

FORUM PROCESS INITIATOR'S GUIDE



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INITIATOR'S GUIDE

FORUM PROCESS INITIATOR'S GUIDE

FORUM PROCESS PUBLICATIONS

- 1 Donor's Brief
- 2 Initiator's Guide
- 3 Coordinator's Guide
- 4 Moderator's Guide
- 5 Forum Program Data
- 6 Forum Films

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1 INTRODUCING THE INITIATOR

Since the dawn of mankind humans have gathered together to bring order into their affairs by holding palavers. Meeting and talking to each other has been a human necessity and an invaluable social activity in and across all eras, national borders, and religious beliefs. By giving these traditional forms a modern structure, they can be shaped into powerful and effective tools for communication.

The **Forum** is one of the methods which can be used to structure a discussion. Its democratic approach furthers the “participatory process”: the Forum takes place in public, and is therefore accessible, handles information openly, gives equal weight to all voices, and accounts for its results.

There are many reasons to initiate a Forum, it being an excellent instrument to bridge the communication and cooperation gap between social groups – in particular between groups in the public sector on the one hand and those in the private /or civil /or informal sector of society on the other. The Forum process enables interest groups that otherwise would never meet and interact to be brought together as equals; it reshapes the setting of public interaction, complementing the established and often restricted patterns of public debate in society.

The typical initiator of a Forum is a player of importance in the public sphere – be it a mayor, a city council, or a (regional) Government office. Sometimes, a private or civil sector organization can also take on the role of an initiator. A Forum is a comprehensive social process that requires influential and organisational faculties in order to be established and maintained. Any initiator therefore needs to have some social, public or institutional standing.

For them this brochure should show why an initiator may find it an attractive idea to hold a Forum (Section 1), what its essential characteristics are (Section 2), and what points should be covered by an initiator to shape the outline of a Forum (Section 3). A final section compiles in brief in what form a Forum could become sustainable (Section 4), whilst the Annex contains a description of the shape a standard Forum takes as a Community Forum designed to result in real projects implemented in the field.

A Forum, it has been said, is a “most welcome bridge”. There are instances

when executives or legislators would appreciate being in close contact with the general public or with groups and organizations outside the normal and formal field of interaction. Learning and understanding more about public opinion and civic attitudes is a basis for devising accountable government policies and better adapted implementation measures. Involving informal groups and organizations in public events or activities, making them partners in decision-making and implementation of project ideas, can improve relations between the public and the private sector, produce new types of interaction between stakeholders, and reap a harvest of smaller and larger solutions to pertinent issues.

A good starting point and core activity for all the above situations can be a Forum; it can motivate a sustained and structured discussion between social groups on an equal footing, and it can help improve community life and interaction between social groups.

1.1 The Forum in a nutshell

What is a Forum?

A Forum brings together a sizeable number of people, representing different stakeholder groups, for a limited, if sometimes prolonged, period. Participants debate an issue of common interest; but contrary to other participatory processes the Forum members engage in discussions not as individuals, but as members of their specific group. They meet in public sessions facilitated by a moderator, each voice carries the same weight, procedures are open, decisions democratic and results are accounted for by measures built into the process.

What is the purpose of a Forum?

The *purpose and immediate objective* of a Forum is to treat a common issue, to find solutions, and potentially to implement measures and projects in line with such solutions. As an outcome, participants can resolve to issue recommendations to outside institutions, or to develop, prioritize, implement and control their own common projects. In some cases the Forum contributes to public policy formation.

The *overall aim* of the Forum, however, is better communication among interest groups and an improved community life, or public life in general. Under a political perspective this can be seen as an improvement in the governance of a society.

What is the use of a Forum?

The use of a Forum is always twofold:

- it deals with a particular issue, and may help to find a solution to a given problem;
- its process improves the social capacities of participating groups and enhances social interaction between them.

Reasons for initiating a Forum can be found in either of these aspects: there may originally be a specific issue, or a general concern about the quality of public life, or both.

How does a Forum come into being?

A Forum is originally conceived and set into motion by the initiator – a local protagonist with an established public/institutional standing. This prominent role of the initiator is the rule. In many less advanced countries the Forum approach is insufficiently established and needs to be promoted first by donor-sponsored programs financing the process and then by gradually enlarging the contribution and involvement of local partners.

The motivation to participate in a Forum is determined by the specific interest of different individuals and groups within their own context and setting – professional, occupational, political or other. Thus it is part of the initiator's role, during the Forum's conceptualization phase, to assess the potential willingness and motivation of participants to become involved in the process.

1.2 Visions of the Forum process to come

Launching the process is the final step in the initiator's role. The Forum will start off from the initiators' vision of the process to come, and a comprehensive view of the interaction between the main groups to be brought together in the hope of achieving results. No doubt a wide variety of results can be envisaged for a Forum.

- The initiator may perceive the need to elaborate a development plan actively involving as many stakeholders, interested and intervening parties as possible. **In the end, the Forum should lead to a consolidation of opinions.**
- The initiator may wish to motivate cooperation within a network of groups or organizations at the level of daily community life, thus coordinating with and complementing the activities of voluntary groups. **In this way, the Forum process helps to bridge the gap between diverse social spheres.**
- The initiator may wish to learn more about the needs of particular informal groups in the community, in order to adapt the framework of regulations.
- There may be the vision to develop, implement and maintain some project on a public/private basis – from playgrounds to social clubs, to museums or continuing education courses, to internet facilities. **Through this, the Forum could contribute to the formation of new coalitions, new forms of cooperation, and new social capacities.**

- The Forum would lead to a consolidation/correspondence of opinions;
- The Forum could help to bridge the gap between diverse social spheres;
- The Forum could contribute to the formation of new coalitions, new forms of cooperation, and new social capacities.



1.3 Comparison of participatory processes

Before deciding on the need for a Forum, the initiator should compare the Forum approach with other types of participatory processes. The Forum concept is but one of many related instruments. There is a range of methods that have been developed in recent decades – all with their particular background and purpose, strengths and weaknesses. It depends which context and objectives the initiator has in mind to decide which instrument is best suited and most efficient.

If the vision is to hold an assembly of prominent persons in order to collect viewpoints and references for development planning (later completed by a planning institution), then a **Future conference** will do very well. If the purpose is to collect salient issues in some community, then a **Participatory learning and action** (PLA) approach is indicated. If project ideas or proposals are to be collected, then an **Agenda 21 Conference** or similar project discussion formats will deal with it effectively. In all these cases, the Forum would be too elaborate and circumstantial. On the other hand, a Forum may be too demanding if the social basis (a community) is too weak, small, or socially undifferentiated to carry out a discussion process. In this case guided **Focus groups** would work better. A Forum is useless if projects are too technical and predetermined in their content (such as infrastructure projects) and are decided on a “take it or leave it” basis – although when organising the social use of infrastructure services, a Forum would be helpful. In the case of projects exclusively in the private sector a Forum is pointless as it serves no function, yet for the formulation of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) it would be very appropriate.

1.4 Advantage of the Forum approach

The Forum, then, is best in cases when:

- issues concerning a range of interest groups or prevailing in the public need to be resolved;
- solutions adapted to the issue have yet to be developed and worked out (and not only compiled as such);
- projects are not based on unilateral top-down decisions, but need to be worked out, adapted and enriched in a bottom-up process;
- interaction of different social groups in project formulation and implementation is considered constructive;
- transparency of the process and accountability of the participants is aimed at.

One may also notice that the Forum is designed to empower its participants to take their own decisions. Structure and rules applied in a Forum setting guarantee equal access and equal opportunity for each participant. Most participatory instruments delegate only certain parts of the decision-making process – either ideas and content, or the funding, but rarely both.

This is where the unique feature of the Forum process comes in: **the Forum establishes a participatory process, as other instruments would of course do, but based on empowerment, transparency and accountability.** The first step towards empowerment is the initial agreement between initiator and the Forum participants on the type of results foreseen as an outcome. This particular two-way interaction reinforces democratic attitudes and values, the essence of dialogue, as well as trust in cooperative relations between public authorities and citizens.

The Forum is certainly a complex and comprehensive approach, usually more demanding time-wise and logistically than some of its lighter or more focussed sister versions. But a fully-fledged Forum is definitely capable of handling the most

demanding and critical issues between highly differentiated stakeholder groups under considerable public strain. Various modified versions of the Forum approach have also proven the latter’s flexibility and capacity to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining its core features intact.

1.5 Launch and step back

If the initial idea for a Forum is with the initiator, it is also his or her task to preliminarily contact interest groups, invite their opinions, and lobby for their active participation in a Forum. After the formulation of the idea, the initiator will no longer be acting alone. Other persons will quickly be involved, either from the initiator’s own institution or by getting key staff from outside to set up a Forum. The process towards a Forum will then gain momentum, and is carried by the coordinator, the moderator, and his/her assistants. The initiator will still remain essential as a promoting force, and as an address for support and influential action. Once the Forum is in operation, the initiator will have the pleasure of acting as a patron of the process and of the Forum’s general results – though without interfering or forgetting that the Forum’s focus is guided by its participants.

Motivation for Forum processes

In past records, one finds examples of Forums as **a response to events** of unprecedented impact. In the 1980s, for example, a major industrial disaster in Basel, Switzerland, prompted a yearlong public deliberation process on the future economic and social development of the town. Other Forums’ starting points included very concrete issues and the initiators’ desire to have a **broad social and not simply technical reflection** on the problems involved: in the 90s, the need to conceptualize the redevelopment of a dilapidated urban area on a broad public basis was the starting point of a Forum in Zurich, Switzerland. In the first case, a city council and a private foundation were the initiators; the mayor of the city initiated the second.

In 2000 in Bulgaria, the starting point of a series of Forums has been the desire to enhance the overall quality of public life at community level. This initial motivation led to a program that first surveyed the need for forum discussions on particular issues in each municipality, followed by a prioritization process of topics. In this case **the overall objective was the driving force**, and an international donor formed a coalition with local Government authorities to act as initiators. The mayors or the city councils calling for their own Forum within the framework of the Bulgarian Program in turn had their own motivation based on local interests.

2 CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF A FORUM

2.1 Common problem, issue, theme

A Forum differs from an informal get-together within the family or the clan, as it is an organised public event with clearly defined rules. Forum participants meet to discuss in depth an issue of common interest. The topic is important enough to be dealt with in a series of sessions; the number depends of course on the specific purpose for which the Forum has been designed.

Since the approach observes democratic principles, sessions always take place in public. In this way, a Forum turns into an important social process that merits to be set up carefully, although the concept is simple.

A Forum discussion is always about **an important specific issue of common public concern**. The interests of the participants determine the topic chosen for a Forum discussion.

2.2 Structured discussion

Wherever a number of people get together, they inadvertently form certain patterns. Families or acquaintances might sit together, or then people of the same background (teachers – pupils; men – women; people from one village – those from other villages; members of the same political party; those of similar age), depending on the type of gathering.

A Forum, too, is **structured in groups of participants**, but the groups do not form spontaneously, they are planned in advance and are kept the same throughout the series of sessions.

In fact, it is the first decision of the first Forum session to agree on this grouping. It should represent the main interest groups in relation to a particular theme. Forum sessions will make the structure visible, as every participant is part of a group; and each group has its own table, these being arranged in a circle. Only the table seating of the so-called “operative group” (the moderator of the session and his/her assistants) differs from the rest. The number and composition of participating groups will be different in each Forum process, as required by the issue under discussion and the expected results.

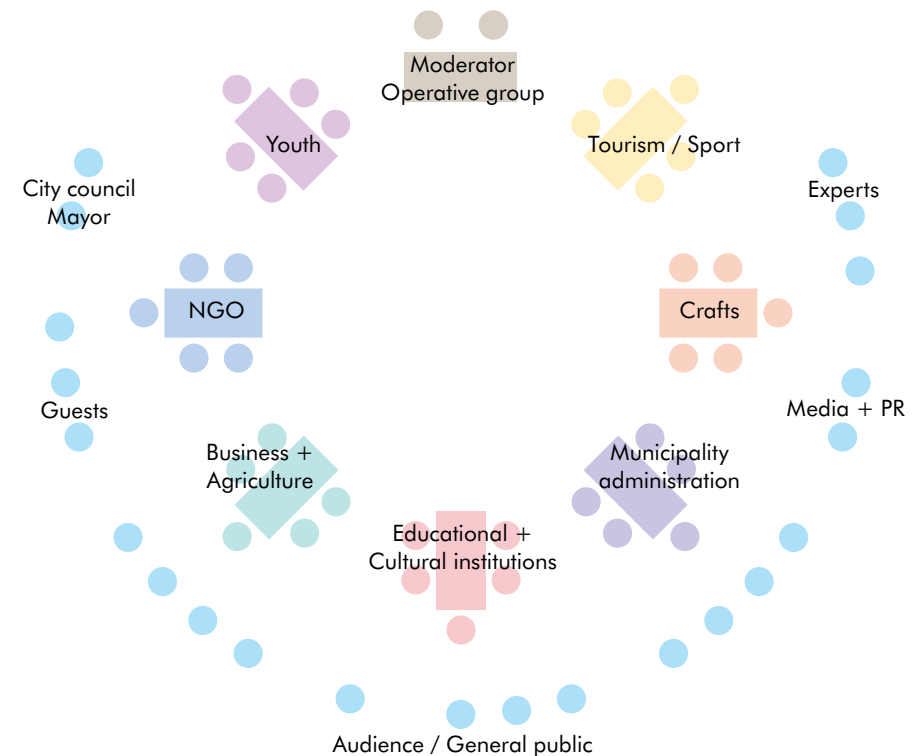
2.3 Neutral venue, public access

Of particular significance is the venue, the place in which people meet for a Forum. Every location (a building, a hall, a square) is full of symbolism and inevitably speaks of its owner or builder. The town hall represents the power of the municipality; a school gym is more neutral but may still not be considered public enough; a conference centre usually reflects business interests; a restaurant is almost too private; a church speaks of transcendental forces turning participants into brother and sisters. The symbolism of a venue may therefore reinforce the status of some participating groups or reduce the status of others.

Since it is the aim of a Forum to allow for a group discussion on equal terms, the **venue or location** of the sessions must be chosen carefully, so as not to forfeit the objective – a discussion amongst equals. As an additional requirement the place should be **accessible to the public** and have a room large enough to place (non-participating) guests as observers.



Forum structured in interest groups and working tables (sample)



2.4 Outside moderator, code of conduct

Facilitation is a key element in any discussion. If all are shouting or talking at the same time, neither facts nor opinions can be shared in any systematic way.

The **moderator** facilitating the Forum process must be independent, unbiased, above the fray, without links to any of the groups – preferably someone from a different place. Since so much depends on the person structuring the debate, it is preferable to choose a person trained in Forum methodology.

Code of Conduct (examples of useful rules)

- Limit speaking to 2 minutes per intervention
- Listen to others speaking; wait for your turn
- State your opinion; bring forward facts (rather than criticize others)
- etc.

As a basis for successful and effective work during the sessions, every Forum will have to ensure that participants adopt a set of basic rules at the outset, in other words a **code of conduct**. Such rules are simple enough and lead to fair and effective discussions.

2.5 Expertise and training

Experience shows that Forum participants frequently need to be supported by expertise coming from outside: methodologically and technically.

Technical support is any **expertise** necessary to properly treat a topic: factual background information, or specific professional advice on particular aspects of an issue. This has to be provided in a professionally reliable form. Any discussion going beyond the basic issues will at some point need to be supported by technical expertise, so that the participants are in a position to form their own, but informed opinion.

Another frequent need is the **training of participants** in particular skills. More often than one would assume, participants need some guidance in the handling of their tasks within the Forum process. Training in project preparation

and the formulation of business plans, scheduling of implementation and monitoring activities, media relations and fund raising is often in demand by organizations as much as by individuals in community Forums.

Finally, training and continuous **coaching of Forum's key staff**, such as the moderator, coordinator, and members of the operative group, is essential to ensure a quality process.

Support activities should be handled by an experienced organization with some specialization in Forum matters. Often some division of tasks is possible with special offices and agencies of the administration available on site, or with specialised NGOs or consulting companies.

Consolidation process in Forum discussions



2.6 Consolidation of opinion

The purpose of a Forum is to transform an abstract public topic, step by step, into a concrete project – or at least into a recommendation or a plan – that can be implemented in reality. During the sessions the discussion moves from diverse individual opinions to a deepened interpretation of the topic being discussed, then to a consolidated position first by tables, and finally of all participants.

As the discussion evolves from one session to another, the consolidation process is characterized by a sequence of stages, as shown in the diagram on page 14. In fact the consolidation occurs several times: first in relation to the interpretation or viewpoint regarding a theme (step 4); then regarding possible solutions (step 7); and again in the final step when proposals are to be ranked by priority (step 10).

The Forum is designed to achieve a **consolidation of opinion**. This is indeed its central function.

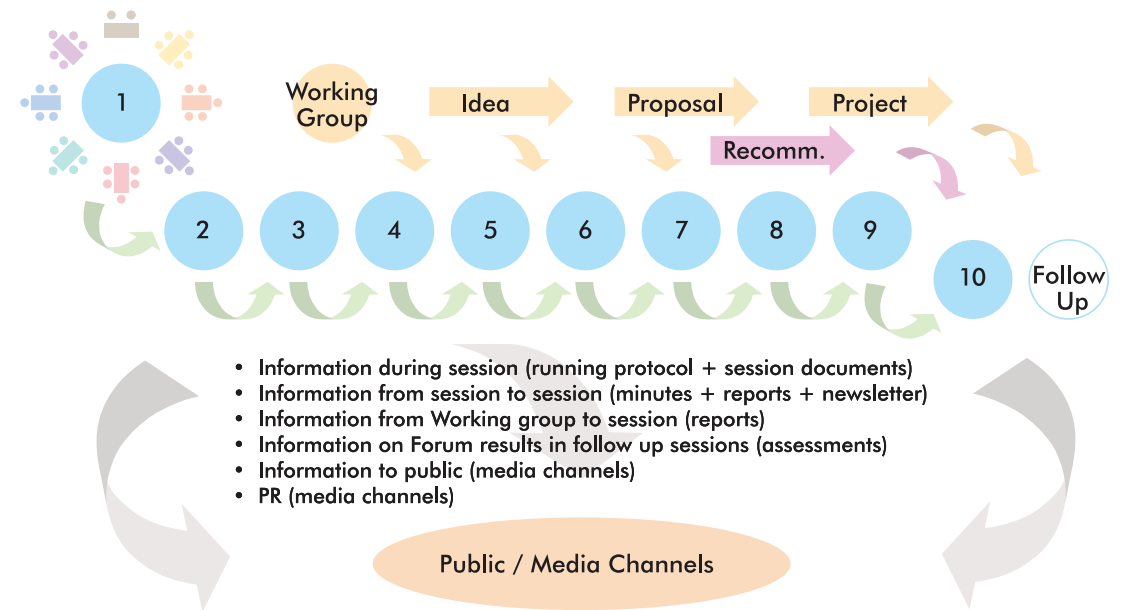


2.7 Transparency, accountability

The consolidation process repeating itself throughout the session cycle is central to the Forum and should be accomplished in a transparent way. As noted above, the grouping – or even the seating of participants – helps to visualise group positions and diverging interests. In this way, facts and their interpretation by the groups can be distinguished by everyone. Yet the most important element in securing transparency is a running record of the proceedings, and a reliable flow of information regarding all activities to all involved. This indeed is a very demanding task. There will be session proceedings, working group reports, a record of recommendations issued, project proposals at different stages, and a newsletter on each session compiled and issued by the operative group with wide distribution to all participants and the general public. Moreover, there is a range of parties to be satisfied: participants need to receive invitations, minutes, background information, reports, and proposals, while the media that link the Forum to the general public need tailor-made material and releases.

A central concern of a Forum is to handle **the flow of internal and external information** correctly and to the satisfaction of participants, media and public. Above all, a Forum is an exercise in transparent interaction. All the virtues ascribed to the Forum process, such as **empowerment, transparency, and accountability**, are based on the proper management and handling of communication flows.

Transparency of Forum activities



The above illustration shows the various flows of information pertaining to Forum activities. If the diagram looks complicated, the principle applied is simple: **the source of a decision should be informed about its outcome.** Whatever the participants of a Forum decide during sessions is recorded and minutes of it are read at the next session. Furthermore, whoever receives a mandate from the Forum participants must report to the participants on the action taken. Thus, activities by working groups between sessions (e.g. developing project proposals) have to be reported to the main body at the next Forum session and published in the Forum newspaper for participants. Similarly, all results of a Forum (in terms of recommendations or project propos-

als) have to be reported on by those in charge of implementing them, and progress monitored and reported by the Coordinator. Even after conclusion of the session cycle, Forum participants receive feedback on projects and recommendations at special follow-up sessions or via the special Forum newsletter for participants. Finally – since a Forum is a public process – press releases, public relations material, and newspaper articles need to be prepared and handed out to the media, based on the primary information flow described above, to relate Forum activity at least in its main results to the general public. The transparency achieved in this way also generates better understanding and acceptance of the Forum process within the community.

3 INITIATOR'S OUTLINE OF A FORUM

Outline of a Forum

- Institutional background of the initiator
- Topic and context
- Specific objectives and corresponding instruments
- Coverage
- Stakeholder groups
- Expected results
- Appropriate number of sessions
- Key persons and support services
- Costing

For a complete outline of a concrete Forum see Attachment 3 to the present Guide.

Many aspects have to be taken into account when creating a Forum. For initiators about to engage in this process, Section 3 discusses a list of important points to reflect upon when shaping the outline of a Forum. The outline contains the main points that need to be clarified and/or adapted to the circumstances under which the Forum is to take place. In a way it summarizes the "state of the idea", providing a general overview before the first operational phases of the Forum commence. The outline requires the initiator to proceed in a coherent way, and to identify potential outside financing options.

3.1 Institutional background of the initiator

First reflect on the initiator. The **initiator** of a Forum is not an individual – even if he or she is acting quite autonomously: it is an **institution** to which the initiator belongs or represents. This distinction is important because in time decisions by the initiator will create obligations.

So it is not without reason to first clarify whether the initiator is the mayor's office, the municipal administration, the city council, the development agency established by the municipality, an NGO or a business organization, in short: a **governmental or a non-governmental organization**.

3.2 Topic and context

The **topic or theme of a Forum**, understandably, is derived from the initial vision and is therefore impregnated by the initiator and the institution he or she represents.

The initiator might set off with a vision to establish a Forum on agricultural development with farmers, research institutes, and regional support and financing organizations, or a discussion on youth issues with schools, NGOs and the youth themselves. Or the initiator is just concerned about poor community interaction, and wishes to improve the situation without a particular theme in mind.

These are all valid starting points. A Forum's initial vision serves as a general orientation, later to be discussed and fine-tuned in detail with stakeholders and participants.

Still, the **context** counts:

To discuss youth issues in a rural community is different from the situation to be considered in a neglected part of a large city. Similarly, a discussion on the promotion of crafts in a region will involve various other issues and the use of different kinds of measures than the same topic would require at the national level. Even if the concern is with the overall objective of improving community life – this is different if the community is a village or a city.

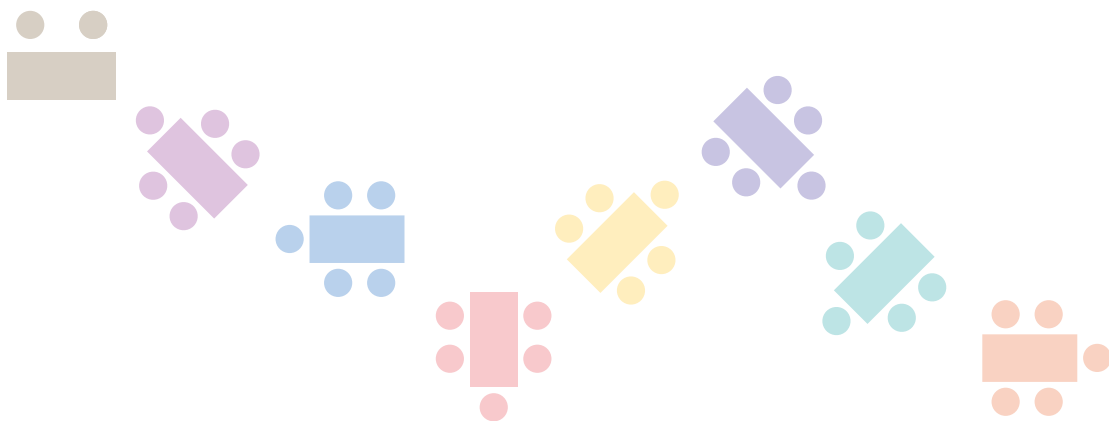
Thus, only an indication of the central theme *plus* the context to which it relates will sufficiently clarify the approach.

At this initial stage it may be wise to remain sufficiently broad to allow for inputs from the various stakeholders. Sometimes the reason to choose a Forum is so general – e.g. improve community life - that only a **citizen survey** would generate more specific issues to be treated. This would at the same time reinforce the motivation to participate.

3.3 Specific objectives and corresponding instruments

The initiator quite naturally expects the Forum to achieve something. He or she has some specific objectives in mind – which later will need to be explored and validated with the participants. The objective in turn requires adequate instruments for the Forum to do the job and produce the desired results. The following typology of instruments has been compiled – arranged from simple to most elaborate – to assist the initiator in specifying this part of the outline:

- A Forum is first and foremost a place for discussion. Is it then your goal to simply arrange for a debate as an end in itself? The results can be interesting: new ideas can take hold and new concepts can spread. Many such Forums have shown that the **discussion can indeed be beneficial in itself**: the exchange of information leads to deeper knowledge and opens the mind, improves understanding about attitudes and interests, and facilitates the formulation of new coalitions which in turn lead to new forms of cooperation. These would be valuable and entirely sufficient results of a discussion process – using the structured Forum discussion process as an instrument.
- As a special case of using discussion as an instrument, a Forum can sometimes help **overcome a state of shock** in a community following catastrophic events that threaten daily life. To talk about and share fears of threats and disturbances is the first step towards healing and therefore certainly a valid objective.
- Discussions often go beyond their initial objectives and can result in the unanimous resolve to join forces in spontaneous **direct action**. People often use this instrument on their own for something within their reach: e.g. hold a commemoration, set up a market day, organize a fiesta, clean



the riverbeds etc. Such a result of a Forum is always welcome but cannot be planned or even expected. As an instrument, direct action consists of straightforward organizational resolve by the participants.

- Of course, a Forum can aspire to more elaborate achievements. As an outcome of their discussion, participants can resolve to recommend that specific action be taken by outside institutions, e.g. by the council, a municipal department, or some local or regional organization. **Recommendations** represent a very powerful instrument since the Forum adds a "public quality" to queries initially raised by individuals or groups. It is advisable, though, to establish a system to treat and monitor the implementation of such recommendations as an integral part of this instrument.
- In a format very close to "recommendations" a Forum would discuss and elaborate on a **strategy or a planning document** on behalf of an authority that will implement the plan subsequently. There are different stages of plan elaboration which a Forum could feasibly contribute. In any case the Forum would have to cooperate with a technical office of the authority which in principle is in charge of plan finalization.

- A Forum may very well aim at tangible results. e.g. it can discuss the realization of projects. With its power to assess the context and the causes of a problem, a Forum discussion can lead to optimized problem solutions and **development of project proposals**. This is again a valuable result of a Forum, leaving the financial part to other institutions or to private engagement. One could consider this as a special form of recommendation, set in a specified format.
- Finally, if the vision is to have implemented and **operational Forum projects** by the end of the process, the Forum then turns into a project-processing and project decision-making body. To that end it should dispose of a **project fund / financial resources**. Opening up or finding financial sources for a project fund rests largely with the initiator. The initiator's institution may have some budgetary possibilities. Outside donors and private sponsors might contribute. Participants would also shoulder part of their own project financing. In any case, if it is expected that ideas for projects will develop as a result of the Forum process, some concrete source of financing must be available. The project fund is the central instrument in this Forum format.

3.4 Coverage

Once you, the initiator, have an idea for a topic, and know to what type of results the Forum should lead, and therefore what instrument should be at its disposal, then the **coverage** of the Forum needs to be considered: who should take part in the debate? At this stage, this is still a general question (what type of participant to envisage?): it will, however, become more specific at a later stage of the process (which persons should be invited to participate?).

The coverage of a Forum always links two aspects concurrently: the geographic area and the specific social level at which a Forum should take place. Thinking of one aspect inevitably relates to the other:

- If you think of a Forum for your **community** in purely geographic terms, you will nevertheless face the issue whether to include all its parts and settlements? Is it the general public of a community that you have in mind including subgroups and minorities, or is your Forum only for regular citizens of the municipality?
- If you foresee a Forum for an entire **region** with several municipalities – are you relating to the broad population of a geographic territory or rather to a set of selected regional institutions linked to a particular theme (e.g. tourist attractions)? Do you want municipalities to talk with each other, or should regions debate with central ministries as partners in discussion?
- At the **national level**, do you want to include groups of professional specialists, or the same profession but only the members of some national association? The need to focus seems to increase with the size of the territory: a national Forum can be held effectively only with well-defined groups of a similar kind within the same country (e.g. all craft associations).

The larger the geographic area the more specific and selective the definition of the types of social groups to be involved has to become.

The examples given above show that straightforward geographic definition alone does not suffice. The outline of the initiator therefore should describe the coverage indicating at **what level** and with which part of the **social structures within the given geographic area** the Forum should be held. Of course, this specification of the coverage will be done with the theme and the specific objectives in mind.

There are Forums on record relating to each of the levels in geographic terms, from village to the national level. How do they usually relate to the social structure within the given geographic area?

- In practice, the record shows that **Forums at village or community level** are mainly of two types:
 - either relating to the population in general, with the Forum trying to be representative and to reflect as well as possible the prevailing social structure. Forum themes can be quite general at the outset.
 - or covering only particular interest groups given a more specific theme e.g. stakeholders in tourism, in agriculture, or in cultural issues. Forum themes here are naturally more specific.
- In **Forums at the regional level**, participation is usually limited to institutions starting from municipality level upwards. Small community stakeholder groups cannot be considered. Themes will have to be of interest for participants at the regional level.

- The **national level Forum** has the same problems as that of the regional level, only at a more comprehensive stage. National Forums would discuss national themes. To mention some exceptions here: in a Forum discussing environmental issues in the context of local municipalities' relations to a specific national park, an individual community may still become involved, as an exception, one is tempted to say.

The link between three components: theme, type of result/instrument, and coverage

Theme and coverage:

The intended coverage needs to correspond with an envisaged theme. One would hold a national Forum with government offices and national associations for a topic such as "national development priorities", a regional one for service providers and municipalities on "tourism cooperation", and a community level Forum for the "design of a local crafts and business centre".

Theme and instrument:

The same holds true for the working instruments to be put at the disposal of the Forum. If the intention is to arrive at "new regulations for outdoor clinic patients" as a result, then recommendations as an instrument would suffice. "Beautification of a pedestrian area", on the other hand, calls for a project fund for projects to be financed and implemented by citizen groups.

All three elements – theme, expected type of result and coverage – are captured and enclosed in the vision of the initiator – usually without him or her being aware of this. The exercise of creating an outline may help to bring implicit intentions to light.

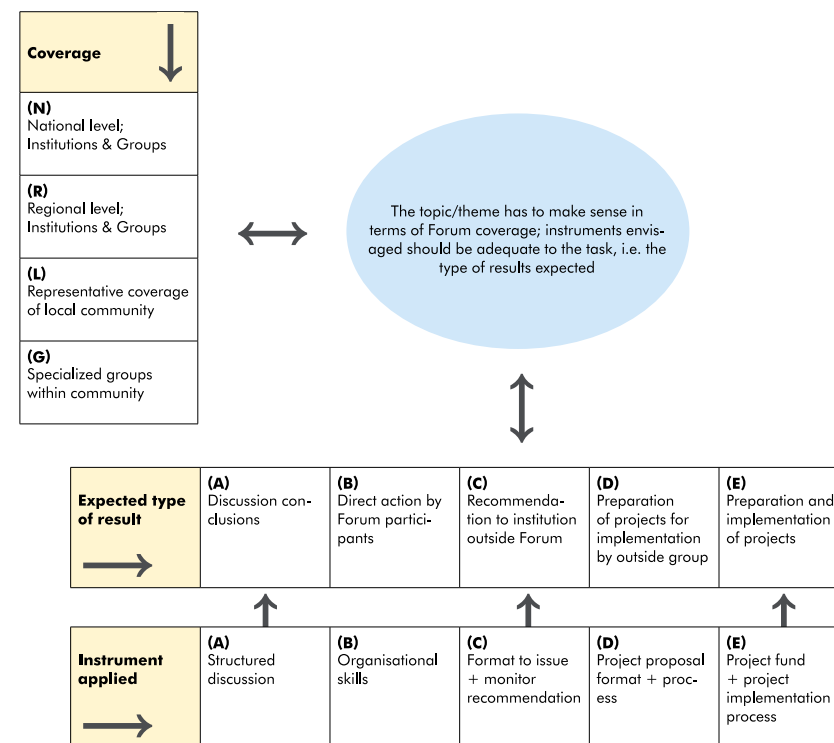
3.5 Stakeholder/interest groups and participants

If you have come this far with your idea for a Forum, you are ready to specify the outline with respect to participants.

Obviously not all people within a geographic area being considered can participate in a Forum. Selection is necessary, and this is best done with the help of certain criteria. The central criterion is: participants must belong to the social groups for whom the chosen topic is relevant.

The first step towards selection therefore is to define the participation not in terms of individuals, but in terms of discernable groups of people with the same socio-economic background – the so called "stakeholder groups" or interest groups. These can be representatives of NGOs, cultural institutions, administration, business, youth, senior citizens, farmers, crafts, environmentalists, teachers, minorities, citizens, or of particular sections or villages of a municipality etc. Again, there is no fixed set of "stakeholder groups"; their composition will vary with each Forum. They will have to be defined for each Forum anew, in line with its particular combination of topic, coverage and type of result expected. Clearly, people interested e.g. in planning waste deposits at a regional level will differ greatly from those developing common projects for a pedestrian area in a town.

The link between Forum components



The initiator's outline should contain a first list of potential stakeholder groups that can still be adapted later, but their tentative selection is useful in planning.

Individual participants are contacted and invited only later, after some orientation meetings which introduce the Forum concept to the general public. The work involved behind the scenes at this stage is already performed by the key staff, usually the moderator or coordinator, with the initiator possibly contributing a covering letter. A Forum usually brings together six to ten stakeholder groups/interest groups, with six to eight members

in each group. The persons in charge of organizing a Forum (moderator, coordinator, members of the operative group) will compose the stakeholder groups with diligence and in-depth knowledge of the social context from which the participants are drawn. To this knowledge the initiator is expected to contribute substantially. Final arrangements are only done during the first session of the Forum.

3.6 Expected results

Concrete results are the measurable reflection of the objectives of a Forum turned into action. If you, as the initiator, aim for an improved public information flow, then the result should be better-informed citizens. If you aim for the formation of new coalitions between stakeholders, the actual forms of cooperation they develop in projects would be proof of that. If the objective of your Forum is to use it as an instrument for project preparation and implementation, results should be tangible in concrete project outputs. Most Forums will yield different types of results; their impact will be felt at various levels of social and economic life. In principle, a Forum's results and impact are measurable.

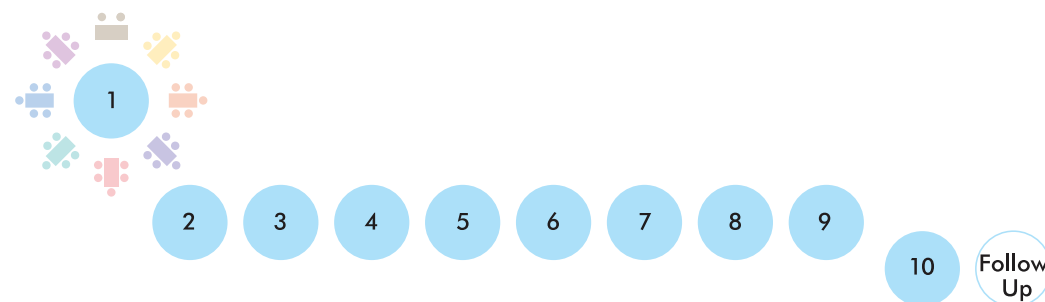
It is part of its concern for transparency that the Forum process requires the initiator to be explicit about the intended types of results and impact. At the same time the initiator is committed to respect and take into positive consideration the results generated by the Forum. An outline should contain a list of expected results (material and immaterial), as far as is possible, these to be checked later against the concrete results produced by the Forum. This can help motivate participants, defend the process against short-sighted criticism, guide media and research, form a basis for subsequent monitoring and control, and, in general, keep the ship on course.

3.7 Appropriate number of sessions

With the outline clarified, the envisaged mandate for the Forum is sufficiently clear to proceed to the next phase - a well-founded estimate of the number of sessions needed to tackle the task.

Note that the first session is usually devoted to organizational issues, the structuring into tables is finalized, the theme defined and the overall program for the session cycle is adopted. The very last session is reserved for prioritization and final decision-making. Situated between the two is a series of working sessions. As a rule, a Forum needs as many sessions to analyse the key issues at stake as it needs to prepare and select solutions for them.

FORUM session cycle



This is the usual number of sessions used in a standard Forum, covering the entire community. The number of sessions is not mandatory. However, experience shows that after an opening session to structure the Forum, three to four sessions are necessary to sufficiently deepen the level of knowledge about an issue or theme adopted by the Forum and to design a pilot project to learn project preparation and decision making methodology. Ideally, by the middle of the Forum process issues are clarified to an extent to allow project ideas to emerge from amongst the groups participating.

The second half of the Forum is devoted to discussion of project proposals (worked out by working groups between the sessions) and enrichment of their content. In a last session, a prioritization of all eligible proposals is done by the Forum in order to decide on the use of the Project Fund. Forum sessions usually last half a day and take place every four to six weeks. A full session cycle thus covers approximately one year. Project implementation by those groups who developed the project idea takes place once the Forum sessions are terminated.

Implementation easily takes another year. To ensure proper information to Forum participants, so-called follow-up sessions of the Forum six and twelve months after completion of the session cycle are organized.

The Program offers technical assistance to ensure standards of the Forum process as such, as well as the quality of the project proposals. External experts requested by the Forums and training courses for particular groups and functions on the process are also organized.

Special Forums with reduced coverage or relating to issues that are already clarified may last only a few sessions to arrive at conclusions, especially if no project fund is attached and results consist of recommendations only.

3.8 Key persons and support services

By now the initiator is facing the task of forming a team to set the process in motion: specialists will be occupied with the implementation of the initiator's vision and outline. Apart from specialists, the future Forum process will need support from experienced institutions. Both, the roles of appropriate key staff and support institutions should be clearly indicated in the initiator's outline, as without them the process cannot be launched.

This is the last phase of the initiator's direct involvement, but it can, nevertheless, be crucial; the key staff selected or appointed by the initiator will largely influence the character of the Forum process. The specialists providing process support would in all likelihood be private sector organizations, firms or NGOs. Sometimes very experienced freelance moderators can be recruited. Large donor Forum programs may already have a base of local civil organizations at hand, specialized in Forum process and project support, as well as in training activities for moderators and coordinators. Individual initiators could then take advantage of such sources of professional assistance.

The initiator working alone and outside a large (state) program may find the recruitment of support organizations a particularly difficult task. Should local organizations with at least some experience in managing participatory processes be unavailable at regional or national level, the initiator would then need to organize workshops with candidate organizations, using training materials now available from international donors supporting Forum programs. A lot can be achieved by jump-starting the process with some professional coaching from abroad. Organizations will learn quickly, but will not be able to perform effectively without an introduction and some guidance on the Forum's "dos and don'ts".

Back to the facts: when the outline is ready, the initiator or initiator organization will need professional support. The first person to be assigned to carry the concept as well as the process towards realization would be the **coordinator**. The coordinator's first task will be to check the consistency of the outline. The next appointment necessary would be the **moderator**, and jointly the three (initiator, coordinator and moderator) would prepare orientation meetings with the "coverage".

A period of detailed preparations will subsequently follow. The moderator will select a local **co-moderator** and the core persons of the "**operative group**" and based on their advice proceed to set up stakeholder groups and select participants. The coordinator at this stage prepares the logistics, organizes venue and infrastructure, contacts the media, secures professional support, and develops detailed budgets. In parallel, through his/her authority and networks the initiator will secure the financing needed for the Forum process. Donor funding may be available, or some local budget could cover the costs. Nevertheless, the initiator should be in a position to finance first contacts with support organizations independently when the initial steps are not covered by an outside funding arrangement.

The initiator's withdrawal

Why should an initiator not be running a Forum, moderating sessions and providing support services? Not only would this task be too heavy for a mayor's office (for example) – the main reason is that the Forum process should evolve undisturbed on its own, without an influential initiator steering the discussions and shaping decisions without even intending to.

With the final touches to the outline, the selection of key staff and a support organization and with the securing of some source of financing of the process, the initiator moves more and more to the background and turns into a benevolent observer of the process and its outcome.

Should an initiator want to take up the role of a regular Forum participant, he or she should do so as a humble member within a regular stakeholder group with no special privilege.

Thus the **sequence of roles** taken up in preparation of a Forum is as follows:

- 1 Initiator → Coordinator + Moderator → all 3: General information meetings
- 2 Moderator → Co-moderator → Core of Operative group → Stakeholders → Participants → Session preparation
- 3 Coordinator → Logistics, Infrastructure, Venue, Media, Technical support, Budget
- 4 Initiator → Financing → general and political context support

All this is rough cut; detailed information on key roles and initiating steps can be found in the Coordinators' guide. Relevant procedures and formats recommended for the proper handling of support services can also be found in the manual.

The coordinator is the key person responsible for support to the Forum process with its session requirements and the use of instruments. The following services must be provided:

Forum process support

- Elaborate formats, checklists, procedures relating to conceptualization, running and monitoring of all aspects of Forum activities, including all forms of Forum results, except those requiring an independent budget for implementation;
- Support and coach the operative group, the responsible PR and the accounting;
- Provide expert support and training to the operative group and the working groups established by the Forum on request;
- Collect and assess monitoring data of individual Forum sessions and carry out impact monitoring of the results.

Project preparation and implementation support

- Develop criteria and formats on types and stages of Forum project development;
- Provide expertise and training on project development to working groups;
- Manage contacts with experts in the course of project development;
- Deliver information on outside project funding possibilities;
- Provide technical and financial control on project implementation;
- Monitor project development and implementation and report to Steering Committee.

3.9 Budget

The budget derives from the type of Forum envisaged. At the stage of outline formulation an estimate of the main entries is sufficient (see marked items in Insert right). More important will be for the initiator to think about sources of financing. Examples of Forums shown in some of the inserts of this brochure indicate sources of actual financing and may serve as a guide.

Forum process cost will depend largely on the cost of key staff and to what extent support services can be provided by the initiator. Costs can increase substantially if there is a project fund envisaged to co-finance project implementation.

As each session implies staff, expertise, preparation work, communication costs, location costs, transport, supplies – the number of sessions earmarked for the Forum is a major factor determining the budget. The number of sessions, in turn, depends on the size of the task to be tackled.

Two points are to be noted by the initiator in this context: first, money alone does not guarantee good Forum projects; second, fund money has a multiplier effect as it brings in additional contributions from project promoters.

Main lines of a Forum budget

- 1 Budget for organization and moderation of Forum sessions
 - 1.1 Coordinator of the Forum
 - 1.2 Moderator
 - 1.3 Accountant
 - 1.4 Travel cost, overnight/coordinator
 - 1.5 Travel cost, overnight/moderator
 - 1.6 Expenses for session experts
 - 1.7 Administrative costs
- 2 Budget for Forum sessions
 - 2.1 Co-moderator
 - 2.2 Operative group
 - 2.3 Secretary
 - 2.4 Room rent etc.
 - 2.5 Sound system
 - 2.6 Coffee breaks
 - 2.7 Office supplies
 - 2.8 Postal charges
 - 2.9 Bulletin
- 3 Project fund contribution

Total 1 to 3

Refer to the Coordinator's Manual for details (Attachment 2)

4 SHOULD A FORUM BE INSTITUTIONALIZED?

A Forum is a “living” social learning process, which as such cannot be institutionalized. It should always be set up and convened once there is a new issue to be treated, and limited to the period of time necessary for a proper response to the issue. Furthermore, the Forum is a subsidiary tool; it should not replace the efforts of permanent institutions.

It has been shown amply in this text that stakeholders will and should vary with the theme selected for discussion. Setting the Forum up anew will allow the introduction of new core staff and adaptation of the composition of the participants to the issues at stake.

Experience also shows that the moderator or members of the operative group are better replaced in a new Forum, even if they performed very well. This is because patterns of behaviour very easily become fixed and turn into stifling habits – whereas the discussion in a Forum should flow freely.

However, even though the Forum as such is not to be sustained and is better not continued for too long, it can be re-established as a **recurrent format** if the initiator is willing to do so and the participants are interested in this:

- There have been arrangements to have Forums convened once a year for an annual consultation during municipal budget discussions. One or two sessions would suffice for a mandate of this highly specialized character.

- Further, if a municipality uses part of its budget in a project fund or community fund for civil society projects or other detailed budget allocations, the annual Forum can develop into an **institutionalized power-sharing** mechanism between civil society and the public sector. Again, a reduced cycle of sessions could be appropriate in this case, if the range of specific projects to be implemented is governed by regulations of the municipality.

And finally one could build up and **institutionalize capacity in Forum management** with local organizations, civil or public. This will develop the local potential to handle Forums in the future, to train new moderators and coordinators as required, and to have Forums reoccur whenever an initiator feels the need for their use.

ATTACHMENT 1

The Forum in its standard format

The standard “Community Forum” is initiated by a municipality. It relates to the community as a whole and deals with themes derived from a survey carried out prior to the Forum. The sessions involve 60 to 80 participants, in groups formed according to common background and interest, at six to ten working tables. The aim is for the groups to be representative of the main social groupings existing in the community. (In diversified versions of the Forum oriented towards special groups or a more comprehensive geographic level, the groups are to cover the entire range of possible interests in the topic envisaged.)

The Forum is guided by a moderator, a skilled person from outside supported by a local “operative group”. The logistics and organizational aspects, as well as provision of training and expertise, are taken care of by a coordinator, usually a person linked to an organization with sufficient organizational capacity.

The Forum participants meet for a series of sessions every four to six weeks over a period of up to one year; one session usually lasts 4 to 5 hours.

The same groups discuss a common topic of their own choosing, usually derived from the survey previously conducted by the initiator.

Training and technical assistance e.g. for media relations, project development and implementation, is provided by professionals.

The discussion process leads the groups to consolidate their interpretations of the issue and to agree on appropriate solutions.

The groups draw up recommendations for local administrations and other institutions.

They agree on project ideas to be developed by working groups between the Forum sessions.

They prioritize finalized project proposals.

A joint fund is established for the financing of projects, with contributions from donors and the municipality. The Forum participants implementing the projects add their own contribution in money or kind.

During its last session, the Forum lists all eligible project proposals and prioritizes the most suitable amongst them. Through a voting procedure by tables, the Forum selects the final list of projects to be financed from its fund. (A substantial number of project ideas, processed by as many working groups in the course of and between the Forum sessions, are turned into completed project proposals. Those not selected for financing by the Forum can still be used to attract funding from other institutions or investors.)

ATTACHMENT 1 (contd.)

The Forum in its standard format

An implementation phase of the Forum-selected projects follows the conclusion of the sessions. This phase involves only those working groups in charge of relevant projects. The operative group continues monitoring the projects’ implementation and results.

After 6 and 12 months, the Forum is reconvened for a follow-up session, to draw conclusions about the outcome of financed projects and to learn about the fate of recommendations addressed to outside institutions.

The entire process of one Forum including follow-up sessions to Forum participants (subsequent to implementation of projects or recommendations) can easily extend to over two full years.

In its standard format (relating to community needs), the Forum mediates between civil society, informal groupings and the official institutional system by offering a platform for interaction. It neither replaces nor competes with public authorities such as local councils or municipal administrations.

Forums in adapted form (e.g. a Regional Forum between municipalities or a National Forum between government bodies or national organizations) will treat other types of themes with groups of participants corresponding to the level concerned. Such Forums have a proven capacity in structuring and sequencing planning processes and public negotiations. They can also successfully design and implement projects at the respective level, and – in other versions – lead to the setting up of regional project development capacity.

ATTACHMENT 2

Forum Process Implementation Sequences: Roles & Responsibilities

ACTIVITIES	INITIATOR	COORDINATOR	MODERATOR
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Forum process preparation			
Forum outline (FO) & draft budget			
Securing sources of financing			
Identification & appointment of coordinator			
Review & finalization of FO + Budget (including project funds, if needed)			
Appointment of moderator		(contract)	
Define/ derive stakeholder groups			
Public outreach/ Media			
Survey on public/community needs (if required)			
Public information meeting			
Appointment of Co-moderator		(contract)	
Identification of members of OG			
Meetings with stakeholder groups to finalize selection of Forum participants			
Selection of Forum venue			
Official invitation sent to Forum participants		(sending)	

color key	assistance/advice	executive responsibility
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ATTACHMENT 2 (contd.)

Forum Process Implementation Sequences: Roles & Responsibilities

ACTIVITIES	INITIATOR	COORDINATOR	MODERATOR
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Managing Forum sessions and in-between activities			
Preparation of the Forum session		technical	
Running the Forum session			
In-between session operations & support			(+ OG)
Forum newsletter & media			(member of the OG)
Minutes & reporting materials			(member of the OG)
Capacity building & training			
Expert support		search&contract	(content)

Managing Forum results			
Implementation monitoring (recommendations, projects, policies)			
Preparation for feedback session			
Final report			
Final assessment			

color key	assistance/advice	executive responsibility
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ATTACHMENT 3

Sample of a Forum outline

Bulgarian Forum Program – Phase Three, Batch 7, Community Forums

Forum Outline

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Name of the applicant coordinating organization Business Centre Svishtov

2. Brief information on the organization: main activity; currently implemented projects; type of Forums the organization has participated in/ coordinated

Main activity:

Business Center Svishtov is a non-governmental organization whose mission is to assist in the development of small, medium, and family businesses in the region of Svishtov Municipality. It is a successor of the "Information and Training Center", founded in the context of the implementation of Local Agenda 21 with support of UNDP.

Experience in organization and coordination of Forum process on local level:

Business Center Svishtov has been a partner in the realization of Community Forum Svishtov 2002–2004. The Forum established 17 Working Groups dealing with the problems involving more than 60 participants – members of the Forum and other citizens. The projects realized were initiated by 5 NGOs, two of them newly established: two libraries, the Historical Museum, the Municipal Hospital and the Municipality of Svishtov (Departments of Education and Culture, Sports). Two years later, the results show the undoubted sustainability of the projects. All the established study rooms, reading rooms, tournaments, sports grounds and clubs are not only functioning but have been institutionalized and are expanding their range of activities.

3. Partner Municipality and Forum site: Municipality of Belene

4. Profile of the Municipality:

1.	Demographic Profile	
1.1	Population (No. of residents)	11 992 (Dec.04)
1.2	Settlements (No.)	6
1.3	Mayoralties (No.)	5
1.4	Rural population (%)	25 %
2.	Social Profile	
2.1	Educational structure	
2.1.1	Pupils, students (No.)	1250
2.1.2	Schools (primary, secondary education)	5
2.1.3	Institutions of higher education	-
2.1.4	NGO and Cultural Centres (Chitalishte)	6 Chital. 30 NGO
3.	Economic Profile	
3.1	Per Capita GDP	1680 BGN
3.2	Area (square metres)	285 sq. km
3.3	Cultivated area	172 sq. km
3.4	Economically active population	6 969
3.5	Unemployment (%)	12.8 % (Feb.06)
4.	Leading Branches of Local Economy (2003)	
	Processing industry (9'067'000 BGN gross prod. 1095 empl.) Agriculture (4'329'000 BGN gross prod., 437 employed) Construction (3'928'000 BGN gross production, 526 employed) Commerce and services are also well developed	

5. Donor-financed projects realized in the Municipality during the last two years:

Title of project	Target group	Period	Budget (in BGN)	Donor program	Implementing organisation
Sewage, water supply network	Residents of Bratya Miladinovi Str.,	09.04 – 06.05	147'536 BGN	Social Investment Fund 75'626 BGN; Municipality of Belene 71'910 BGN	Municipality of Belene
Construction of loading platforms for handicapped people in 4 public buildings in Belene	Handicapped people in the territory of Belene	09.05– 11.05	17'800 BGN	Beautiful Bulgaria Proj 8'700 BGN; Municipality of Belene 9'100 BGN	Municipality of Belene
Repairs of the façade of Dimcho Debelyanov School, Belene	Dimcho Debelyanov School, Belene	08.05– 11.05	50'000 BGN	Beautiful Bulgaria Proj 245'000 BGN; Municipality of Belene 25'500 BGN	Municipality of Belene
Reconstruction of 15 sites destroyed by the floods		07.05 – 12.05	234'085 BGN	Natural calamities Fund 234'085 BGN	Municipality of Belene
Equal inclusion of socially marginalized groups in the local government	Municipalities of Belene and Nikopol	09.04– 06.05	15'000 USD	World Bank	Assoc. of Danube Municipalities
Local ombudsman - an effective method for corruption prevention	Municipalities of Belene and Kozloduy	04.06– 03.07	18'000 USD	Democratic Commission of the US Embassy in Bulgaria	Assoc. of Danube Municipalities
Project in the frame of "Active services on the labour market" Program	4 municipalities of Pleven Region			Agency of Employment	European Centre-Sofia
Project in the frame of "Active services on the labour market" Program	3 municipalities of Pleven Region	01.06– 12.06		Agency of Employment	Danube Center for Training, Svishitov

II. INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED FORUM:

1. Description of the necessity of a Forum in the Municipality

Description of the Municipality:

Belene is a classic type of rural municipality. It is characterized by a predominantly rural way of living and development of agriculture, forestry and processing industry. The service sector needs development in order to avoid depopulation of the region. Seasonal employment in agriculture and construction is insufficient to solve the problem of unemployment. Diversification of economic activities and mainly development of tourism in the *Persina* Natural Park is an opportunity to increase income and improve living conditions through opening of new jobs.

Despite the developed social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens, cultural centres, public libraries, clubs, healthcare emergencies etc) there is a tendency of migration of young economically active people from the region. It is provoked by the low quality of life and high level of unemployment because of the lack of alternative economic activities.

Even with a number of NGOs in the Municipality, the citizens' participation in the local development processes is very weak.

Expediency of the Forum theme for the Municipality:

Realising a Community Forum in the Municipality of Belene is in line with the third strategic objective of the National Plan for Rural Development 2007-2013.

- It is necessary to increase the activity and involvement of stakeholders in the process of local development – creation of an annual program to implement the Municipal Development plan 2007; a Tourism development program; realization of the Environmental Program 2006-2009; the Program for waste management 2006-2010.
- In spite of their willingness, the NGOs have insufficient capacity for participation in the processes of local and regional development. It is necessary to enhance their capacity and develop efficient partnerships between the NGOs on one hand, and between NGOs and local authorities and business on the other.
- During the Community Forum Belene, urgent problems of local development will be defined and common solutions will be identified.
- We expect that the Forum process will increase knowledge and skills of local community to apply to EU Structural Funds and different donors as well as to prepare specialists for the establishment of a Local Action Group within the LEADER Program. It will provide real opportunities to elaborate quality projects to the Operative Programs of the EU Structural Funds from 2007 onwards.

2. Forum objectives and theme

The Forum theme:

Improving the quality of life in Belene Municipality

The theme formulated is in line with the third strategic objective of the National Rural Development Plan 2007–2013. The main objectives of **Community Forum Belene** are:

- To create conditions for improvement of life quality in Belene Municipality through active participation of citizens and social-economic partners in the processes of local development;
- To build capacity in the local community for active and effective participation in the processes of local development and demand for joint solutions for improving life quality.

3. Forum format

a) Forum site; territorial range of participants; number of sessions:

Forum site: Municipality of Belene, Hall 26

Territorial range of participants: residents of the town and the settlements of Belene Municipality

Number of sessions: Eight Forum sessions (information session, five regular sessions, two follow-up sessions six and twelve months after the final session)

The **Operative Group** will work in the premises of Belene Municipality, outside the Forum Center (Business Center Svishtov). We envisage a team of 6 persons, representatives of the main stakeholder groups in the community: Co-moderator; Representative of Municipal Administration; Representative of NGO; Representative of institutions; Secretary taking the minutes of the meetings.

Tentative outline of Forum session cycle:

At the **First session** the National Rural Development plan and the Municipal Development plan 2007–2013 will be presented by experts or by providing information material. Thus the work of the Second session will be outlined.

After the First Forum session we envisage training for the operative group members. It will be held in May 2006 in the Business Center Svishtov. The training will ensure the effective work of the operative group in realization of the entire Forum process.

At the **Second session** in June and the **Third Session** in July 2006, resources and factors defining the quality of life will be discussed. Main problems will be formulated and common solutions will be identified. We expect the necessity of a survey in the local community; forming of working groups for a detailed research of the problem areas; formulation of lots of questions and recommendations to the local authorities and institutions; forming of working groups for project preparation. We envisage training in project preparation between the Second and the Third Sessions. The training will be held in Belene with the attendance of representatives of different stakeholder groups and working groups. The Third session will form working groups for preparation of demonstration projects. Criteria of project selection and prioritization procedures will be clarified and adopted. Implementation of recommendations will be reported. It will be necessary to organize training (a seminar or other form)

for presentation of the EU Structural Funds and the opportunities of the LEADER Program. Possibly it could be realized through the demonstration projects or as a part of them.

At the **Forth Session** in September 2006 the Working groups will present the ideas which have been elaborated for demonstration projects. They will be prioritized for realization in the next three months. Working groups for the main Forum projects will also present their ideas to be realized in 2007. Implementation of recommendations will also be reported on.

The Fifth Session will be held in October 2006 as a closing session. Prioritisation of main Forum projects for financing from the Forum budget will take place. The status of recommendations will be monitored and a summary of Forum discussions will be made.

Follow-up Sessions: we envisage organizing one in six months, in April 2007, and another one in September 2007. The first follow-up session will report on the realization of the main Forum projects, and the second one will report on the results and the sustainability of projects.

An **Information Bulletin** will be published after each main Forum session presenting the basic themes and issues of Forum discussions.

b) Expected results:

Objective oriented results:

- Created conditions for improved quality of life through development and realization of projects providing for:
 - Stabilized and diversified economy, improved infrastructure and services;
 - Ecological and efficient management of natural resources respecting the principles of sustainability;
 - Efficient use of human resources in agriculture and rural areas; increased skills and abilities.
- Increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the process of local development: Municipal plan 2007; Tourism development program; Environmental Program 2006-2009; Waste management 2006-2010;
- Defining urgent problems of local development and identifying of common solutions;
- Increasing the skills of local community to apply to EU Structural Funds and different donors;
- Preparation for establishment of a Local Action Group within the LEADER Program;
- Establishment of networks, of long-term effective partnerships in different spheres and levels;
- Strengthening and development of NGO sector in the Municipality and encouraging its role in the processes of local development;
- Achieving of ecological and effective use of resources;
- Effective application of the Forum approach in Belene Municipality as a model of future replication on local level.

4. Parties interested/ stakeholder groups, according to Forum theme:

a) Brief presentation:

- Business: main employers in the municipality, agricultural cooperatives and producers; private companies;
- Local authority: municipal administration and villages;
- Institutions: municipal service 'Agriculture and Forestry'; social services; educational and cultural institutions;
- Directorate of Persina Natural Park;
- NGOs;
- Association of Danube Municipalities Danube; Youth organization With open eyes; cultural centres (Chitalishte) in the Municipality – six pensioners' clubs in each settlement; sports clubs etc.;
- Disabled persons' clubs. The Municipal Organisation of disabled people was established with a Decision of the Municipal Council n° 22/30.04.2002 as an NGO for social services on a budgetary support. 312 members in clubs of several villages;
- Media – local and regional media;
- Citizens.

b) Proposal/ idea of the Forum structure (working tables - number and names):

We propose a Forum structure of nine Working Tables (WT): WT 'Local Authority'; WT 'Settlements'; WT 'Social Activities'; WT 'Education and Culture'; WT 'Ecology and Education'; WT 'Business'; WT 'Youth'; WT 'Citizens' + WT 'Operative Group'.

5. Role and contribution of the Municipality to the realization of the Forum process and Forum results (recommendations; project proposals; strategies; programs etc.)

1. Municipality of Belene engages to contribute financially to project realization up to 20 000 BGN
2. Co-financing of the Forum process up to 2 000 BGN
Municipality of Belene engages to support organization and implementation of Forum sessions. A representative of the Municipality will participate in the operative group. It will realize an information campaign before starting the Forum. Representatives of Local Administration, Mayoralties and different institutions will participate in the Working Tables. The Municipality engages to reply to the questions and recommendations addressed during the Forum process. Part of the proposals formulated during the Forum process could later be included in the Municipal Development Plan 2007 and financed through the Municipal budget.

6. Proposal for a team to support realization of the Forum process: (coordinator, moderator, accountant etc.) incl. description of responsibilities of each member

Moderator: Petar Petrov

Coordinator: Tatyana Miteva

Accountant: Kamelia Todorova

Operative group with: 6 representatives of local community (Co-Moderator, PR, Representative of Municipality; Representative of NGO; Representative of institutions; Secretary) Members will be defined at the first information session.

7. Schedule of Forum sessions:

Information Session	May 06	
First Session	June 06	Theme: Establishment of the Forum
Second Session	July 06	Theme: Introducing the EU Funds and Programs
Third Session	September 06	Theme: Discussion of the potential of Belene Municipality and Development plan 2007-13
Forth Session	October 06	Theme: Discussion of project ideas and proposals for amendment in the Municipal Plan
Fifth Session	November 06	Theme: Prioritisation of project proposals
Follow-up Session 1	April 07	
Follow-up Session 2	September 07	

ATTACHMENT 4

Setting development in motion

The Forum has the merit of being a platform for discussion and decision-making, offering an equal voice to all participants and a publicly accessible process transparent from the moment of its conceptualization to the last feedback regarding its outcome.

A series of Forum sessions is a substantial social process designed to involve all stakeholder groups (thematically or interest-aligned) relevant to a particular theme or issue. If the coverage is extended from a community to a district or a region, the composition of the stakeholder groups and participants are adapted, yet the instrument and the process remain unchanged.

An outside moderator facilitates the sessions. Structured in groups, participants learn about differing viewpoints and interests – including their own – and work towards consolidated responses to issues acceptable to all.

The Forum can lead to new coalitions and new forms of cooperation between stakeholder groups and to better understanding of diverse interests.

The Forum reinforces local capacity in project preparation, implementation and monitoring, thus eliminating a notorious bottleneck in decentralization policies.

The Forum puts citizens in a position to decide on project proposals and recommendations and to experience the impact of their decisions.

The Forum has a proven record of altering and improving the attitude and engagement of its participants towards their role in public life.

The Forum process is designed to complement existing political structures, enriching them with bottom-up contributions and broad involvement of citizens and civil organizations.

If the immediate outcome of a Forum process is tangible projects and targeted recommendations, the overall impact is a changed attitude and heightened interest of participants in public affairs. Improved governance quality may be the overall outcome of a Forum.