



Study Trip on Participatory Budgeting to the Paris Region
7-8 December 2006

REPORT

WHAT THE STUDY TRIP WAS ABOUT

As citizen involvement in service planning and policy design is becoming more and more common throughout Europe, it is a logical next step to consult citizens more on budgets. Clearly, the experience of Porto Alegre in Brazil has inspired many European public agencies, particularly at local level. Nevertheless, participatory budgeting is still an emerging practice, both in France, where there is great interest in it, but also in other European countries.

Governance International staff have been following the participatory budgeting practices of three local government champions in the Paris region for a number of years and they used their experience to put together a **comprehensive study trip programme which allowed participants to compare three very different ways of transferring the Porto Alegre model into a European context.**

In order to ensure that our participants got maximum benefits from the study trip, *Governance International* staff provided an introduction to the

French local government system so that the participants had a framework to understand the context.

The one-and-a-half day programme involved visits and presentations from

- **The director for neighbourhood management and a key citizen activist in Issy-les-Moulineaux,**
- **The vice-mayor, the president of the citizen inspectorate and a member of a neighbourhood committee in Bobigny,**
- **The mayor and chief executive of Saint-Denis.**

The participants also had the opportunity to exchange their own experiences of participatory budgeting approaches during a session which was led by Davy Jones of the UK Audit Commission. Last but not least, the social programme gave participants a chance to build new professional networks, which they considered an important spin-off from the Study Trip.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY TRIP

The issues explored on this trip included:

- *Three different approaches* to running participative budgets
- Giving citizens a role in *holding the local council to account*
- Different ways of organising *neighbourhood councils*.

THE THREE GOOD PRACTICE CASES IN A NUTSHELL

The study trip also showed how participative budgeting can work in very different social, economic and political contexts:

Issy-les-Moulineaux

... in the south-west of Paris (ca. 60,000 inhabitants) is *one of the most affluent towns in France* and home to the head offices of some major communication companies such as Orange, Canal Plus and Hewlett Packard. Not surprisingly, the local authority is also strongly committed to e-government and is known as Cyber-City in France. The mayor of Issy-les-Moulineaux, *André Santini*, is a famous politician in France. He is not only been the mayor of a right-wing government in Issy-les-Moulineaux since 1980 but also a parliamentary deputy for the Department Hauts-de-Seine and a former Minister.

Bobigny

... is a new town with an *economically and socially strongly disadvantaged population (ca. 40,000 inhabitants)* in the north-east of Paris. Its skyline is characterized by the tower-bloc architecture of Michel Holley who built a whole new city on “dalles” in the late sixties and early seventies to provide cheap housing for workers from rural parts of Europe. Today, a large part of the new immigrant population from French-speaking Africa has no jobs and lives in bad housing conditions. Indeed, 65 percent of the housing in Bobigny is social housing. Politically, Bobigny has a long history as the model city of orthodox communism. It is still today a stronghold of the Communist Party in France and there are very strong tensions with “dissidents” in neighbouring cities in the red belt, particularly with its main rival Saint-Denis. Its approach to participatory democracy clearly bears the imprint of the

former mayor Bernard Birsinger, who died unexpectedly in August 2006. The former Vice-Mayor who took over his post, Mrs. Catherine Peyge, continues his participatory approach.

Saint-Denis

... is a large suburb (86,000 inhabitants) in the north of Paris and is known for the Saint-Denis Basilica, a famous burial site of the French monarchs. Because of this historical heritage, Saint-Denis has the reputation as “the city of the French kings”. During the 19th century Saint-Denis became strongly industrialized, giving rise to an important social movement and its nick-name as the “red city”. After 1972 the city experienced major job losses from de-industrialisation. *The turning point came in 1986 with the construction of the new stadium ‘Stade de France’*, which helped to create new jobs in the service sector. Clearly, without strong inter-municipal cooperation between the eight surrounding cities, this project and the subsequent economic recovery would not have been possible. However, *unemployment still remains relatively high (17 % in 2005)*. The City is governed by a leftist coalition under the leadership of the communist mayor, Didier Paillard.

Clearly, participatory democracy has become an issue for all political parties in France, albeit typically right-wing governments tend to be more cautious with participatory approaches. However, this should not be misinterpreted as meaning that there is all-party consensus on participatory approaches in any of the local councils. In fact, the experience of the City of Pantin, another Paris suburb, has shown that participatory approaches are sometimes not sustainable when the political majority changes.

KEY LESSONS OF THE STUDY TRIP

A number of key lessons emerged in relation to each of the issues outlined above.

1 THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO RUNNING PARTICIPATORY BUDGETS

1.1. What Issy-les-Moulineaux, Bobigny and Saint-Denis have in common

While each of the good practice cases has developed its own distinctive version of participatory budgeting, there are a number of elements which are shared by Issy-les-Moulineaux, Bobigny and Saint-Denis:

- In each town, *the mayor has been the driving force* of participatory budgeting and other participatory instruments. Surprisingly, even the Citizen Inspectorate in Bobigny has not been a bottom-up initiative but a creation of the former mayor, Bernard Birsinger.
- All three local councils developed *a whole range of participatory instruments before they introduced participatory budgeting*.
- *Porto Alegre has been a key inspiration* to all three local councils. Indeed, there is a regular exchange with Porto Alegre. On the other hand, for political reasons there is no exchange of information or learning from the experiences between these three local councils, even though they are 'next door' to each other.
- The participatory budgeting approaches of all three 'good practice cases' are restricted by *a strongly centralised (national) budgeting system* which is characterised by numerous inspections by the Ministry of Finance and offers little room for manoeuvre which would allow local solutions. Indeed, the mayor of Grenoble has been put in prison for interpreting the budget rules too flexibly.
- *None of the three cases has developed any specific policies on how to make participatory budgeting and*

democracy work for immigrants. Clearly, integration or equality policies do not figure high on the French political agenda, in spite of the strong lip service and historical commitment to "égalité" (equal rights and opportunities). The local referenda organised by Bobigny and Saint-Denis on the political voting rights of non-EU residents have to be seen as pure political propaganda, since neither town has taken much action to give a voice to non-French speaking immigrants.

1.2. Participatory Budgeting in Issy-les-Moulineaux

In Issy-les-Moulineaux participatory budgeting is strongly anchored in the four neighbourhood councils in the town (see section 4.1. for more information).

According to article 5 of the Charter of Neighbourhood Councils the role of the neighbourhood councils is two-fold:

- 1 They are consulted on city-wide investments projects which the mayor considers to be of particular interest to the neighbourhoods.
- 2 They may also make proposals on local investment priorities. For example, the local council of Issy-les-Moulineaux agreed, for financial year 2006, a total lump sum of € 610,000 for investments in the neighbourhoods. This means that each neighbourhood council was invited to make propositions on how to spend € 152,500 in the current budget year on investments in its neighbourhood. The total of the investment proposals on which the four neighbourhood councils voice their views by making their own proposals represents 10 % of the investment budget of Issy-les-Moulineaux. Due to the peculiarities of the budget process in France, the neighbourhood council has to come up with a decision regarding the local investment projects in February when the new budget is available. This means that the consultation about new investments projects typically takes place in autumn. This timing assures that the local authority is able to spend the budget on behalf of the neighbourhood by the end of the year.

3 Last but not least, each neighbourhood council is allocated € 15,250 running costs per year for small-scale projects. For example, this might involve the organisation of events in the neighbourhoods such as open-air cinema etc.

Therefore, the neighbourhood councils have a role both as a forum of consultation and for developing initiatives. But the Charter stresses that the neighbourhood councils cannot take any binding decision and cannot commit the local council.

The consultation process related to the investment projects and events may last 2–6 months. Depending on the project, the neighbourhood councils sometimes set up information booths at the market to consult with residents. Clearly, the Vice-Mayor responsible for local democracy, M. Bernard Prauthois, has a strong role in this consultation process. As he has to present the project plan to the local council of Issy-les-Moulineaux for final approval he will make sure that the project is politically sound. Therefore, there will be an intense consultation between the Vice-Mayor, the President and Vice-President of the neighbourhood council. At the end of the consultation the public officials draft a project plan and present it to the neighbourhood council who votes on it and decides how much money out of its 'project budget' is to be allocated to the project. Once the local council has approved the decision of the neighbourhood council the project money is transferred to the specific local service departments which are in charge of the project. This means that no budget is physically transferred to the neighbourhood council. Furthermore, the involvement of the neighbourhood council in the implementation of the project is limited (there is no encouragement of volunteering or additional fundraising of the neighbourhood councils).

Issy-les-Moulineaux launched the participatory budget in 2002 and has run the process six times without any major changes. However, so far, no systematic self-assessment nor any external assessment has been carried out. Nevertheless, there is evidence that a number of local improvements have been achieved such as the creation of parking shelters for bikes, playgrounds in parks and the renovation of a sports facility. Interestingly, in the case of one neighbourhood project which exceeded the budget for this neighbourhood, two other

neighbourhood councils stepped in and agreed to allocate part of their budgets to it. This shows that the neighbourhood councils have matured and adopted a city-wide perspective. All in all, participatory budgeting and democracy is very action-oriented in Issy-les-Moulineaux.

1.3. Participatory budgeting in Bobigny

As in Issy-les-Moulineaux, the idea of introducing participatory budgeting did not come from civil society but from the political leadership of Bobigny. The then mayor, Bernard Birsinger and his vice-mayors had made a number of visits to Porto Alegre and other cities in Brazil and decided to introduce a participatory budget during the third round of citizen assemblies in 2003.

However, as the briefing of the mayor's office prepared for Governance International admits, "these assemblies involved only minor participation by citizens because they took place in the particular context of a long election campaign, which reduced the time for preparation. Furthermore, the concept of participatory budgeting was not easy to introduce. At this time, it was something completely new in France. ... Eventually, the residents became impatient to see the City implement some of the commitments it had made, particularly in regard to urban regeneration projects. It was also necessary to focus more strongly on citizens' concerns about issues affecting their daily lives."

The local authority organised a number of budget workshops in autumn 2003 at which the general budget was explained and citizens could make proposals. However, the local authority never gave feedback on these proposals from citizens and suspended the participatory budgeting project in 2004.

In order to understand why *the approach of Bobigny with participatory budgeting has been relatively modest* so far it is important to consider the political context of Bobigny, which is very different from Issy-les-Moulineaux.

As a (French) report by the (communist) Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin points out, the introduction of participatory democracy has to be interpreted as the attempt of the new political leadership, under the then new mayor Mr. Birsinger, to build a new relationship with local residents as the old party apparatus had lost its legitimacy. In particular, when Mr. Birsinger took over from the previous party-apparatchik he faced some severe problems:

- The social services provided by the City of Bobigny to socially disadvantaged groups, which had once been very novel, had become common elsewhere and were now seen as low quality.
- The clientelism of the communist leadership had become a major burden for the local budget and dysfunctional in terms of professionalism.
- The old communist strategy of mobilising the working force against 'capital' was proving to be dysfunctional, as business relocated and attraction of investment became an economic necessity for the local tax base.
- Last but not least, the communist party had failed to build up a relationship with the new immigrants from Africa.

As other neighbouring cities lost their communist majority in local elections, Mr. Birsinger decided to follow the example of Saint-Denis which had embarked on participatory democracy much earlier – a move which at the time had been strongly criticised by the old leadership of Bobigny.

Source: Yves Sintomer, Carsten Herzberg and Anja Röcke (eds.): *Participatory Budgets in a European Context: Comparative Approaches*, vol. II, Nov. 2005, Hans Böckler Stiftung.

Therefore, a strong focus of the citizen participation process in Bobigny has been to reach out to the masses, and results-orientation has not been a prime concern.

The first citizen consultation in 1998 started with a film in which 67 local residents completed the sentence "For me, Bobigny means ...". The video and the views expressed by local residents during the eight-month consultation process helped the local council to draft the vision paper "Scenarios for a capital city", which led to the brief for an architectural competition in January 2000. The second citizen assembly was launched on 17 June 2000 to discuss the proposals brought forward by the four

inter-disciplinary teams of architects, urbanists, sociologists and economists which had been chosen by a city-led committee in a two-stage selection process. This second round of the citizen assembly, entitled "Cards on the table – let's decide together", involved about 25 meetings from the end of September to December 2000. The competition ended with a surprise: when the local council had to vote on the proposals, it decided to declare all four teams as the winners! Subsequently, the four competing teams were asked to draft a new plan, based on the common denominator of their proposals. The professionals accepted this task, even though they had initially doubts whether this kind of co-operation would be possible.

On 18 October 2001 a new plan was submitted to the population for another round of consultation. This third consultation on the urban redevelopment project was two-fold: From 22 October to 28 November about 30 meetings with citizens were held. Furthermore, the local authority commissioned a written survey with 9,425 questionnaires being returned to the local authority. *In fact, the number of survey respondents outweighed the number of voters to the previous local elections!* A large majority of respondents approved of the proposed reorganisation of the city centre but the traffic proposals were more contested. Furthermore, different views emerged concerning priorities in the neighbourhoods.

Even though the survey was called "consult'action", *there are no indications that the City of Bobigny has developed an action plan with clear priorities and a sound financial basis.* Indeed, in 2003 the local authority started a so-called "campaign in a time of constraint". It proposed a petition with the signatures of local residents to press central government to make the necessary financial resources available to implement the projects decided together with the residents. Thousands of petition cards were signed and taken to the residence of the prime minister by a delegation of inhabitants and elected members. Unsurprisingly, the reaction of the (right-wing) central government was negative.

Nevertheless, the mayor has been eager to give feed-back to the citizens regarding his conclusions from the consultations and has even initiated a Citizen Inspectorate to ensure that local councillors are held accountable for their promises to the citizens (see section 2).

Even though Bobigny has never carried out an evaluation of its participatory approach, *there is evidence that the mobilisation of a large number of citizens has helped to build social capital in a highly hostile built environment*. Indeed, as the Vice-Mayor, Mme Annie Gérard pointed out to the participants of the Study Trip, Bobigny was less affected by the violent riots of autumn 2005 than other suburban areas. And M. Jean Joubert who is a dedicated member of the Citizen Inspectorate stresses that now people know each other and that the decisions taken by the local council are more responsive to the needs of citizens than before.

1.4. Participatory budgeting in Saint-Denis

When Saint-Denis started to launch participatory budgeting in 2002 *it had the advantage of building on more than 10 years of experience with neighbourhood management*. The reason that development of participatory democracy was made one of the four strategic objectives in the local action plan from 2001–2007 was the crisis of world-wide communism, together with a crisis of legitimacy of the ruling communist majority in Saint-Denis (see also section 1.3).

According to an internal report of the local council *a vital success factor would be embedding the participative budget in the neighbourhoods* in order to get a maximum number of citizens interested. The report also stresses a number of other success factors:

- discussing issues relevant to citizens, even if this means purely street-level issues;
- making sure that the whole process “leads up to something”;
- making sure that citizens can voice their views independently.

At the same time, the local council thought it important that the citizens also had a city-wide perspective. Therefore, the participatory budget process also includes city-wide consultations.

Typically, the participatory budget cycle consists of four phases:

- 1 *May to September*: the local council assesses the expectations and needs of the citizens through neighbourhood-based workshops and thematic city-wide workshops.

- 2 *October to November*: the local authority finance department does the costing of the proposals made by the citizens.

- 3 *December*: elected members negotiate with citizens on which proposals should be financed, although of course, the local council has the last word.

- 4 *May*: evaluation of budgetary choices

The way in which each of the phases has been implemented has changed over the years as a result of an annual self-assessment of the process by the local authority. For example, the local council introduced a written survey of the population in 2005 in order to get a better picture of their expectations. The purpose of the questionnaire was also to encourage more citizens to take part in the budget workshops. *In fact, 129 citizens declared themselves ready to participate in budget workshops in their neighbourhood*. However, the return rate of the questionnaire was rather low (only 400 questionnaires were returned), so that the statistical representativeness of the survey is questionable. Nevertheless, *the survey revealed some key issues local residents care about, such as public safety, cleanliness, and shopping facilities and housing*.

The budget workshops in the neighbourhoods are also used by the local council to report on the suggestions made by citizens in the previous year and to detail which suggestions have been implemented. Finally, the new proposals by the citizens are drafted and aggregated by delegates of each neighbourhood into a document presented to the local council. During the first phase, there is also consultation with city-wide thematic working groups which debate on issues such as public health, culture, the disabled and elderly and community groups. All in all, *the mapping of the expectations of the population draws from three sources*:

- 1 a written survey
- 2 a budget workshops in the 14 neighbourhoods
- 3 thematic advisory committees

The proposals by each forum are aggregated during an “integrating workshop” and the final set of proposals passed to the financial department.

In the second phase, *the financial department does the costing of the final set of proposals* and checks how big the financial margin from which voluntary activities can be financed, on top of the mandatory tasks.

The third phase is characterised by a political negotiation process between a citizen assembly composed of the delegates of the budgetary workshops and advisory committees and the local council. Clearly, the local council needs to have an eye on the budget balance whereas the citizen delegates are more concerned about pushing their priorities. Even though the mayor has the last word, it is important to note that in Saint-Denis this process takes place in public and not behind the closed doors of the Cabinet of the Mayor which is the case in Bobigny. In Issy-les-Moulineaux, this debate is more confined as it mainly concerns the Vice-Mayor and the Pres-

ident of the respective neighbourhood council. Therefore, the participatory budgeting process in Saint-Denis comes closest to the ideal of co-decision-making.

In the last phase of the participatory budget cycle – which falls into May of the subsequent year – the local council sends the budget report to all participants in the process to give them feed-back on the participatory budget. The citizen-led proposals which have been taken on board by the local council are marked by a 😊 so that citizens can easily see where they have been considered.

	fonctionnement				investissement				total	
	budget ville		budget Plaine Commune		budget ville		budget Plaine Commune		total	dont budget participatif
	total	dont budget participatif 😊	total	dont budget participatif 😊	total	dont budget participatif 😊	total	dont budget participatif 😊		
développer les solidarités, lutter contre l'exclusion	465 952	59 923			758 362				1 224 314	59 923
réussir la transformation de la ville	450 039	10 000	223 617		608 400		9 090 632	477 095	10 372 688	487 095
une meilleure qualité de vie pour les habitants et les salariés	287 780	230 200							287 780	230 200
un service public municipal proche des habitants et performant	1 736 156				3 412 105				5 148 261	
contribuer à la protection de l'environnement et à un développement maîtrisé	47 000	5 000	105 848	38 300			1 266 514	420 000	1 419 362	463 300
favoriser l'égalité des chances par le développement des politiques éducatives	1 018 476	197 480			10 270 851	1 597 000	1 524 280	1 524 280	12 813 607	3 318 760
un renforcement de la démocratie participative	272 575	103 500			949 200	949 200			1 221 775	1 052 700
total	4 277 978	606 103	329 465	38 300	15 998 918	2 546 200	11 881 426	2 421 375	32 487 787	5 611 978
<i>% budget participatif</i>		14%		12%		16%		20%		17%

Source: Luc Bouvet, chief executive of Saint-Denis.

Over the years the extent to which citizens have been consulted on the budget has gradually increased:

- In 2001, the participatory budget only involved investments.
- In 2002 citizens were consulted on the investment budget and running costs without staff costs.
- In 2003 the participatory budget related to the whole budget of the local council.
- Since 2004, the consultation process involves the whole budget of the local council as well as the

budget of the intermunicipal co-operation agreement (*Communeauté d'Agglomération*) of which Saint-Denis is part.

Even though Saint-Denis has never commissioned an external evaluation of its participatory budgeting process, *there has been a systematic internal self-assessment after each round* which have helped to develop participatory budgeting further during the next year.

2 GIVING CITIZENS A ROLE IN HOLDING THE LOCAL COUNCIL TO ACCOUNT: THE CITIZEN INSPECTORATE OF BOBIGNY

Elke Löffler, Managing Director of Governance International, interviewed M. Jean Joubert, who is a long-term member of the Citizen Inspectorate in Bobigny during a follow-up visit of the Study Trip on 19 December 2006.

Elke Löffler: What was the motivation for launching a citizen inspectorate in Bobigny? Was this a bottom-up initiative by the citizens?

M. Jean Joubert: No, not at all. This may sound strange but it was the former mayor, Mr. Bernard Birsinger, who took this initiative in 1999. His idea was to make the policies of the elected member clearer to the citizens and to improve the citizens' image of politics and politicians. In fact, he saw it as a way of creating an independent forum to evaluate public policies in order to know if they work or don't work.

Elke Löffler: This was certainly a very courageous initiative, given that the French public agencies are still very hesitant about commissioning external evaluations. How was the Citizen Inspectorate set up?

M. Jean Joubert: It is important to understand the political context of Bobigny at the time. In 1998 the mayor Bernard Birsinger launched the first citizen assembly because he felt that citizens could no longer put up with the harsh concrete built environment in Bobigny – he felt the time had come to think about urban redevelopment and to give citizens a voice. During 8 months of consultation from April to November 1998, six working groups including about 200 citizens were set up. Based on the recommendations of the working groups, the local council promised to undertake 136 improvements which were short-term (before March 2000), medium-term (before December 2000) and long-term (up to March 2001). All 136 improvements were published and distributed to all households in Bobigny. Then, the mayor promised at the closing session of the Citizen Assembly in November 1998 to create a Citizen Inspectorate, in order to establish each year what has been done and what remains to be done. The "Citizen Inspectorate" was actually set up in June 1999, but it was stressed that this would be an experiment. Spontaneously,

about 60 people who had previously been in the working groups of the citizen assembly agreed to become engaged in this initiative.

Elke Löffler: What were the first steps taken by the Citizen Inspectorate?

M. Jean Joubert: During the first months we drafted a charter in order to determine our governance structure. In the beginning our role was limited to evaluating whether or not the local authority of Bobigny had implemented the commitments that it had stipulated to the public. Our first report was published on 14 March 2000 and presented to more than 300 citizens. After our presentation the mayor gave his immediate reaction, which was followed by a discussion with the citizens and local councillors. Some councillors were surprised by the findings of the Citizen Inspectorate and proposed corrections based on their own experiences. However, they all found our report well-researched and stimulating. Today, councillors say that they like working under the scrutiny of the Citizen Inspectorate.

Elke Löffler: How does the Citizen Inspectorate work in practice?

M. Jean Joubert: The members of the Citizen Inspectorate also participate in a variety of activities and are members of many associations – from all of these they receive information about what is going on in the City. They can also observe the implementation of local projects by carrying out site visits, analysing newspaper reports and questioning local councillors. Afterwards they compare their information with the promises made by the mayor and assess the degree of implementation.

Elke Löffler: Who participates in the Citizen Inspectorate? Are these the same "usual suspects" as always?

M. Jean Joubert: Yes, indeed. After seven years the Citizen Inspectorate now only includes a hardcore of committed 12 persons, who are also very engaged in other activities such as the neighbourhood committees. However, at least this means that there is now continuity in the membership of the Citizen Inspectorate. At first, there were sometimes 200 people who attended our meetings. But this brought the problem that people who had missed previous meetings questioned what had already

been agreed. It was important to us that there would be continuity in the decisions made. Therefore, we consider it to be legitimate that the authors of the report are those members who have worked in the Citizen Inspectorate for a long time.

Elke Löffler: How has the Citizen Inspectorate evolved?

M. Jean-Joubert: I think we have become an indispensable element of participatory democracy in Bobigny. The fact that the Citizen Inspectorate still exists after 7 years of operation is itself a success for me. Elected members are always tempted to make promises to the citizens during the citizen assemblies – our presence and the audits we make after the assembly have provided a discipline to the elected members. I would like to stress that nowadays elected members never contest our findings, which shows our independence. Indeed, the Citizen Inspectorate just published its fourth report last week and there wasn't a single question from elected members regarding our findings. But I also have to admit that the Citizen Inspectorate has run out of steam and needs to be changed. Indeed, most members of the Citizen Inspectorate also work in other groups and associations. This takes time and a lot of energy. Over time, many members have preferred to devote their time to other activities.

Elke Löffler: Would the Citizen Inspectorate not be well placed to evaluate the quality of participatory democracy, which is an important commitment of the local authority? After all, the local authority spends an important part of its budget on communication?

M. Jean Joubert: Yes, it's true that we do not have any evaluation of the citizen assemblies and other instruments of participatory democracy in Bobigny. But so far, this has not been the role of the Citizen Inspectorate.

Elke Löffler: What have been the biggest challenges for the Citizen Inspectorate in your view?

M. Jean Joubert: Our charter only gives us the right to audit elected members on the progress of projects, in order to know whether the commitment has been adhered to or not. This has limited our work in two respects: first, I think the Citizen Inspectors should talk more to the public officials,

since they have a more technical view of the issue concerned, different from the political view of elected members. Therefore, the Citizen Inspectorate should draw information from both politicians and public officials and validate the information gained in order to get a more balanced picture. Secondly, I think we should also consider the costs of the improvement activities, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of project implementation. In particular we should look at the numbers of staff engaged in different services. But at present, we do not have any information about costs, since we do not even have staff plans. If we had more information about costs, we could also organize our work better and invest more time and effort in services which are financially important rather than giving equal weight to all commitments. Last but not least, the work of the Citizen Inspectorate would benefit greatly from users panels for each of the local services since these panels could help us to communicate with the professionals.

Elke Löffler: How do you see the future of the Citizen Inspectorate?

M. Jean Joubert: At present, we are in a re-orientation phase. We have set up a working group which consists of members of the Citizen Inspectorate, local councillors, public officials and members of the neighbourhood committees. The working group has not finished yet but there are already some early conclusions about changes which we want to introduce:

- The Citizen Inspectorate will audit each local councillor once a year and publish its findings in a report.
- In the future, the reports will be signed by the members of the Citizen Inspectorate. So far the authors of the reports have not been named, since the local council had been afraid of a counter-weight.
- Furthermore, we want to introduce an analysis of the key problems of our city into the reports.
- Each neighbourhood committee will be represented by one member in the future Citizen Inspectorate.
- Another change will be the nomination of a secretary, who will remain a volunteer.

Elke Löffler: And how do you see the future of participatory democracy in Bobigny ?

M. Jean Joubert: I think that the citizen assemblies are very much appreciated by local citizens but, at the same time, their expectations have increased as far as their relations with public officials and local councillors are concerned. In particular, it seems to me that the moment has come to pass from consultation to genuine co-decision-making. This would imply that the prioritization of public services would have to be done together with citizens. By doing so, the citizens would have a better understanding of why some projects cannot be implemented. At present, this is often difficult for citizens to understand, because they do not see their project in an overall political context and do not know the budget implications of their demands. Certainly, participatory democracy is now sufficiently mature in order to move in this direction.

3 DIFFERENT WAYS OF ORGANISING NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCILS

On 27 February 2002 the National Parliament in France adopted a law (so-called loi Vaillant) which makes the creation of neighbourhood councils obligatory in cities with a population over 80.000. However, Issy-les-Moulineaux and Bobigny were not affected by this law since their population is below 80.000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, both cities decided voluntarily to create tools for neighbourhood management (in French this is referred to as *démocratie de proximité*). The approach adopted by both cities is very different though.

3.1. The neighbourhood councils and neighbourhood committees in Issy-les-Moulineaux

Issy-les-Moulineaux took the opportunity to set up neighbourhood councils on a voluntary basis since the law allowed cities above 20.000 inhabitants to do so. The intention was to reinforce local democracy and to create another forum for citizen participation besides the neighbourhood committees (comités de quartier) which had been created voluntarily in 1995. These bodies, of which there are eight, essentially have the task of improving the level of social integration in neighbourhoods. In order to avoid any confusion with the new neighbourhood councils (con-

seils de quartier), they are now called the ‘villages d’Issy’ (Villages of Issy).

The neighbourhood councils can be consulted by the mayor on any issue concerning the neighbourhood. For example, they participate in the meetings of the Traffic Commission on a regular basis. They may also take initiatives and, through their President, take up with the mayor any issue relating to the neighbourhood. As pointed out in section 1.2, the *neighbourhood councils also have an important role in the participatory budgeting process*. Indeed, the participatory budgeting process reinforces the double role of the neighbourhood councils as a forum for consultation and as an initiator.

Altogether there are 4 *neighbourhood councils in Issy-les-Moulineaux*. This means that each of these neighbourhoods has two “neighbourhood committees” which organise social and cultural events with the residents and local business.

Each of the 4 neighbourhood councils consists of 18 members which can be divided into four sections:

- 1st section: 6 local councillors elected for 6 years, including the Vice-Mayor for Local Democracy, the Vice-Mayor in charge of the specific neighbourhood, and one local councillor representing the opposition party.
- 2nd section: 8 residents, with 4 residents being elected by the residents of the respective neighbourhood by internet, 1 representative of the Council of the Elderly, 2 representatives of the Youth council and 1 representative of the Council on Economic and Social Affairs in Issy-les-Moulineaux.
- 3rd section: 3 representatives from business and commerce, nominated by local business associations.
- 4th section: 1 representative from an association which is active in the neighbourhood, nominated by an umbrella organisation of associations.

The Mayor is a member ex-officio and so are the Heads of the two neighbourhood committees in the neighbourhood concerned. The President and Vice-President of the neighbourhood council may not come from the 1st section. *Although members of the 1st section are members of the neighbourhood council for the duration of the term of office (6 years), all other members are nominated or elected for 2 years.* From a British perspective, the neighbour-

hood councils may be viewed as '*participatory local strategic partnerships*' given that they not only include professionals from different sectors but also a number of residents. Indeed, the fact that the four 'resident' members are directly elected by their neighbourhood gives them a strong legitimacy in the eyes of the vice-mayor (who is appointed by the mayor, not directly by residents). Indeed, it even gives them a strong local legitimacy compared to all the local councillors, who are all candidates of party lists, elected 'at large' rather than for particular wards within the city.

Another interesting innovation is the election of the 4 residents in each neighbourhood council by internet. In particular, it seems that this has been a good way of encouraging elderly people to use the internet, since typically about 30 % of voters in elections in France are over 65 years old.

The neighbourhood councils meet every two months. The meetings are prepared and organised by public officials and the Vice-Mayor for Local Democracy. It is important to note that the *meetings are NOT public*. The explanation for this policy offered by the Vice-Mayor M. Prauthois during the Study Trip was that not all proposals made by the neighbourhood council can be implemented.

When the neighbourhood councils started their meetings in April 2003, many members saw local problems mainly from a personal point of view but in the meantime they have learnt to accept other points of view as well. A first indication of this more collective awareness is the fact that some members of the neighbourhood councils have set up thematic working groups which deal with cross-cutting issues relevant to all neighbourhoods.

Issy-les-Moulineaux also organises training events three times per year in budgeting and public finance for the members of the neighbourhood councils. Furthermore, there are meetings where they can talk to the elected members and professional staff of the local authority and learn who is responsible for what and how the local authority is organised internally.

3.2. The committees of citizen initiatives in Bobigny

The local council of Bobigny refuses to adopt the model of neighbourhood councils which has been adopted in Issy-les-Moulineaux, on the grounds that this restricts participation to the "usual suspects" and to "people who are close to the mayor". Therefore, the six committees of citizen initiatives (*Comités d'Initiatives Citoyennes – CIC*) are open to all people who live or work in Bobigny. This means that non-French nationals may participate in the committees, although in practice participation of immigrants is low in all six committees. But in contrast to Issy-les-Moulineaux the meetings are open to the public and the minutes of the meetings are published on a more or less regular basis on the internet.

Nevertheless, *the committees at neighbourhood level in Bobigny are not completely independent*. The local council designates one elected member to attend each meeting and to liaise back with the local council and also designates one public official in charge of neighbourhood management, who acts as a secretary. The funds of the neighbourhood committees are also very limited so that it is impossible to implement any meaningful project.

Clearly, in this open model *continuity of participation* is an issue. According to the new Charter of the Committees of 2004 there must be a hard core of 3–5 people to act as a working party for the local council. Obviously, participation varies across the neighbourhoods. Whereas the committees work reasonably well in the more affluent areas, participation in the more disadvantaged tower-bloc areas is low.

In contrast to Issy-les-Moulineaux, the Bobigny committees at neighbourhood level are not consulted by the local council on a regular basis but they can make representations to the local council on any issue within the responsibility of the local council. The more limited role of the committees may be explained by the different mix of participatory tools in Bobigny, which strongly relies on the biannual city-wide assemblies. *The role of the committees at neighbourhood level is to continue the dialogue with citizens during the time between the assemblies.* Furthermore, they also help to prepare the meetings of the council members and public officials with citizens at neighbourhood level which

takes place every two years (the meetings are called “Let’s talk openly”).

So far, *there has been no survey of the participants of the committees in the six neighbourhoods in Bobigny or any other external evaluation* but it is obvious that the committees could be much more effective, especially in potential trouble-spots, if the local council allowed for more co-production of citizens. As Mme Olga Chliakhoff who is a member of a neighbourhood committee told the Study Trip participants during lunch, she lives in a tower bloc which has been in a very bad state for many years. Indeed, there is so much anti-social behaviour that people throw out refuse and even washing machines out of the windows into the street below. One day when she came back from a holiday she found that the entrance area had been renovated. She had little hope that this state would last for long but to her surprise the residents were careful to keep the entrance area in good order. She learnt later that the entrance area had been renovated by a group of residents themselves, which in her view explains why this improvement was sustainable.

There are also suggestions to run together the two fora at neighbourhood level (the committees and “Let’s talk openly”-meetings) since most citizens cannot see what the difference is.

3.3. The neighbourhood committees in Saint-Denis

Neighbourhood management has a long history in Saint-Denis. Indeed, the communist leadership launched the first neighbourhood committees in a number of neighbourhoods in 1988. Later, the neighbourhood committees were extended to the whole city by dividing the city into 14 neighbourhoods. As in Issy-les-Moulineaux and Bobigny, each neighbourhood committee is managed by a Vice-Mayor responsible for neighbourhood management and a public official. The structure of the neighbourhood committees in Saint-Denis is the same as those in Bobigny – they are open to all residents and people working in Saint-Denis. Usually, they take place 4–6 times per year in each neighbourhood. Whereas in the beginning the issues discussed focus on ‘street-level’ issues, the participatory budget has helped the residents to adopt a wider perspective and to see their own issues in a city-wide context.

In recent years, the mayor also initiated ‘neighbourhood visits’ called “Hello neighbour” (*Bonjour voisin*) in order to reach out to residents who do not attend the meetings of the neighbourhood committees. Typically, the mayor organises these visits twice a year. From time to time, the local council also organises city-wide citizen meetings to discuss projects which concern the whole city such as the regeneration of the city centre.

However, over the years, the limits of a purely neighbourhood-centred approach have become evident. Furthermore, the national law on neighbourhood management of 6 February 2002 meant that the neighbourhood policies of Saint-Denis were not innovative any more. This was why the mayor thought that the time was ripe for a new city-wide initiative and the introduction of participatory budgeting.