

# Participation



# • GROWING A COMMUNITY I •

## WHAT IS IT?

IF YOU WANT TO INVOLVE DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN A PROCESS, FOR EXAMPLE IN A COMMUNITY GARDEN, YOU MAY BE CONFRONTED WITH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How can we bring all these different opinions, feelings and backgrounds together?
- Why are some working so much and others do not show up?
- How can we manage conflicts?
- How can we decide what we will do?

These cards cannot give final answers, but they aim to inspire you in developing a community process. Community building is an interactive process between participants and the given conditions. Thus, occasionally you have to find individual answers on individual questions. These are some guidelines helping you on a path towards developing a garden community.

## DIFFERENT DEGREES

Firstly, you need to be aware of different degrees of participation with an increasing degree of commitment:

- (just) informing others,
- shared decisions,
- informing and consulting others,
- shared initiative and decision.

The strongest form of participation would be a community which results out of an self-organized collective process with everybody equally respected and involved from the first idea to the last decision. Be aware that different people at different stages of the process have different needs concerning participation: e.g. to reach the shy ones in the beginning, information is a good first step. During the process you should move on to a more intense form subsequently. The longitudinal aim should be a strong degree of participation. However, do not try to be pushy, some people do not want to get involved in the decision making process (sometimes for years). Be patient and offer them participation opportunities according to their personal needs.

## THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

- Decision making is a complicated process: either it is done in an authoritarian way, a non-participatory decision, ignoring the needs of many and privileging the opinion of a few. Or it is done in an participatory form and you will have to find a way to integrate many different options to come to an consensus. Bringing together differences is not so easy, so time and energy is needed.
- Participation includes the possibility of failing!
- Most institutions, such as universities, NGOs, associations, are hierarchical to a different degree. Some have more power or privileges than others. If you are part of an institution, you are not able to reach the strongest participation grade including yourself (only if you are really radical within your institutions), be aware of that.
- A lot of grass-root organizations and social movements are trying to be non-hierarchical, thus these are contexts where you can try to reach the last participation level, self-organization, emancipation and autonomy.
- The term participation is such a warmly persuasive word, and exactly for that reason it is being abused to legislated top-down processes, so that they appear more democratic even if they are just a fake. So be aware of manipulative and decorative pseudo-participatory processes where people are trying to fool others!
- Be honest! If you just want to make a pseudo-participatory process do not do anything that seems participatory because people will get angry. An example would be to ask everybody's opinion and decide in another direction afterwards.

## DOES IT CONTAIN IT?

### YES

Different people with different backgrounds,  
different ideas, different feelings, different ways of communication  
Voluntary and creative participation • Consensus and working creatively with dissent  
Opportunity to fail and try a new strategy • Basis democracy • Fun • Patience

### NO

Hurry • Leaders • Obligation

## INTERACTIVE QUESTIONS

- What is the idea of participation?
- What are the different degrees of participation?
- Can participation fail? Why?
- If you're part of an hierarchical institution, how can you reach the strongest degree of participation?
- What is a manipulative and decorative pseudo-participatory process?