3-7).

#### **7.3.4 Mind map**

An overwhelming majority of focus group participants found this exercise useful, with seven participants finding it very useful indeed (T1,2,3), despite the fact that a few had felt upset about it at the time. There was an overall feeling that the mind map widened their horizon to get a visual image of what concerns their fellow citizens (FG 1-21). The mind map got them thinking and brought many issues back into their consciousness that they had started to be complacent about (FG 2-8, FG 3-8). They enjoyed the overview perspective, which some felt they could never have drawn together on their own (FG 2-7). Recognizing that their concerns belonged to that bigger picture created by all of them made them feel connected (FG 1-21, FG 2-7).

On the other hand, there were many complaints, that the flood of information was overwhelming (FG 2-9), particularly because it was dominated by negative trends (FG 2-9). It made several people feel helpless and disempowered in the face of such a grasping negative force, like this member of the family and social sector:

*And it really shook me to face that. And I had the feeling, at first: Oh Lord, there is nothing we can do about this. It is horrible, what we've got to cope with. And then we should dare to shape a future for ourselves, as little citizens of this Borough? While everything is so dreadful all around us? While everything has become so difficult? (FG 2-3)*

Also, many said that they felt all the positive trends had been overlooked, that the picture was not as bleak in reality as it had been painted in the mind map (FG 2-7, FG 2-9, FG 3-3, FG 3-9). They blamed the facilitation and the media in general for their inability to come up with positive trends. One reported that her impression had been that only negative trends were demanded by the facilitation (FG 2-9). They said, the media made them take good things for granted and focus on the bad news (FG 2-7, FG 2-8, FG 3-9).

Also, there was criticism that the way in which trends were picked up by the facilitators from the participants put those at an advantage who were experienced in public speaking in front of large groups, a point which was raised by the less articulate (FG 3-8). And one participant reminded the others that it had been late Friday evening after a full week and that they had simply been tired by the time they got to the mind map (FG 3-8).

#### **7.3.5 Prouds and sorries**

A majority of focus group participants enjoyed themselves during the prouds and sorries session, and half found it useful, while the others gave it a neutral ranking. One focus group felt that the instructions given by the facilitators had been confusing. One participant reported that her environment stakeholder group had wasted a lot of time debating what it was they had been asked to do (FG 1-19).

Participants welcomed that the good news were coming through in this exercise. Finally, there was a stock-taking of all those aspects of life in Olching they loved, wanted to keep and improve (FG 2-9). A few participant actually felt a sense of pride (FG 3-6). Participants were surprised and excited to discover the same prouds everywhere: the active local associations, the annual fair, the carnival procession, enough kindergarden vacancies (FG 2-9). This discovery gave participants across the diverse stakeholder groups a sense of commonality (FG 2-10) and *"suddenly, everyone seemed to have the same interests. For me, that was a very powerful feeling"* (FG 2-10). Some participants found it insightful to spot some of the same issues at the prouds and at the sorries side - the waste incineration plant, the integration (or lack of integration) of foreigners and the regional farming were three such contested issues (FG 2-10). Participants agreed that 'prouds and sorries' had been an easy task, and that they had particularly enjoyed the walking around the room in order to debate the listings of other groups (FG 2-10), an innovation introduced by the conference facilitators instead of the usual reports back to the large group. An environmentalist regretted that she had lost sight of her political issues in the prouds and sorries session because she felt the facilitation had directed her towards private issues (FG 1-19).

### 7.3.6 Ideal future groups

The overwhelming majority of conference participants rated the ideal future session as useful and one participant spoke for many when she described this session as *"a big event"* (FG 2-4). Most participants reported that they had found it difficult to get started because they first had to get their head around the challenge of behaving in what was described by a senior environmentalist as an alien (*"artfremder"*) way (FG 3-10). This was experienced as particularly difficult by those used to rational ways of working: *"we were such a heady table"* (FG 2-11). Also, the thought of having to present their ideas in form of a drama killed all those ideas that did not seem to lend themselves to a play (FG 2-11). A long-serving member of a local voluntary organisation commented:

*"But I had real trouble getting into the topic, most of all things. Maybe that's because I am an extreme realist by nature. I am not only standing on the ground with two, therefore my walking-stick, but with three feet. And that has been very inhibiting in that case, because I kept saying: 'But that is an utopia. You can't do that kind of thing.' And then the others had to time and time again persuade me, that our task actually was to create something absolutely unrealistic."* (FG 2-11)

However, once those groups got going, it all came together easily (FG 2-11). One ideal future small group had launched off into the future with no problems at all, as group members reported:

*"In our group, we were going nuts from the very beginning all the way through... First, we need a tunnel and then we fly into space. We really pulled each other upwards that way...If we had continued like that for longer, we would have gone insane."* (FG 2-12)

*"We were sitting at our table and really went nuts. We said, at the Olching lake, there are the wind power stations and everywhere there are solar cells." (FG 1-20)*

All groups reported that they had only been able to draw their pieces together at the last minute - or even over lunch (FG 2-12). And the actual drama itself tended to unfold with its own creative momentum to the surprise of all: *"Once we had the idea, it was working. And I think we could have kept acting for an hour. No problem, once we were at it."* (FG 2-11) Across all sectors, participants showed themselves impressed with what they were capable of producing (FG 3-10) and acknowledged each other for some instances of *"professional acting performance"* (FG 2-2).

There was a general feeling that participants enjoyed the positive emotions stirred up (FG 1-20) and the creativity and flights of fantasy (FG 2-11, FG 3-4). They said it was relaxing and liberating to laugh together about the nonsense they made up (FG 1-20) and that somehow that created one of the decisive foundations for their willingness to work together afterwards (FG 3-11). Participants enjoyed the feeling that everybody was joining in (FG 3-10) and contributing their own bits to the drama (FG 1-20). That led to a deeper sense of being for each other and being in it together (FG 3-10, FG 3-11). Also, the visions acted out by the different groups were strikingly similar (FG 1-1, FG 1-20, FG 3-11). Some argued that just debating visions for the future would never have led to the same result but rather to a big argument (FG 3-11). Especially the less high-powered conference participants suggested that many would not have dared to raise that they were in favour of pedestrianising the High Street in a more rational conference setting (FG 3-11).

However, it was disputed, how useful the ideas generated in that session actually were. Participants said that it had been very valuable to think things through rather than blocking them as unrealistic from their first conception (FG 1-20). Also, one participant felt that it had made all the difference to focus on the future and on what one could actually create together with joined forces instead of looking at failed projects and digging around in the past (FG 3-4). Others doubted the visions' usefulness (FG 1-20), particularly because a few felt they were not adequately used in the later sessions. However, all seemed to agree that no matter if useful or not, *"we had a good time"* (FG 1-20).

### **7.3.7 Common ground**

The overall feeling after the common ground session has been pointedly summarised by this conference participants, who was also a steering group member: *"I believe, we were all upset Saturday night, because we had met at the lowest common denominator. That was really tough for everybody, I think."* (FG 2-4)

A majority of participants complained that the session where the common ground was identified had been carried out at the end of a long day's work (FG 3-15, FG 3-16) and had been rushed (FG 2-14). Participants agreed that half an hour more could have made all the difference (FG 2-14). Others suggested a

break beforehand or to avoid having a session like that at the end of a long day (FG 2-14). The facilitators were accused of being too hooked to their schedule to respond adequately to people's needs (FG 2-15). Therefore, the quality of the results had suffered. Examples that were referred to with outrage were the elimination of the pedestrian zone in Olching's High Street despite the fact that all subgroups seemed to have been in favour of it (FG 1-8) (but it later emerged that one group had only agreed on the less ambitious target of traffic calming) and of the education group's only target 'holistic learning' from the consensus list simply because a single person had intervened (FG 2-14) – for example the Mayor in one case. There was an overall feeling that there had been a lack of opportunity to challenge the intervener's argument which in those cases were dismissed as unqualified (FG 1-4). Participants across all stakeholder groups and social positions were bursting with desire to comment on what was going on and felt resentful for not being given an opportunity to do so (FG 3-16). Consequently, the debate got polarised, culminating in an emotional outburst that really shook everybody up (FG 3-11, FG 3-15). Here the facilitators were acknowledged for handling that instance skilfully (FG 2-1).

A second strand of critique with regards to the quality of the outcomes said that the consensus principle had favoured minimalist solutions coined by someone as "*smallest common denominator*" (FG 2-4) rather than more ambitious optimised solutions (FG 1-6). A majority of participants however was impressed with how large the consensus actually was. Participants from diverse stakeholder groups said they would never have imagined that such a diverse group would be able to come up with so many agreed visions (FG 1-2, FG 1-6, FG 1-8, FG 1-12, FG 3-4). While all experienced the identification of the common ground at least as exciting and full of tension (FG 2-1) if not painful and difficult, many said that at least the targets got reduced to a manageable number (FG 1-4). Still, some criticised that the wording chosen was open to wide interpretations with each person having their own understanding of what for example a 'citizen centre' could be (FG 3-13).

One of the three focus groups questioned whether an absolute consensus was desirable. Especially a church representative did not like it at all that the requirement of everybody's agreement gave veto power to single individuals. The blessings of a qualified majority principle were brought up (FG 1-4, FG 1-5). Nevertheless, a majority agreed that for future publicity work and political lobbying the consensus might after all turn out to be the most powerful and therefore valuable outcome (FG 1-5, FG 1-6, FG 1-8, FG 2-14, FG 2-15). Not least because each conference delegate might speak for a larger population of the local community with his or her veto.

### **7.3.8 Opening on Sunday morning**

The facilitators started Sunday morning by lining up all participants in a circle along a rope, which was moved together in order to experiment with notions of cooperation, disruption and tension in a group. The rope exercise was the real



highlight of the whole weekend for a number of steering group members, who were satisfied with what they had helped to create:

*"I thought it was an uplifting experience, when everybody was pulling the rope at the end. There was somehow total satisfaction in their faces, was my impression. I really enjoyed that very much."* (FG 2-1) (female steering group member and conference participant)

*"The most remarkable moment for me was, when everybody was pulling the rope in one direction. That was symbolically very, very significant."* (FG 1-2) (male steering group member and conference participant)

### **7.3.9 Action planning groups**

The working groups were considered the most useful phase of the entire conference across all three focus groups (T1,2,3). The facilitators structured the action planning phase into two parts and gave clear guidance on the steps necessary for the action groups to narrow down on manageable first steps. A number of participants who had little to do with the conference preparation said that at the time of choosing a working group, they were not aware that those groups were expected to continue their work after the conference (FG 3-16). Therefore, some participants volunteered to join groups with a lack of participants, because it didn't seem to make such a difference (FG 3-16). The self-selection led to a good cross-section of participants in each working group, breaking the patterns of only women doing social work and environmentalists planning action for the environment. As a farmer said:

*"What really struck me was the composition of those circles [the working groups]. I am a member of the working group on energy. It would never have occurred to me that I might ever talk to those particular people in the group about energy problems in Olching. Therefore, I think it will be really interesting."* (FG 3-3)

A drive to take follow-up action originated from the urgency of the need for action experienced by some groups. A member of the education sector reported:

*"The young people, there were three of them at our table, they were very clear what they wanted. ... 'We immediately need a meeting room. That's the most important thing to us and everything else can wait.' This pressure made us agree our first meeting, when to meet and who to address in the meantime and invite as well. Therefore, that was a very satisfying experience."* (FG 2-16&17)

Out of eight action groups formed at the conference, six pledged that they would continue to meet and take action as a group. The groups on the environment and on the economy decided not to continue as a group.

### **7.3.10 Closure**

In a last step, structures for overseeing the progress of the conference follow-through were agreed upon in the plenary session. Each group nominated a spokesperson who was supposed to meet every two months with the other spokesperson in order to monitor progress and help each other out. Also, a

documentation team was formed out of those willing to assist with the transcription of all conference posters. Finally, all participants were asked to position themselves in the room at a location that expressed how they felt about their overall conference experience – the best rating was in the centre of the room, the lowest at the periphery. While there was a lot of crowding in the centre of the room, others did position themselves at a bit of a distance from there, but not far away. The conference was closed by the Mayor on a word of gratitude and with a lot of positive energy. At the well-attended press conference held only two hours later in the conference room, the enthusiasm of the conference participants was still able to make a lasting impression on the media.

### 7.3.11 Summary

I conclude that the conference participants found the Olching Future Search Conference throughout useful and mostly enjoyable. Participants found the acting out of their ideal future scenarios the most enjoyable conference phase and were struck by the similarities of their visions. The well-structured action planning groups were considered the most useful phase of the conference, and left participants optimistic that their follow-through would be successful. Nevertheless, a few participants experienced it as a 'surprise attack' that the action groups were expected to continue their work beyond the conference. Most complaints were raised about the design of the common ground phase, where participants would have like more room for discussion to sort out misunderstandings. Moreover, a number of participants doubted that a consensus was necessary at all and those participants would have preferred majority voting. Participants reported that they learned a lot from each other in the time lines exercise and the mind map, and that they enjoyed discovering shared pride in the prouds and sorries session.

Conference phase	Usefulness Rating	Mood Rating	Comments
1. Time lines	diverse	diverse	-some participants enjoyed digging in the past and gained new insights from that -some experienced a panic of not being able to remember anything or found the exercise too personal -a majority thought that too much time was spent on this exercise

Conference phase	Usefulness Rating	Mood Rating	Comments
2. Mind map	+	0/-	-the exercise shook participants out of their complacency -participants enjoyed getting a visual image of the diverse concerns of their fellow citizens -some found the flood of information overwhelming and dominated by negative trends
3. Trends in stakeholder groups	N/A	N/A	N/A – This exercise was not included in the Olching conference.
4. Prouds and sorries	+	0	-the instructions given by the facilitators had been confusing for several participants -participants enjoyed discovering shared 'prouds' while walking around the room from flip-chart to flip-chart -some participants experienced a sense of pride
5. Ideal future groups	+	++	-some participants struggled to let go of the constraints of reality -the acting performances were praised as impressive -going through the acting together created a deeper sense of being for each other and being in it together -the similarity of the visions was striking
6. Common ground	+	--	-one focus group doubted that a consensus was required and criticised the veto power this arrangement gave to individuals -participants criticised that the common ground was identified at the end of a long conference day -time pressure and lack of opportunity to debate led to widespread frustration and anger -the common ground was described as 'smallest common denominator'
7. Action planning groups	++	+	-was considered the most useful conference phase the mixed composition of the action groups was praised -some action groups pressed ahead with a real sense of urgency, while others were surprised that the groups were expected to continue to meet after the conference

**Table 7.3 : Participants' experience of the Olching Future Search Conference**

Source: my data

## **7.4 Evaluation with the stakeholders' evaluation criteria**

The following part of this chapter will present the findings from the assessment of the Future Search Conference with the evaluation criteria proposed by the stakeholders. The first section will evaluate to what extent the conference *process* could be considered as inclusive, collaborative and competent. Moreover, I will discuss possible explanations for the performance along these criteria. In the second section, I will assess the extent to which the Olching Future Search Conference delivered the *outcomes* that were sought by those with a stake in the conference. The factors that influenced the follow-up implementation from the conference will be investigated. The third and final section will elaborate on the *capacity building* generated by the Future Search Conference. The performance of the conference with regards to facilitating new contacts, learning, trust and community spirit will be assessed. The findings of the evaluation will be drawn together in the concluding section of this chapter.

### **7.4.1 Process criteria**

#### ***Inclusive***

The planning group had the publicly declared aim of recruiting a representative cross-section of opinions and views held in Olching to the conference. It was hoped that the conference would bring together many people who had not met before.

The Olching Future Search Conference successfully attracted a cross-section of the most active people from a broad range of sectors, including youth and business representatives. The excellent representation of all sectors in the conference was a result of the strong purpose and commitment of the steering group. The initiators of the Future Search Conference were a group of more or less environmentalists, many of whom were close to the Green Party, who were desperate to step out of their green corner and to genuinely engage with other local stakeholder groups. When this group appointed the steering group, they were led by the aim to involve the broadest possible range of local stakeholders in the conference.

Despite the good cross-section of sectors represented at the conference, the participants were considered as a chosen few of the most committed and most active citizens, whom councillors and Council officers called "*the usual activists*" (I 18-4, I 17-9). The fact that all conference delegates were more or less activists (with a few exceptions) can be explained by the recruitment procedure. Of course, when names were sought for certain labelled seats in the conference, the steering group used their networks to identify suitable people. This is why many participants had met before the conference at other occasions - because they were members of the same networks of activists. My research shows that the conference participants were not considered as representative of Olching's population as a result.

The only group which felt underrepresented were councillors and their political parties - despite the fact that 10% of the participants were councillors. As one 'excluded' councillor summed up the feelings of his peers:

*"I believe that before the conference, many people were upset because they had not been invited to the Future Search Conference, apparently because they are not important. And every councillor believes of himself that he is important in the community. And if he isn't included, something must be seriously wrong." (I 8-7)*

The steering group selected and invited one councillor from each party, which added up to five councillors at the conference (the invitee from the Conservatives declined). The former Mayor kept challenging the steering group arguing that the parties would have liked to determine a delegate themselves (I 28-19) and some councillors who had attended the conference agreed with this suggestion in the interviews (I 4-5). A rare accusation was that the steering group selected and recruited only those who fit in with their political orientation and their ambitions for Local Agenda 21 (I 17-4). One factor which contributed to this was that a few local key players like the former Mayor were not included in the conference, a fact which was hard to defend for the steering group. It is nevertheless significant, that the selection of conference participants became highly politicised in Olching - a fact which indicates the importance attributed to the conference as otherwise nobody would have cared.

The choice that no more than 10% of delegates should be councillors was a result of the view that the conference was supposed to be an event for the citizens themselves, and that too much involvement of political professionals would impair the different and more collaborative character of the event and turn it more into one of those usual politicised, polarised and highly competitive meetings. In my focus group discussions, the outcry of the councillors about their supposed exclusion from the conference was judged as destructive and inappropriate by most focus group participants (FG 2-21). Most participants in my focus group discussions acknowledged that the selection procedure was difficult and that it would always remain contested who would have been the 'right' participants (FG 3-23).

I conclude that the Olching Future Search Conference was reasonably successful in gathering delegates from a broad cross-section of sectors. The downside of this achievement was that most participants were from an activist elite and that the Future Search Conference was therefore not considered representative of the wider population.

### *Collaborative*

In selecting the Future Search method, those with a stake in the conference were aiming to provide a safe framework that would allow the participants to open up to each other, learn from and with each other and to support to each other. Substantive debate was to be fostered and rhetoric and polarisation discouraged. Those with a stake in the conference were hoping that comments which divide or hurt would be avoided and that conflicts would be resolved in a cultivated fashion. Conference participants should be able to work with each other as equals in the absence of domination.

The majority of conference participants showed themselves impressed by the collaborative spirit which had characterised the conference (QN-5). There was an overall feeling that the diverse group of people had gelled and worked well together (FG 1-1, FG 3-2, FG 3-4) - overcoming age gaps and socio-economic barriers (FG 3-2). Most striking for officers and councillors was the absence of self-important behaviour by the participants:

*"A behaviour of showing off, which some people seem to have as a habit, that was missing, everyone contributed on a factual level." (I 2-3) (male, statutory sector)*

*"There was nothing forced to it, nobody had to prove what a bright guy he is. Instead it was possible to win support in many very small steps." (I 29-9) (councillor)*

Secondly, councillors acknowledged in the focus group discussions the absence of the confrontational fighting from fixed positions so characteristic of political debates in the Council (FG 2-24).

*"You treat each other very carefully, none of the typical I hit you and you hit back, but instead playfulness, allowing others to speak up, allowing opposing viewpoints to be aired." (I 4-7)*

The focus group participants explained the collaborative climate with reference to the framework provided by the facilitators (FG 1-1, FG 3-24). A councillor said that the facilitators sought to mobilise the best out of the participants by continually encouraging them, ensuring that everybody's contributions were taken seriously and by taking away their fear of doing the wrong thing:

*"But they succeeded time and time again to tickle information out of people, to encourage them to do something, to encourage them to say something and to take away their shyness. I believe that it was important, that they kept reassuring us, that everything (that is said) is being taken seriously, and that we take each other seriously." (FG 2-2)*

There was a general sense in the focus groups, that without the facilitation  
*"we would have started arguing on the very first day!" (FG 3-24)*

Councillors in particular argued that it was easy to collaborate as long as no details were fixed and no money spent (I 12-5), and claimed that there would be no change unless the conference would start to *"tear and bite"* (I 29-9).

When probed about the issue of fairness, two areas of complaint arose in the focus groups and in the individual interviews. First of all, a few of those who referred to themselves as 'more practical people' like farmers criticised that those with a lot of experience in debating and public speaking like councillors had been *"leading"* the discussions (FG 3-3). A junior public sector employee said that she had not felt comfortable to work in a small group with the Mayor, because it made her reconsider every contribution twice (FG 3-12). The political 'professionals' have had a chance to think about the issues beforehand in their daily political activities, while others needed a lot more time to get their head around the issues and form an opinion (FG 3-3). Especially the ever-present time pressure had put the more practical people at a disadvantage (FG 3-3). I

observed that the small group self-facilitation often failed to shut up the dominant people and to encourage the quieter ones (NP O-11). Apart from pre-preference training for those new to political work on the one hand and the professionals (listening skills etc.) on the other, there is little the conference method itself could do to resolve this source of inequality, I believe.

A second focus for criticism was the consensus session. There was an overall feeling amongst conference participants that the facilitators had not made it clear to them what sort of argument was sufficient to eliminate goals from the common ground (FG 2-14). Many said that "*unqualified*" justifications (like that it was impossible to achieve that goal from the local level) had been accepted by the facilitators. There was criticism that the participants had not been given a chance to discuss (FG 3-15) and maybe persuade others that it was not necessary that everything was achievable locally (FG 2-14). A majority of participants therefore got cross with the facilitators and everybody else and felt disempowered to do anything about what was going on. Thereby, the general atmosphere of that session was experienced as full of tension and unnecessarily sharp remarks (FG 3-15). Quite a few participants questioned the principle of consensus in general as an oppression of the majority by individuals who play out their quasi-veto-power (FG 1-4, FG 1-5, FG 1-6) while others defended the consensus principle as a constructive starting point for collaboration (FG 1-5, FG 1-6, FG 1-8).

I conclude that the Future Search Conference was experienced as very collaborative. Nevertheless, there was evidence that the more 'intellectual' participants had dominated slightly throughout. Moreover, the procedure by which the common ground was identified was experienced as unfair by a majority of conference participants who felt oppressed by the veto rights given to individuals.

### *Competent*

Another criterion for the success of Olching's Future Search Conference put forward by those with a stake in it was that the conference proceedings should be competent. Conference participants should be treated as experts in their own right and no view should be allowed to claim supremacy over all others. The conference should allow conference participants to learn from each other and to revise own views in the light of new insights. It was hoped that the conference would cover all local key issues and locate single issues in their wider regional, national and global context. It was hoped that the competence to come to informed conclusions about these issues would be in the room in the form of the diverse fields of expertise and life experience of the participants.

The selection of conference participants had successfully ensured that a wide range of knowledge and life experience was represented in the Olching Future Search Conference. The collaborative conference atmosphere had moreover ensured that this knowledge was valued and shared amongst participants. Nevertheless, the Future Search method was criticised for hindering competent proceedings on three counts. First of all, while a lot of information was dragged

into the open by the various exercises about past, present and future, there seemed to be a lack of direct input from the earlier conference phases into the later ones (I 16-2). A steering group member thought that the conference produced too many lists but too little thorough analysis and reflection that could lead to new insights (I 16-2). Secondly, those who referred to themselves as 'the more practical people' complained that the time allocated for each exercise always seemed too short and that the constant feeling of being rushed had reduced the quality of the conference results (I 26-5). Finally, even steering group members criticised the conference method for misleading the participants into an irrelevant fantasy land and failing to anchor the visions in reality (I 16-2). A focus group participant spoke for many when he criticised the conference results as too general ("*everything needs to be improved*"), and said that targets needed to be specific to be meaningful (FG 1-11).

Non-participating councillors in particular were sceptical about the competence of the selected conference participants to tackle the full range of issues Olching is facing at present. While some argued that a group of randomly recruited citizens could never be expected to have the competence of the professionals and officials in the same field (I 17-11), others referred to the citizens' lack of experience and knowledge about local politics and why certain things could not go forward (indirect report by 27-4 & 5). The councillors' concerns about the competence of the conference participants is likely to originate from their hurt pride as experts on the local issues who were excluded from the conference proceedings (I 8-7).

The Future Search Conference raised most local key issues, as my comparison with a listing compiled from pre-conference interviews shows. The issue of improving the traffic situation in the high street featured highly throughout the conference, leading to the formation of an action group on 'traffic calming' at the end of it (NP O-15). Further traffic calming and enforcement of existing speed limits (NP O-13), improvements to cycling tracks and public transport were demanded throughout the conference (NP O-6 & 7, NP O-13), and included in the group's remit. The issues of leisure activities for young people and the need for a local arts facility both appeared throughout the conference (NP O-6) and led to the formation of action groups on each theme (NP O-14 & 15). The issue of the future of the local waste incinerator appeared throughout the conference, but those demanding its closure failed to win a consensus on this issue (NP O-13).

The demand to close down the nearby airfield for private aircraft flights was included in the consensus results (NP O-12). The issue of attracting new business to Olching (i) to create jobs and (ii) to increase the local tax base was mentioned throughout the conference and led to the formation of an action group on 'Labour and Economy'. While agricultural issues did feature at the conference and led to the formation of an action group, the sub-issues of test sites for genetically modified crops in the local area and excessive use of chemicals in non-commercial gardening only appeared fleetingly in the 'prouds and sorries' session (NP O-6). While the issue of regionalising the energy supply was not



discussed in the conference as such, alternative energy sources like solar power enjoyed significant popularity throughout the conference (NP O-9&10) and led to the formation of an action group on energy. The tight financial situation of the local authority was listed as a major regret by the administration table in the 'prouds and sorries' session of the conference (NP O-7), but did not feature elsewhere in the conference. The need for more day nursery facilities and for more sports hall capacity as well as the disgusting appearance of most recycling stations/banks were briefly mentioned at the conference, but did not manage to win wide-spread support or interest.

The two issues which were mentioned to me beforehand but neglected at the conference were the planned bypass road which has been contested for a decade and the planned changes to the landscape protection legislation ('Landschaftsschutzgebiet') of one region of the municipality where local farmers pressurise the government to allow more construction activity. However, there were a few further issues which interviewees felt should have been addressed at the conference. A number of interviewees showed themselves surprised that the planned housing development for 4,000 new residents on a former agricultural site called 'Schwaigfeld' seemed to have been neglected at the conference (I 29-1). Also, they would have expected the issue of lack of creche facilities to surface more forcefully (I 11-6, I 25-2). Not surprisingly, these two issues featured prominently in my focus group discussions with young mothers (NFG-1, NFG-6) and 14-year olds who had been underrepresented at the conference (only two conference participants had children under the age of 5 years). The mothers also demanded a lot more door-to-door collection of recyclables (NFG-6&7). The boys wanted a McDonald's as a cheap place to eat out, a local cinema and more sports facilities to use in their leisure time (inline skating, larger swimming pool, more sports halls) (NFG-4). Finally, an issue which generated heated discussion at the annual citizens' meetings ('Bürgerversammlungen') was hardly mentioned at all: the through-traffic and traffic jams during rush-hour in many residential areas of the borough (I 29-1). I conclude that while the majority of local key issues were raised at the Future Search Conference, a couple of important themes were notably absent, some as a result of the absence of certain groups from the conference, most notably young mothers.

I conclude that the Olching Future Search Conference can be considered overall as competent in that it addressed most of Olching's key issues. However, there remained some doubts if all the information generated by the conference method was sufficiently processed and used over the course of the event.

### Summary

Overall, the Olching Future Search Conference worked well in bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders in a collaborative setting for three days. Thanks to a committed steering group, all sectors of the local community, all three villages of *Gemeinde* Olching and all age groups were well represented – the only exception was the underrepresentation of parents of children under the age of 5 years. Participants treated each other as experts in their own right and

praised the new culture of listening to each other which they experienced. All of Olching's key issues were addressed over the course of the conference.

However, a few conference participants complained that time pressure had put participants with 'intellectual' professions at an advantage compared to more 'manual' professions, who felt they needed more time to get their head around certain political issues. As a result, it was felt by some that the 'intellectuals' had contributed more and dominated the small group sessions. Time pressure was moreover thought to have reduced the overall quality of the conference outcomes – in particular the results of the common ground session. Participants complained about the lack of debate allowed in the common ground session and did not consider the veto power given to individuals as fair. The outcomes found less public and political attention than expected because the conference participants, most of whom were well-known local activists, were not considered as representative of the population at large.

Process criteria	Rating	Comments
1. inclusive	0	-conference participants were from an activist elite and therefore not considered representative of the wider community -the full range of sectors were well-represented -all age groups were well-represented
2. collaborative	+	-a new culture of listening to each other and valuing diversity -'intellectuals' contribute most while 'more practical people' feel at a disadvantage from the constant time pressure -'unqualified' vetos in the common ground session experienced as unfair
3. competent	+	-participants treated as experts in their own right -most of Olching's key issues properly addressed -time pressure and breadth of issues were thought to reduce the overall competence of the proceedings

**Table 7.4 : Evaluation of the Olching Future Search Conference –**

**Part 1: Process criteria**

Source: my data

#### **7.4.2 Outcome criteria**

##### ***Consensus about coherent, innovative vision***

Those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference were aiming for the participants to achieve consensus on an overarching vision for Olching's future. The vision was expected to be capable of informing action by including concrete, manageable first steps. Those with a stake in the Future Search Conference hoped that the conference would identify some new solutions for old problems or be innovative in other ways.

The group presentations on a desirable future included many innovative elements. Examples worth mentioning are the introduction of a 'social week' for employees where they work as a volunteer for a charity once a year, the redistribution of work, so that everybody would do 25 hours of paid work and 15 hours of voluntary work per week, airport-like escalators replacing the

pavements in the High Street and a Zeppelin-shuttle to Australia replacing planes. All presentations included well-known 'innovations', which nevertheless have yet to become wide-spread: internet-shopping, solar-power, car-sharing, 100% waste avoidance, women as chancellor, president and mayor, and alternative health practices like acupuncture in hospitals. Finally, a few of the burning local issues were resolved in the presentations in a resolute way: the nearby private airfield was closed down, cars were banned from the High Street. Most striking however was the strong social component in all group presentations. The groups wanted to see rooms for people to meet up - from an open-air coffee shop in the pedestrianised High Street to a meeting place for old and young (NP O-8&9). Some focus group participants from diverse sectors noticed that they had not dared to challenge some fundamental things like an economy based on money (FG 3-4, FG 3-5), and therefore must have felt constrained in some ways in their fantasy. A number of the innovations from the ideal future groups were included in the common ground and later addressed by the action groups – most notably the idea of a meeting place for old and young and the building of support for solar power.

Most striking for the environmentalists who initiated the conference was the supremacy of project ideas which foster social interaction in the community. This loudly reinforces the need for a public sphere beyond the confines of the associations and for more communication across socio-economic and physical barriers:

*"The question was if there were any surprises. The main surprise are the three [social] issues and their common aim communication, exchange. That is surprising. However, it does seem to mirror the situation in a spatially separated community, which prefers to organise into 160 societies instead of engaging in a shared public life. Changing this is the precondition for collaboration. We need forms of interaction, a political culture, processes of forming opinions and deciding together."* (I 7-19&20)

The Future Search Conference was regarded as a first step in that direction.

Identifying a consensus had not been as difficult as they expected, participants wrote in their responses to the questionnaire. However, a focus group participant argued that it was easy to agree *"as long as it doesn't cost anything"* (FG 3-12). This criticism was shared by some of those who initiated the conference. They said that as long as the targets were long term and did not make demands on people's pockets, consensus would be possible. These interviewees claimed that existing conflicts around distribution of resources were hidden behind the vague terms of the consensus vision (I 12-5). Participants in my focus group discussions argued that the common ground identified at the Future Search Conference was of limited use because it remained open how they could ever be achieved:

*"It wasn't that I didn't like the outcomes or that they didn't match my own visions for the future, but I see few can realistically be implemented. Let's take an example. One of our visions was no unemployment any more. That is absolutely utopian. It won't be possible to achieve that. And I feel the*

*same way about most things, no matter what is in the way, if it's money, the Council or the citizens.* " (FG 1-10)

The conference outcomes were criticised by non-participating councillors on four counts: for failing to take into account financial considerations, for including contradictory aims, for failing to be concrete enough to be meaningful and for including some unreasonable, undesirable suggestions, as I was told by one interviewee (I 25-4). The accusation that the conference aims included contradictory elements is closely linked to the lack of detail produced at the conference. One non-participating councillor told me that he shared all those wonderful conference aims which were trying to please everybody. However, given limited resources, tough choices would have to be made and winners and losers determined. He considered the conference results useless in assisting with these choices because they did not suggest any possible trade-offs between aims that were not necessarily mutually exclusive, but competing for limited resources. (NP BV-E). The lack of detail in the conference outcomes was criticised in particular by those interviewees who had not participated in the conference themselves (I 12-5&6, I 17-6, I 7-3).

Also, these interviewees complained that even where the consensus was good at pointing out what participants would like to see (for example traffic calming), it failed to come up with acceptable suggestions about how to get there (for example what to do with the traffic instead). The suggestion of a tunnel below the High Street, which had been made by one of the ideal future scenario groups but was not included in the consensus, was an often referenced example of unreasonable conference outcomes in the interviews (I 17-9, I 6-1, I 2-4). The conference consensus aim of closing down the nearby private airfield and the visions put forward by individual groups to turn the local river Amper into a drinking water reservoir and to close down the waste incinerator were criticised as ill-informed choices by one non-participating councillor in particular (I 17-2&3), a criticism which was shared by some steering group members (I 14-1).

Part of the criticism of the conference results was unjustified in that it was not based on the actual conference consensus but on the raw material thrown up by the individual scenario groups in the ideal futures session. The conference documentation seems to have unthinkingly given ammunition to the opponents of the Future Search Conference. For example, the tunnel which had been suggested by one scenario group was listed as the fourth point in the conference documentation under the heading 'what we want /visions'. This point was particularly picked up on by non-participants who had the conference documentation as their only source of reference and who did not realise that the tunnel had been eliminated from the conference consensus results in a next step.

I conclude that the consensus identified in the Future Search Conference lacked the detail to be meaningful. The lack of clear priorities meant that the consensus was not a suitable basis for guiding action and distributing limited resources. The conference consensus included a few innovative elements, most notably the need for more communication across socio-economic and physical barriers in *Gemeinde Olching*. The ideal future groups had presented some

visions which were later judged as ill-thought through, because they left financial constraints unconsidered, but those were mostly eliminated in the process of agreeing on a consensus.

### *Action groups deliver*

It was hoped that participants would feel highly motivated to take action by the end of the conference and that at least some participants would take personal responsibility for seeing project ideas through. The work of the action groups was hoped to lead to visible change on the ground. Those with a stake in the Future Search Conference hoped that the participants would be able to attract resources for the follow-through projects, especially Council grants for projects which required such support. Moreover, it was hoped that the Council would take responsibility for some proposals which require Council support and integrate those in the Council budgets and planning activities. In the interviews eleven months after the conference, many interviewees thought that an effective coordination point, regular progress reviews and a reunion of the conference participants would be essential ingredients for the continuation of the process.

On the last day of the conference, eight working groups were formed. Six of these groups said at the conference that they intended to continue their work as an action group outside the conference. Only the groups on reduction of pollution and on employment left it to individuals to follow-through with certain issues and did not intend to meet again as a group. (NP O-14) Eleven months after the conference, progress of the action groups was mixed (table 7.5). The main achievement was that a number of groups were still meeting despite the fact that they had not achieved much on the ground. The youth group and the arts facility group were the most vibrant groups and came close to securing a room for their purposes. The groups on renewable energies, organic farming and growing old in Olching developed a number of project ideas, but apart from inviting speakers to public talks, nothing had been followed through yet. The project ideas in the areas of citizen participation, employment and traffic calming were pursued by individuals with no visible impact yet. Half of the action groups presented themselves at the 'info-point' and prepared some special activity for their stall.

The vibrancy of the action groups was directly linked to the experienced urgency of their mission and their prospects for success. The explanation for the outstanding vibrancy of the youth group for example is rooted in the fact that the group members seemed to get along very well (I 8-3&4), reporting unanimously that their meetings were highly enjoyable and good fun (I 10-1), and secondly by the young people's strong desire for a self-managed meeting space (I 8-3). The arts facility group benefited from the perfect timing of the Council's purchase of a suitable building for an arts facility. The group's momentum was based very much around the good prospect for success. The organic farming group suffered a serious blow when their idea of organising a market for local produce failed to gather sufficient interest and support, suggesting to them that there was no real need for their idea (I 6-3, I 16-10). The lack of response to

their invitation of members of social organisations in Olching was a serious blow which disheartened the 'Growing old in Olching' group members significantly.

Secondly, all action groups suffered from the fact that most conference participants had pre-conference commitments to other voluntary groups or were extremely busy with their jobs and struggled to find time to attend group meetings. At the focus group discussions ten days after the conference, sceptical voices remarked that the conference participants were bound to run into time constraints (FG 3-3, FG 3-22, FG 1-10). A councillor confessed:

*"I left the conference with stomach ache, thinking oh no, another appointment. And realistically, I can't make it, I really need those two nights that I have left at home to myself."* (FG 2-17)

This was very much echoed in the interviews eleven months after the conference, where the main explanation given to me for the lack of group activity was many people's pre-conference commitment to other voluntary activities (I 28-22, I 14-9, I 1-13, I 12-1). The organic farming group and the renewable energy group suffered most directly from the professional commitments of the farmers in these groups. The farmers found it difficult to meet over the summer, when they had most to do at their farms (I 6-3).

#### *Lack of coordination and support of action groups*

In the focus group discussions ten days after the conference, the resourcing of the conference proposals was considered a key issue for the follow-through process (FG 1-2, FG 1-10). There was a clear expectation on the side of the volunteer organisers that eventually the Council was going to provide appropriate staffing and resources so that the coordination of the Future Search process could be continued on a paid basis. The lack of initiative in that respect from the Council was subject of great disappointment on the side of the volunteers (I 12-1, I 7-6, I 16-1). The person in the Council administration who has been nominated by the Mayor quite early on for that function (I 25-3&4) was said to have taken no initiative at all to keep in touch with the groups and to circulate information between the groups, despite the fact that members of the steering group had submitted a list of tasks such a person would need to do (I 10-4). When interviewed, the person was not aware that any action might have been required on their part and said that it would have been up to the groups to get in touch. The person said they would have quite willingly supported anyone who had approached them, but to their own disappointment, nobody came (I 19a-5).

In the absence of Council initiative, a core of three of the original steering group members kept overseeing and intervening in the conference follow-through process throughout the year. Besides much informal interaction, they gathered regularly at the *Agenda-Treff* once a month. Three official review meetings were held in the context of the *Agenda-Treff*, the first five months after the conference, shortly before the summer break in July 1998. All nominated contact people for the action groups, and all members of the steering group and all members of the *Agenda-Treff* were invited (Hüneke 1998b). However, the

turnout to all meetings was extremely low. There were complaints from participants that the meetings had lacked focus and that they had failed to reach beyond exchanging reports about the status quo. There was a lack of strategic debate and no discussion about future action (I 23-7). The half-heartedness with which follow-up meetings were organised by the core group of the *Agenda-Treff* was explained to me with reference to important professional and family commitments (I 7-10). The person who was referred to by several others as 'the engine' (I 14-2) of the entire Future Search process had not been able to sustain his high level of commitment to the process, but nobody else seemed to have filled that vacuum.

In my interviews eleven months after the conference, I found that the majority of interviewees had no clue what the other action groups were doing (I 26-5, I 5-1, I 20-7, I 4-3, I 6-6, I 11-2), or indeed if anything was still happening as a result of the conference (I 2-3, I 5-1, I 11-2). As a steering group member reported:

*"The reason why everything is so ineffective is the complete lack of coordination. I mean there is nothing. We have to do it ourselves, from group to group. There is plenty of overlap, where we could work together. But if you don't write to somewhere or call somebody, how should it ever work? It simply doesn't come together."*

(I 10-3)

Interestingly enough, a lot of the conference participants I interviewed attributed their lack of knowledge about the conference follow-through to their own lack of initiative. A few said that if they were willing to attend more meetings, they would surely be better informed (I 26-2, I 20-7). Many interviewees thought that a reunion might be an important element to regain momentum and reconnect (I 11-2, I 2-6; I 29-8).

Action group	Status of the action groups 11 months after the conference
'Growing old in Olching'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the group had three meetings in the first eleven months after the conference (I 1-11)</li> <li>-an invitation sent out to about 100 social associations in Olching to join the group's efforts mobilised only two new interested parties who were close to the organisers</li> <li>-the group participated in the 'info-point' with a survey which assessed the citizens' awareness of existing associations and their wishes for new ones (I 1-11)</li> <li>-the group members were pre-occupied with a different joint project which had nothing to do with the Future Search Conference by late 1998</li> </ul>
Arts facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-one Future Search participant drew on her networks in order to mobilise the local arts community to join in with her effort to create a local arts centre (I 4-2)</li> <li>-the Council took ownership of a suitable building, but failed to provide the resources required to do up the run-down building for use as an arts facility (I 4-3, I 30-1)</li> </ul>

Action group	Status of the action groups 11 months after the conference
Traffic calming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-an influential group member carried the group's ideas on the High Street into the existing official working group on the future of the High Street, a fact which was supposedly reflected in the outcomes (I 2-23)</li> <li>-the group did not make any presentations to the citizen meetings as planned</li> <li>-the group had only two meetings (I 5-1)</li> </ul>
Organic farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the group tried to initiate a market where local farmers sell their produce but failed to recruit sufficient numbers of interested farmers (I 16-10)</li> <li>-the group compiled a list of local farmers which sell produce from their farms, but never published this list (I 6-5)</li> <li>-the group designed a questionnaire survey to local farmers to explore ecological and regional farming issues, but could not agree on the terms (I 6-3)</li> <li>-the group was close to dissolving by late 1998 (I 16-1)</li> </ul>
Renewable energies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the group organised a public talk for the heads of all local schools where teaching materials on energy saving were introduced, but only 2 heads of school attended (I 26-1, I 23-10)</li> <li>-one group member organised a display of solar panels and brochures for the info-point in collaboration with a local business (I 12-11, I 23-10)</li> <li>-this group member also initiated the sale of booklets on energy saving in a number of local shops (I 23-10), wrote energy guidelines for the Council (which were not adopted)(I 23-11&amp;12, I 30-1) and initiated a talk on renewable fuels in cooperation with the adult education institute (I 23-10)</li> <li>-two active group members struggled to keep the others interested (I 12-1)</li> </ul>
Open youth work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-early on, the group doubled its membership as a result of word of mouth (I 10-1)</li> <li>-the group resisted the attempt undertaken by one of its members to instrumentalise the group against the existing youth club (I 8-1)</li> <li>-the group participated in the 'info-point' with a youth coffee shop display</li> <li>-the group had not secured a self-managed meeting room for youths yet, but had checked out the option of buying an old railway coach (I 20-2, I 10-1) or securing a room in the Rosstall building of which the Council had recently taken ownership (I 8-1)</li> <li>-the idea of a youth advisory panel was postponed to a later point in time (I 20-1)</li> <li>-group turned into a formal association called 'TROJA – Treffpunkt Offene Jugendarbeit Olching e.V.' (SZ-FNN 07.02.00)</li> </ul>
Strengthened citizen participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the group held its first meeting 11 months after the conference (NP O-231198)</li> <li>-the Mayor had pursued some issues on his own, for example connecting the Council to the internet and hosting an open day in the town hall</li> <li>-the Mayor had let the media know that he intended to host a number of citizen gatherings on hot topics like the High Street and that he hoped to host a follow-up conference to the Future Search</li> <li>-the other group members saw their role in monitoring the Mayor's progress</li> </ul>

**Table 7.5 : Status of the action groups 11 months after the Olching Future Search Conference**

Source: my research



### *Delayed, half-hearted Council action on Future Search outcomes*

The conference outcomes entered the formal decision-making process of the Council no earlier than nine months after the conference via the Committee for Planning, Environment and Economic Development. The motion which had been prepared by the administration for the Committee started off by acknowledging the work of the participants of the Future Search Conference and by expressing overall support for the follow-through of the conference outcomes. It suggested that the conference outcomes should be assigned to a department each, which would be responsible for investigating the status quo in the area of the measures suggested by the conference, for proposing a time frame and order for the implementation of the conference aims, for estimating the costs of the suggested measures and for assessing the possibility of providing finance from the Council budget and finally for assessing the available staff time. Each department would be expected to act as liaison for one or a number of action groups and expected to engage in dialogue with the group(s). The results of this consultation were to be reported back to the Council for further discussion and decision-making (Gemeinde Olching 1998a).

Strong resistance from the Conservatives meant that three major changes were made to the text which was voted upon. First of all, the passage on the Council expressing support for the follow-through of the conference outcomes was deleted, because the Conservatives argued that not all aims listed by the conference were supported by them, quite a few were actually problematic. The Conservatives added a passage which says that they see a number of problems in the way of implementing a couple of the conference aims. Finally, a half-sentence was added which commits the administration to work on the Future Search issues only to the extent that it does not crowd out any of their pre-existing duties (Gemeinde Olching 1998a, MM-FFB 26./27.09.98, SZ-FFB NN 26./27.09.98). Watered down that far, a number of interviewees agreed with members of the Conservative party who were quoted to have said they thought that this meant that the administration would do nothing at all (I 7-6). At the time of my interviews, the Council officials had just started to work on their assigned subject area (according to the Committee vote discussed above) and had not yet entered into dialogue with the groups, most of which in the meantime had stopped having regular meetings (I 19-8).

### *Defensiveness of the Council*

Throughout all interviews, there was a single explanation given to me for the unwillingness of the Council to engage with the outcomes of the Future Search Conference: defensiveness. Ignoring the conference outcomes and undermining their legitimacy seemed to be the chosen strategy to avoid having to share power with the conference participants and organisers. There seemed to be also an element of hardcore realism and refusal to look beyond obstacles to action. A councillor who participated in the conference summarised the reaction of his peers in the following way:

*"I notice a certain resistance of the Council. They don't want to allow others to push them from the outside. Therefore, the Future Search Conference runs in parallel and maybe even somehow into limbo, when you look at it that way." (I 5-2)*

*"Now it looks more like this: 'Help, a major conference ! Now I will have to expect a pile of suggestions, I will be confronted with lots of stuff !' So it's a quite defensive position." (I 5-15)*

Even those councillors most sympathetic to the concept of the Future Search Conference and citizen participation in general, were disappointed if not hurt by not having been selected as a participant or at least influenced the selection of the participants.

*"A lot of it is hurt pride - they would have liked to participate themselves or at least to select who participates, I am sure that is an element in all that." (I 12-14)*

The councillors were said to feel threatened by the sudden appearance of a new citizen formation which made claims to their territory and to a competence which the councillors located firmly with themselves (I 22-2). A conference participant from the agricultural sector who had been in touch with the Conservative party reported:

*"One [councillor] held the view that it [the conference] inhibits the work of the Council. He held the view that the experts who should learn their way into these issues are the elected councillors. If individual interest groups now start to steer in very different directions, the Council will be inhibited in pursuing their aims on the basis of their long-term experience." (I 6-2)*

Somehow, the role of the Council and the councillors seemed to be shaken by the appearance of the Future Search Conference. However, the councillors who participated in the conference emphasized that there was no doubt that the elected representatives were the ones who would have to take the final decision and to be held accountable:

*"Somehow, there is a huge difference being made between elected representatives and somehow selected people. I mean, this difference remains, the Council keeps the final decision about municipal issues, and I don't think anyone has doubted that at all. It's just that one wants some influence on this process." (I 12-14)*

#### *Reasons for the steering group to act 'behind the back of the Council'*

If so much of the Council's resistance is down to their defensiveness of not having been included in the conference itself or at the preparation stages, the question remains why the steering group chose to keep the Council away from its activities. The reason given to me by the majority of steering group members was their strong belief that the Council would have prevented or eternally delayed the Future Search Conference if they had been given any influence on this project.

*"It was quite obvious, that we did it somehow behind the back of the Council. Our starting point was, that if we involve them, it [the conference] won't happen. Now we are paying the price for that. Still, I don't think that*

*we were wrong in our judgement. I think we all still believe that it [the conference] wouldn't have happened otherwise. It was a conscious risk. However, it was an absolute failure on our part that we didn't have the energy to work through the implications of that path." (I 7-10)*

Only one steering group member thought that given the tremendous obstacle of a Council hostile to the conference outcomes, that maybe it would have been worth involving the councillors from early onwards, even if it would have meant a lot of effort back then.

*"Some are constantly moaning, slowing others down, criticising. And the energy which is now required to cope with all that, we should have invested in a process TOGETHER with them. I am afraid that wasn't very intelligent. My feeling is: we insisted on our principles, we said, it will have to work without them, it's for the citizens after all. But we underestimated how politics works in Bavaria, how they are in control of the power switch." (I 23-2)*

#### *Party-political reasons for opposing the Future Search outcomes*

However, there was also evidence of party-political issues keeping especially the Conservatives from applauding the conference and its outputs. First of all, in Olching, Agenda 21 was still considered very much a Green issue (as opposed to wider Bavaria, where the Conservatives are very active in that field) (I 5-5). Many of the conference outcomes were extremely close to what is usually found in Green election manifestos, as some conference organisers admitted (I25-1). In addition, the Mayor declared at the press conference after the Future Search Conference that the outcomes equalled an "election manifesto free from ideology" for all citizens of Olching (MM-FFB Tagblatt 19.01.1998). Because the Mayor is a member of a voters' association which strongly rejects established party structures and ideologies, the Conservatives seemed to recognise clear party-political interests attached to the promotion of the Future Search Conference and its outcomes (I 7-4&8). This was also true for the proposals made by one action group, the leader of which was a councillor and member of the voters' association. This councillor was accused of using the group for her purposes (I 19a-2).

I conclude that a lot of the Council's resistance was mostly due to councillors' defensiveness. The Future Search Conference was perceived as a threat in that citizens were making claims to the councillors' territory and supposed area of supreme expertise, while deliberately excluding councillors. Secondly, the conference outcomes were politically contested.

#### *Effective outreach*

Another criterion for the success of the Future Search Conference as put forward by those with a stake in it was that the conference results should reach the wider public. A precondition for this outreach is a high profile of the Future Search Conference in the local media, including explicit reference to the conference results. As well, it was hoped that the conference would set an example for other local authorities in Germany and be portrayed that way in the

media. Moreover, those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference were hoping that the conference participants would disseminate the conference results into their own organisations, and recruit new members for the follow-through process.

The steering group of Olching's Future Search Conference went public with its plan to host the conference as early as one year before the event took place. Half a year before the conference took place, the event became a highly politicised issue and the local media eagerly picked up on the local 'scandal' that a number of very vocal councillors felt excluded from the event. Overall, more than 17 items were published prior to the conference, and 9 directly afterwards, including a few items in a regional section of a national newspaper. The vast majority of articles were very enthusiastic about the conference process, often mirroring closely the press releases and press conferences held by the conference organisers. One member of the steering group participated in a radio talk show about the Rio follow-through process and another conference participant, who works as a journalist, produced a radio clip with original sound bites from the conference.

The opportunity to get national recognition as the first Future Search Conference applied in a Local Agenda 21 process in Germany was missed, because the steering group did not want the additional pressure of having to live up to the expectations raised by national newspapers and therefore chose not to invite them to witness the conference. The town of Viersen in North-Rhine-Westphalia conducted a Future Search Conference half a year later and won an award by the German President (*Bundespräsident*) for its efforts. The Olching Future Search remains much less known and only the heading in one of the local papers acknowledged the nation-wide significance of the Olching conference: '*Olching sets standards for Germany*' (FNN 19.01.1998).

The key outreach activity after the conference was the so-called 'info-point'. The 'info-point' was a stall which carried displays about the Future Search Conference and Local Agenda 21. It was manned every Saturday morning between May and July 1998 to raise awareness on one particular aspect of the conference outcomes or Agenda 21 in general. This activity was initiated and coordinated by the members of the local Agenda-Treff ('Agendatreff'), who prepared the displays for three mornings and organised a survey competition with prizes donated by local shops (I 12-10). The survey competition asked demanding questions about Local Agenda 21 and turned out to be too difficult for by-passers. The organisers helped a number of people to fill it in, in order to recruit enough people to distribute all the prizes (I 16-6&7).

Despite the widespread publicity about the Future Search Conference, there was extremely little interest in it from the local population. There had been no inquiries about the Future Search Conference either in the town hall or in the adult education institute (I 10-1, I 10-10). Most interviewees reckoned that the majority of local residents still did not know about Agenda 21 and Future Search (I 27-5, 24-1). Members of the steering group thought the majority of citizens did not care about the issue (I 27-6), and that things had to get a lot worse before

they would start to take notice of activities to improve local and global conditions (I 23-12). One interviewee thought that the lack of interest of the local population could be explained by the fact that the conference was 'ahead of its time' (I 23-1). One of them said that people nowadays were drowning in information and would therefore not take notice of the conference, unless it was mentioned repeatedly and persistently (I 27-5). The conference initiators thought that the traditional ways of feeding information to people - paper-based or as formal presentations - were insufficient in raising people's interest and that new and more creative ways of getting a message across were required (I 10-7&8,

I 12-10, I 12-12, I 1-2). Conference participants from diverse stakeholder groups reported that it had been similarly tough to raise interest for the Future Search Conference in their organisations (I 27-5, I 18-3, I 16-14, I 28-24) or in their private circles (I 16-14, I 6-1).

An account of the conference experience and its outcomes was offered to the councillors (and the wider public) in an open meeting one hour before a formal Council session three months after the conference (MM-FFB 6.4.98). Two members of the steering group, two conference participants and the Mayor presented what the conference had meant to them and what some of the outcomes were (MM-FFB 6.4.98, I 7-5). The meeting was attended by around forty people, most of whom had had something to do with the Future Search Conference in the past. However, this meeting left no room for discussion.

While a multiplier effect was achieved by some of the action groups, others failed despite systematic efforts. Most successful was the youth action group which managed to enrol about six permanent new members in working to create a self-managed meeting space for youth. Among these new members were a number of high school students who had heard about the project by word of mouth (I 24-2, I 10-1), the councillor responsible for arts issues (I 8-1) and the manager of the existing youth club (I 24-3). The leader of the arts facility group managed to recruit all the relevant local arts people into the group (I 4-1). In this recruitment, the person could draw on a network of contacts which went back to anti-nuclear protests in the 1980s (I 4-1). The other action groups failed to enrol new members.

In February 2000, two years after the Future Search Conference, a follow-up conference was hosted in Olching which invited whoever was interested by open invitation. Seventy participants attended the one-day event, a third of whom had been at the original Future Search Conference. This event included some of the loudest opponents of the Future Search process, which must be regarded as an achievement. The conference reviewed what had been achieved and made new short-term action plans. Again, there was a lot of favourable publicity about this event in the local media (SZ-FNN 07.02.00; MM-FTB 07.02.00; SZ-FNN 08.02.00).

I conclude that the Olching Future Search Conference was accompanied by excellent publicity in the local media. Moreover, a weekly stall was held in the High Street in spring 1998 and a follow-up conference with open invitation hosted in February 2000 reached out to the wider public. Two of the action

groups managed to recruit new members to support their efforts. Nevertheless, the wider public was still thought to be largely ignorant about the Future Search process.

### *Local Agenda 21 strengthened*

Those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference wanted it to be the starting point of a long-term Local Agenda 21 process. It was hoped that the participants would be inspired to make changes in their own behaviour patterns to encourage more sustainability and to carry the concept of Local Agenda 21 pro-actively into their organisations. It was hoped that the Council would take on a leadership role with regards to Local Agenda 21 and vote in favour of starting a Local Agenda 21 process in Olching. Eventually, those with a stake in the conference hoped that there would be visible change towards more sustainability in Olching as a result of the Local Agenda 21 process.

The simple fact that the Future Search Conference took place with such a broad range of participants (see section 7.3) is a milestone in Olching's Local Agenda 21 process. Before the conference, Agenda 21 was dealt with by a small and rather isolated group of environmentalists and green party members. The fact that action groups were formed (see section 7.3.6) which intended to continue with their work after the conference meant that more hands were actively contributing to Local Agenda 21. However, it is only partly true that the conference participants developed a better understanding of Local Agenda 21 during the conference. Some participants complained and the organisers admitted, that *"the word Agenda was rarely dropped during the conference"* (FG 1-16, I 16-11).

Eleven months after the conference, I found a majority of interviewees well-informed about Local Agenda 21, strikingly not only conference participants (I 20-9, I 23-2, I 18-5, I 24-4, I 27-12), but also Council officers and councillors (I 8-10, I 15-2&9, I 19-9). A majority referred in one way or another to the need to preserve resources for future generations (I 15-2&9, I 27-12, I 19-9, I 8-10, I 23-2, I 20-9, I 18-5). One person emphasized the process-character of Local Agenda 21 (I 24-4), and two thought it was fundamentally about more humane ways of living together (I 1-3, I 2-6). Apart from a few exceptions, I found no evidence that participants had altered their personal behaviour as a result or that they had carried Local Agenda 21 into their organisations.

Steering group members showed themselves impressed or surprised that social issues were much more popular at the conference than the environment (FG 1-13, FG 2-16). This was even more so as they were aware that *"if you go out there and ask somebody (about Local Agenda 21) they say it's about the environment full stop, the environment only."* (FG 1-20) However, one participant argued that the conference could not claim to make a contribution to the local implementation of the Rio Earth Summit as long as it didn't address the environmental issues in a serious way. He criticised that the conference results were all about *"how to make life in Olching even more pleasant"* (FG 1-17). A councillor who did not participate in the conference was reported to have said

that the conference had "produced the same old egoisms, and failed to address the subject area" (I 7-5). In the interviews, the environmentalists in particular claimed that a Local Agenda 21 based on the conference results would fail to meet the wider aims of Agenda 21 (I 18-2, I 7-5). When probed about this criticism, members of the steering group said they nevertheless preferred to work with others on less radical aims instead of remaining isolated in their green corner with demands that the citizens are simply not willing to support (FG 1-17).

The group which had initiated the Future Search Conference, kept meeting as 'Agenda-Treff'. The group members have made a major contribution to the conference follow-through process by organising the already discussed 'info-point' (see section 7.4.2.3). The 'info-point' offered to the action groups an opportunity to crystallize their ideas for their presentation at the 'info-point'. Besides organising all the logistics for the 'info-point' (I 12-11), the Agenda-Treff was working on a booklet to guide consumers to places which offer reparation of household items (I 1-2, I 24-5, I 10-4). Moreover, one member was preparing an exhibition with local artists on Agenda 21 related issues (I 1-4).

Olching's Council did not take a vote on starting a Local Agenda 21 process until January 1999, one year after the Future Search Conference. At that time, it had become known that the Bavarian state government was offering financial support to local authorities for their Local Agenda 21 processes upon the condition that the Council had declared its intention of engaging in a process leading to a Local Agenda 21 document. Given the financial incentive, there was little resistance to supporting a Local Agenda 21 process in general - given that the contents was still entirely up for grabs (I 19a-2, I 10-8). While a majority of interviewees thought that such a public statement of support for the Local Agenda 21 process was highly desirable (I 13-9), a few feared that such a 'token' vote would not carry the process very far (I 7-14).

One person in the Council administration reported that Agenda 21 activities were regarded as an additional workload by most of their colleagues and therefore not exactly welcomed. Also the shape in which Local Agenda 21 related issues tended to come usually crossed the well-defined departmentalism of the Council administration and required even further effort simply to agree on responsibilities (I 18-5&6).

*"Our administrative structures are dominated by hierarchies, departmentalism and competencies. All this inhibits creativity, spontaneity. ... in the end it comes close to a blinker mentality, an extremely narrow field of view... There is a lack of motivation to show more commitment than required, to make contributions, to invest own thought, because all this is perceived as putting a spanner in their works, it annoys the others, it creates tension, it creates costs." (I 18-5&6)*

Despite the good publicity about the Future Search Conference, the focus group participants agreed that most likely out of the 22,000 local people, 21,500 had never heard about Agenda 21 (FG 1-17). And even if they read about the

Future Search Conference, they were likely to dismiss it as "*a talking shop of the same old environmentalists*" and of no relevance for themselves (FG 1-17).

I conclude that Local Agenda 21 in Olching was significantly strengthened as a result of the Future Search Conference. Despite the fact that Agenda 21 was hardly mentioned at the conference itself, all of my interviewees were well-informed about the concept and its implications. A wide range of sectors was involved in Local Agenda 21 as a result of the conference. However, some felt that environmental demands lacked radicalism as a result. The Council gave up its stubborn opposition and took a positive vote on Local Agenda 21 when it became clear that an additional grant could be secured for the Future Search Conference that way. However, the wider public was still thought to be largely ignorant of the concept and its implications.

### *Summary*

The outcomes of the Olching Future Search Conference were disappointing for many. The painfully agreed upon common ground statement was considered of little use because it lacked detail to be meaningful, left financial considerations unconsidered and failed to identify clear priorities to guide decision-making in times of limited resources. The action groups struggled along without support from the Council and without an effective follow-up coordination. Two years after the Future Search Conference, only the youth action group and the arts facility group were still fighting for a room, while the other groups had folded without having achieved anything tangible apart from holding further meetings. There was also no evidence of policy changes in the Council as a result of the Future Search Conference.

The Future Search Conference suffered a serious backlash because a majority of councillors who had felt 'excluded' from the event kept ignoring or discrediting the conference. However, it was considered a first important step, that by autumn 1998, the Mayor had involved all heads of service in a thorough assessment of how the outcomes of the Future Search Conference could be supported by the Council. Moreover, the Council surprisingly took a vote in January 1999 to engage in a Local Agenda 21 process. This however was more a result of a financial incentive from the Bavarian Environment Ministry than of persuasion by the Local Agenda 21 activists. The follow-up conference held in February 2000 was even attended by some of the Future Search Conference's most vocal opponents – a fact which may promise slow integration of 'excluded' councillors.

The Olching Future Search Conference contributed in a number of ways to the publicity about Local Agenda 21 in Olching. First of all, the excellent media coverage of the conference planning, event and the follow-up conference made it known to all those interested that a Local Agenda 21 process was on its way and was seeking further supporters. Secondly, a weekly stall 'info-point' in the High Street in spring 1998 sought the attention of shoppers for a number of Local Agenda 21 issues. The 'info-point' also provided focus for the action groups, half of which participated in the series with a display. Nevertheless, the



wider population was still thought to be rather ignorant of the Future Search Conference and Local Agenda 21 and more was to be done to reach them.

Outcome criteria	Rating	Comments
4. consensus about coherent, innovative vision	-	-ideal future groups presented many innovative ideas, a few of which translated into common ground statements -lack of detail to be meaningful, financial implications left unconsidered -no clear priorities to guide decision-making about limited resources
5. action groups deliver	0	-half of the action groups contributed a display to the weekly stall 'info-point' between May and June 1998 -the youth group and the arts facility group were still active to secure a room for their purposes, while most other groups were dissolving -no impact on the Council's policy making -lack of effective follow-up coordination meant that nobody had an overview what the other action groups were doing and if they needed support
6. effective outreach	+	-the Future Search Conference and its follow-up event received excellent media coverage – already in the planning stages -two action groups successfully recruited new members to support their efforts -a weekly stall in the High Street in spring 1998 and a follow-up conference in February 2000 reached out to the public -there were no inquiries about the Future Search Conference and the local population at large was thought to be ignorant of the FSC process
7. Local Agenda 21 strengthened	+	-Local Agenda 21 was hardly mentioned at the conference, nevertheless conference participants were well informed -there was support from a wide range of sectors for Local Agenda 21, but few radical environmental demands as a result -Council took a vote to engage in a Local Agenda 21 process -the wider population was still thought to be ignorant of Local Agenda 21

**Table 7.6 : Evaluation of the Olching Future Search Conference –**

**Part 2 : Outcome criteria**

Source: my data

**7.4.3 Capacity building criteria**

**Networking**

Those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference hoped that the event would improve local social networks. It was hoped that new contacts between conference participants would form, which would be a basis for collaboration in the future. It was also hoped that the first signs of joint initiatives and co-operation across stakeholder group boundaries could be identified eleven months after the conference.

Without prompting in that direction, more than a third of the questionnaire respondents listed as a major gain from the conference the fact that they had made new contacts they valued (Q-5). There was a particular emphasis on the value of the diverse backgrounds of the people at the conference in focus group discussions with conference participants. Participants from diverse sectors enjoyed the work in mixed small groups which gave them an opportunity to meet people they do not usually come across or even if they do, do not get a chance to talk to (FG 3-12, FG 2-19, FG 2-26, I 26-3, I 18-3, I 22-6, I 12-12, I 20-10). The conference was valued as an opportunity to connect with people whom one had wanted to meet for some time but had never an excuse to approach.

*"In general, there is this danger, and it's quite real, to move around in closed circles of very homogenous people. Where you work and your private circle is usually people who got similar views, where the differences are not very big and also the topics, that are raised. Even if some circles actually discuss a lot with each other, it tends to be always the same people with the same attitudes or at least with similar ones."*

(FG 1-12)

A majority of interviewees gave examples of their new contacts. On a very basic level, participants enjoyed the feeling that they found themselves greeting a lot more people in the streets, shops and public facilities (I 4-10, I 2-6).

*"The conversation between the citizens during such an event is absolutely useful. I met so many business people, who I can interact with differently in the future, when I appear in their shops...When we bump into each other, we say hi, how are you. Or when I go to the library to take out a book, the librarian [another conference participant] will say: 'How is your café [project from the conference] going?' And that kind of stuff. It's nice when you have a shared experience - and it was quite an experience !"* (I 2-6)

Secondly, a considerable number of conference participants and steering group members had crossed stakeholder group boundaries and given a talk to or sought an informal conversation with a group whose support they were seeking. The youth group reported that it had approached the young Conservatives (I 24-3), a farmer had given a public talk in the Local Agenda 21 series of the Adult Education Institute about the difficult situation of German farmers (I 6-9&10) and a steering group member had sought an informal discussion with the local Conservative party about the Future Search follow-through process (I 7-4).

Even more impressive however was the number of examples of actual collaboration and joint initiatives. A business man reported that a suggestion made to him at a Local Agenda 21 meeting had prompted him to introduce regionally grown foods onto the shelves of his store (I 22-3). The Adult Education Institute, the Church Academy and the local Women's Forum reported that the extent of their collaboration in the form of joint events and joint advertising had increased as a result of the conference (I 11-1). Members of the church reported that their contacts to the Association of Parents of Disabled

Children had been revived as a result of the conference. Moreover, the church had agreed to contribute a section called 'religious book' and a section targeting pensioners to the local public library (I 11-1). One conference participant had launched a business joint-venture with another participant's husband on solar energy, which however failed to be more than an ad-hoc initiative (I 26-2). An artist who participated in the conference met the head of a school as a result of conference follow-up events, and agreed to give an art performance at the school (I 12-17). Finally, one participant who also works as a journalist reported that she had used her conference contacts for her job (I 4-10&11). This is simply the range of examples given to me by the small number of conference participants I interviewed, so there is a high likelihood that much more than this has happened as a result of the conference.

I conclude that the conference was highly successful in building new and in reviving existing partnerships between conference participants, and that already a number of collaborations across stakeholder group boundaries have taken place as a result.

### *Learning*

Those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference aimed for the conference to facilitate cross-sectoral thinking and work. It was hoped that participants would be open-minded and leave their prejudices towards other sectors behind. The conference dialogue was supposed to facilitate a growing understanding between the diverse stakeholder groups as participants genuinely engage with those holding opposite views.

Participants agreed that over the duration of the conference their understanding of one another had grown (FG 2-25). Participants had realised that, fundamentally, all of them had similar needs and dreams (FG 2-25). Many participants agreed, that at the beginning of the conference, participants had been thinking "*in boxes*" (FG 2-25). I observed the 'business' stakeholder group at the opening of the conference and overheard somebody handing the job of time-keeping for the small group to the only employee at the table (the others had their own business):

*"You will be the time-keeper, because you are an employee, and they are very exact about time."* (NP O-1)

Even in the focus group discussion, a participant referred to "*the businesswoman*" who obviously "*looks at things from an economic angle, like who will pay for that*", but showed himself impressed that she had fully supported their group's scenario about a 'Social Week' (FG 3-11). The businesswoman herself said that she had been surprised how prejudiced people had been towards her at the conference and how much she had struggled to make them understand that if someone was only concerned about their self-interests they would be at the wrong conference (FG 2-22). A number of other conference participants had similar experiences of breaking through prejudices that were held against them. A member of the Green Party said:

*"I think a few people who I was sharing a table with and with whom I discussed a lot, will take me more seriously from now on, because they have realised that it is not my aim to get everybody to wear nose rings."*  
(I 4-10)

By listening carefully to others, focus group participants said they had begun to understand why others perceive issues differently (FG 2-17, FG 3-12). This fact was echoed in four written comments in the conference questionnaire. Having to explain one's own point of view to people likely to challenge the basic assumptions on which it is based was considered as *"a practical training for life"* (FG 3-12). The mixed small group I observed in the phase on future visions discovered many unexpected disagreements about what was desirable and what wasn't (NP O-7). While some wanted to centralise the schools, others wanted primary schools to be more neighbourhood based. While some wanted the number of local residents to grow, others preferred to keep the population constant. Some wanted to ban genetic engineering completely, while others wanted to see it limited to medical applications or to require the industry to impose some self-constraints on its research activities. One person said that it was a powerful way of learning (FG 2-25) to sit at a table with such diverse people and hear directly from them, what problems they are facing - things you usually only read about in the papers (FG 3-21). It was possible to relate in an emotional way to the issues brought up, they were no longer abstract and far away (FG 1-13, FG 3-21).

Participants also wrote they had 'widened their horizon' (Q-16) (2x) and 'gained new insights' (Q-3) (7x) in interesting conversations with others. They mentioned that the complex links and interdependencies of issues had become a lot more transparent to them. They wrote they had gained an overview of the lines of debate surrounding certain contested issues. In the later interviews, one participant who was a proponent of pedestrianising the high street said that the conference made him aware of the issue of deliveries to the shops which would then need to be resolved (FG 3-13). Representatives of the police and of the agricultural sector reported that their fellow conference participants had been surprisingly keen to learn more about their sectors' perspective and needs (I 6-4, I 2-3).

I conclude that participants enjoyed learning from people they would not normally come across. As a result of listening carefully to each other participants reported that they had found their taken-for-granted assumptions challenged and had to let go of some prejudices.

### ***Building trust and community spirit***

Those with a stake in the success of the Future Search Conference hoped that the event would make a contribution to building and strengthening trust between the elected representatives and the citizens. It was hoped that the conference would set an example for the more frequent application of similarly innovative tools of citizen participation for other occasions. Those with a stake in the

Future Search Conference hoped that the conference would generate community spirit and increase the participants' sense of efficacy.

In my interviews 11 months after the conference, I could still get a sense that the conference had been a precious experience for many participants. Despite the fact that little seemed to have happened on the ground since the conference, people's faces lit up when they started to talk about the conference as an important 'experience'. The atmosphere at the conference, and especially at the end of it was unanimously described by the interviewees as "euphoria" (I 14-11, I 10-12), and participants said they enjoyed it more and more the longer it went on (I 2-3). Three respondents to the questionnaire wrote they had lots of fun (Q-5). Six characterised the conference climate as filled with a "spirit of commonality" and a "sense of belonging" (Q-5) and seven more wrote that the conference climate had been very relaxed and pleasant. Even the newspapers referred to a "frightening enthusiasm" which the reporter picked up at the press conference (I 12-1).

Several participants wrote that the conference made them realise that they were not the only ones who care about the local community and its future and that as a result, they were now more hopeful about their capacity to bring about change (Q-2B). Similar remarks were made in the focus group sessions, where participants emphasized that the knowledge that others cared as well had reinforced their own willingness to make a contribution as part of their job or in a voluntary capacity (FG 3-16). As one concluded: "Many are ready to lend a hand." (FG 1-1) Again, someone said they enjoyed feeling part of a bigger whole and realised that with joined forces, the conference participants would be able to make a huge difference locally (FG 1-12). Also, people's sense of belonging to Olching increased. (FG 1-12).

The simple fact that the Future Search Conference took place has proved that there are enough motivated citizens who would like to be consulted on local issues in a meaningful way. This in turn has forced councillors hostile to citizen participation to lower their critical voices as a fellow councillor reported (I 10-9). One councillor who participated in the conference thought that the Future Search Conference had made an important statement to his colleagues:

*"It [the conference] is an example that the citizens care about their municipality, a few at least - quite a number out of these 64 or 62, who met." (I 29-8)*

In the year since the Future Search Conference, there was evidence of a few more cases of citizen participation in Council matters, however none as innovative as the Future Search Conference. In one of the three towns of the municipality, an extraordinary public meeting of the citizenry had been called to discuss the proposed new Local Plan, after the Council had been bombarded with letters of complaint (I 18-4, I 19-1&2).

The fact that the Mayor considered the Future Search format for a desired citizen participation in the design of a traffic scheme for the High Street was regarded as a sign that the Future Search Conference on Local Agenda 21 had succeeded in setting an example. A lot of interviewees referred to this planned

citizen participation scheme for the High Street as an indication of progress (I 7-9, I 27-8, I 23-5, I 13-8, I 25-1, I 8-7). While it was still open how the Council would vote on that particular proposal, there seemed to be a lot less resistance to the general idea of consulting the citizens on the High Street traffic scheme than in the past:

*"There was some resistance to consulting the citizenry with regards to the High Street question, but there were few who dared to vote against it. The recommendation was that the Mayor should find a suitable format for that participation process, and nobody dared to vote against that. The decision has been taken with a far greater majority than 1,5 or 2 years ago. That was a surprise for everyone. [Interviewer: But wasn't that just a tactical victory of the Mayor? Didn't he avoid giving them an opportunity to vote on this matter?] They would not have dared to object it."* (I 7-15) (male, steering group member)

However, the majority of conference participants showed themselves disappointed by the lack of support from the Council for the outcomes of the Future Search Conference. The subsequent media reports about these councillors' critique of the Future Search outcomes contributed to the Council's image of resisting citizen initiative. One commentator of a local paper concluded:

*"Synergism is more than a fashionable expression. Precondition for the successful collaboration of forces, which support each other, is that preserving hierarchies is not made a priority issue. After this school-masterly attack on the Future Search Conference, Olching may praise itself for having delivered a model, which is now waiting for its successful implementation elsewhere."* (SZ-FFB 26./27.09.98:5, my translation)

I conclude that participants experienced a strong sense of community and that their sense of belonging to Olching increased as a result of the conference. The simple fact that the Future Search Conference has successfully taken place has turned it into an established method for citizen participation in Olching. However, the hostile reaction of a number of councillors did not contribute to the building of trust.

### **Summary**

I conclude that the Olching Future Search experience was cherished by the participants more than anything else for the 'intangible' benefits on the capacity building front. All participants enjoyed meeting such a broad cross-section of local stakeholders and reported that they had made 'valuable contacts' across stakeholder boundaries as a result. I came across several examples where participants had engaged in joint projects on a one-to-one basis with other participants as a result of the Future Search Conference. Participants reported that the diverse views put forward by other participants in the course of the conference made them question taken-for-granted assumptions and all thought that the level of prejudices held against each other had been reduced as a result of working with each other. Participants were excited to discover that they were

not the only ones who cared about the local community and as a result, experienced a community spirit and a stronger sense of belonging locally.

The fact that the Future Search Conference had taken place successfully had been a living demonstration to the Council that there were sufficient numbers of citizens who desire to be involved in local decision-making and Council opposition to citizen participation in general has weakened as a result. The Future Search design as such enjoys a good reputation and has been considered for a citizen participation exercise around the hot topic of the future of the High Street. To the disappointment of the conference organisers, the trust between Council and citizenry has not improved as a result of the conference. The fact that a number of councillors kept discrediting the Future Search wherever they could seemed to demonstrate to the organisers that the Council was not open to citizen initiative outside the confines of the councillors' direct control.

Capacity building criteria	Rating	Comments
8. networking	++	-participants made valuable contacts across stakeholder boundaries or revived existing ones -participants reported they now greet more people in public places -quite a few participants had carried out joint projects with others on a one-to-one basis
9. learning	+	-participants found their taken-for-granted assumptions challenged by participants with a different perspective -participants let go of some of their prejudices -participants reported they 'widened their horizon' in conversations with other participants
10. building trust and community spirit	+	-the hostility some councillors developed against the FSC caused great disappointment amongst the conference organisers and participants -FSC as a participation method enjoyed a good reputation -participants reported a strong sense of community and a sense of belonging

**Table 7.7 : Evaluation of the Olching Future Search Conference –**

**Part 3: Capacity building criteria**

Source: my data

## 7.5 Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the Olching case study, its origins and its embeddedness in the wider policy context of Local Agenda 21 in Germany. I have described how the initiative for a Local Agenda 21 process in Olching originated from the non-governmental sector, as is typical for most of Germany's Local Agenda 21 processes. The situation in Olching was more tricky than elsewhere however, because the Council had already postponed and then 'forgotten' to take a decision on a Local Agenda 21 in 1994 with the excuse that it would be wiser to wait until more scientific information was available on how best to do a Local Agenda 21 process. The bottom-up initiators of Olching's Local Agenda 21 process therefore decided to embark on the risky

strategy of organising a Future Search Conference without asking for the official permission or support of the Council. They feared that their efforts would be immediately brought to a halt if they did.

However, the lack of Council support became one of the major problems for the organisers and the follow-up process at large. Half a year before the Future Search Conference, after the invitations to the conference had been sent out, the majority of councillors felt deliberately excluded, because only one member of each party was invited. The 'excluded' councillors' pride was hurt and subsequently they either ignored or actively discredited the Future Search Conference as a result. One of the arguments launched against the conference was that it had gathered no more than a self-selected group of local activists and could therefore by no means be considered representative of the population at large. When a Council vote was taken nine months after the Future Search Conference on the status the Council should give to the conference outcomes, the majority of councillors insisted that Council staff should only be allowed to spend time on conference outcomes as long as their core duties were not impaired by doing so. This meant that support from the Council administration would be a more or less voluntary activity. There was no evidence at that time, that any Council policies had changed as a result of the Future Search Conference. A surprising ray of hope was the Council's vote to engage officially in a Local Agenda 21 process, which was taken in January 1999 as a direct result of a financial incentive provided by the Bavarian Department of the Environment.

The Future Search Conference itself, which took place on 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> January 1998, was considered a success by all participants. As my evaluation along the process criteria shows, all participants agreed that the Future Search format had provided an effective framework for constructive work. The conference was praised for bringing together local activists from a broad range of organisations and sectors most of whom had not met before, and for allowing them to discover their commonalities. Participants thought that the diversity of views had been well respected, but some complained that the 'intellectuals' had contributed more, simply because they had more experience thinking about local politics. Participants found being treated as experts in their own right encouraging, but also a challenge. For example during the time lines exercise, a number of participants experienced a panic of not being able to remember anything, while many enjoyed digging in the past and gained new insights from that.

As my review of the participants' experience of the Future Search Conference shows, a majority of participants thought that too much time was spent on the past (i.e. time lines). The mind map of present trends was experienced as overwhelming and disempowering by some participants, while the prouds and sorries session generated solid pride for some participants. At the same time, there was a lot of satisfaction that all of Olching's key issues had been put on the table in the first three conference sessions. The challenge of performing a piece of drama together with a group of strangers meant that participants suddenly had to let their defences drop and really be there for each other and with each other.



The striking similarities in the drama performances were a real surprise for most conference participants and made them feel closer to each other.

The process by which the common ground statement was derived was subject of much criticism and was experienced as unfair by conference participants. Participants agreed that there had not been enough time to clarify and discuss and that as a result, some important items had been cancelled from the common ground on the basis of 'unqualified' vetos. Participants reacted with anger and frustration and many felt that the common ground had shrunk their inspiring visions to the 'lowest common denominator'. The well-structured action planning phase was nevertheless considered the most useful phase of the conference, and some action groups pressed ahead with a real sense of urgency.

As my evaluation along the outcome criteria shows, Olching's Future Search failed to trigger tangible changes on the ground. The resulting common ground statement was considered to be of little use in guiding Council decision-making, because it lacked detail to be meaningful, and failed to identify clear priorities or suggest possible trade-offs. The action groups embarked on a number of ambitious projects, however all but two groups collapsed before anything tangible was achieved. The action groups also suffered from a lack of inter-group coordination, and as a result nobody had a sense of what the other groups were up to. The main achievement of most action groups was their contribution to a weekly stall held in the High Street in spring 1998 and spring 1999, in order to raise public awareness about Olching's Local Agenda 21 process. The excellent publicity which surrounded the Future Search Conference and its follow-up event in February 2000 also contributed to raising the profile of Local Agenda 21. Nevertheless, the population at large was still thought to remain largely ignorant of the Future Search Conference and the Local Agenda 21 process.

Despite the conference's failure to deliver outcomes, the Future Search was a valuable experience for most conference participants for other reasons. As my evaluation along the capacity building criteria has shown, participants were grateful for the 'valuable contacts' they made across stakeholder boundaries and several had engaged in joint projects with others on a one-to-one basis as a result of the Future Search Conference. Participants reported that the conference had widened their horizon as a result of interacting with participants who held views often quite different from their own. Participants felt very connected to their fellow participants as a result of performing a drama together and discovering the (unexpected) commonalities across all ideal future presentations.

The simple fact that the Future Search Conference took place successfully has not just given the Future Search method a good reputation, but has also made a clear statement that there are numerous local citizens who would welcome more involvement in local decision-making. As a result, the resistance many councillors have in the past launched against citizen participation has become a lot more subtle. The Mayor had already hosted a number of additional voluntary citizen gatherings since the Future Search, including the follow-up conference to the Future Search in February 2000.

## 7.6 Outlook

Olching's environmentalists have successfully employed the Future Search approach in order to win mainstream support for a Local Agenda 21 process in Olching. The prospect of getting reimbursed for the costs of the Future Search Conference by the Bavarian Department of the Environment convinced Olching's councillors to vote in favour of an official Local Agenda 21 process in January 1999 – to everybody's surprise. In spring 1999, the Mayor's proposal to host a follow-up conference to the Future Search Conference was endorsed unanimously by Olching Council (U2-3). This extent of Council support within just over a year after the Future Search Conference certainly gave Local Agenda 21 legitimacy within the Council. Nevertheless, there was no evidence of any policy change towards sustainable development or changed practice in the administration as a result of the Future Search Conference as of February 2000 (U2-1).

A second achievement was that the citizen participation in Local Agenda 21 could be sustained despite rather disappointing short-term results of the Future Search Conference. Since the well-attended one-day follow-up conference in February 2000 and the Mayor's announcement that such a one-day event should be held every six months from now on, it is clear, that the Future Search will not remain a one-off event. The follow-up conference gathered 70 people, including more than half of the former Future Search participants, one third of the local councillors (10) and many new faces, most of whom had been recruited because they had shown an interest in a follow-up conference (SZ-FNN 07.02.00a&b; MM-FTB 07.02.00).

As a result of the follow-up conference, there are again eight action groups with up to 14 committed members each, many of which are still pursuing aims which originate from the Future Search conference (SZ-FNN 07.02.00a&b; MM-FTB 07.02.00). The major progress achieved at the follow-up conference lies in the fact that the action proposals of most groups are very specific and include financial considerations and details about what sort of Council support is needed. The downside of this progress is that all action groups suddenly seem to rely heavily upon Council support. Half of the action groups produced drafts for Council motions which they wanted the Council to pass (U2-3).

The key problem with these motions is that most likely the Council will not be willing to commit sufficient resources to pay for all ideas and secondly, that some ideas put forward by the action groups are actually at odds with other action groups' ideas (U2-3). The working group on the economy for example proposed a location for a new business park in parts of a nature reserve, that the group on nature protection was aiming to expand. The future success of the Local Agenda 21 process depends crucially on how the Council will handle this challenge. A hostile reaction that tells the action groups off for failing to understand the need to prioritise and to make tough decisions between economic and environmental interests is likely to drastically increase *Politikverdrossenheit* (active distaste of politics and politicians) locally and to put off citizens (U2-3). The citizens might then continue to blame the lack of follow-up action from the

Future Search Conference on the Council, and the Council might continue to blame the incompetent citizens for their lack of insight into the requirements of policy-making. Both sides would feel self-righteous and nothing would change on the ground (U2-3).

In the best case, as I was told by a member of the steering group (U2-3), the Council would delegate the prioritising back to the next follow-up conference and expect the citizens to come up with trade-offs and clear priorities. In that case, a process of learning might take place amongst the active citizens, in that they will be able to empathise better with the tough choices the Council usually has to face (U2-3), choices with losers and winners. The Council would then vote in support of the revised clear priorities from the third follow-up conference. This best case scenario however was supposed to require major learning on the side of the Council and on the side of the citizens (U2-3), both of whom would need to break out of long-standing behaviour patterns.

Finally, the Future Search Conference and its follow-up process were reported to have created ever-growing local networks amongst committed people, which were functioning as a basis for mutual support - for public, professional and private purposes alike (U2-3). An interviewee thought that the real lever for change in Olching was in the difference the individual members of this local network around Local Agenda 21 were able to make with their everyday decision-making in their own organisations and professions (U2-4). The future success of Olching's Local Agenda 21 process will depend much upon these individuals' decisions to make a difference in their organisation or profession and to link this to a larger Local Agenda 21 process.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter is to make a link between the case study findings and the theories introduced in chapter 3 and 4 of this book. The first section will briefly summarise the implications for the Future Search design while making links to the concerns raised by Emery and Purser (1996). In the main part of the chapter, I will take the reader on a walk around the boundaries of the territory occupied by collaborative planning theory. In the course of this undertaking, the case study evidence presented in earlier chapters will be reviewed from a number of theoretical perspectives. I will begin the exploration from the centre ground and ask to what extent the investigated Future Search Conferences were successful in facilitating deliberation that matches the requirements of collaborative planning theory. This will include an assessment of the extent to which the Future Search Conference model can be considered successful in meeting the Habermasian criteria of fairness and competence of process as operationalised by Webler (1995).

The second part of this chapter will then enable us to gaze upon collaborative planning theory from adjacent land. A new pair of glasses is put on to assess the Future Search Conference process from a Foucauldian perspective. The aim of doing so is to investigate the extent to which participants were able to use the Future Search Conference as a tool to facilitate deliberation about their heartfelt concerns and needs. As this is rather difficult to do, the analysis will focus upon the many little instances of resistance to the conference method. In a fourth step, I will draw on theories of power in order to back my claim that power to implement the outcomes cannot be locked into the room. I will discuss the personalities, interests, institutional gaps, cultural gaps, central-local government relations and global interdependencies which are relevant to understanding the failure of each Future Search Conference to deliver tangible outcomes. For the conclusions, I will return to the centre ground and discuss the implications of these findings for theories of collaborative planning and for the practice of Future Search conferencing. The final section will briefly discuss the implications of this debate for Local Agenda 21.

#### **8.1 Implications for the Future Search design**

The aim of this section is to return to the debates about the Future Search design, which I have introduced in chapter 4, and to link those to the case study findings. Emery and Purser (1996) have challenged the Future Search design on a general level on three counts.

First, they have claimed that the fact that the Future Search Conference works with a fixed agenda bears the risk that the participants form a group without a well defined task. Emery and Purser have claimed that the fixed agenda - which they consider as a mixed mode between truly democratic and hierarchical approaches - might have good therapeutic value, but would undermine the conference leading to tangible outcomes. The findings of both case studies show

that participants had been unclear about what it was they had agreed to participate in, and some still did not know after the conference what it had all been about. In the Rushmoor case study, one participant used the strong word 'social experiment' to describe their resulting experience. In Olching, participants were overall better informed. These findings reinforce Emery and Purser's (1996:136) concern that enough time needs to be spent at the beginning of a (Future) Search conference to define and explain the purpose of the event.

Secondly, they believe that Weisbord and Janoff's (1995) emotional roller-coaster ride can and should be avoided by choosing a design that does not intentionally upset or confuse conference participants. My focus group findings show that at least a large majority of the conference participants in both case study areas experienced considerable mood swings over the course of the Future Search Conference – including feelings of anger, frustration and helplessness. Interestingly enough though, the conference participants explained these emotions with reference to factors like overly long conference hours, having to stand up for too long, facilitators who seemed to give in to vociferous minorities, and ill-designed conference tasks (e.g. veto rights for individuals in the common ground phase). I believe that there is a real danger that the conference facilitators and the entire Future Search Conference design remain immune to criticism on the basis of the fact that negative emotions over the course of the conference are interpreted as psychologically predictable and an intended roller-coaster ride.

Third, Emery and Purser disagree with the label 'stakeholders' employed in the Future Search Conference, as they fear that the label would make it difficult for participants to attend in a private capacity. The dislike for the Future Search 'jargon' which I encountered in the Rushmoor focus groups in response to my question 'what is your stake in the area?' made it rather clear that the majority of conference participants did only identify with their 'stakeholder label' to a very limited extent.

I will now turn to a discussion of each conference exercise in relation to the background of the theoretical debates raised in chapter 4. Table 8.1 provides a schematic overview of the findings in both case studies.

Conference phase	Rushmoor case study		Olching case study	
	Usefulness Rating	Mood Rating	Usefulness Rating	Mood Rating
1. Time lines	diverse	diverse	diverse	diverse
2. Mind map	+	-	+	0/-
3. Trends in stakeholder groups	+	+	N/A	N/A
4. Prouds and sorries	diverse	diverse	+	0
5. Ideal future groups	+	++	+	++
6. Common ground	+	--	+	--
7. Action planning groups	++	+	++	+

**Table 8.1 : Participants' experience of the Olching and the Rushmoor Future Search Conference**

### ***8.1.1 Time lines***

Emery and Purser's critique that it is not to be recommended to start a conference with 40 minutes of individual work in silence was strongly echoed by the Rushmoor participants, who felt angry that there was no proper welcome and warm-up. In Olching, the conference facilitators had designed two small group exercises to allow conference participants to introduce themselves to each other before they embarked upon the silent phase of the time line exercise, so there were no complaints. The vivid descriptions of how people started to feel part of a group during that exercise suggest that Asch's (1952) shared field became established successfully for a majority of conference participants in both case studies. Emery and Purser's concern that reviewing the personal history, the internal system and the trends in the environment at large at the same time would confuse people unnecessarily was not backed by my research. On the contrary, one participant reported that she could only access her memory of global events by going through her personal life step by step.

### ***8.1.2 Mind map***

While the Rushmoor participants disengaged mostly from this exercise as they were tired and resented having to stand up, the Olching participants, who were allowed to remain seated, actually reported they had felt overwhelmed and dragged down by the complexity and negativity of the mind map data. Emery and Purser might argue that a data overload pushed the group into a dysfunctional (and avoidable) behaviour that can be interpreted as Bion's (1961) basic assumption of flight. On the other hand, Weisbord and Janoff's aim of causing confusion and destroying participants' illusion that they are in control could be regarded as achieved. Emery and Purser's fear that handing out sticky dots of different colour to the different stakeholder groups would reinforce the divisions experienced by the conference participants and thereby undermine Asch's conditions for effective communication did turn into reality at the Rushmoor conference. Stakeholder groups with fewer members demanded more sticky dots to compensate for their smaller overall physical presence, and were offended when they were not given any.

### ***8.1.3 Trends in stakeholder groups***

The case studies provided too little data on this conference phase and hence it would be inadvisable for me to draw any strong conclusions with respect to this part of the conference method.

### ***8.1.4 Prouds and sorries***

The prouds and sorries session was considered the overall 'least necessary' part of the conference from the point of view of the participants – a fact which is astonishing, given the great significance attributed to this phase as one of 'owning up' by Weisbord and Janoff. My preliminary explanation for this, from one of the Rushmoor focus groups, is that the American approach to owning up one's personal contribution might be at odds with the English culture. However,

I have no data from the other two focus groups on this issue and this proposition must therefore be taken with great caution. One factor that might have made Olching's prouds & sorries session more enjoyable is that the facilitators had replaced the oral reports of the small groups back to the plenary by a system by which one representative of each small group presented the group's work to one other small group at a time – until each group had learned about the work of all other groups. The participants at the Olching conference were pleased to recognise a lot of commonalities and to tap into positive energy when sharing their prouds. There seemed to be a strong recognition amongst participants that 'others are like me', thereby establishing Asch's condition for effective communication as intended by Weisbord and Janoff.

#### ***8.1.5 Ideal future groups***

The drama performances of the small groups were described as 'good fun' and triggered a lot of positive energy. This seems to reinforce Ronald Lippitt's (1983) claim that the possibilities of the future have a capacity to excite people. In Rushmoor, tensions were reported from the small groups between those who wanted to get straight down to planning the acting performance and those who sought a thorough discussion of all issues. This tension between the two tasks assigned to one time slot has been described as problematic by Williams (1997) as well, and she recommends that the facilitators separate the two steps of this exercise and assign a time slot for each one separately. My findings back the need for such an innovation. The experience of working through the difficulties together, laughing about the nonsense they came up with and risking exposure in the drama performance together had a strong bonding effect. The original conference design asks participants in the ideal futures groups to discuss the steps necessary to turn their vision into reality and to list some obstacles that had been overcome on the way. However, my observation from both conferences showed, that this step was dropped due to time pressure. Therefore, it might be necessary to allocate an extra time slot to this step in the conference design.

#### ***8.1.6 Common ground***

The original Future Search Conference design recommends that only two small groups discuss their lists of the common future, potential projects and unresolved differences on the evening of the second day while the huge task of identifying common ground between all groups is left to the morning of the third day, when participants are fresh and awake and the experiences of the second day have had time to settle and sink in over night. However, neither the Olching nor the Rushmoor conference followed this recommendation and as my research reveals, to their own disadvantage. As my analysis of the quality of the consensus achieved in this session in both conferences has shown, a majority of participants criticised the common ground statements for lacking enough detail to be meaningful, for including contradictions and for failing to prioritise clearly between issues that were making claims to the same limited resources. Emery and Purser have argued that if the consensus was to carry participants through it

must be based on real understanding, which in turn requires thorough discussion. Emery and Purser argued that otherwise the consensus would remain at a 'motherhood-and-apple-pie' level and therefore useless to guide decision-making. The suggestions of Future Search practitioners to overcome this deficiency go in two directions. First, it is proposed that the facilitators prepare common ground statements overnight out of their observations of the ideal future presentations and the first small group merger session towards the common ground (Penn State Geisinger Health System 1997). Secondly, the debate about the common ground is limited even further by introduction of voting cards (for example red/green traffic light) (Jones 1997).

### ***8.1.7 Action groups***

Participants complained that the action planning had been too short compared to other conference phases, thereby echoing Emery and Purser's criticism. A Search conference spends at least half of the conference time on the action planning. Secondly, in both cases, a considerable number of conference participants were surprised that the action groups were supposed to continue with their work after the conference. This was criticised as a 'surprise attack'. Some had even volunteered to join groups which lacked members as it had not seemed to matter that much. However, looking back, this fact seems to explain the instability of some groups. There was also evidence that at least one action group in the Rushmoor case study faked their intention to continue their work as a group, simply to please the organisers and not to expose themselves as non-committed. I conclude that it is important to make the action planning stage of the Future Search Conference a lot more transparent and to give participants an opportunity not to commit to any follow-up action without losing face.

### ***8.1.8 Summary***

My research on the Future Search design suggests that it is a rather robust tool, well capable of engaging the participants fully once they have been brought into the conference room. Three changes to the Future Search design can be recommended on the basis of my case study findings and on the basis of evidence from Future Search practitioner days introduced in section 4.3:

1. First of all, the conference should start with a warm welcome and a clarification of the purpose of the event. A warm-up phase should be designed which allows participants to meet their fellow participants, before the silent individual working phase of the time lines exercise is entered.
2. Secondly, a new design should be considered for identifying the common ground. This new design should raise the quality of the common ground statements, allow more time for a clarification of the differences between the participants and enhance participants' sense of ownership of and identification with the common ground statements. One possibility was that the facilitators or a working group of



participants could formulate programmatic statements in full sentences overnight, upon which the plenary would then vote the next morning.

3. Finally, the action planning phase should be longer and be divided into two separate steps in order to improve the quality of the action plans.

## 8.2 Linking the case study findings to collaborative planning theory

The aim of this section is to link the case study findings back to theories of collaborative planning. I will discuss to what extent the investigated Future Search Conferences complied with the criteria put forward by collaborative planning theories and to what extent they delivered the outlined benefits. For the purpose of this analysis, I have linked the criteria of collaborative planning with the evaluation criteria used in the case studies (table 8.2). My discussion will start with the process criteria, then turn to the capacity building criteria and end on a review of the outcome criteria.

Collaborative planning theory	Evaluation criteria used in the case studies	Rush-moor	Ol-ching
<b>Process criteria</b>			
Diversity of stakeholders present	Inclusive	-	0
Constructive dialogue	Collaborative	+	+
Fair process			
Transcending egoistic preferences towards the common good			
Participants are experts on their affairs	Competent	0	+
Allowing multiple ways of making validity claims			
Scope for innovation	Consensus about coherent, innovative vision	-	-
<b>Outcome criteria</b>			
A consensus	Action groups deliver	-	0
	Effective outreach	-	0
	Local Agenda 21 strengthened	0/+	+
<b>Capacity building criteria</b>			
New contacts and partnerships	Networking and partnership	++	++
Learning amongst the participants	Learning	++	+
Systems thinking			
Building trust and reviving local democracy	Building trust and community spirit	+	+
Generating community spirit			

Table 8.2 : The evaluation criteria linked back to collaborative planning theory

### 8.2.1 Process criteria

#### *Diversity of stakeholders present*

Collaborative planning aims to bring a diverse range of stakeholders into the conference room. Participant recruitment to the Future Search Conference was the task of an appointed steering group in both case study areas. Each steering

group consisted of 8-15 highly influential members, each of whom represented one of the major stakeholder groups of the community. The steering group carefully selected participants from a range of those affected by the outcomes, those with information on the local key issues and those with resources to facilitate action. There was no process by which a sector could nominate their own candidates or by which those who felt they would be affected by the outcomes were given a right to participate. In that sense, access to the Future Search Conference was highly restricted.

In practice both Future Search Conferences gathered a local elite of committed people, but failed to attract a cross-section of 'ordinary' citizens. This bias is implied in the Future Search guidance which emphasises the importance of getting the local movers and shakers into the conference room – in addition to the citizens. In Rushmoor, the business sector and young people were moreover under-represented at the conference. This weakened the status of the conference outcomes in both case studies and made it easy for politicians to dismiss them as the views of one particular fraction of the local community. Nevertheless, participants at both Future Search Conferences emphasised how much they had enjoyed meeting people they would not normally come across. The conference participants were from a wide enough range of sectors to facilitate a widening of horizons amongst conference participants.

### *Fair process*

Fairness has been interpreted by Webler (1995) as the equal opportunity of all conference participants to shape the agenda, select the rules and the facilitator, look after rule enforcement and to discuss. The overall title or topic of a Future Search Conference is determined by the steering group. The agenda for a Future Search Conference is fixed by the guidance available on the method, which urges facilitators not to compromise the recommended step-by-step proceedings and allocated timings in any way (Weisbord & Janoff 1995). Nevertheless, the facilitators at the Olching conference decided to drop the 'trends in stakeholder groups' to shorten the overall conference hours. Participants are expected to follow the instructions of the facilitators in an unquestioning way, often without understanding the overall purpose of a conference task. This has made a number of conference participants feel as if they were subjected to a large 'social experiment'. Also, the procedure prescribed for the identification of the common ground was regarded as highly unfair and unsuitable by a majority of Olching conference participants.

It is only within the framework of each conference exercise that participants are free to identify their own priorities and issues of their choice. In the small groups, all are equally charged with selecting a facilitator, a note-keeper, a time-keeper and a person to report back to the large group, and to swap these roles around for each new task given to them. In practice however, these decisions are taken in a very ad hoc fashion due to the time pressure, leaving wide scope for arbitrary outcomes. There are also no established procedures for the resolution of disputes in the small groups. In my two case study conferences, I have

witnessed everything from fair and respectful mediation to majority voting or ignoring a trouble-maker's inputs. All participants have an equal opportunity to contribute to the conference deliberations in theory. In my two case study conferences I have found evidence that the articulate and those with professional experience in discussing political issues dominated. I have conducted a thorough analysis of the theoretical fairness of the Future Search design along Webler's (1995) criteria, the results of which are presented in table 8.3.

I conclude that the theoretical fairness of the Future Search proceedings was impeded by the restricted access to the conference, the fixed conference agenda and the predetermined conference facilitators. Within the small groups, participants had most scope to equally influence agenda, facilitator and discussion. However, there was evidence from both case studies that the most articulate at times dominated the small group sessions and the plenary sessions.

FAIRNESS	NEEDS			
ACTIVITIES	Attend	Initiate	Debate	Decide
Agenda and rule making	-	S	-	-
Moderation and rule enforcement	S	S	S	-
Discussion	S/-	+	+	-

Scoring is as follows: +=meets most criteria, S=meets many criteria, -=meets few or none

**Table 8.3 : Evaluation of the Future Search Conference design using Webler's (1995) criteria of fairness**

Source: my evaluation using Webler's (1995) criteria

### *Competence*

In this section I will discuss to what extent the two investigated Future Search Conferences lived up to collaborative planning theories' objectives that (i) participants should be treated as experts on their affairs and (ii) that multiple ways of making validity claims should be possible. I will do so before in the context of Webler's (1995) operationalisation of competence.

The conference aims to bring all those with relevant 'expertise' on the topic under discussion into the room. Competence is thereby anchored in the recruitment of the participants more than anything else. A core principle of the Future Search Conference is that all those attending the conference are experts in their own right - in their capacity as local residents, parents, charity activists, business(wo)men or Council members. Educational inputs during the conference days are strongly discouraged as participants would feel less inclined to draw on their own (often) unexpected resourcefulness. This was adhered to in both observed conferences. Future Search facilitators are supposed to encourage participants to back any argument they make with anecdotal evidence or real-life examples. This can be seen as an organised effort to establish the comprehensibility of what is being said. While overall, this worked well at both observed conferences, there were of course instances where abbreviations were used and organisations mentioned which at least a few group members had

never heard of before. Future Search Conference facilitators are supposed to establish the legitimacy of emotions at the opening of each conference and to encourage participants throughout to be authentic in their full human capacity. As my research has shown, the majority of conference participants allowed themselves to experience a roller-coaster ride.

Half of the conference is spent building a shared pool of local expertise from a systems perspective. Participants reported that they had learned a lot from each other over the course of the Future Search Conference. A core aim of the Future Search Conference is to raise awareness of the diversity of views and value-judgements and to learn to respect them and work constructively with them. All energies are directed towards the common ground, namely that which the participants can agree upon without ever going into value disputes. The underlying practical discourse was rarely made explicit. My analysis using Webler's (1995) criteria is summarised in table 8.4.

COMPETENCE	NEEDS	
	Access to Knowledge	Best Procedures
Explicative Discourse	-	-
Theoretical Discourse	-/S	-
Practical Discourse	S	-
Therapeutic Discourse	S	S/-

Scoring is as follows: +=meets most criteria, S=meets many criteria, -=meets few or none

**Table 8.4 : Evaluation of the Future Search Conference design using Webler's (1995) criteria of competence**

Source: my evaluation using Webler's (1995) criteria

I conclude that the Future Search Conference design allowed the participants to act as experts in their own right and that the facilitators successfully encouraged multiple ways of making validity claims. Participants reported they learned a lot from each other as they gained a systems perspective on the past, present and future of their locality.

### *Collaborative*

In this section I will discuss the extent to which the two investigated Future Search Conferences facilitated (i) constructive dialogue and (ii) a focus on the common good. A key principle of the Future Search Conference is that each person's point of view is regarded as equally valid. Both investigated Future Search Conferences successfully established a collaborative mode of deliberation which struck conference participants as exactly the opposite of the adversarial rituals of party politics. Participants at both conferences showed themselves impressed by the level of responsibility and commitment displayed by their fellow participants. They reported that they had treated each other with a previously unknown amount of respect. Some participants sarcastically

claimed however that the constructive conference atmosphere had only been possible because the conference was not threatening to anyone's interests. The conference method was supposed to have ensured that no decisions were taken that 'hurt' any particular stakeholder group. As one participant remarked: "*It is easy to agree as long as it doesn't cost anything.*" (FG 3-12) Especially in the Olching conference, participants seemed to leave their sectional interests and stakeholder labels behind easily in order to work towards the common good. Participants reported how mutual prejudices had to be left behind, before participants were able to relate to each other in a trusting way. In Rushmoor, there was more notable pushing of sectional interests throughout the conference, especially from sectors with few delegates at the conference. I conclude that both Future Search Conferences succeeded in establishing a new mode of relating to each other amongst the participants. However, the price for the constructive atmosphere might have been a lack of 'bite' of the outcomes.

### ***8.2.2 Capacity building criteria***

#### ***New contacts and partnerships***

Both Future Search Conferences facilitated very well the formation of new and the revival of old contacts amongst the conference participants. In Rushmoor and Olching, conference participants gave many examples of collaborative endeavours that had become possible as a result of these new or revived contacts. These often crossed stakeholder group boundaries, as a look at the examples given shows. In Olching, conference participants reported that they now greeted more people in the street as a result of the conference. I conclude that the Future Search design is highly effective in creating a conference climate that is conducive to establishing rapport and trust between conference participants, and that lasting networks are formed as a result.

#### ***Learning amongst the participants and systems thinking***

This section will review the extent to which the investigated Future Search Conferences facilitated learning and systems thinking amongst the conference participants as set out in collaborative planning theory. In both Future Search case studies, participants reported that they had learned a lot from each other in the course of the conference. The time lines exercise was appreciated most by those who had only recently moved to the case study area or only commuted there for work and those who were too young to be familiar with the history of the local area. Even those who had lived there a long time realised with surprise the extent of changes the local area had gone through in the last three decades.

Secondly, just meeting other conference participants had widened people's horizon about what was going on locally, what organisations existed and what they were doing. Participants of the Rushmoor case study in addition reported they had learned more about how the local political and planning system worked. Participants in both case study conferences generally felt after the conference that they had a better overview of the local issues that needed tackling and some had discovered new opportunities for the future development

of the area. Finally, many participants said that the conference had raised their interest in learning a lot more about the area.

Participants at both conferences realised the interconnections between seemingly disconnected issues. When analysing the mind map, participants said things like *"interdependence is the word we need"* and *"everything is interlinked, it all comes back to the quality of life and we all have our issues in that"* (NP O-6). A particularly challenging kind of learning took place in the mixed small groups that had the task of performing an ideal future scenario together. Here, participants realised that one person's ideal future was another's horror scenario. Participants were forced to question their taken for granted assumptions about how the world should be. My non-participant observation documents the large extent to which this was going on. I conclude that learning is an inbuilt design feature of the Future Search Conference and happens in diverse ways.

### ***Building trust***

The Future Search Conferences have not significantly increased the trust between citizenry and Council in either of my case studies. This was first of all down to the fact that the conference by the nature of its composition collected the already converted, namely those who were known for their willingness to make an active contribution to the local community in a voluntary or professional capacity. Secondly, both conferences only involved a tiny proportion of councillors and officers, and the organisers of both conferences emphasized that the conference was to be held by the community for the community and therefore needed to steer clear of party political battles and Council bureaucracy. Therefore, the conference offered little opportunity for the formal holders of political power to learn. In Olching, the attacks launched against the Future Search by 'excluded' councillors alienated many participants, for whom the Council's reaction was a typical sign that the councillors were not willing to share power and did not appreciate citizens stepping forward to join in the governance of the local area. I conclude that neither Future Search Conference contributed in any significant way to the building of trust between Council and wider citizenry.

### ***Reviving local democracy***

In both case studies, the fact that the Future Search Conferences took place and were considered a success has made Future Search a viable option for other Council or voluntary sector consultation processes. In Rushmoor, an officer described vividly how tools like focus group discussions and Future Search conferencing were no longer regarded *"as some weird flung idea by some ancient hippy"* but instead were now becoming a common practice in local authorities in general and in Rushmoor in particular. Moreover, New Labour's strong emphasis on public participation in local governance (mainly by making the delivery of Best Value a statutory duty) has made a huge difference in establishing the legitimacy and even necessity of involving the local public in

meaningful ways. In Olching, the fact that the Future Search Conference has taken place successfully has made a lasting impression on local councillors, who can at least no longer claim that the citizenry does not want to be involved. Local observers reckoned that the opposition to citizen participation of all shapes had weakened. I conclude that both Future Search Conferences played a significant role in establishing the Future Search method as a mainstream tool of citizen participation in the local authority.

### *Community spirit*

Both Future Search Conferences were highly successful in generating community spirit. During the conference, participants showed themselves surprised by how close others' visions for the future were to their own. The participants felt strongly connected to other participants as a result of the conference experience, so that one participant to the Rushmoor conference said he felt he went away with 63 friends. In both cases, a number of participants reported how their sense of belonging to the local community, of being a valued member of it, had increased as a result of the conference. They reported that their willingness to make a contribution to the local community had increased as a result of connecting with such a large number of people who seemed to care deeply about its future. A few participants reported that the conference had alerted them to pay more attention to local issues, in order to be in a position to intervene when necessary. Participants also reported that they were more hopeful that things could actually change for the better, now that they knew so many hands were willing to help. I conclude that the participants' identification with the local community increased significantly as a result of their conference attendance.

### **8.2.3 Outcome criteria**

#### *A consensus about a coherent, innovative vision*

In both case study conferences, a consensus vision was achieved as envisaged by collaborative planning theory. Nevertheless, its quality was subject of great disappointment. First of all, few of the many innovative ideas generated by the ideal future groups translated into common ground statements. Secondly, the conference results lacked the detail to be meaningful, ignored financial considerations, failed to identify clear priorities and included a number of ill-thought-through ideas, for example a monorail in Rushmoor. The participants explained these shortcomings in quality with reference to the time pressure at the conference. Somebody moreover suggested that the consensus had only been achievable because it was formulated in vague terms, had no direct financial implications and did not 'hurt' any sector's interests. It is also not an aim of the Future Search Conference design to facilitate tough negotiations about trade-offs and priorities. Instead it is hoped that over time, the common ground between the participants will grow through continuous communicative involvement.

### 8.2.4 Conclusions

I conclude that a closer look at the Future Search Conference model from the perspective of collaborative planning theory allows us to recognise the design as one with highly restricted access, a hierarchically fixed agenda and little scope for participants to take charge. However, the nature of the conference tasks is such that they prescribe activities which facilitate a new way of treating each other and a new perspective on familiar issues. To the extent that participants engage with these tasks, they learn from each other, eliminate prejudices and build trust. A remarkably trusting and collaborative atmosphere is created at the Future Search Conference as a result. The process of identifying common ground and joint action is such that it avoids 'hurting' any sectors' interests as all participants are given veto rights and no negotiation of necessary trade-offs takes place. Given these insights, a Future Search Conference can only be the starting point of a long-term process, which will have to involve steps which facilitate tough negotiations and implementation.

The evaluation of fairness and competence of the Future Search Conference design allows us to compare it with the other methods discussed in Renn et al's (1995) book. The Future Search Conference design shows a performance close to the average with a slight superiority on the therapeutic front. The bad performance of the Future Search Conference with regards to competence is down to the fact that a Future Search Conference does not offer the participants to draw on expert panels and best methods of making sense of expertise.

Model	Competence				Fairness		
	Explicative	Theoretical	Practical	Therapeutic	Agenda	Moderator	Disc.
Citizen advisory committees	+	S/-	S/-	S	S	+	S/+
Regulatory Negotiation	+	+	-	-	-	-	+
Compensation	-	S	S/+	-	S	-	-
Mediation	+	S	S	-	+	+	+
Citizen juries	+	-/S	S	-	-	S/-	S
Planning cells	S	S/+	+	S	+	S	+
Citizen Initiatives	+	-	S/+	S	S	S	+
Dutch Study Groups	+	+	S	-/S	-	-	+
Future Search	-	-	S/-	S	-	S	S

Scoring is as follows: +=meets most criteria, S=meets many criteria, -=meets few or none

**Table 8.5 : Comparative evaluations of the Future Search Conference and eight other participatory process designs investigated by Renn et al (1995)**

Source: Renn, Webler & Wiedemann 1995:340 and my own data on Future Search



### **8.3 Understanding the lack of tangible outcomes in the context of theories of power**

This section aims to make sense of the failure of both Future Search Conferences to produce the outcomes hoped for. According to the evaluation criteria put forward by those with a stake in the success of each Future Search Conference, the conference was supposed to produce a consensus that could inform policy-making and action groups which would follow through with their plans. The action groups were expected to attract more active members and to win Council support where needed. Moreover, it was hoped that the conference would strengthen the Local Agenda 21 process by building wider support. Finally, it was hoped that an effective outreach to the wider public would take place via media reports and word of mouth. The main outcome more than two years after each conference was that two action groups were still active in each case study area, and that the Local Agenda 21 process in Olching had gained official support. In neither case was the consensus produced by the conference considered of much use to policy-making and the Councils had taken no action at all to accommodate or support any conference outcomes.

#### ***8.3.1 The Future Search Conference as a Foucauldian regime of power***

The aim of this section is to investigate the extent to which the Future Search design was experienced as empowering by the conference participants and thereby contributed to or inhibited participants' ability and willingness to implement the action plans. In order to answer this question, I will draw on a Foucauldian perspective of power and conceptualise the Future Search Conference as a regime of power i.e. a situation which imposes rules of conduct on what participants say or do. From a Foucauldian perspective one can see that it is impossible to leave power at the door, like a coat, before entering into a deliberative process.

*"The field of power imposes constraints about the possible options open to individuals and groups, but it is those individuals and groups which ultimately make choices to accept these constraints or to challenge them."*  
(Darier 1999:19)

From a Foucauldian perspective, the Future Search Conference is a semi-public situation in which the Future Search Conference rules and implicit norms of behaviour are enforced, though not necessarily intentionally, by facilitator surveillance in plenary sessions and by peer surveillance in the small groups. According to the 'middle' Foucault, we must look for the 'normalisations', i.e. pressures to conform to preconceived expectations, and instances of 'resistance' in order to trace the workings of power in social relations. Abu-Lughod draws on Foucault (1982:209,211) to suggest that

*"we can then use resistance 'as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used.' We could continue to look for and consider nontrivial all sorts of resistance, but instead of taking these as signs of*

*human freedom we will use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them.*" (Abu-Lughod 1990:42)

The Future Search experience can be considered empowering to the extent that participants were able to use the conference exercises as enabling tools for their own purposes. Moreover, the conference could be considered successful to the extent that it facilitated a fairer production of knowledge. This means that we must look for instances where power relations which are present outside the conference room are replaced by new behaviour patterns in the conference room. In the worst case, conference participants were simply replicating the power relations which enable and constrain their behaviour and thinking outside the conference. These however may be challenged by the new set of norms proposed by the Future Search Conference. Conference participants might react to this challenge by behaving in ways purely aimed to please the organisers and to be seen to be doing the 'right' thing by their fellow participants. Resisting the implicit and explicit rules and norms of the Future Search Conference in various ways, for example by disengaging from the exercises, might from a Foucauldian perspective be considered as an indication of a modest degree of empowerment by confronting imposed constraints.

On the surface, the vast majority of conference participants in both case studies seemed to engage well with most of the conference exercises. The following analysis will be limited to a review of apparent instances of resistance. There was resistance in both Future Search Conferences to the way the first two conference exercises were framed. In Rushmoor's conference, a member of the oldest generation complained that the fact that the time lines were limited to the last three decades meant that her experience of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was not valued. She reacted to the exercise by going blank, i.e. not being able to remember anything. In the Olching conference, the youngest generation complained that the time lines exercise had been far too long given that they had only one decade of conscious memories of the world. With regards to the mind map, participants in the Olching conference criticised that the trends collected were largely negative, despite the fact that they felt there were just as many positive developments. Upon reflection, conference participants blamed the media for their obsession with 'bad news', which in turn had according to them directly influenced what participants had put forward in the mind map exercise. This is an indication of power/ knowledge at work: what counts as valid 'news' or 'trends' for public discussion and what items people withhold is enabled and constrained by the implicit norms of society at large.

The second type of resistance I observed concerns participants' protection of their private sphere. In Olching, one of the small groups charged with summarising the personal 'story' of the participants in the room - as part of the time lines exercise - frankly admitted that they resisted going into any depth on their personal lives and instead started counting each others' dogs, cats and houses. A similar kind of resistance emerged in the prouds and sorries session of the Rushmoor Future Search Conference, where senior professionals in particular resisted this exercise. Here participants made no secret out of the fact

that they had found this exercise too personal and had resisted by coming up with what was described by one person as 'some fairly bland remarks'.

The drama performances of the ideal future groups were described by some participants as an 'alien' way of tackling the issue of the future of the Borough. There was resistance against this mode of working from a number of directions. One participant in the Olching case study described how he felt incapable of producing 'unrealistic' ideas because he could not see the point of doing so. This may be explained by the fact that power/ knowledge relations in wider society tend to get people in the habit of only being realistic. Being 'fanciful' is frowned upon for adults in most situations. In contradiction the Future Search Conference encourages people to come up with anything they like. This participants was caught up between these two normalising discourses.

In Rushmoor, one group reported how they decided to focus all their attention upon the contents of their presentation and to ignore the demand to find a creative mode of presentation ('just because they told us not to give a speech, we will give a speech'). This is again an indication that the new norm imposed by the Future Search Conference collided with the norm held by wider society that creative presentations are not appropriate for adults. After the exercise, participants in both case study areas acknowledged that they had discovered a resourcefulness in the acting performance which they had not been aware of.

The visions produced at each Future Search Conference can be analysed for the extent to which they are innovative and even silly, as this would indicate that participants actually pursued the new creative norm of the Future Search Conference instead of remaining attached to the normalising discourse of being sincere and realistic. The Rushmoor Future Search Conference had more stereotypical elements than the Olching one – including a 'sunshine dome', a monorail and a visitor from Mars. Participants at both conferences came up with a large amount of what I tend to classify as 'the usual innovations' like solar panels and internet shopping. Especially in the Rushmoor conference, there seemed to be an element of competition in coming up with the most ambitious vision. The recycling quota achieved in Rushmoor in 2010 went up from group to group until it reached 90%. This may indicate an (unconscious) attempt to please the facilitators, organisers and fellow participants by coming up with the 'best' vision.

Participants were stunned that 7 out of 8 small groups envisioned Olching's High Street as a pedestrian zone and that a majority of action groups in Rushmoor saw the local airfield closed ('Aerospace Forest' had taken its place) and the army gone. These politically highly contested issues had been resolved in a surprising clarity and calmness by the ideal vision groups. This indicates that visions became conceivable within the Future Search Conference which were at odds with the demands of 'realism' held outside the conference. However, a later veto by somebody in the common ground session prevented either conference from including a political recommendation on these issues.

To everybody's surprise, the Olching participants identified a strong need for communication across the boundaries of the many local societies and political

parties, across the boundaries of generations and income levels in Olching. A number of action groups which formed at the conference were dedicated to realising this vision. This may be an indication that the communicative norms of the Future Search Conference were subconsciously adopted by the Future Search participants and informed the visions they generated.

The common ground session triggered most resistance. At the Rushmoor conference, the majority of conference participants simply disengaged from this conference exercise in a move of resistance and chatted in small groups while a few group spokespeople were left to negotiate the common ground on their behalf. As a result, there was little sense of ownership of the resulting common ground. In Olching, participants stayed engaged but the high level of tension in the room was indicative of the resentment many participants were feeling. This resentment was directed at the veto rights of individuals to eliminate important proposals and secondly, at the lack of allowed discussion. I conclude that participants in both conferences resisted or endured a process which they did not agree with. Instead of being empowering, the conference process was at this stage experienced as constraining and unfair. The vague terminology of the achieved common ground hides the deep divisions which were suppressed in this session.

Out of all conference exercises, there was a clear indication that the action groups resembled most closely the way of working in groups that participants in both case study areas were familiar with: a 'rational' discussion of targets and action plans with deadlines. Nevertheless, there was resistance against the expectation of the conference organisers, that the action groups should come up with project ideas and carry through with those in the months after the conference. This came as a 'surprise attack' to many participants, who were already over-committed and unwilling to take on new duties. Resistance took diverse forms. One group at the Rushmoor conference admitted that they had a chat in the sun, but still gave the impression to the conference plenary that they had formed an action group. A group of very diverse interests at the Rushmoor conference and two groups in the Olching conference openly declared in the final plenary that they had no intention of continuing as a group but that instead, individuals were to take their ideas forward.

I conclude that a Foucauldian perspective on the conference proceedings highlights the fact that the fixed schedule of the Future Search Conference triggers resistance of some participants to unfamiliar modes of working and to framings and expectations which they are not willing to fulfil. The Foucauldian perspective allows us to notice the extent to which conference participants engage with new modes of working and as a result, have new insights and discover unknown needs. Finally, the Foucauldian perspective allows deeper insights into the way that much behaviour at the conference can be related to the impulse to conform and please. And that the Future Search Conference itself constitutes a normalising discourse that plays a part in producing participants' patterns of behaviour.

Through the Foucauldian analysis, we can identify a first set of possible explanations for the failure of both Future Search Conferences to trigger action on the ground. As my analysis has shown, the procedure prescribed for the identification of the common ground was rejected by a majority of conference participants, many of whom reacted with resistance, which surfaced in their disengagement from the conference task. As a result, there was weak ownership of the produced consensus and little will for implementation behind it. Also, the lack of allowed discussion was supposed to have reduced the quality of the common ground and thereby its usefulness.

As I have proposed in the first section of this chapter (8.1), one possible explanation for the fact that the action plans remained castles in the air is the comparatively short amount of time spent on the action planning. Too little time was spent at the conference to consider the barriers to implementation and to consider strategic issues of winning support for the action plans. Too little opportunity was given to the participants to drop unrealistic plans and opt for less ambitious, but nevertheless exciting projects. In addition, my Foucauldian analysis in this section demonstrated that there was an additional element of resistance amongst the participants who found the task of initiating an action group imposed on them. The scope for opting out was considered so small in the Rushmoor case study, that one small group faked their intention to continue as an action group despite never having the slightest will to do so. This explains why a number of action groups never met.

### ***8.3.2 Re-embedding the Future Search Conference into its wider political context***

From a perspective of Lukes' 1<sup>st</sup> dimensional power (Lukes 1974), the lack of outcomes seems to suggest that the Future Search Conference failed to gain any political clout worth mentioning. This section aims to summarise and make explicit the main factors which kept it from gaining influence.

#### ***Personalities***

Both Future Search Conferences were the initiative of committed individuals. In Rushmoor Borough Council, the (former) chief executive considered Local Agenda 21 as the way forward for local government in the UK and created the post of a Local Agenda 21 coordinator working directly under him. He employed a woman as LA21 coordinator with a strong, charismatic personality who shared his vision. As a team, these two built support within the Council for a Future Search Conference and secured a 10,000 pounds budget. Also, the former Leader of the Council (1996-1997) – a Liberal Democrat - played a crucial role in winning support and recruiting participants to the event. By late 1996, the (former) chief executive left for a more influential job. When it became clear that the new chief executive had different priorities and removed the Local Agenda 21 officer to the policy and review unit, which was known to be a collection of people who had been removed from influential positions, the former Local Agenda 21 officer left for a new job as well. The former Leader of

the Council suffered from a serious health problem and was replaced in the 1997 elections from his frontline position. While the new Local Agenda 21 officer – a former member of the Environmental Health Unit – is genuinely committed to making LA21 a success, he operates from no power base at all. Local Agenda 21 is no longer regarded the way forward for the Council but instead an added-on luxury to be taken care of by the LA21 officer on his own. The change-over of chief executive severely weakened the importance attached to the Future Search Conference and its outcomes. As a result of his commitment, the new LA21 officer is building a continually growing network of people who are willing to support the LA21 process when needed – with sponsorship, with an opening speech, with a letter to the editor. It is these contacts outside the Council which are keeping Local Agenda 21 alive in Rushmoor.

In Olching, the Future Search Conference was initiated in a voluntary capacity by a group of environmental activists, who won the support of the Mayor early on. One group member could draw on the resources of the local adult education institute to provide meeting rooms and to advertise the Local Agenda 21 process in the programme. While all those who helped to initiate the Future Search Conference stayed on board throughout, the amount of time the activists were able and willing to dedicate to the Future Search process in a voluntary capacity decreased after the Future Search Conference. The activists expected a Council officer to take over the main burden of the work. However, despite the fact that the Mayor claimed he had charged an officer with this task, the person in question took no initiative until two years after the conference, when they helped to organise the follow-up conference. The lack of genuine interest of this officer in the Future Search process contributed to the lack of coordination in the first year after the conference. A key obstacle in the Olching case study was the defensive behaviour of the former Mayor, who repeatedly discredited the Future Search Conference. The former Mayor is a charismatic, articulate and publicly much admired person, who did not seem to get over the fact that he had not been invited to the Future Search Conference despite the fact that he had played such a vital role in shaping the area's destiny over the last 12 years. Therefore, he questioned the sincerity of the conference organisers and the legitimacy of the entire conference at all possible occasions. The media reported in many articles about the 'scandal' that the majority of councillors had been 'excluded', thereby endangering the reputation of the Future Search Conference.

### *Interests*

Commitment to Local Agenda 21 and a Future Search Conference was rarely entirely without self-interest. In Olching, the local environmental activists were fed up with being isolated in their green little corner. They were willing to temporarily compromise some of their radical demands in order to engage with the wider spectrum of interests in the local community in a joint Local Agenda 21 process. The main reservations against Local Agenda 21 in Olching were supposedly coming from the construction lobby, who were said to fear

constraints on their activities if a Local Agenda 21 process was to gain ground. The construction lobby was supposed to be well represented in Olching's Council in the form of a number of business owners who had direct financial interest in preventing any constraints. A vote on a Local Agenda 21 had been postponed in 1994 and then 'forgotten' about until the time the activists started campaigning for it again. Support for the conference and Local Agenda 21 in general came from the new Mayor in Olching. The ethos of citizen participation implied by Local Agenda 21 fitted with his membership of the Free Voters' Association, which is an organisation of people who are fed up with the conventional political parties and their tendency to govern in self-serving ways. The Free Voters' Association is regularly making a point out of the fact that they are there to serve the citizens' needs rather than a party ideology. At the end of the Future Search Conference, the Mayor was quoted in the newspapers saying that the outcomes of the conference could be considered a 'political programme of all citizens', by which it was implied that the outcomes were in some ways superior to the ideological party programmes put forward by the competitors of the Free Voters' Association. This raised the Conservative's suspicion that the Mayor was instrumentalising the Future Search Conference for his own anti-party political interests.

In Rushmoor, early support for the Future Search Conference came from the ruling Liberal Democrats, who have a long standing interest in citizen participation and who felt they could raise their profile by such a flagship exercise. When the new chief executive came to power, he was said to want to leave his mark on the borough, and therefore shifted priorities to a new set of issues, most notably to the regeneration of Aldershot. In the aftermath of the conference, the Local Agenda 21 officer struggled to win wider support within the Council and in its related bodies. The Local Agenda 21 subcommittee and the Local Agenda 21 officer steering group behaved as passive recipients of the LA21 coordinator's reports, but never took any initiative or action themselves. The fact that Rushmoor Voluntary Services refused to advertise Local Agenda 21 to the wide range of grassroots groups coordinated by it was supposed to be down to the fact that the head of RVS was afraid of losing his power base as 'the' link between Council and the community. There were also fears that the LA21 coordinator might want to take the kudos for the work of the RVS and that the very existence and finance of RVS would be endangered if they made LA21 their main issue. I conclude that organisational, sectoral and personal interests played a crucial role in the fate of each Future Search Conference.

### *Institutional gaps*

A major problem of both Future Search Conferences was that they were not sufficiently 'plugged' into the formal decision-making processes of the Council. In Rushmoor, the Future Search Conference had the advantage of starting off from within the Council administration. Unfortunately however, the status of the Future Search Conference was defined as 'for the people by the people' and no arrangement was made for any outcomes of the Future Search process to enter

Council decision-making. Amongst the participants of the Future Search Conference were only two Council officers and three councillors – too few to create a critical mass of support within the Council. The two officers played a key role in keeping alive an action group each and in making sure that these groups had access to Council resources. One example is the action group on the environment which was able to secure funding from a number of organisations – including the Council – for a neighbourhood award scheme, which was successfully set up. An interface between LA21 member subcommittee and Future Search steering group was not successful in allowing the Future Search outcomes to influence Council decision-making. The LA21 officer steering group and the LA21 member subcommittee proved so utterly ineffective in furthering Local Agenda 21, that the LA21 coordinator did not oppose proposals to their suspension in 1999. A 'Future Rushmoor Forum' was created consisting of genuinely interested councillors and members of the former Future Search steering group in order to oversee the conference follow-through process. However, given that only two action groups were still active, this new body was still looking for a role in early 2000. Overall, the Future Search process never gained sufficient status to pose any threat to the councillors' role as 'legitimate' representatives of 'the people'.

In Olching, the initiative for the Future Search Conference came from outside the town hall. The support of the local adult education institute provided the crucial link to the Mayor, who had acted as patron of a special course programme featuring Local Agenda 21. The involvement of the adult education institute and of the Mayor gave the Future Search Conference a respectable status. However, as the conference organisers chose to position the Future Search Conference outside the realms of party politics, and as only a handful of councillors (and three Council officers, of whom two attended) were invited to participate, the majority of councillors reacted quite defensively to the conference. The Committee on Planning, Environment and Development refused prior to the conference to give its outcomes any binding status. Nine months after the conference, a vote was taken to have the conference outcomes assessed by the administration – but only to the extent that the existing duties of the administration would not be impaired. As a result, the Mayor was the only member of the administration who implemented a number of conference outcomes. Apart from one pre-conference presentation to the Committee on Planning, Environment and Development, and one presentation of the outcomes in the town hall to which councillors and the general public were invited, no direct interaction between members of the Future Search steering group and councillors took place. As a result, the outcomes of the Future Search Conference have had no impact on Council decision-making yet. At the follow-up conference two years after the Future Search event, almost all the small groups were drafting motions which they wanted the Council to pass. These motions were aiming for policy change just as much as for financial support for concrete projects. It remains to be seen if the Council will furiously reject these



claims to power or if these motions might be the beginning of a constructive working relationship in which both sides learn.

### *Cultural gaps*

The main reason for the defensiveness of the councillors in Olching was that they considered themselves as the legitimate representatives of the wider community. They attacked the Future Search Conference on the count that it had gathered a self-selected group which failed to be representative and which lacked the accountability the councillors were subjected to. According to a number of councillors I interviewed, they did not consider it appropriate to 'hide behind the citizens' and to compromise their party programmes in the name of 'populism' and popular demands generated at the Future Search Conference. The councillors were arguing and thinking in terms of 'representative democracy'. Evaluated on these terms, deliberative and inclusionary processes like Future Search are bound to be considered illegitimate. In Rushmoor, councillors had less reason to feel threatened by the actual Future Search Conference. Nevertheless, the strong impetus for citizen participation coming from the New Labour government was giving Conservative councillors in particular some headaches. The suggested new role for councillors to act as empty vessels into which the citizens would pour the needs they discovered in participatory processes seemed to be at odds with the ideological councillor leadership envisaged by the existing party democracy. I conclude that the follow-through of both Future Search Conferences was significantly impeded by the fact that they were not attributed a status that would give them influence. My analysis has shown that both Future Search Conferences were discredited on the terms of representative democracy. This suggests that new terms of reference are needed if local players are to perceive a Future Search Conference as legitimate – for example a discourse on 'deliberative' or 'participatory' democracy. This most importantly includes a new subject-positioning (as Foucault would say) of the councillors in the discourse of deliberative and participatory democracy.

### *Central-local government relations*

In both case study areas, the capacity of the local authority to be responsive to the outcomes of the Future Search Conference was rather limited in the first place. In the UK, the dramatic cuts in local authority powers and finances under the Conservative central government have not been significantly turned around by the New Labour central government. In Rushmoor Borough Council, officers everywhere complained that the New Labour central government had given them many additional duties, but no new finance or staff to implement them. As a result, there was hardly any capacity at all for non-statutory tasks like Local Agenda 21. New Labour's imposition of best value as a replacement of the Conservative's compulsory competitive tendering required the Council to dedicate some of its scarce resources to monitoring its performance with regards to meeting the needs of its citizenry. As best value requires a careful reformulation of the corporate objectives of a local authority, it provided –

according to Rushmoor's LA21 coordinator – his best opportunity ever to integrate Local Agenda 21 into the corporate objectives. He was expecting that this might in the best case lead to a transformation of his role from a lonely advocate of LA21 to a much requested consultant of other Council departments in their quest to meet their corporately fixed sustainability targets.

While the autonomy of German local authorities is protected by the Constitution, the capping of spending and debt imposed in the early 1990s as a result of Germany's obligation to meet the fiscal criteria of the European single currency has decisively constrained local room for manoeuvre. Moreover, the costs of rising long-term unemployment are also squeezing local budgets to a point of overt crisis. In Olching, there is particularly little scope for anything but the most essential services, because Olching has a small budget compared to neighbouring local authorities. This is because Olching has few businesses it can tax directly. This explains why a financial incentive from the Bavarian state government can influence local policy making to the extent that a vote in favour of an official Local Agenda 21 process was taken.

### *Increasing global interdependence*

Finally, many of the actions proposed by the two Future Search Conferences were not only beyond the reach of the participants' influence but also beyond the reach of local authority influence. A first constraint is posed by the interdependence of local, regional, state and central / federal government decision-making. The issues that would most decisively influence the future of Rushmoor would be decided elsewhere: the future of the army was in the hands of the Ministry of Defence and the future of the airfield depended at least partly upon the report by a government planning inspector. In Olching, no changes could be imposed upon the traffic on the High Street as long as the *Landkreis* had not taken a vote to return decision-making rights about the High Street to the *Gemeinde*. In both case studies, there seemed to be a helplessness with regards to the issues which required political action by higher level authorities.

A second set of constraints originates from the increasing influence of EU policy-making upon local affairs. In Olching, the action group on agriculture struggled to see what it could do from the local level to influence EU agricultural policy-making which was endangering the survival of their farms. Finally, there were also examples that it was difficult to influence market-based operators, whose main target was survival in a highly competitive market and not primarily the satisfaction of local needs – of unprofitable needs in particular. In Rushmoor, the action group on transport struggled to come up with strategies to improve the quality of local public transport, because public transport was privatised and involved a number of companies who were not willing to send busses onto unprofitable routes.

## **Conclusions**

Collaborative planning theory is a normative ideal disembodied from any concrete political context. Both of my case studies have demonstrated that an understanding of power relations is crucial to making sense of what happens and fails to happen after a Future Search Conference. Conference participants return into a setting which constrains (and enables) the range of available options. In the preceding section I have identified six factors which have helped to further our understanding of the lack of action after each Future Search Conference:

1. personalities
2. interests
3. institutional gaps
4. cultural gaps
5. central-local government relations
6. increasing global interdependence.

I conclude that what happens in and after a Future Search Conference must be understood in relation to the background of the political context that nourishes or fails to nourish the Future Search process. A Future Search Conference can only be as good as the context it is embedded in.

### **8.4 Implications for collaborative planning theory and the practice of Future Search Conferencing**

As my analysis of the two investigated case studies from the perspective of theories of power has shown, there is a lot more to facilitating local change than using the right participation tool. The American political economist and professor of planning Susan Fainstein (1999) has warned the followers of collaborative planning theory that the wonderful plans which get formulated in collaborative planning processes are bound to remain castles in the air as long as they ignore the powerful interests that govern local affairs. She claims that at the end of the day, material interests will be much stronger than 'nice ideas'. A precondition for any effective change process according to Fainstein is the recognition and exposure of these powerful interests. Fainstein argues that 'touchy-feely-goodness' and open reasoning alone are not going to get us far in working for a just world. She suggests that we need the mobilisation of bias in the form of social movements in order to shift power relations and facilitate change as a result. To be fair to collaborative planning theory, its proponents are well aware of power relations as the work of Forester (1989) and others demonstrates. Forester has argued that planners should encourage and support political organising – in particular the organisation of disadvantaged interests – so that these can build a power base before entering into a dialogue (Forester 1989:153,155).

The main problem with collaborative planning theory is that it conceptualises power relations as negative deviations from an ideal state of freedom from power (for example Forester 1989:150-151). This view is misleading, because it sends us in a direction of aiming to cut the ties of power. This distorts our perception of the purpose of participatory processes. The most simple and most

powerful critique of this view comes from Janis Joplin: "*Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.*" Flyvbjerg suggests an alternative view:

*"Instead of thinking of modernity and democracy as rational means for dissolving power, we need to see them as practical attempts at regulating power and domination."* (Flyvbjerg 1998:236)

Flyvbjerg's detailed account and critical analysis of processes of planning innovation in the Danish town of Aalborg highlights the overriding importance of power relations in twisting what is considered 'true, right and legitimate' in local politics. Flyvbjerg concludes that processes that foster 'rational' argumentation and consensus are ill-equipped to deal with this every-day-reality of 'power-in-discourse'. Flyvbjerg proposes a readiness for conflict as a precondition of successful interaction:

*"The tradition shows us that forms of participation that are practical, committed, and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of democratic virtue than forms of participation that are discursive, detached, and consensus-dependent, that is, rational."* (Flyvbjerg 1998:236)

What does this mean for the practice of Future Search conferencing? The Future Search model is not a tool for social movement building nor a tool for tough negotiation or mediation. But then, it was never designed for these purposes. A Future Search Conference is strong at building appreciation of diversity and shared meaning amongst a diverse group of stakeholders. It facilitates new contacts across stakeholder boundaries, trust and joint action on a one-to-one basis. It widens the participants' horizon and challenges anyone who believes they hold the single truth on an issue. The strength of Future Search is that it builds understanding and a sense of community where there was division and indifference prior to the conference. So the first important, but rather obvious conclusion from this discussion must be that a Future Search Conference is not the solution to all problems. It is very capable of achieving capacity building. It seems rather less capable of facilitating any changes on the ground that the powerful were not intending anyway, as Future Search seems rather ill-designed to facilitate concessions from powerful sectors. Instead, Future Search facilitates the lowest common denominator – an outcome that neither threatens nor hurts the interests of any party to the conference, which makes it in many ways unthreatening. Of course, the Future Search Conference provides scope for learning. But as Flyvbjerg (1998) has demonstrated in his book, power is – to put it simply – often so much more persuasive than reason

*"Power procures the knowledge which supports its purposes, while it ignores or suppresses that knowledge which does not serve it."*

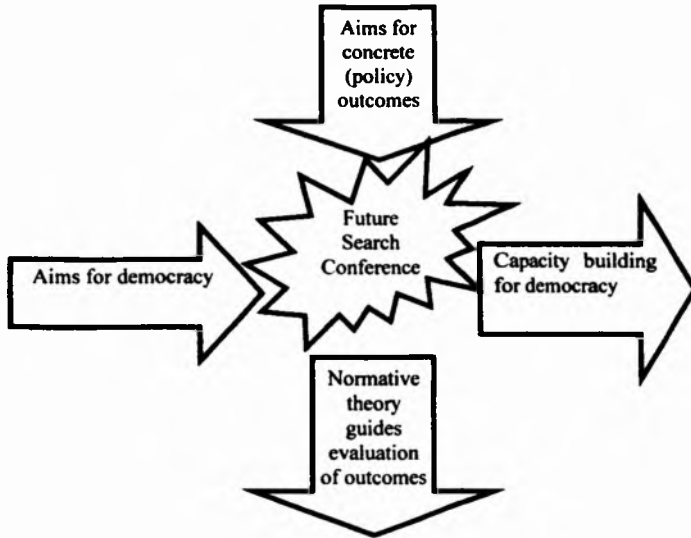
(Flyvbjerg 1998:226)

Where do these considerations leave us with regards to the application of deliberative and inclusionary processes? I would argue that the application of any participatory process must be preceded by a thorough analysis of what exactly is needed in that particular situation by that particular system, organisation or person considering an intervention. In some cases, the Future Search Conference will be a good option to facilitate community building of

some sort, in other cases, it is time for a thorough analysis of interests in the game and for tough negotiation in the framework of a mediation process. In other cases, change may only come from what Schattschneider (1960) has famously called the '*mobilisation of bias*'. From a Foucauldian perspective, this means building support for a different way of making sense of the world, for new 'truths' and for a redefined understanding of what is 'right' and 'legitimate'.

Before this background, it seems inappropriate to idealise stakeholder-based, consensual participatory practices as a morally superior way of facilitating change towards the common good as is done in collaborative planning theory. While there is of course no doubt that 'collaborative planning' and 'deliberative democracy' are highly preferable to expertocratic and purely market-based modes of decision-making, they are – on their own – simply not a viable option for radical change. The powerful are simply not likely to surrender their power on the note of some 'nice ideas'. Consensus and conflict are two ends of a spectrum, and I dare to suggest that one needs the other, that they are complementary. There cannot be a viable consensus in the absence of an option for conflict. If there is no exit option, a consensus is likely to be purely oppressive.

If collaborative planning is not to be the moral standard to evaluate our participatory practices, from where might orientation come? I would agree with Fainstein (1999) that all practices will have to be measured by their results (this includes outcomes as well as capacity building benefits). From the perspective of proponents of the 'just city', the key question to ask is: 'Who benefits?' and 'Has this intervention made any contribution to the redistribution of resources from the rich to the poor?' From the perspective of sustainability, we may ask: 'What has this intervention achieved on the ground in order to bring us closer to sustainable development?' While it sounds rather obvious, this is a major departure from theories of collaborative planning who are obsessed with getting the participatory *process* right, never mind the results. Theories of collaborative planning may continue to give us orientation, for example by emphasising the capacity building (for democracy that is) aspects of any participatory process. But they should never be used to criticise confrontational strategies from a moral high ground. Not least, because an important part of such capacity building for democracy in the face of ever-present power relations might involve making it a value commitment to side with the power-less and to foster their empowerment - which is a normative goal quite different from collaborative planning theory, though sometimes implied by some of its proponents. The goal of empowerment requires (participatory) practices quite different from a Future Search design. Often, conflict has been one of the most effective means of empowerment (Abbott 1996).



**Figure 8.1 Guidance for best practice in deliberative and inclusionary processes**

### **8.5 Implications for Local Agenda 21**

The inbuilt mechanism for failure in Local Agenda 21 processes seems to be that they prescribe a consensual mode as the only 'legitimate' route to local change towards sustainability. It is easily overlooked that one might not lead to the other: a consensual process might be established, but it is not clear how – in the absence of an option for conflict – it should ever get into a position to facilitate change towards sustainable development, given the strong economic interests preventing such changes (Eblinghaus & Stickler 1996). What has been observed in practice is that such consensual processes tend to stretch the meaning of 'sustainable development' to encompass present economic practices as 'sustainable' – again an indication of power defining knowledge production. If the concept of sustainable development is to grow teeth, it will need a clear positioning upon (measurable) normative aims. One example for such a move is the concept of 'environmental space' developed by Friends of the Earth Europe. While this concept is limited to environmental sustainability, and more exactly to sources and sinks of pollutants, it is highly effective in exposing rhetoric, 'busy-ness' and talking-shops which at the bottom-line do not contribute to environmental sustainability. What I am suggesting here is not a return to an expertocratic view featuring one single truth as superior to all others. A viable alternative may be the conscious use of explicitly normative theories to evaluate the failures and benefits of (participatory) action. It is only upon such grounds, that current practices can be challenged.

I want to conclude by saying that the contribution of democratic practices to capacity building for democracy should not be discounted – even in the absence of other outcomes. Deliberative and inclusionary processes are crucial to increasing interaction within rapidly globalising and fragmenting communities, so that the ground of shared values may widen through prolonged interaction. This is because at the end of the day, we have to agree upon ways of living on this one planet together.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the main results of the research presented in this book, to make proposals for further research on that basis and to provide an outlook for the future of Future Search conferencing.

#### 9.1 Main contributions of this book

In chapter 2, I have effectively linked theories of globalisation, of governance in networks, of Agenda 21 and of theories of organisational development based on systems thinking in order to capture the complex context which has given rise to the popularity of deliberative and inclusionary processes at the dawn of the new millennium. Theories of organisational transformation were drawn upon in order to identify what is qualitatively different about citizen participation in the 1990s as compared to earlier decades, namely the whole systems perspective and the capacity for learning and self-organisation which tools like the Future Search Conference aim to mobilise.

I have sought to show that collaborative planning theories are particularly successful in presenting current ideas about citizen participation. They reflect the high currency of consensus-based modes of policy-making in Germany in particular, but also in England. As I have sought to demonstrate in chapter 8, the evaluation criteria which have emerged from the empirical work in both case studies neatly reflect the normative claims and values of collaborative planning theory. The empirical work conducted has also reinforced the observation of much of the published case study work that participatory processes employed in the spirit of collaborative planning theory may fail to deliver on the outcome front. Here, I have argued, theories of power in participation can help to shed light on the reasons for failure to deliver. Of particular significance is the Foucauldian conceptualisation of 'power in discourse', which implies the most fundamental critique of collaborative planning theory, namely that the Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' is a misleading ideal, which blurs ever-present power relations. This has led me to question the current enthusiasm for consensus-based approaches, which may obscure the fact that these approaches – in the current setting – serve the interests of the already powerful.

I have provided a deep and critical assessment of the Future Search Conference design on the basis of the experience of organisers and conference participants in two case study areas. On the basis of my empirical work, I have been able to make a modest contribution to the theoretical debates which divide the promoters of the Future Search design (Weisbord & Janoff 1995) from those of the Search Conference design (Emery & Purser 1996). My research evidence supports Emery and Purser's claim that the fixed agenda of the Future Search Conference at times infantilises the participants and thereby reduces the chances of effective follow-up action. My data also supports Emery and Purser's view that the common ground phase of the Future Search Conference is ill-designed to facilitate meaningful consensus. My findings seem to suggest that the Future



Search Conference design successfully facilitated a creative space liberated from the constraints of reality, but failed to link the visions back to reality in a strategic way. The common ground identified in both case study areas reflected the lowest common denominator and did not ask concessions from any group. Moreover, Emery and Purser's concern that the Future Search Conference spends too little time on the action planning has been echoed by a majority of conference participants. The creative presentations of ideal future scenarios emerged as the most effective element of the Future Search design, which generated most capacity building benefits in one step. However, this evidence must remain prepositional and requires further research on a much larger number of cases.

My main contribution has been the development of a research methodology that is sensitive to the specific benefits promised by collaborative planning theory and the Future Search proponents while at the same time meaningful to those with a stake in the investigated Future Search Conferences. Inspired by the Social Audit approach and on the basis of the tenets of naturalistic inquiry, I have developed a research strategy that fulfils these requirements. A major part of the strategy was that the field work was carried out at two points in time. The field work progressed carefully step-by-step and course corrections occurred throughout in order to accommodate unexpected findings. It proved essential to draw on different methods as no single method would have been able to capture the full picture. The focus group design was well-suited to draw out an emic perspective of the participants' Future Search perspective, while the interviews were more effective in revealing the contextual factors and power relations that influenced the follow-through process.

The findings of my evaluative studies have provided evidence that the Future Search Conference design seems well capable of facilitating effective capacity building for local democracy. Despite their many differences, both investigated conferences enabled learning, facilitated new contacts between conference participants and generated community spirit. The conference process itself brought together a diverse mix of local activists and engaged them in respectful, constructive dialogue. Conference participants in both case studies showed themselves impressed by the collaborative style of communication achieved and described it as noticeably different from the adversarial debates common in the Council chambers.

The main shortcoming of both investigated Future Search Conferences was their failure to facilitate much tangible change on the ground – apart from further meetings. In both case studies, the organisers had not planned any systematic support infrastructure for the action groups, a fact which might have contributed to their rapid decline. It was a second conference event that revived the process in both case studies. However, the opportunity was lost in both case study areas to assess the causes of their failure to deliver on the ground at the follow-up conference. A major conclusion for the Future Search Conference is therefore that it should not be misunderstood as a one-off event, but rather as a starting point for a long-term process that will require a well-designed follow-up

structure, including further conferences and including course-corrections where outcomes are lacking.

An important insight that I have backed is that any evaluation study will have to pay considerable attention to the wider political context within which a deliberative and inclusionary process takes place and to the power relations between key actors. As my analysis in chapter 8 has demonstrated, these contextual factors play a crucial role in facilitating or inhibiting the follow-up process of any deliberative and inclusionary process. I have proposed that the effectiveness of a Future Search Conference is limited by the context within which it is embedded.

On the basis of a thorough analysis of power relations which were at work in both case study areas, I have concluded that power relations are ever present in collaborative planning practice. I have argued that the normative aim of creating communicative spheres from which distorting power relations are absent – as promoted by theories of collaborative planning – seems rather misleading on the basis of my research evidence. As an alternative, I have followed Flyvbjerg's call to sharpen our awareness of enabling and inhibiting power relations which are ever present. The aim of theorising and practice should be to learn how to achieve our normative aims in the presence of power relations. This has led me to question the claim that consensus-based approaches should be the only legitimate route towards achieving sustainable development, as implied by *Agenda 21*. Instead, I have proposed that social movements may be needed to mobilise social bias for sustainable development.

The research also suggests that in the context of local politics and in the current political setting of central local government relations - unless there is a distinct move toward co-evolution and power sharing – Future Search Conferences and similar participatory approaches will have little moment.

## **9.2 Proposals for further research**

I have generated an in-depth understanding and critical assessment of two community-based Future Search Conferences. The conclusions derived on the basis of just two cases must necessarily remain propositions that require further research. Nevertheless, the explorative work I conducted has mapped uncharted territory and provides a solid foundation upon which further research can build. It is now possible to investigate and compare a larger number of cases of Future Search Conferences with regards to selected criteria or issues I have raised. While my research methodology had to be broad to make sure that no essential aspect was missed only because it had not been anticipated, future research can more safely narrow down.

Secondly, as the specific workings of the Future Search Conference are now better understood, it will be easier to design effective comparative studies with other innovative participation tools like Open Space Technology. Such an approach will help to make visible the particular strengths and weaknesses of the Future Search method more clearly in a contrast with a different design.

Thirdly, the long-term impact of Future Search Conferences over a period of 5-10 years is still awaiting exploration. The real transformative power of Future Search Conferences may lie in the social networks that form at the conference and the long term difference these linked-up people make locally.

Finally, the real issue that demands further attention and research is the relationship between informal and formal governance. I have suggested a need to ensure that deliberative and inclusionary processes are not just used to legitimise decisions of local governments, but that they allow for a real sharing of power. In order to achieve this, a process of co-evolution of formal and informal institutions of governance is required. It remains to be explored, how such a process of co-evolution could best be achieved.

### **9.3 The future of Future Search Conferencing**

There are a number of indications that community-based Future Search Conferences and similar tools which foster stakeholder deliberation in participatory processes of local governance are still on the rise in Germany and the UK in the first decade of the new millennium.

In the UK, New Labour's *Guidance on enhancing public participation in local government* (DETR 1998a) and the guidance on best value (DETR 1998d) suggest that the government wants participatory processes like Future Search Conferences to play a leading role in local governance in the years to come. To the extent that Local Agenda 21 and the concern of sustainable development is absorbed into 'Best Value' processes (LGA & LGMB 1998), the momentum for citizen participation is likely to come from 'Best Value' rather than from Local Agenda 21. However, while 'Best Value' processes may raise the hope of power sharing and meaningful citizen involvement, they may in reality turn out to be just another means of central government control. The imposition of centrally conceived performance standards may facilitate a rise in the efficiency of local government, but not necessarily further power sharing.

In Germany, the slow and half-hearted adoption of the New Steering Model is raising very similar issues (CAF 1999b). As the main emphasis so far is upon the introduction of profit centres within the administration and upon achieving performance standards, there is little momentum for citizen participation. Future Search Conferences and similar tools have in the meantime been discovered in Germany for purposes of rural development (Offenbach Post 1998a & b). Also, Local Agenda 21 is still gaining ground in Germany, as all federal states (*Länder*) have established coordination units which provide support and advice to local authorities (Rösler 1999). A recent development I have come across was that a Future Search Conference was suggested to launch an Agenda 21 process on the level of the *Land* Sachsen-Anhalt in July 2000 (Zimmermann 2000, personal communication).

I have shown that community-based Future Search Conferences which try to address the whole complexity of issues all at once have trouble producing meaningful outcomes. A slight improvement are sector-based conferences which aim to build a lasting network amongst the many institutions working in the

same field, in order to agree upon shared priorities, to coordinate the various organisations' programmes, to avoid duplication and to establish shared standards of practice in the sector. In the UK, the series of three sector-based Future Search Conferences hosted in Gloucestershire (see section 4.2 of this book) – one on transport, one on the economy, one on housing - has set a leading example in that respect. In Germany, the region Vogelsberg near Frankfurt a.M. has brought together all institutions which support youths in the transition to the job market in a Future Search Conference that was hosted at the end of March 2000 (Weber 2000, personal communication).

Sector-based conferences have also been hosted at the national level, for example on health issues in Bangladesh. Future Search Conferences there have been hosted on themes like 'Child Labour' or 'Stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS' (Steil 1998/1999).

While the contribution of community-based Future Search Conferences to capacity building for democracy should not be discounted, the two investigated case studies have certainly given me much reason to conclude this book on a word of caution. Successful Future Search applications will require a distinct move to power sharing and institutional innovation at the interface between formal and informal structures of governance. In the absence of such changes, Future Search Conferences in particular, and collaborative planning practices in general are destined to remain little more than legitimising devices for the already powerful.

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## Appendix 1

### Listing of all meetings I attended as non-participant observer in my case study areas

#### 1. Rushmoor 1<sup>st</sup> round of data collection

- steering group meeting on 10 June 1997, 12.30-3pm
- Future Search Conference 4-6 July 1997
- steering group meeting on 22 July 1997, 12.30-3pm
- transport meeting in Aldershot

#### 2. Olching 1<sup>st</sup> round of data collection

- steering group meeting on 17 October 1997, 5-9pm
- steering group meeting on 8 December 1997, 6pm
- steering group meeting on 8 January 1998
- Future Search Conference on 16-18 January 1998

#### 3. Rushmoor 2<sup>nd</sup> round of data collection

- meeting of the Future Search team on 3 September 1998, 9.30-12.30, followed by a quick briefing with the facilitators
- meeting of the environment group on 10 September 1998, 6.30-8.30pm
- meeting of the youth action forum on 15 September 1998, 5-7pm
- meeting of the social needs forum on 23 September 1998, 12-2pm
- liaison meeting of the Future Search team and the LA21 members subcommittee on 29 September 1998

#### 4. Olching 2<sup>nd</sup> round of data collection

- Annual citizen gathering in Geiselbullach /Graßlfing on 11 November 1998, 7.30pm
- Annual citizen gathering in Esting on 13 November 1998, 7.30pm
- Annual citizen gathering in Olching on 18 November 1998, 7.30pm
- meeting of the group on citizen participation on 23 November 1998, 2-3pm
- meeting of the youth action group on 23 November 1998, 7.30-9pm
- Committee on Planning, Environment and Development on 24 November 1998, 7pm
- Annual women's citizen gathering on 25 November 1998, 3.15-5.15pm
- public meeting of the *Landkreis* Fürstenfeldbruck Local Agenda 21 on 26 November 1998, 7pm

## Appendix 2

### Listing of Peer Debriefings

#### **1. Future Search practitioner days and trainings I attended**

- UK FSC practitioners' day with Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff on 9 September 1996 in Bristol
- UK FSC practitioners' day on 20 June 1997 in Warwick
- Open Space training with Harrison Owen on 2-5 September 1997 in Roffey Park Management Institute
- German FSC training on 26-28 November 1997 in Oberursel
- *Annual conference on models of citizen participation in local governance.* Stiftung MITARBEIT & Evangelische Akademie Loccum, 3 days in November 1997
- UK FSC practitioners' day on 11 July 1998 in London
- *Annual conference on models of citizen participation in local governance.* Stiftung MITARBEIT & Evangelische Akademie Loccum, 3 days in October 1998
- German large group interventions practitioners' day on 15-16 November 1998 in Oberursel
- German FSC practitioner conference with Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff on 12-13 September 1999 in Oberursel

#### **2. Conferences where I presented early findings of my research**

- *Technology, the Environment and Us.* Sixth IRNES Conference, 22-23 September 1997, Imperial College, London.
- *Annual conference on models of citizen participation in local governance.* Stiftung MITARBEIT & Evangelische Akademie Loccum, November 1997.
- *International Sustainable Development Research Conference.* March 1998, ERP Environment, Leeds.
- *Futures Planning: Planning's Future.* The Planning Research Conference. 29-31 March 1999, University of Sheffield, Sheffield.

#### **3. Full day peer debriefings about my research**

- Sustainable Futures (Neil Spencer, Dr. John Colvin and Sue Porter) in January 1997 in Gloucestershire
- Sustainable Futures (Dr. John Colvin and Sue Porter) on 28 July 1997 in Gloucestershire
- New Economics Foundation (Peter Raynard) on 1 August 1997 in London
- University of East Anglia and Cambridge postgraduates on 5 August 1997 in Cambridge
- University of East Anglia, Cambridge and Sheffield postgraduates in September 1997 in Norwich

- University of East Anglia and University College London/ESRU postgraduates and staff on 5 June 1998 in London

**4. *List of colleagues whose work has influenced and benefited my own:***

- Dr. Tim Bending, University of East Anglia, Norwich
- Andrew Walters, University of East Anglia, Norwich
- Dr. Sabine Kolloge, Humboldt University, Berlin
- Dr. Liz Sharp, University of Sheffield/recently University of Bradford
- Dr. Susanne Weber, Marburg University
- Uwe Schmidt-Leinigen, Carl-von-Ossietzky-University, Oldenburg
- Daniel Mittler, London School of Economics
- Matthias Mogge, University of East Anglia, Norwich
- Andy Wild, Sheffield University
- Dr. Harriet Bulkely, Cambridge University
- Anna Davies, Cambridge University
- Stefan Kanther, Stiftung Mitarbeit, Bonn
- Ruth Dobrindt, Bonn University
- Carole Maleh, Hannover
- Oliver Kuklinski, Hannover
- Sue Porter, Dr. John Colvin and Neil Spencer of Sustainable Futures

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview guide**

I used the following interview guide for all interviews. However, the focus of the interview depended on the area of expertise of the interviewee. The heading of each section is the question asked, with sub-questions for probing listed underneath.

**a) How do you evaluate the Future Search process, looking back on it now?**

- (if outsider: ) what is your impression /perception of the Future Search process
- what do you regard as the outcomes of the conference? what has the conference had an impact on?
- what are in your view the biggest achievements of the conference?
- what have you gained personally from being involved with the conference process?
- what are in your view the regrets with regard to the conference?
- what are the lessons learned?
- were the aims of the conference right?
- what are the strengths and weaknesses of Future Search?
- what are you personally proud of, what do you regret?

**b) (for members of the steering group) What was your experience of being a member of the steering group?**

- which phases did the steering group go through, if any?
- what has its role been? what is it now?
- which lessons were learned?
- what has kept you personally on board?
- how did you feel about the liaison meetings with the LA21 members subcommittee? what is the purpose of those meetings and where do you see them going?

**c) Do you feel the outcomes of the Future Search Conference have legitimacy? Do you feel a certain sector / group is missing or underrepresented in the process?**

- prompt: media, youth, business
- is that a problem / does it make the Future Search process less legitimate?
- why do you think that group (business, youth, media) is not involved?
- what could be done to involve that group better?
- what do you think are the interests / motivation of those involved in the process? any self-interest?

**d) What is the relationship between the Future Search activities and the council (members and officers)?**

- what do you think is the role of the council? what role should it play?
- what do you think is the role of (i) councillors and (ii) council officers in the Future Search process?
- do you think there should be more or less involvement from the council? why?
- how do you think councillors feel / how do you as a councillor feel about the Future Search process? do they regard it as a legitimate process or as a threat that non-elected activists are working on proposals for the future of the borough?
- has the Future Search process any impact on what's going on in the Council? is power shared in any significant way?

**e) What is your experience of the action group(s)?**

- what are achievements of your action group?
- why did your group fold/ survive while others thrived / folded?
- what kept you on board of your action group / why did you quit?
- what is the relationship between the action groups and LA21?

**f) What is the general line of the Council on consultation and participation?**

- who or what drives the emphasis on participation?
- what is the relationship between elected members and non-elected activists? what are the respective roles?
- to what extent is decision-making power and resources shared between council and non-elected activists? to what extent should it be shared / how far can it go?
- how does the Future Search process relate to other consultation exercises carried out by the council (or third parties)? is there a danger of duplication?
- do you feel all this is leading to more local democracy?

**g) What is the influence of central government policies on consultation and local democracy?**

- what is the state of local democracy in Rushmoor/Olching? what are the problems? what is Rushmoor/Olching already good at?
- will the proposals made by central government (best value, in touch with the people, citizenship education) increase local democracy?
- do you see something like the Future Search contribute to local democracy?
- what do you think of central government's emphasis on working in partnership? how is that going to influence what you do?



**h) What is your perception of LA21 in Rushmoor/Olching?**

- what is for you the essence of LA21?
- what is the role of the council in the LA21 process?
- do you think the council has grasped what LA21 is all about?
- has LA21 been integrated into the council policies?
- what are the difficulties with progressing LA21?
- where should LA21 be going?

**i) (for members of LA21 officer steering group or members subcommittee:)**

**What has your group been up to?**

- who is on your group?
- how does your group operate ( who initiates, how are things decided upon)?
- what are achievements of your work?
- lessons learned?
- what are remaining problems?
- how would your group need to change to be more effective?

**j) What do you feel are the key issues facing Rushmoor/Olching at present?**

- what are the needs of the community?
- what are the policy priority areas?
- what are the challenges Rushmoor/Olching is facing at present?

**k) (for participants of my focus groups) What was your experience of participating in the group discussion?**

- did you feel free to express fully what you really thought and felt?
- do you think others expressed their thoughts honestly and fully?
- do you have memories of anything in particular that you didn't say / weren't able to say? what was it?

Hartmut Elsenhans

**Das Internationale System zwischen Zivilgesellschaft und Rente**

Gegen derzeitige Theorieangebote für die Erklärung der Ursachen und die Auswirkungen wachsender transnationaler und internationaler Verflechtung setzt das hier vorliegende Konzept eine stark durch politökonomische Überlegungen integrierte Perspektive, die auf politologischen, soziologischen, ökonomischen und philosophischen Ansatzpunkten aufbaut. Mit diesem Konzept soll gezeigt werden, daß der durch Produktionsauslagerungen/Direktinvestitionen/neue Muster der internationalen Arbeitsteilung gekennzeichnete (im weiteren als Transnationalisierung von Wirtschaftsbeziehungen bezeichnete) kapitalistische Impuls zur Integration der bisher nicht in die Weltwirtschaft voll integrierten Peripherie weiterhin zu schwach ist, als daß dort nichtmarktwirtschaftliche Formen der Aneignung von Überschuß entscheidend zurückgedrängt werden können. Das sich herausbildende internationale System ist deshalb durch miteinander verschränkte Strukturen von Markt- und Nichtmarktwirtschaft gekennzeichnet, die nur unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen synergetische Effekte in Richtung einer autonomen und zivilisierten Weltzivilgesellschaft entfalten werden. Dabei treten neue Strukturen von Nichtmarktwirtschaft auf transnationaler Ebene auf, während der Wiederaufstieg von Renten die zivilgesellschaftlichen Grundlagen funktionierender oder potentiell zu Funktionsfähigkeit zu bringender, dann kapitalistischer Systeme auf internationaler und lokaler Ebene eher behindert.

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Klaus Schubert

**Innovation und Ordnung**

In einer evolutionär voranschreitenden Welt sind statische Politikmodelle und -theorien problematisch. Deshalb lohnt es sich, die wichtigste Quelle für die Entstehung der policy-analysis, den Pragmatismus, als dynamische, demokratieendogene politisch-philosophische Strömung zu rekonstruieren. Dies geschieht im ersten Teil der Studie. Der zweite Teil trägt zum Verständnis des daraus folgenden politikwissenschaftlichen Ansatzes bei. Darüber hinaus wird durch eine konstruktiv-spekulative Argumentation versucht, die z. Z. wenig innovative Theorie- und Methodendiskussion in der Politikwissenschaft anzuregen.

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Klaus Segbers; Kerstin Imbusch (eds.)

**The Globalization of Eastern Europe Teaching International Relations Without Borders**

Globalization and fragmentation, weakly controlled flows of information and knowledge, increasing cleavages in societies undergoing rapid change, flows of migrants, services and capital, bypassing the control of national governments, life styles and consumption patterns produced by electronic media and advertising – all these developments already have a significant impact on post-Soviet regions. And all kind of actors – decision makers, journalists, experts, students – perceive the environment beyond their respective national borders increasingly as the “playground” they have to take into account, and as a framework for action.

The chapters in this volume are produced by experts in the so called transformation countries in Eastern Europe. They address various questions on inter- and transnational relations, thereby offering a framework for reflection and for analysis of macro-trends around policy fields relevant for the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The product certainly mirrors the specific environment of researchers, teachers and students in these countries. At the same time, it reflects a process of intensive discussion on the state of IR literature worldwide. Furthermore, this book demonstrates how useful teaching tools for universities and institutes not only in Eastern and Central Europe can be produced.

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Hartwig Hummel; Ulrich Menzel (Hg.)

**Die Ethnisierung internationaler Wirtschaftsbeziehungen und daraus resultierende Konflikte**

Mit Beiträgen von Annabelle Gambe, Hartwig Hummel, Ulrich Menzel und Birgit Wehrhöfer

“Die Ethnisierung der internationalen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen und daraus resultierende Konflikte” lautete der Titel eines Forschungsprojekts, das diesem Band zugrunde liegt. Es geht um die Themen Handel, Migration und Investitionen. In drei Fallstudien werden die Handelsbeziehungen zwischen den USA und Japan, die Einwanderung nach Deutschland bzw. Frankreich und das auslandschinesische Unternehmertum untersucht. Die Ergebnisse des Projekts sehen Hummel und Menzel in den späteren Ereignissen bestätigt: Ethnisierende Tendenzen können sich in der Handelspolitik und der Investitionstätigkeit von Unternehmen nicht durchsetzen, während die

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Ethnisierung im Bereich der Migration andauert.  
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Theodor Ebert

### **Opponenten und Regieren mit gewaltfreien Mitteln**

**Pazifismus – Grundsätze und Erfahrungen für das 21. Jahrhundert. Band 1**

Das grundlegende und aktuelle Werk eines Konfliktforschers, der über Jahrzehnte in pazifistischen Organisationen, in sozialen Bewegungen und in Gremien der Evangelischen Kirche gearbeitet hat. Ebert breitet in anschaulichen Berichten und doch in systematischer Ordnung die Summe seiner Erfahrungen aus und entwickelt Perspektiven für eine Welt, die mit der Gewalt leben muss, doch Gefahr läuft, an ihr zugrunde zu gehen, wenn sie auf die Bedrohungen keine neuen, gewaltfreien Antworten findet.

Aus dem Vorwort: "Es gibt eine pragmatische Befürwortung des gewaltfreien Handelns in innenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen durch eine Mehrheit der Deutschen, und dies sollten wir als tragenden Bestandteil der Zivilkultur nicht gering schätzen. Doch die Frage, wie man mit gewaltfreien Mitteln regieren und sich gegenüber gewalttätigen Extremisten durchsetzen kann und wie man sich international behaupten und Bedrohungen helfen kann, ist bislang kaum erörtert worden... Dieses Buch soll klären, was unter politisch verantwortlichem und doch radikal gewaltfreiem Pazifismus zu verstehen ist, und wie mit gewaltfreien Mitteln nicht nur opponiert, sondern auch regiert werden kann."

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Theodor Ebert

### **Der Kosovo-Krieg aus pazifistischer Sicht** **Pazifismus – Grundsätze und Erfahrungen für das 21. Jahrhundert. Band 2**

Mit dem Luftkrieg der NATO gegen Jugoslawien begann für den deutschen Nachkriegspazifismus ein neues Zeitalter. Ebert hat sich über Jahrzehnte als Konfliktforscher und Schriftleiter der Zeitschrift "Gewaltfreie Aktion" mit den Möglichkeiten gewaltfreier Konfliktbearbeitung befasst. Von ihm stammt der erste Entwurf für einen Zivilen Friedensdienst als Alternative zum Militär. Aus dem Vorwort: "Wer sich einbildet, auch in Zukunft ließe sich aus großer Höhe mit Bomben politischer Gehorsam erzwingen, unterschätzt die Möglichkeiten, die fanatische Terroristen haben, in fahrlässiger Weise. Jedes Atomkraftwerk ist eine stationäre Atombombe, die von Terroristen mit geringem Aufwand in ein Tschernobyl verwandelt werden kann. Wir haben allen Grund, schleunigst über zivile Alternativen zu militärischen Einsätzen nachzudenken und die vorhandene Ansätze solch

ziviler Alternativen zu entwickeln."

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Wolfgang Gieler

### **Handbuch der Ausländer- und Zuwanderungspolitik**

**Von Afghanistan bis Zypern**

In der Literatur zur Ausländer- und Zuwanderungspolitik fehlt ein Handbuch, das einen schnellen und kompakten Überblick dieses Politikbereichs ermöglicht. Das vorliegende Handbuch bemüht sich diese wissenschaftliche Lücke zu schließen. Thematisiert werden die Ausländer- und Zuwanderungspolitik weltweiter Staaten von Afghanistan bis Zypern. Zentrale Fragestellung ist dabei der Umgang mit Fremden, das heißt mit Nicht-Inländern im jeweiligen Staat. Hierbei werden insbesondere politische, soziale, rechtliche, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Aspekte mitberücksichtigt. Um eine Kompatibilität der Beiträge herzustellen beinhaltet jeder Beitrag darüber hinaus eine Zusammenstellung der historischen Grunddaten und eine Tabelle zur jeweiligen Anzahl der im Staat lebenden Ausländer. Die vorgelegte Publikation versteht sich als ein grundlegendes Nachschlagewerk. Neben dem universitären Bereich richtet es sich besonders an die gesellschaftspolitisch interessierte Öffentlichkeit und den auf sozialwissenschaftlichen Kenntnissen angewiesenen Personen in Politik, Verwaltung, Medien, Bildungseinrichtungen und Migranten-Organisationen.

Bd. 6, 2003, 768 S., 98,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-6444-8

### **Friedensgutachten**

der Hessischen Stiftung für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (HSFK), des Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), des Instituts für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF), der Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft (FEST), des Instituts für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg (IFSH)

### **Friedensgutachten 2001**

herausgegeben von Reinhard Mutz, Bruno Schoch und Ulrich Ratsch  
Das Friedensgutachten 2001 nimmt sich aus verschiedenen Blickwinkeln der derzeit wohl brisantesten Konfliktkonstellation auf dem Globus an: der Krisenregion Naher Osten. Der Friedensprozess gilt als gescheitert, in den zwischen Israelis und Palästinensern strittigen Fragen scheinen Kompromisse ferner denn je. Die Gewalt dauert an und droht weiter zu eskalieren. Für eine

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hoffnungsvolle Perspektive lassen die festgefahrenen Fronten keinen Raum. Europa hingegen kann und muss die Atempause der immer noch fragilen Waffenruhe auf dem Balkan nutzen, um seine friedens- und sicherheitspolitischen Strukturprobleme anzugehen. Die Erweiterung der EU darf die erreichten Integrationserfolge nicht in Frage stellen, Ziele und Mittel einer eigenständigen Sicherheitspolitik sind miteinander in Einklang zu bringen, Osteuropa, einschließlich Russland, braucht glaubhafte Aussichten auf friedensfördernde Einbindung. Im globalen Rahmen stellt sich der industrialisierten Welt die Aufgabe, organisierte Gewalt an ihren Wurzeln zu eliminieren. Armutsbekämpfung und Klimaschutz sind Beispiele. Das Friedensgutachten fragt nach den Ursachen von Bürgerkriegsökonomien und beleuchtet die Bemühungen, das Instrumentarium der UNO zur Friedensvorsorge zu stärken. Ausgewählte regionale Konflikttherde werden gesondert analysiert: Nordirland, Afghanistan, Korea, Irak, Indonesien. Den Abschluss bildet die Thematik internationaler Abrüstung und Rüstungskontrolle, die dem Blickfeld der Öffentlichkeit zu entschwinden scheint. Eng zusammen hängen die offene Frage der amerikanischen Raketenabwehrplanung und das Problem der Ausbreitung von Massenvernichtungswaffen. Die Begrenzung konventioneller Streitkräfte in Europa und die deutsche Rüstungsexportpolitik werden ebenso untersucht wie die Schwierigkeiten wirksamer Kleinwaffenkontrolle.

Von mehr als dreißig Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern verschiedener Disziplinen erarbeitet, erscheint das Friedensgutachten 2001 zum fünfzehnten Mal. Es wird im Auftrag des IFSH, der HSFK und der FEST sowie in Kooperation mit dem INEF und dem BICC von Reinhard Mutz, Bruno Schoch und Ulrich Ratsch herausgegeben. Es kostet 12,90 €.

2001, 368 S., 12,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5435-3

### **Friedensgutachten 2002**

herausgegeben von Bruno Schoch, Corinna Hauswedell, Christoph Weller, Ulrich Ratsch und Reinhard Mutz  
Das Friedensgutachten 2002 kreist thematisch um den 11. September. Die Beiträge erheben Ursachen und Folgen, die weit über den Krieg in Afghanistan hinausgehen. Was ist das Neue am internationalen Terrorismus? Aus welchen Quellen speist er sich? Wie kann man ihm begegnen? Wie hat sich die Weltpolitik der USA verändert? Welche Rolle nimmt Russland ein? Und wie reagiert die deutsche Politik? Die Anschläge in den USA haben den Massenvernichtungsmitteln, auf deren Kontrolle und Abrüstung wir seit langem pochen, beunruhigende Aktualität verliehen. Und nicht zu-

letzt verändern neue Sicherheitsgesetze die in der Demokratie immer prekäre Balance von Sicherheit und Freiheit. Zwar hüten wir uns, schon das neue Jahrhundert definieren zu wollen - doch wir versuchen, Tendenzen zu einer neuen Weltordnung oder - unordnung aufzuspüren. Halten die völkerrechtlichen Regeln den Belastungen stand? Brauchen wir eine neue Aufrüstung? Und was hat es mit der Rede von den neuen Kriegen auf sich? - Exemplarisch gehen wir regionalen Konflikten nach: Mazedonien, Serbien und Montenegro, Nordirland sowie dem israelisch-palästinensischen Krieg, der im letzten Jahr im Mittelpunkt des Friedensgutachtens stand. - Nach wie vor ist Frieden weit mehr als Terrorismusbekämpfung. Wir thematisieren diesmal die Teilbereiche zivile Konfliktbearbeitung und nachhaltige Entwicklung und plädieren für eine neue globale Kooperationskultur. Den Internationalen Strafgerichtshof bewerten wir trotz mancher Mängel als einen Fortschritt.

Das Friedensgutachten erscheint 2002 zum sechzehnten Mal. Es wird im Auftrag der fünf Institute herausgegeben von Bruno Schoch, Corinna Hauswedell, Christoph Weller, Ulrich Ratsch und Reinhard Mutz. Es kostet 12,90 Euro, im Abonnement 8,50 Euro.

2002, 320 S., 12,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6007-8

### **Friedensgutachten 2003**

herausgegeben von Corinna Hauswedell, Christoph Weller, Ulrich Ratsch, Reinhard Mutz, Bruno Schoch  
Das Friedensgutachten ist das gemeinsame Jahrbuch der fünf Institute für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung in Deutschland. Einzelanalysen von mehr als dreißig Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern aus verschiedenen Disziplinen untersuchen das internationale Konfliktgeschehen und entwerfen Friedensstrategien. Auf diese Beiträge stützt sich die Stellungnahme der Herausgeber. Sie zieht Bilanz, pointiert Ergebnisse und formuliert Empfehlungen für die friedens- und sicherheitspolitische Praxis in Deutschland und Europa.  
Das Friedensgutachten 2003 stellt die Frage nach der Zukunft von Kooperation oder Konfrontation in der neuen Weltordnung. Die weitreichenden Folgen des 11. September 2001 und der Krieg gegen den Irak haben nicht nur die transatlantischen Beziehungen und die Zusammenarbeit in den internationalen Institutionen erschüttert, sie machen die tiefer gehenden Asymmetrien des neuen Weltgefüges sichtbar: Das Verhältnis von Macht und Recht in den internationalen Beziehungen steht auf dem Prüfstand; Militarisierung bedroht Entwicklung, Gerechtigkeit, Demokratie und humane Wertesysteme.

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Auf der Basis einer Analyse dieser grundlegenden Tendenzen fragen die Autoren nach den Auswirkungen und Alternativen in relevanten Weltregionen, für das Nord-Süd-Verhältnis und nach der zukünftigen Rolle Europas: Wie soll eine Friedensordnung im Mittleren Osten Gestalt gewinnen, im Irak, zwischen Israel und Palästina, im zerrissenen Afghanistan? Wie können sich die Konfliktregionen Afrikas aus der Umklammerung von Gewaltökonomie und Plünderung ihrer Ressourcen befreien? Welche Bedrohung geht von Nordkorea aus? Was bedeutet der globale Anti-Terrorkrieg für Südostasien oder Kolumbien? Wie müssen die Instrumente globaler Ordnung, des Völkerrechts und der UNO weiterentwickelt werden?

Das Friedensgutachten wird im Auftrag der fünf Institute herausgegeben von Corinna Hauswedell, Christoph Weller, Ulrich Ratsch, Reinhard Mutz und Bruno Schoch. Es kostet 12,90 Euro, im Abonnement 8,50 Euro.

2003, 336 S., 12,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6760-9

## **Forschungsberichte Internationale Politik**

im Auftrag der Arbeitsstelle Transatlantische Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik, Fachbereich Politische Wissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin, herausgegeben von Ingo Peters

Klaus Günter Deutsch

### **The Politics of Freer Trade in Europe Three-level games in the Common Commercial Policy of the EU, 1985–1997**

Trade policies of the European Union have not followed the simple script of free trade. In some sectors, protection has been granted, in others, far-reaching liberalisation has occurred. In the European Union, a politics of freer trade has developed over the decades, a very particular phenomenon not found in single nation-states around the globe. Deep-seated commitments of governments to the social purposes of the welfare state have played a considerable role in the shaping of national and Community trade policy preferences.

The politics of freer trade has originated in the very unstructured nature of policy-making itself. Trade policy usually takes place in the context of simultaneous bargaining at national, Community, and external negotiation tables – in complex three-level games. However, socio economic and political coalitions for freer external trade have emerged in a considerable number of issue-areas. These coalitions comprise the "open regionalists" among governments of member

states, the Commission, and liberal constituencies. Often, international pressure is essential as well, as in the cases of the farm trade negotiations in the Uruguay Round of the GATT or of trade diplomacy with Japan in the automotive sector. Both case studies are analysed in this book. Institutional reforms aimed at enhancing the capacity of the European Union to cope with societal and diplomatic pressures in future are suggested. Multilateral policies for free trade in the world economy are in the best political and economic interest of the European Union itself. Co-published with St. Martin's Press, New York. Bd. 25, 1999, 344 S., 35,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-4143-x

Hildegard Bedarff

**Die Wirkung internationaler Institutionen auf die Energie- und Umweltpolitik  
Weltbank, EU und Europäische Energiecharta in Polen und in der Tschechischen Republik**  
Unter welchen Bedingungen wirken internationale Institutionen auf innerstaatliche Politikprozesse ein? Diese Studie zeigt, daß internationale Institutionen besonders dann auf substaatliche Reformen einwirken können, wenn sich die Empfängerländer in einer Umbruchsituation befinden, in der die Regierung noch keine Richtungsentscheidung getroffen hat und die gesellschaftlichen Gruppen noch nicht klar konturiert sind.

Aus umweltpolitischer Perspektive wird untersucht, inwiefern die internationalen Institutionen ihren eigenen Ansprüchen gerecht werden und einen Wandel zu einer ökologisch tragfähigen Energiewirtschaft unterstützen. In der umweltpolitischen Forschung in den internationalen Beziehungen stehen bisher internationale Umweltregime im Vordergrund. Hier wird dafür plädiert, daneben auch Wirtschaftsorganisationen, die sich mit ökologisch sensiblen Bereichen, wie der Energiepolitik beschäftigen, gleichberechtigt zu untersuchen. Die umweltpolitischen Wirkungen der drei untersuchten Institutionen sind schwach, da sie ihre ökologischen Ziele bisher noch nicht mit ihrer ökonomischen Ausrichtung verbunden haben und da gleichzeitig die ökologische Modernisierungskapazität der Empfängerländer begrenzt ist.

Bd. 26, 2000, 272 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-4790-x

Joanna Lucia Bodenstein

### **Frankreichs Antwort auf das Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts**

**Die Reaktion des politischen Systems auf den Umbruch 1989**

In Umbruchphasen der internationalen Beziehungen gewinnt die Sicherheitspolitik einen besonderen Stellenwert; sie beinhaltet Anforderungen und Gestaltungsspielräume zugleich. Der

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Fall der Berliner Mauer 1989 ist Symbol für das Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts und eine historische Zäsur, die Europas Sicherheitsarchitektur grundlegend veränderte.

Diese Studie analysiert Frankreichs Handlungsspielraum nach dem Mauerfall zwischen Autonomieanspruch und zunehmender internationaler Interdependenz. Welche Politik verfolgte Frankreich gegenüber der deutschen Vereinigung, wie entwickelte sich Frankreichs internationaler Rang? Welche Antworten gab die französische Politik auf die neuen Fragen an die nationale Verteidigung und die Reform der Bündnisstrukturen? Wie reagierte Frankreich auf die gesamteuropäischen Herausforderungen, u. a. die EU-Osterweiterung?

Bd. 30, 2002, 344 S., 25,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-5877-4

## **Münchener Beiträge zur Geschichte und Gegenwart der internationalen Politik**

herausgegeben von Peter J. Opitz  
unter Mitwirkung von Mir A. Ferdowski  
und Dietmar Herz

### **Claudius Rosenthal Zur Legitimation von Außenpolitik durch Politische Theorie**

Wie läßt sich Außenpolitik legitimieren? Der Autor beantwortet diese nach 1989 besonders aktuelle Frage unter Verweis auf die Politische Theorie: Nicht Tradition, nicht Gesetze, nicht charismatische Führer und nicht der Verweis auf ein höchstes Ziel, sondern vornehmlich das "systematisierte Argument" könnten der heutigen Außenpolitik Legitimation verschaffen. Den Nachweis für diese These führt der Autor zunächst begründungstheoretisch; er entwickelt dann Kategorien, mit denen sich das Legitimationspotential unterschiedlicher Politischer Theorien bestimmen läßt.

Bd. 8, 2001, 570 S., 40,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-4840-x

### **Heike Schröder Negotiating the Kyoto Protocol** An analysis of negotiation dynamics in international negotiations

Climate change has become an important policy area, one which has been gaining momentum since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in December 1997. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted by 159 nations after a tenacious final marathon of negotiations, during which all unresolved issues were hammered out one by one. The commitments that were finally agreed upon exceeded the original expectations.

Despite its shortcomings, the Kyoto Protocol is a constructive compromise worthy of commendation, and is therefore a remarkable diplomatic achievement. The aim of this book is not only to present an introduction to the historical, legal and political foundations of the Kyoto Protocol, but also to offer a thorough analysis of the negotiation process at the Kyoto Conference. It investigates the positions, interests and strategies of three crucial players, the EU, US and Japan, on the issue of climate change and examines how these influenced the outcome of the negotiations. Furthermore, it examines the impact of other factors on the final result. This book thus presents a unique case study of an international negotiation process, negotiation strategies and conference dynamics. It is an indispensable guide for political scientists, policy makers, negotiators and all those interested in negotiation processes and the politics of climate change.

Bd. 9, 2001, 208 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5446-9

## **Berliner Studien zur Internationalen Politik**

herausgegeben von Dr. Werner Pfennig  
(Freie Universität Berlin)

### **Uday M. Ghose**

#### **Die Transformation der Indischen Union** Eine empirische und theoretische Analyse der Wirtschaftsreformen 1991 – 96 und ihrer Implikationen für die Mainstream Transformationstheorie

Mehr als 40 Jahre lang verfolgte Indien eine von starken planwirtschaftlichen Elementen geprägte Wirtschaftspolitik. Erst mit dem Antritt der Regierung unter Premierminister Rao wurde die Marktwirtschaft zur ökonomischen Leitlinie erhoben. Theoretische Grundlage dafür war (und ist) die „Mainstream“-Transformationstheorie neoklassischer Provenienz, mit der sich diese Arbeit kritisch auseinandersetzt und zudem das Fundament für eine empirisch gehaltvolle Theorie der Transformation legt. Indiens Transformationsprozess in der entscheidenden Phase 1991 – 96 liefert dafür das empirische Material.

Bd. 6, 2003, 288 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6631-9

### **Thomas Benedikter**

**Krieg im Himalaya**  
Hintergründe des Maoistenaufstandes in Nepal. Eine politische Landeskunde  
2002 war das blutigste Jahr in der Geschichte Nepals seit dem Krieg gegen die Briten 1815/16. Im Land herrscht Ausnahmezustand und im mittleren Westens geht die Armee ohne Rücksicht

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auf die Zivilbevölkerung gegen die maoistische Volksbefreiungsarmee vor. Diese startet von ihren Basisgebieten aus Großangriffe auf Militärstützpunkte und trägt ihre Guerrilla immer mehr in die Städte. Nach 7 Jahren „Volkskrieg“ mit fast 7.500 Toten nimmt, unbeachtet von der Weltöffentlichkeit, die Dynamik von Gewalt und Vergeltung ihren scheinbar unaufhaltsamen Lauf....

Wie konnte es so weit kommen? Was wollen die Maoisten? Was hat zu diesem Konflikt geführt? Der Autor hat 2002 verschiedene Schauplätze des Maoistenaufstandes besucht und monatelang in Kathmandu recherchiert. Er geht nicht nur auf die Maoistenbewegung und deren Aufstand ein, sondern hellt auch die wichtigsten sozialen und politischen Aspekte Nepals auf, die den Hintergrund dieses Konfliktes bilden. Das reich illustrierte Buch geht vom aktuellen Geschehen aus, ist aber vor allem eine politische Landeskunde des heutigen Nepal.

Bd. 7, 2003, 264 S., 19,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6895-8

### **Fragen politischer Ordnung in einer globalisierten Welt**

herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Friedrich Kratochwil  
(Universität München)

Alexander Mutschler

#### **Eine Frage der Herrschaft**

Betrachtungen zum Problem des Staatszerfalls in Afrika am Beispiel Äthiopiens und Somalias

Insbesondere in Staaten der sog. Dritten Welt kommt es immer wieder zu Fällen von Staatszerfall, die im Extremfall, wie etwa in Somalia, zum Verschwinden von staatlichen Strukturen führen. In dieser Arbeit wird Staatszerfall mit Hilfe politischer Begriffe und Faktoren analysiert. Zum einen wird nach der Funktionalität und Legitimität der Herrschaft des Staates, zum anderen nach der Rolle von in Konkurrenz zum Staat stehender Herrschaftsverbände gefragt. Vor diesem Hintergrund wird in zwei Fallstudien, Äthiopien und Somalia, die Entwicklung dieser Staaten seit Ende des zweiten Weltkriegs bis zum Niedergang der Militärdiktaturen zu Beginn der 90er Jahre betrachtet.

Bd. 1, 2002, 360 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6138-4

Doris A. Fuchs; Friedrich Kratochwil (eds.)  
**Transformative Change and Global Order**  
Reflections on Theory and Practice

The world at the beginning of the 21st century is fundamentally different from what it was only 50 years ago – or so it seems. In the political realm, scholars identify deep changes

in organization. What are the new institutions and qualities of political order? Debates on this question have focused on two concepts in particular: globalization and global governance. Using these concepts as entrance points, therefore, the contributors to this volume explore theory and practice of political organization in a transformed/ing world with the aim of shaping the post-globalization discussion.

Bd. 2, 2002, 272 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6374-3

### **Regensburger Schriften zur Auswärtigen Politik**

herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Stephan Bierling  
(Universität Regensburg)

Robert Kulzer

#### **Demokratiieverständnis und demokratische Praxis des African National Congress (1994 – 1999)**

Mit den ersten freien Wahlen vom April 1994 ist die Befreiungsbewegung African National Congress (ANC) zur bestimmenden Regierungspartei in Südafrika geworden. Aufgrund des überwältigenden Rückhaltes in der schwarzen Bevölkerung wird der ANC die politische Zukunft des Landes auf absehbare Zeit maßgeblich gestalten. Vom ANC hängt es ab, wie – und ob – sich die junge und ungefestigte Demokratie in Südafrika entwickeln wird.

Die Analyse der ersten fünf Regierungsjahre des ANC zeichnet nicht nur anhand konkreter Entwicklungen den Umgang des ANC mit demokratischen Institutionen nach und zeigt damit die demokratische Praxis des ANC als Partei und als Regierung auf, sondern sie erschließt aus dem Handeln, aber vor allem aus den Aussagen und Dokumenten des ANC auch dessen theoretisches Demokratiieverständnis. Im Ergebnis wird deutlich, dass die zentrale Stellung des ANC sehr wohl ein Risiko für die Entwicklung der Demokratie in Südafrika darstellt.

Bd. 1, 2001, 192 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5131-1

Hans-Joachim Bauer

#### **Der Europarat nach der Zeitenwende 1989 – 1999**

Zur Rolle Straßburgs im gesamteuropäischen Integrationsprozeß

Bei seiner Gründung im Jahr 1949 stand der Europarat im Zentrum der europäischen Zusammenarbeit und Integration. In den darauffolgenden Jahrzehnten liefen ihm jedoch andere Organisationen den Rang ab. Ein Schattendasein war die Folge. Erst mit dem Zusammenbruch des Ostblocks und dem Ende der Spaltung Europas

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Ende der achtziger und in den neunziger Jahren rückte Straßburg wiederum verstärkt in den Blickpunkt der europäischen Politik. Die Studie untersucht, welche Rolle der Europarat in den Jahren zwischen 1989 und 1999 spielte und ob er den – nicht zuletzt von seiten der mittel- und osteuropäischen Reformstaaten in ihn gesetzten – hochgesteckten Erwartungen gerecht werden konnte. Im Mittelpunkt der Analyse steht dabei die Osterweiterung der Straßburger Organisation, die zu einer problematischen Aufweichung ihrer für den Kontinent so wichtigen Prinzipien geführt hat. Außerdem wird das Verhältnis Straßburgs zu EU und OSZE beleuchtet, das von sektoraler Doppelarbeit und mangelnder Abstimmung geprägt ist.

Bd. 2, 2001, 368 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5178-8

**Dorothea Lamatsch**

**Euro versus Dollar**

Die währungspolitische Integration Europas aus US-amerikanischer Perspektive 1969 – 1999

„Wake up, America!“ – mit dieser Aufforderung versuchten Wissenschaftler die Aufmerksamkeit der Amerikaner auf die währungspolitischen Aktivitäten der Europäischen Union zu lenken. Die Einführung des Euro im Jahr 1999 markierte den vorläufigen Höhepunkt einer 30-jährigen Entwicklung in Europa. Aber auch die Handelspartner, allen voran die USA, sind von den Folgen dieses Schritts betroffen. Manche Autoren sagten sogar das Ende der Dollar-Hegemonie voraus. Das vorliegende Buch analysiert, wie die US-Administrationen seit 1969 – begleitet von stürmischen internationalen Währungsbeziehungen – die Entwicklung hin zur Einheitswährung verfolgt haben.

Bd. 3, 2002, 240 S., 17,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5946-0

## **Texte zu Politik und Zeitgeschichte**

herausgegeben von Hans Karl Rupp  
(Universität Marburg)

Wolfgang Hecker; Joachim Klein;

Hans Karl Rupp (Hg.)

**Politik und Wissenschaft. 50 Jahre**

**Politikwissenschaft in Marburg**

Band 1: Zur Geschichte des Instituts

Bd. 1, 2001, 408 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5440-x

A. Kai-Uwe Lange

**George Frost Kennan und der Kalte Krieg**

Eine Analyse der Kennanschen Variante der

Containment Policy

George F. Kennan, entscheidender Ideengeber

für die strategische Konzeption des Marshallplanes, wird in diesem Buch als Strategie des Kalten Krieges erkannt, der mit einer kohärenten und moralisch begründeten Theorie die Abweichungen der amerikanischen Außenpolitik von seinem theoretischen Ideal wie ein Seismograph registrierte: Dabei fand er in den vergangenen fünf Dekaden nur selten zur Ruhe. Fast niemals traf die USA aus seiner Sicht das ideale Maß zwischen legitimer Interesseneröffnung und notwendiger Interessenbeschränkung. Immer blieb aus Kennans Perspektive darauf zu verweisen, daß die USA sich über- oder unterschätzte. Seine Variante der „containment policy“ geriet dabei zu einer historischen Alternative, über deren Qualität heute nur noch auf theoretischer Ebene spekuliert werden kann, da diese sich nach 1949 nicht mehr durchsetzen konnte. Die Entscheidungen zur Gründung der NATO, zur Teilstaatsgründung in den westlichen Besatzungszonen Deutschlands und zum Bau der Wasserstoffbombe drängten den Direktor des politischen Planungsstabes des State Department zur Aufgabe seines Amtes.

Bd. 3, 2001, 368 S., 30,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-5436-1

**Julia Isabel Geyer**

**Rechtsextremismus von Jugendlichen in Brandenburg**

Brandenburg befindet sich seit einigen Jahren in den Statistiken rechtsextremer Gesetzesverletzungen unter den ersten Plätzen. Zwar sind auch in Westdeutschland rechtsextremistische Einstellungen weit verbreitet. Dennoch tritt insbesondere die rechte Gewalt Jugendlicher in Ostdeutschland manifest in die öffentliche Wahrnehmung. Nur beide Faktoren zusammen, Verhalten und Einstellungen, können Aufschluss geben über die Verbreitung von Rechtsextremismus.

Den Fragen, ob der Rechtsextremismus in Brandenburg und in Ostdeutschland insgesamt ein spezifisches Jugendproblem ist, welche Strukturen er annimmt, wie weit er verbreitet ist und woraus er resultiert, wird in diesem Buch nachgegangen. Die Analyse verschiedener Brandenburger Maßnahmen und Initiativen gegen rechts zeigt hingegen trotz allem, dass es verfehlt wäre, verallgemeinernd vom „braunen Osten“ zu sprechen.

Bd. 4, 2002, 168 S., 15,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6004-3

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Stakeholder participation is supposedly a good thing. But does stakeholder participation live up to the high expectations raised about it in the literature? How can we measure success? What are suitable criteria and indicators? How do the involved stakeholders themselves judge the outcomes of their involvement? What can be done to improve the performance of stakeholder participation? And which structural factors impede stakeholder participation?

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