


2024

An Analysis of the Public Participation Processes Employed for an Urban Greenway Project

Maeve O'Connell

maeve.oconnell@tudublin.ie, maeve.oconnell@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschacart>

 Part of the [Business and Corporate Communications Commons](#), [Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons](#), [Environmental Policy Commons](#), [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), [Public Administration Commons](#), [Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Commons](#), [Transportation Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Connell, Maeve, "An Analysis of the Public Participation Processes Employed for an Urban Greenway Project" (2024). *Articles*. 66.

<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschacart/66>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Accounting, Economics, and Finance at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#).

An analysis of the public participation processes employed for an urban greenway project

Maeve O'Connell

Department of Accounting, Economics & Finance, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

maeve.oconnell@tudublin.ie

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the public participation mechanisms employed for a proposed new infrastructure project. Public participation is a core characteristic of a contemporary democratic society as policy makers are increasingly encouraged to engage with citizens for learning and legitimacy. Participation is a loose concept with many forms and interpretations. This study explores the key characteristics of public participation formats, challenges to and the criteria for success. This analysis is then applied to the proposed local infrastructure consultation process. An additional survey is designed and its role in the public participation process is assessed. The processes adopted were hybrid formats highlighting the flexibility in process design and the opportunity to minimise the limitations of a single design approach in the further stages of the process.

Key words: public participation, citizen participation, participatory arrangements, deliberative arrangements, design dilemmas, greenway

© 2024 The Author. Published by ARROW@TUDublin. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

O'Connell, M. (2024). *An analysis of the public participation processes employed for an urban greenway project*. Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie>

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the public participation mechanisms employed for the public engagement on a proposed new infrastructure project. This study is laid out in three stages. First, there is an exploration of the key characteristics of public participation formats, the challenges to the processes and the criteria for success. Second, the concept of greenways is introduced, followed by an examination of the design challenges in the creation of greenways. Finally, the proposed greenway is introduced and the associated public consultation process. A local online survey is designed and its role in the public participation process is assessed.

Public Participation

Public participation is a core building block of a contemporary democratic society and sustainable communities (Cuthill & Fien, 2005). Policy makers are encouraged to engage with citizens for three reasons, empowerment, legitimacy and learning (Hisschemöller & Cuppen, 2015). Participation supports democratic ideals, while it also enables policymakers to gain insights from citizens knowledge, particularly where problems are complex, and seek to reach a consensus. The process seeks to facilitate a collaborative approach between citizens and governments for the common good (Cuthill & Fien, 2005). Participation is a loose concept with many forms including search conferences, citizens' jury, the 21st century town meeting, the open space technology, and the citizens assembly (Bobbio, 2019; Suiter et al., 2016). These diverse options have some common features including highly structured participatory processes, processes with well-defined phases, pre-defined durations with strict time controls, small group participant interaction, information supplied is complete, balanced and accessible, and processes are designed and run by neutral parties, see Table 1A. Beginning with these common features, public participation designers have further options to consider in their process with five main considerations, discussed in the following paragraphs and summarised in Table 1B.

Participation vs Deliberation

Both participatory and deliberative democracy aim at involving citizens in public choices. The terms can be and are often employed interchangeably. However, the former is more political, shaped by the opposition between the powerful and the powerless involving the pressure of people on governments. Deliberation is based on the premise that a diverse group of citizens, if given adequate information, resources and time to deliberate on a given topic, can produce a rational, informed judgment (Shortall, 2021). While similar they are somewhat contradictory, as massive participation hinders deliberation, while effective deliberation

requires limited participation. The key consideration is the problem to be tackled and the expected outcomes. For example, if the objective is to give voice to underrepresented groups, then participatory designs are preferred (Fung, 2006). Whereas deliberative designs are more appropriate where the objective is to engage citizens in problem-solving.

Online vs On-site

Policymakers are attracted to online participation as it is less expensive and supports the involvement of large numbers of citizens. However, empirical research is more cautious about the comparative advantages of online participation (Friess & Eilders, 2015). There are technical barriers, and also cultural and political ones e.g. a distrust of government. Online arenas work best when gathering information or receiving inputs from citizens. Even with these one-way input processes key design features are best incorporated to support effectiveness and process legitimacy. These include the provision of neutral information, proactively seeking diversity of respondents, and making contributions pseudo-anonymous to ensure privacy and verification of the contributor (Vebrova et al., 2022). For deliberative processes, face to face interactions remain most effective.

Hot deliberation vs Cold deliberation

A key objective of participatory processes is to encourage a constructive dialogue with the public and stakeholders. Its purpose is to avoid heated arguments, to replace passion with reason (Bobbio, 2019). Ensuring all voices and views are heard, while avoiding stormy debate is a key challenge in the design of the process. One approach is to open with partisan presentations, followed by structured citizen deliberations.

Open-door settings vs Mini-publics

Open-door arenas are where anyone can participate, while mini-publics aim to gather a balanced sample of the affected population. While an open-door strategy, such as a public meeting, is open to allowing anyone to join, it risks self-selection bias where social, time and preference biases can dominate the contributions. These arise as the well off, the retired and those with strong preferences about the topic are more likely to show up (Bobbio, 2019). These distortions can be useful if it raises the profile of the topic among those impacted or gives voice to those normally unheard. However, where these benefits do not materialise, or are not required, the process and outcomes may lose legitimacy.

Mini-publics endeavour to include a sample of the impacted population through defined criteria, for example, as applied for the composition of the Irish constitutional citizen assembly (Suiter et al., 2016). As they gather a balanced sample, they do not suffer from the open-door biases. However, the basis for the selection can nonetheless underrepresent groups. For example,

migrants are less likely to be on the electoral register, the basis for selection for the Irish citizen assembly.

To address the limits of either option, rather than focusing on the individuals in the process, both operate more effectively when the process ensures all groups are included, and within the groups, the representation of all the possible positions on the issue (Ravazzi & Pomatto, 2014).

Decision making v Consultation

It must be clear to the participants the power and influence that they have on the final decision. However, granting a mini-public or a public meeting the power to make a decision binding on the wider community will be controversial. Consequently, these processes rarely grant formal decision-making power, while the actual degree of influence they have is often unclear (Bobbio, 2019). The next steps for a group's proposals could be that they are submitted to a referendum, that the authorities commit to adopting them, or for authorities to publicly explain a rejection of the proposals. Often authorities only commit to taking the group's recommendations into serious consideration. However, the group's influence is not limited to the level of delegation of formal power. Their influence also depends on the quality of deliberation and of its outcomes. For example, the Irish constitutional citizen assembly has exerted considerable influence due to the time committed by participants, the range of experts that present to the assembly and government commitments to act on their recommendations (Farrell et al., 2019). In addition, the participation process is not the only game in town. There are other mechanisms, and other players active on the same policy field, who can re-enforce the group's recommendations (Parkinson, 2006).

Conclusion

Participatory processes are often criticized for just pretending to give voice to citizens with the process employed to legitimize decisions already made (Bobbio, 2019). Of course, these criticisms are often made by political opponents, interest groups who feel cut-off from the process (especially where mini-publics are used) or other groups eager to attack the policy or government. However, there is also a grain of truth to these criticisms. These processes aim to learn from citizens but only within pre-defined agendas. They are open to innovative ideas but only by participants first confirming decisions already made. They give voice to citizens but are also employed to gain legitimacy. In addition, despite the increases in public participation, the effect of participation on legitimacy, the primary objective of adopting these processes, is unclear (Fung, 2015). There are several mechanisms that can be employed to improve legitimacy and reassure participants that they are not being used or manipulated. These include ensuring participants are supplied balanced information, providing expertise and

witnesses to the participants, creating an advisory committee consisting of all stakeholders, and assigning the process to skilled outsiders that are separate to the promoters (Bobbio, 2019).

Table 1: Creating effective Public Participation Processes (Bobbi, 2019)

A: Common Features of Public Participation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly structured • well-defined phases • pre-defined durations with strict time controls • small groups • information is complete, balanced and accessible • process designed and run by neutral parties
--

B: Dilemmas in Public Participation Design

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Online • Open-door settings • Hot deliberation • Decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberation • On-site • Mini-publics • Cold deliberation • Consultation
--	--

C: Improving Public Participation Legitimacy

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supply balanced information • provide expertise and witnesses to participants • process advisory committee of all stakeholders • outside administrator separate to promoters

Greenways

This section introduces the greenway concept, and the local infrastructure project that is the focus of this study. A greenway is a connected corridor of land deliberately designed and managed for multiple purposes including ecological, recreational, cultural and other sustainable compatible uses (Ahern & Fabos, 1996). Greenways often incorporate pre-existing manufactured infrastructure, such as roads, canals, or railways as a framework for the route. Building on existing manufactured or natural features increases the successful implementation of the greenway. Greenway benefits include ecological preservation, public health, transportation, recreation and tourism, historical and cultural heritage celebration, social connectivity, and access to aesthetic scenery (Fabos, 1995; Keith et al., 2018; Kondolf & Pinto, 2017; Larson et al., 2016). However, the benefits of a specific greenway depends on

the location and goals of that project. Greenways in urban areas have the potential to provide important benefits to local communities but these can be especially difficult to implement (Keith et al., 2018).

The challenges that greenway projects encounter are in the areas of management, design, and implementation. Support for greenway projects has encountered resistance due to the failure to clearly identify responsibility for ongoing management of the completed route (Ryan et al., 2006).

The second challenge involves the design of the greenway. One of the more important design challenges is the creation of a safe route, both safe physically and the feeling of being safe along the greenway (Keith et al., 2018). Secluded spaces with reduced lighting can become, or can be perceived to be, places that attract anti-social behaviour and crime. To address this, good greenway design incorporates features that activate the route, includes clear-site lines, and numerous access points. Increasing sightlines contributes more eyes while routes without blind spots increases perceptions of safety. Creating an attractive route will attract more users and more eyes deterring criminality. Similarly, numerous access points increases the user's entry and exit options preventing users feeling trapped on the greenway. These combined features can reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and their interaction encourage more use of the route.

The third challenge is implementation. This can be addressed through a clear and effective public outreach strategy (Erickson, 2006; Ryan et al., 2006). Engaging the public early in the process can prevent derailment of the project later on. It can also capture early the desired greenway features future users want and enable effective activation of the spaces. Local support is particularly important for greenway projects as distance to home and accessibility are key factors influencing frequency of use, and thus the success of a greenway project (Akpinar, 2016).

The next section describes the selected greenway project and the associated public participation process.

Method

This is a single case study examining the implementation of a public participation process. The subject of this case study is the proposed Cabinteely Greenway. A similar scheme was proposed but not implemented in 2015. The purpose of this Greenway is to connect two urban areas via the existing road network and a large local park. The benefits for the proposed Greenway include improving connectivity, safe route to schools, reducing car reliance, enhancing accessibility to public transport, and improving access to nature (DLRCoCo, 2024). The route is entirely within the Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council administrative area,

ensuring a clear area of responsibility for implementation and future maintenance (Ryan et al., 2006). The proposal includes four potential routing options with varying levels of consideration of greenway features in the design options, for example, clear-site lines and number of access points (Keith et al., 2018). Engagement with the public on the design options to seek their views and concerns is a key objective of the public engagement process on the proposed greenway (DLRCoCo, 2024). The summary of the study design is captured in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Study Design

Topic area	Summary
Research method	Case study
Type of case study	Single; holistic
Unit of analysis	The public participation process
Selection of case	Typical
Criteria for interpreting findings	Public participation features
Data collection method	Documents; Survey
Analysis process	Within-case: Explanation

Data Collection

The Cabinteely Greenway proposals were publicly announced on social media by the local authority in November 2023. This announced two public meetings, design workshops, for local residents and businesses on the proposals, with an accompanying link to an online information and registration page on the local authority website (DLRCoCo, 2024). The agenda was the same for both meetings, with the meeting presentation and the outline of the public participation processes later uploaded to the online information page. Approximately seventy local persons in total attended the two meetings. As this study is investigating public participation processes, a survey of the local community on the Greenway was created by the researcher and distributed in December and January 2024. The formal announcement of the Greenway proposal was presented at local authority meetings in January 2024.

The survey consisted of six questions, four demographic and two on the Greenway. 1,100 letters were distributed to residential homes in areas adjacent to the Greenway routes as distance to home is a key factor influencing the frequency of greenway use (Akpınar, 2016). The local population within 1 km of the route, based on the electoral register, is approximately 3,400 persons (DLRCoCo, 2023). This process engaged with approximately 80% of this local population. The letters explained the purpose of the Greenway and invited the resident to complete the online survey accessible via a QR code printed on the letter. There was no social

media communication. There were 197 responses representing a 17.9% response per letter. Gender, age, and geographic responses were representative, summarised in Appendix B.

Analysis

The purpose of this study is to investigate public participation processes in a single case study. The features of public participation processes are applied to the stages of the case-study processes.

The structure of the case-study public participation process is highly structured with clearly defined phases and timelines, summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of the Greenway Design Process (DLRCoCo, 2024)

STAGE	TIMELINE
Design Workshops	Q4 2023
Community & Stakeholder Engagement	Q4 2023-Q1 2024
Preliminary Design	Q1-Q2 2024
Planning	Q2-Q3 2024
Final Design	Q3 2024
Detailed design	Q4 2024
Construction	Q1 2025

The first phase, the design workshops, was a timed and structured process. Hosts were introduced, followed by a presentation explaining the proposals rationale and the alternate routes. Participants were then invited to examine the proposal and make observations directly on the route plans with sticky-notes. The hosts encouraged dialogue during the presentation and the direct observations phase. Participants were also encouraged to share their contact details to enable communication of updates on the plans and the next stages in the process. The level of information and the open dialogue are features of a deliberation process (Shortall, 2021). Local resident groups were formally invited while a wider public notification of the events was via social media. Attendee numbers were limited at one workshop, due to the limited capacity of the venue, with advance registration required to ensure admission. Limits on numbers and controlled communication are not typical features of open-door engagements. However, diverse views or the range of stakeholder were also not certain to be captured. The workshops were a hybrid of open-door and mini-publics. The purpose of constructive dialogue is to avoid intense arguments (Bobbio, 2019). The history of the earlier project in 2015 was raised in the first workshop resulting in heated contributions at the first meeting. While this workshop also limited attendee numbers and individuals may have been refused entry, the overall impact may not have been significant as the number of attendees at both events were similar. One workshop was in the evening and the second in the morning, enabling a wider diversity of attendees, addressing the issues of time, and social bias. The hosts of the

meetings were local authority staff and external engineering experts. The features of this public participation process are summarised in the context of the overall project in Table 4 below.

In contrast to the above in person workshops, the survey was administered online. As participants were not recruited online, it was not strictly an open-door method, with the associated bias risks. Recruitment was via a letter to residents within a defined geographical area, inviting them to complete the online survey. This supported capturing a range of resident views, and addressed time bias as residents could complete at a time convenient to them. Analysis revealed that all address areas, age groups, and transport users were represented in the responses, capturing a range of voices, a feature of mini-publics. However, respondents also self-selected into the study, a risk of preference bias (Bobbio, 2019). There are indicators of potential preference bias as the gender ratio, average age, location, and transport use in the study was not representative of the local population, see Appendix B. The overall approach is a hybrid, best described as a targeted open-door method. Respondents were given an opportunity to make comments, a limited form of cold consultation. A summary of the analysis of the processes are captured in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: Summary of the Greenway Design Public Participation Process

STAGE	DETAILS	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FEATURES
Design Workshops	Two public meetings with invited stakeholders	Cold-hot deliberation On-site Hybrid Mini-publics/open-door Consultation External expertise
Community & Stakeholder Engagement	Public meetings and webinars with stakeholders e.g. schools Online greenway project page with updates Online public submission	Deliberation On-site and online Mini-publics Cold deliberation Consultation
Preliminary Design	Engagement on the design	details tbc
Planning	Statutory process	details tbc
Final Design	Report to elected members for consideration	Decision making

Table 5: Local Community Survey

Q4 2023 -Q1 2024	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FEATURES
Online survey	Online Open-door – targeted

	Cold deliberation Outside administration
--	---

Conclusion

The examination of this case reveals that the many options available within participation processes enables the creation of hybrid formats. New formats provide an opportunity to minimise the limitations of binary process options. The case selected is also ongoing, creating the opportunity for later stages to address the limitations of the earlier stages. Table 1C highlights methods to improve public participation processes which could be considered and incorporated in the future stages of this process.

Appendix A: Cabinteely Greenway Public Participation Process (DLRCoCo, 2024)



Appendix B: Survey Data Summary

		No.	%
Gender	Female	48	42
	Male	58	51
	Prefer not to say	8	7
	<i>Total</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>100</i>
Age	<25	1	1.00
	25-34	9	8
	35-44	24	21
	45-54	23	20
	55-64	30	26
	65 +	27	24
	<i>Total</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>100</i>
Transport <i>At least once per week</i>	walk	108	95
	cycle/scoot	32	28
	private motor car/taxi	105	92
	motorbike	2	2
	public transport	51	45
	<i>Total</i>	-	-

		No.	%
Address	Bray Road	11	9.65
	Brennanstown Road	5	4.39
	Brennanstown Wood	2	1.75
	Cabinteely Close	2	1.75
	Cabinteely Way	1	0.88
	Carrickmines Ave/Chase	5	4.39
	Claremount	3	2.63
	Cornelscourt Hill	3	2.63
	Glens	19	16.67
	Highland	11	9.65
	Holmwood	8	7.02
	Killart	7	6.14
	Lambourne	2	1.75
	Monaloe Court	1	0.88
	Park Drive	4	3.51
	Prospect	4	3.51
	Stillorgan/Foxrock	1	0.88
	Sycamore	9	7.89
	Vale View	16	14.04
	<i>Total</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>100</i>

- Gender: Dublin male:female ratio 96:100 (CSO, 2022). The transformed, for comparability, response rate, excluding not indicated, is 121:100.

- Age: Mean age of respondents is 52 years. Mean Dublin age is 38 years (CSO, 2022).
- Transport: 10% of workers cycled in Dublin City, the highest county percentage (CSO, 2022). This study asked for any usage, not just commuting, and the 28% of study participants are thus not directly comparable with CSO data.
- Addresses: The addresses with the highest number of responses, Glens and Vale View, 19 and 16 respectively, are two residential roads where there is an option for the Greenway to be incorporated on these roads.

References

- Ahern, J., & Fabos, J. G. (1996). *Greenways: The Beginning of an International Movement*. Elsevier Science.
- Akpınar, A. (2016). Factors influencing the use of urban greenways: A case study of Aydın, Turkey. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 16, 123–131.
- Bobbio, L. (2019). Designing effective public participation. *Policy and Society*, 38(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2018.1511193>
- CSO. (2022). *Census of Population of Ireland*. CSO.
- Cuthill, M., & Fien, J. (2005). Capacity building: Facilitating citizen participation in local governance. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 64(4), 63–80.
- DLRCoCo. (2023). *Register of Electors Dublin Rathdown Stillorgan*. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.
- DLRCoCo. (2024). *Cabinteely Greenway*. Retrieved on 1st March 2024 from <https://www.dlrcoco.ie/environment-climate-change/active-travel/cabinteely-greenway>
- Erickson, D. (2006). *MetroGreen: Connecting Open Space in North American Cities*. Island Press.
- Fabos, J. G. (1995). Introduction and overview: the greenway movement, uses and potentials of greenways. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 33(1), 1–13.
- Farrell, D. M., Suiter, J., & Harris, C. (2019). ‘Systematizing’ constitutional deliberation: the 2016–18 citizens’ assembly in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 34(1), 113–123.
- Friess, D., & Eilders, C. (2015). A Systematic Review of Online Deliberation Research. *Policy & Internet*, 7(3), 319–339.
- Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66(1), 66–75.
- Fung, A. (2015). Putting the Public Back into Governance: The Challenges of Citizen Participation and Its Future. *Public Administration Review*, 75(4), 513–522.

- Hisschemöller, M., & Cuppen, E. (2015). Participatory assessment: Tools for empowering, learning and legitimating? In A. J. Jordan & E. J. R. Turpenny (Eds.), *The tools of policy formulation* (pp. 33–51). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Keith, S. J., Larson, L. R., Schafer, C. S., Hallo, J. C., & Fernandez, M. (2018). Greenway use and preferences in diverse urban communities: Implications for trail design and management. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 172.
- Kondolf, G. M., & Pinto, P. J. (2017). The social connectivity of urban rivers. *Geomorphology*, 277, 182–196.
- Larson, L. R., Jennings, V., & Cloutier, S. A. (2016). Public parks and wellbeing in urban areas of the United States. *PLoS ONE*, 11(4).
- Parkinson, J. (2006). Deliberation in the real world. Problems of legitimacy in deliberative democracy. In *Oxford: Oxford University Press*.
- Ravazzi, S., & Pomatto, G. (2014). Flexibility, argumentation and confrontation. How deliberative mini-publics can affect policies on controversial issues. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 10(2).
- Ryan, R. L., Fábos, J. G., & Allan, J. J. (2006). Understanding opportunities and challenges for collaborative greenway planning in New England. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 76(1), 172–191.
- Shortall, R. (2021). Deliberative appraisal methods. In Moute, N (Ed.), *New Methods, Reflections and Application Domains in Transport Appraisal* (Vol. 7, pp. 51–82). Academic Press.
- Suiter, J., Farrell, D. M., & Harris, C. (2016). The Irish constitutional convention: A case of ‘High Legitimacy.’ In M. Reuchamps & J. Suiter (Eds.), *Constitutional deliberative democracy in Europe* (pp. 33–51). Ecpr Press.
- Vebrova, M., Münster, W. W. U., Volkmer, L. A., Münster, W. W. U., & Distel, B. (2022). Design Principles for Online Platforms Fostering Deliberative Political Discourse. *Wirtschaftsinformatik Proceedings*.