# Involvement as a process

To visualise the general workflow in planning processes and indicate the peculiarities of collaborative work, we will resort to a very simple flow-chart model.

## The traditional planning process

A simple form of planning can be found in what we may call the 'traditional' process, shown in Fig. 1, where planners set out on a certain task or problem, develop a solution and present it as a plan.

*Fig. 1: The traditional planning process*

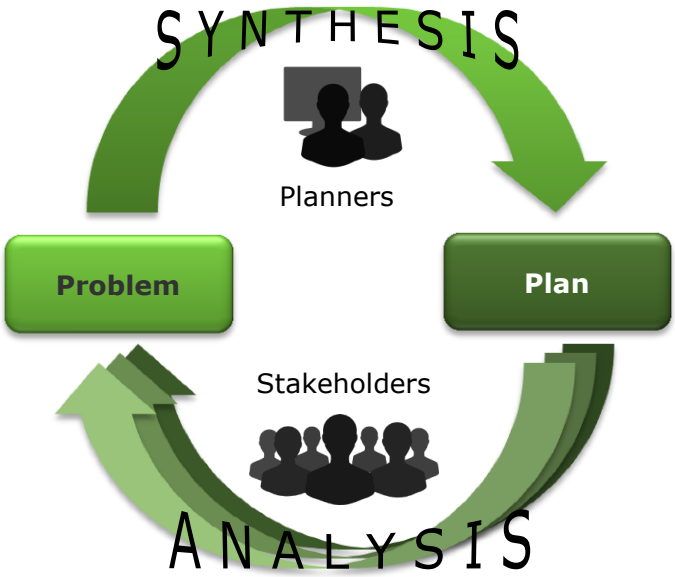

This simple procedure does not allow for involvement of others which makes it quite efficient but unapt for the purposes of collaborative planning.

## The participation cycle

Participation, in a strict sense, means that stakeholders are encouraged to vote on plans or contribute their own ideas, suggestions or amendments which, under the terminology we have chosen here, results in a new problem, or a new understanding of the one framed before. Taking up this revised problem, planners then evaluate the suggestions made to arrive at a modified plan which may be put up for discussion again. Fig. 2 shows how this results in an iterative procedure we may call the participation cycle.

The cycle can be run through several times, eventually forking off with a final solution. The important thing to recognise is that under this concept, planners and stakeholders are acting along two opposite principles universally referred to in science as *synthesis* and *analysis*: the former compose something which is then broken up and critically examined by the latter. This, along with the conservative distribution of decision powers, accounts for the unequality of both roles.

*Fig. 2: The participation cycle*




## The collaborative process

The main goal of collaborative planning is to improve the grade of stakeholder involvement. It should be obvious at this point that this goal cannot be achieved just by increasing the number of iterations through the cyclic workflow pictured in Fig. 2 until everybody is either satisfied or has ceased to participate for other causes. Three reasons can be named:

- With planners and stakeholders working alternatingly, as the approach requires, the procedure would be very inefficient and time-consuming.
- Having only two one-way interfaces for communication (the plan and stakeholders' suggestions) also contributes to the inefficiency of work.
- The distribution of decision-making powers does not fundamentally change.
- As stakeholders and planners perform fundamentally different tasks of analysing and synthesising, respectively, they can neither really work together nor learn from each other.

The last point is especially important because critisising a plan seems to be the easier part at first view. But qualified criticism, meaning to make practically applicable suggestions for improvement, also requires considerable knowledge which is not usually communicated to stakeholders in participatory planning. As it were, they are forced to work backwards on their own through a process they can hardly understand without guidance.

To visualise the idea of collaborative planning – the development of a plan as a common effort of planners and stakeholders – we need only to rotate some arrows: Fig. 3 shows how both planners and stakeholders work in the same direction, from the problem to the plan.

*Fig. 3: The collaborative process*


This visualisation suggests that collaborative planning does not need multiple iterations through the same procedure but, like traditional planning, is a linear process. This is true insofar as constant communication between participants is supposed to make explicit feedback during a separate 'half cycle' of the process dispensable. However, we will see that a collaborative process can require recursive application of the same steps within the overall procedure.

We will also see that the positioning of the 'problem' box in the Fig. 3 is questionable because establishing the problem can be part of the collaborative process itself. This, along with a more detailed inquiry into the process, will be the subject of handout 3.1.2.