

The collaborative process

The collaborative process, when performed under the concept of programme-based planning, can be divided into three stages as shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 1: Stages of a collaborative process



This is in the first place a linear scheme. We will see later that it can be applied recursively, but the involvement of all stakeholders throughout the whole process is supposed to make going through the whole process multiple times unnecessary.

Problem identification

This part may also be termed 'scoping'. It comprises the initial process of **establishing the planning issue itself** which must precede any decision-making in terms of actual planning. This usually includes

- describing the situation or 'system boundaries' of the problem,
- identifying needs, pressures and opportunities, including funding conditions,
- defining the scope of decisions to be made,
- identifying stakeholders and their interests,
- establishing cooperation.

There is no strict chronological order in this list, although the sequence of actions is not arbitrary and will influence the start-up conditions for a collaborative process.

In most cases, a collaborative process will not be running right from the start of the 'problem identification' phase. A planning authority, local action group or any other body of stakeholders driven by their own interest may first come up with a planning idea, and sometimes several such groups will pursue similar, but possibly diverging, ideas at the same time.

In terms of process organisation, the 'problem identification' phase is the period of time during which a **collaborative process should be launched**: somewhere in between acknowledging that there is an issue to be solved and carrying on to the second stage of problem structuring, those first concerned with the project or

planning idea will have to communicate and invite others to join in.

There are many cases conceivable where collaborative planning may come too late to do the entire scoping itself, e.g. when a planning authority has already set out the background for a project. The above enumeration of issues is assuming that this is the case by listing 'establish cooperation' as its last item. However, when consequently pursuing the collaborative idea, it seems favourable to launch the process at an earlier point in time: as more stakeholders may press in once the process has been launched, the 'problem identification' phase can be an iterative process to be repeated until a common understanding of the issue has been achieved.

PROBLEM STRUCTURING

With the planning issue and participants of the process established, this part is about understanding **how the issue may be solved** (not yet about actually solving it) and how stakeholders can contribute and express their preferences.

Problem structuring often requires developing different alternatives, or scenarios. To do so, it is necessary

- to devise a set of possible decisions (alternatives),
- to explore possible changes (impacts) caused by any of them,
- to set up a scheme for evaluating these changes.

CoPack provides methods that can help develop such scenarios.

The phase of problem structuring ('shaping' would be as appropriate) is an invariable part of collaborative processes. It distinguishes collaborative planning from other forms of participation where the part is taken over by experts, presenting only their results to the stakeholders who are allowed no more than to veto or suggest amendments.

PROBLEM SOLVING

This is the **actual decision-making part** of the process. Although problem solving invariably includes the final and crucial planning decisions to be made at the end of the process, it is not confined to that stage. The next section will deal in more detail with the recurrence of scoping, shaping and deciding during the entire collaborative process and related to minor issues as well as to the overall problem.

Relation between stages and methods

With collaborative planning roughly divided into the three above phases or stages, CoPack aims at providing methods to facilitate each one.

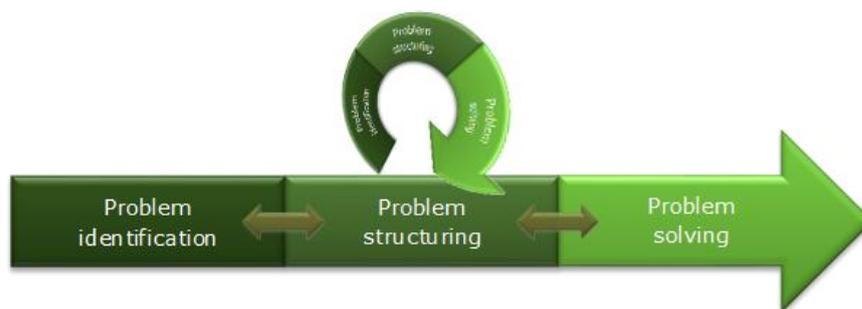
It is natural to imagine these stages to be sequential and building on each other, and this is true as far as the overall outline of a collaborative process is concerned. Methods are dedicated to scoping, shaping or deciding – with some intersections natural to the same degree in which those issues intersect – and the issues arise in

the order named during a planning process.

But while this classification of methods is applicable to the overall schedule, it is not always that systematic on a level of day-to-day developments. It may be necessary to go back sometimes – for instance, when new, unexpected stakeholders are pressing in in the middle of the ‘problem structuring’ period, requiring a redefinition of objectives and preferences.

Also, smaller, subordinate problems may occur at every point of a collaborative process, requiring to find ways of problem identification, structuring and solving over and over again. That is where the collaborative planning scheme will have to be applied recursively, that is, on issues that occur during the process itself and may be of a more social than technical nature.

Fig. 2: Repetitive and recursive three-stage model of a collaborative process.



The concept of programme-based planning therefore includes

- a rough schedule of three phases of collaboration with special methods to be applied during each one,
- the responsibility of those leading the process to identify problems occurring during the process and apply the schedule repeatedly or recursively.

Fig. 2 shows how this repetition (small arrows) and recursion (bent arrow) looks in the timeline chart devised at the beginning of this handout. Recursive application of the scheme is most likely to occur during the ‘problem structuring’ phase.