

**Aarhus Workshop on
public participation in stratégic
décision- making**

**The French « public debate » on
Transportation policy in Southern France**

Laure Tourjansky – MEDAD- France

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1. Public participation in France

- **The framework of public participation is the 85-337 « directive », derived from the Aarhus Convention.**
- Public debates use to concern national infrastructure projects (those costing more than 300 M €, or longer than 40 km)
- The national Commission of the public debate is a national independant authority. It was created in 1995 and reformed in 2002. It usually ensures that the public is involved in the national projects decision making.
- For each public debate, the national authority appoints a specific commission.
- **Since 2003, 30 to 40 public debates have taken place about different projects.**

2. The usual organisation of « public debates »

- **The Equipment Ministry, in charge of road development, or companies (for railways and airports) set up the debate.**
- They prepare documentation, basis for the debate, transfer it on to the nominated Commission, who in turn will organize meetings.
- **When the debate reaches its end, the Commission presents a summary but does not draw conclusions.**

2. The usual organisation for « public debates » (2)

- **The contracting authority takes a decision.**
- If the project is given the go ahead, its contents is specified.
- Next comes a public survey focusing on the specified project, followed by expropriation (if any)

3. The public debate on transportation policy in Southern France : a specific case

- **This public debate took place from March to July 2006**

- It concerned a policy, not a project as usual
- As a result, it was put together by 2 ministries:
 - Equipment Ministry
 - Ecology Ministry

Therefore, environmental issues were more widely discussed than in debates regarding projects. Roads, trains and rivers were mentioned.

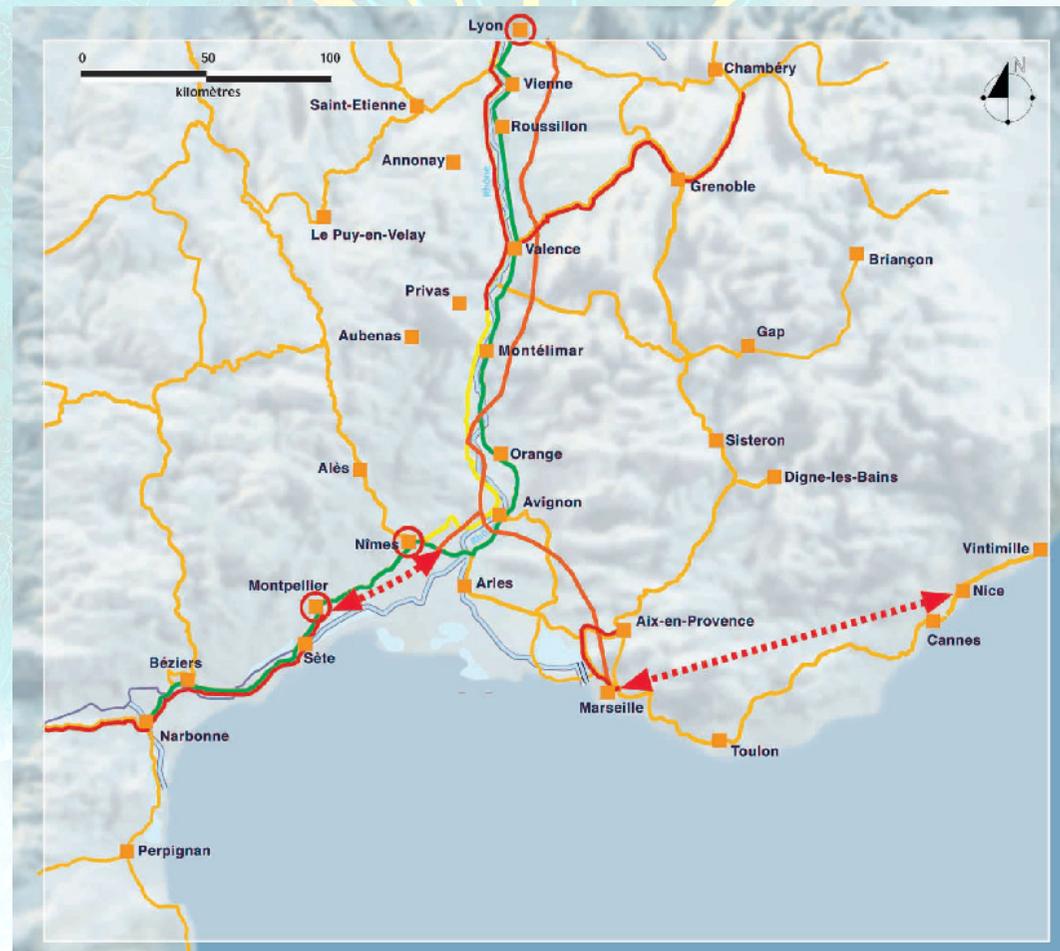
- The final decision was taken jointly by the 2 ministries.

4. The subject debated

- There is a huge traffic increase in the region, along the Rhône and in Languedoc
- The current projects do not seem able to tackle the problem, traffic congestion will increase.
- France undertook to reduce greenhouse effect gas; is this compatible with the increase in road ?
- The first main question is whether a new motorway in the South of France is necessary or not?
- **A difficult question is at the heart of the debate.**
- **how to meet needs in terms of mobility while respecting the ecological targets by the year 2025 and after?**

5. The area of the debate

- The scope of the debate covers a large territory, including 3 French main districts, 1/8th of the territory, 13 millions of inhabitants (over 60 millions), 1/5 th of the GNP



6. A complex debate.

- The term is far away ; 2025 to 2050
- The geographic area is vast.
- All types of transportation are involved, apart from air transport.
- Some decisions have already been made.
- One must evaluate levels of traffic, whether local, national or international, in this perspective.
- One must try to take into account the impact on the different components of the environment : water, air (global and local pollutants), biodiversity.

7. Setting up the debate (1)

- **To start with, the representatives of the three districts were consulted in 2005.**
- **On this basis, the two ministries prepared a new documentation, which presented:**
 - The description of the three regions, the state of the environment, the traffics and the peak traffic flow today and within 20 or 50 years, and a global environmental assessment ;
 - The main decisions regarding the transportation policies and the projects already decided.
 - The documentation tries to propose a prospective analysis of potential changes : what will be the oil price? What about climate change ? Which consequences on the traffic ?

7. Setting up the debate (2)

- **6 sets of measures were finally proposed by the document, but no scenario – which could have been too extreme**
 - regulate the existing traffics,
 - develop rail, fluvial and maritime transportation,
 - develop road facilities,
 - encourage a steady trend of technological innovation
 - keep road traffic under control
 - encourage changes of behaviour

8. The running of the debate

- **The Commission in charge of the public debate chooses the appropriate tools – which are currently used for public debates**
- About forty public debates were held in the cities from the three main districts: people were informed and were given opportunities to express themselves
 - half of them about specific topics
 - the other half about the territories
- A citizen working group, composed of volunteers, was set up, a paper was published ; people could give positions via a web site.
- Two senior civil servants represented the State at all the meetings.

8. The running of the debate (2)

- **Lastly, the meetings attracted small but well informed people**
- As for debates about projects, every body was invited to join; few young people usually participate to this debates
- There was not a large public compared to debates about projects : about 2000 people all together
- But people who came were rather experts on specific topics
- NGO voiced their views extensively in the meetings; Economic stakeholders provided written participations (papers, e-mail..)
- The elected representatives took part mainly in the territorial meetings.

9. What did the debate provide? (1)

- **About the method :**

- The fact that two ministries worked together has been very interesting, even if the means were really different
- Organizing a public debate on such a vast territory is difficult :

Public meetings were held across all the concerned territory, and the population was not able to come to all of them. People went to meetings held in their neighbourhood, whatever the specific topic on the agenda.

- The time frames for public involvement seems to have been sufficient ; the public debate was held during Summer so as to involve tourists.

9. What did the debate provide ?(2)

- **About the content :**

- During the meetings, the discussion was often the same, whatever the topic : on the policy itself, in the end it all came to one major question : can road traffic keep on increasing? Is there an alternative?
- **The public doubts the States's sincerity** : is there already a new project decided (doubling works for example)?
- **New questions appeared during the public debate:**
- The real problem is not, as one used to believe international haulage, but local, national and international traffics of cars and trucks, concentrating in the same area.

10. Following the debate

- **At the end of the debate, the two commissions resumed the content, without giving an opinion. Then, the two ministries took their decision based on this report :**
 - The decision to draw a national plan dealing with « transportation, town-planning and greenhouse effect » by December 2007
 - The decision not to build a new highway near the old one, and improve the use of existing transport facilities
 - Confirmation of projects regarding other ways of transportation, particularly fluvial transport.
 - Setting up mobility watchdogs to improve knowledge about traffics.

11. Since then ...

- The decision remains unquestioned.
- The joint work done by different services was used in the preparation of other project debates.
- Work started regarding « transport, planning, greenhouse effect gas ».
- **The newly elected government organised the « Grenelle debate on Environment », which takes the results of this public debate to a national level.**