

Dr. Manfred Peter

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Citizen participation using the example of Vienna Airport

Good evening, dear listeners.

Before I start with the example of the Vienna Airport, let me make a few basic remarks on public participation in large-scale projects and their special features from the point of view of citizens' initiatives, in addition to Prof. Hooper's extremely informative presentation.

If one follows the experts on the further development of civil society and citizen participation, civil society will continue to grow in strength. So citizens' demands will grow to be involved properly in decision-making processes on issues that directly affect them, such as major investments which emissions affect them.

When I used the term proper involvement of citizens earlier, I meant that the goal of such a participation process must be to achieve a consensual outcome. But this can only be achieved through a genuine reconciliation of interests. If the citizens' initiatives get the impression that they are being used as a fig leaf and cannot achieve results in their interest, they feel fooled and abused. Therefore also the project operators must be prepared to give something in this participation process, to accommodate the citizens groups involved in fulfilling their interests.

This is crucial, because the decision to participate in such negotiations and to support their outcome is not easy for citizens' groups.

Because: how do citizens' initiatives come into being?

Active people in areas that suffer from impairment due to aircraft noise join together in citizens' initiatives to protest against it, to fight against it, to try to achieve an improvement of the situation. These efforts should be taken seriously. Because, as we now know with scientific certainty: Noise makes people ill! The goal of this groups therefore is to eliminate these impairments!

This is difficult to achieve in the case of aircraft noise around airports. Because no aircraft noise would mean no air traffic. So, when citizens' initiatives enter into negotiations with project operators such as airports, they know that they will not be able to achieve 100% of what they want. However, this is only feasible for citizens' initiatives if it is ensured that also the project operator does not achieve 100% of his objectives, but accommodates the citizens' initiatives and negotiates a real compromise. Only then the citizens' initiatives can support the outcome of this process and be accountable to the people they represent.

Now let's take the Vienna Airport as an example:

When the number of aircraft movements rose sharply in the second half of the 1990s, the Vienna Airport intended to build a third runway in order to avoid capacity bottlenecks. When this became public knowledge at the end of the 1990s, unrest and discontent arose in the area surrounding the airport, in the communities and among the population. There were justified fears that this would lead to steadily increasing impairments and burdens from aircraft noise. A number of citizens' initiatives emerged, the mayors of the surrounding communities wanted clarity.

At that time, the conditions were in place in Vienna that are necessary to get a project like the mediation process at the Vienna Airport off the ground: It needs a project that generates the

corresponding pressure. This requires groups such as citizens' initiatives and municipalities that take up the fears and anxieties of the population, articulate them and pass them on. External circumstances, such as upcoming elections, are helpful to make the regional political leaders look for ways to prevent this pressure from the population becoming politically effective. It needs a proposal for a path that seems practicable and it needs persons on all sides who are willing to go down such a path. So there are definitely complex prerequisites required by such a project.

This was given in Vienna, and led to the establishment and implementation of the mediation process at the Vienna Airport. This process lasted from 2000 to 2005 and led to the conclusion of the mediation agreements after intensive negotiations that demanded a lot from all parties involved and not only once ran the risk of failure. These results, which are laid down in civil law contracts, would not have been achievable in an official procedure according to the legal situation at that time, but also according to the current legal situation.

In terms of content, the main pillars of these agreements are the distribution of air traffic between the runway directions, a night flight restriction, the financing of technical noise protection measures in certain aircraft noise zones, the Dialog Forum and the Environmental Fund. This is an institution that offers the communities particularly affected by aircraft noise a financial compensation for this burden on their citizens and the restriction of their development possibilities due to the proximity to the airport.

The Vienna Airport Dialogue Forum was created to implement everything that has been agreed, to monitor further developments, to evaluate various parameters and to develop and advise on measures to improve the noise exposure of the population. All major groups around the airport are represented in this forum. The airport operator, the airlines represented by the home carrier AUA, the surrounding federal states of Lower Austria, Vienna and Burgenland, the surrounding communities, the ARGE gegen Fluglärm (Working Group against Aircraft Noise) representing the citizens and Austro Control, the air traffic control authority of the Republic of Austria.

Now, after 16 years of experience in the work of the Dialogue Forum, it can be said with full conviction that the creation of this instrument of reconciliation of interests has proven its worth. A large part of what is possible in the given situation of the 2-runway system in terms of optimisation with regard to noise reduction has been implemented.

The implementation of further measures is becoming increasingly difficult because, unfortunately, shifting flight routes also means shifting burdens. After all, the surroundings of large cities are not deserted and therefore relieving the burden on one population group means burdening others. Finding consensus solutions therefore requires a high degree of willingness on the part of those involved to take a holistic view, which is to put aside self-interest in favour of justice and solidarity.

But time does not stand still and the aviation industry has developed enormously. While there were 187,000 aircraft movements at the Vienna Airport at the beginning of the mediation process in 2000 and 250,000 at the end of it in 2005, there were already 281,000 movements in 2019. And without the pandemic, it would have been more than 300,000 in 2020.

The 3rd runway did not go into operation in 2012, as intended, because the approval process took until 2018. And now the slump in air traffic due to the Corona pandemic and it's not really predictable recovery have postponed the construction of this runway indefinitely. The "ARGE gegen Fluglärm" (Working Group against Aircraft Noise) therefore has already requested in 2019 in the Dialogue Forum that the possibilities for further improvements for the people affected by aircraft noise in the 2-runway system be negotiated in mediative negotiations. This request has been adopted by the Dialogue Forum. These negotiations will begin shortly. The ARGE (Working Group against

Aircraft Noise) will enter these negotiations with corresponding demands. This also includes an extension of the night flight restrictions.

These negotiations will once again put this model of public participation and reconciliation of interests at the Vienna Airport to the test and demand a maximum of willingness to compromise from all parties involved. For only if all negotiating partners are prepared to approach the other partners an agreement can be reached.

It remains to be seen whether this model of citizen participation at the Vienna Airport will also be successful in the second round and thus perhaps serve as an example for imitation.

Thank you for your attention.