

in focus

ISSUE/2 Summer 2003

the newsletter of the Edinburgh Demos Project

improving
local
democracy

Demos
www.demosproject.org

Making the Council work for you

Welcome back to In Focus – the newsletter of the Demos Project in Edinburgh. In the last newsletter we introduced you to the Demos Project and its European partners. In this issue you find out more about the pilot projects run by the City of Edinburgh Council, about the website developments and about the lessons that can be learnt so far from all the pilot activities.

In total, Edinburgh is running 17 pilot projects to test how the Council can respond better to local needs in consultation with local communities. From this range of projects, eleven pilots are supported by the Demos project. There are four important themes that the Demos pilots address: making the Local Development Committees (LDCs) work better; involving 'hard-to-reach' groups; testing new governance structures and introducing new information and communication technologies.



Councillor Wilson (Executive Member for Modernising Government) is Chair of the Demos Joint Project Management Team.

DEMOS WEBSITE

The website of the Demos project www.demosproject.org has expanded a lot over the last couple of months. You will now find 'project profiles' for each of the Edinburgh projects in the section on Edinburgh as a project partner. These profiles are brief summaries describing each project. These profiles will be updated after the projects are evaluated.

Results from the action research are also published in 'policy briefings'. These are posted regularly on the site and cover topics such as citizen involvement in policy-making and the links between representative and participatory democracy.



Community Councils

The New Town, Broughton and Pilrig Community Council is making good progress on the Broughton Road Project. A row of lime trees was planted after extensive consultation with the local community on the Broughton Masterplan.

Forthcoming event

Demos is organising an informal event for project co-ordinators and project participants to take place in June this year. This will be in the form of a **market place**, providing an opportunity to talk to other project co-ordinators, share experience and get inspired! More information and invitations will follow.



New duty for the Council

The lessons from the variety of Demos pilot projects may help the Council to shape its community planning agenda.

The Local Government in Scotland Act came into effect on 1 April 2003 and makes community planning a duty for councils. The duty extends to other partner agencies such as the Health Boards and the Police, but the local authorities have a lead role in maintaining and facilitating a process of community planning.

The act defines **community planning as the process by which public services are planned and provided by way of consultation and co-operation with public bodies and community groups**. More information is on www.scotland.gov.uk

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What's happening elsewhere?

The last 'In Focus' reported on innovation in citizen participation in partner cities of Aberdeen, Utrecht and Turku. This issue moves to other cities: Antwerp, Krakow, Solingen, Germany and the Greek island of Chios.

City of Antwerp Council is improving quality of life by neighbourhood consultation using ICT and development of neighbourhood action plans and websites across the city. Within the context of democratic decentralisation, Antwerp is divided into nine districts. Each district has its own elected council, with many statutory responsibilities. There is a separate elected council for Antwerp as a whole.



In Chios, Demos uses the traditional Greek neighbourhood kiosk as a site for interaction between citizens and local government. There are ICT kiosks and a mobile unit for rural areas. The project is led by a development company owned by ten local authorities and the Prefecture.

In Krakow's industrial district of Nowa Huta, District Co-ordination Teams are tackling problems of community safety by engaging with citizens, voluntary organisations and police. City police are involved in an educational programme with local schools with 'Neighbourhood Watch' initiatives being piloted.

Finally, Solingen's initiatives include citizen service guarantees and the right of referenda. Rights of referenda mean that if a sufficient number of residents disagree with a local authority decision, they can trigger a city-wide vote on the issue.

The council is obligated to abide by the decision. The German Demos team are rather surprised citizens of Edinburgh don't have this right!



Monitoring and Evaluation – the Edinburgh Pilot Projects

Project management is a sophisticated activity and setting up appropriate systems of monitoring and evaluation is essential.

Project support for Demos pilot projects is provided by the Lead Officer who assists the pilot projects in developing their ideas and also provides links with key officers within the Council to help 'make things happen'. Support from the research team is also provided to help project participants develop their own internal monitoring systems and targets as a means of monitoring progress towards key objectives.

Based on this data, which can be quantitative (e.g. numbers attending meetings) or qualitative (what people think), project participants can reflect on the process and whether the aims set out in their original proposals are likely to be met. If project aims are not being met, there may well be good reasons for lack of progress, some of which may be outwith the control of individual projects. Other projects may find that their original objectives change over the course of time and may have to be adjusted in light of experience. This is what is called '**action research**'. Projects are dynamic and the Demos research partners are just as interested in what people learn as part of the process as much as the final project outputs.

Next Issue

The next issue of In Focus is due in Autumn 2003. This will be an exciting time with the pilot testing stage drawing to a close in December.

You will be reading about the lessons learnt from our projects and links with our European partner cities to share experiences.

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