OECD International Futures Programme Seminar on Power and Democracy in Denmark and Norway, 25th October 2004, OECD Headquarters, Paris

The impetus for the seminar came from the "Democracy and Power" studies carried out by special commissions of the Norwegian and Danish governments over 1997-2003. The aim of the discussions was to present the Norwegian and Danish governments' studies to OECD experts and delegations from OECD member countries. The seminar was convened on the initiative of Ambassadors Storm of Norway, and Brückner of Denmark, and was organised by the OECD International Futures Programme in cooperation with the Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development (GOV).

The OECD defines itself as a grouping of "30 member countries sharing a commitment to democratic government and the market economy", but most of its work deals with the latter aspect, and while some Directorates, notably GOV, work explicitly on questions of public policy-making and governance, the Organisation rarely has the opportunity to examine the freedoms and responsibilities that a market economy is supposed to underpin. This, plus the international reaction to the Scandinavian studies, helps to explain the high level of interest for the seminar within the OECD.

The following document is not intended as a verbatim summary of the day's proceedings, but rather as a presentation of themes tackled during the debate itself and in the preparatory discussions. The most striking feature is perhaps the number of topics on which no consensus was reached, and the range of issues for which participants feel that further exploration could be useful.

NORWAY

 The liveliness and pertinence of the exercise was illustrated by the Norwegian commission, which decided not to publish a unanimous report, given the persisting divergence of opinion among the members of the commission. The seminar reflected this state of affairs, providing time for two presentations by members of the Norwegian study: Øyvind Østerud introduced the views of the three-man majority, while Hege Skjeie defended a minority view, notably on gender issues.

Norway – majority report

The Scandinavian countries have a tradition of studies aimed at evaluating democracy, and the present exercise was designed to examine changes as regards previous Norwegian and other studies. The commission's mandate called on it to examine the impacts of increasing internationalization; the development and availability of modern technology; the growth of public opinion; environmental issues; the problems generated by a multiethnic community; increasing demand for qualifications and knowledge; and decentralization, deregulation, privatization, and other mechanisms influencing markets and consumer involvement. The mandate also includes the significance of socio-economic and cultural divisions within the community and the individual's age and sex as regards prospects of participating in and exerting influence on community life.

The commission concluded that the most critical change in power relations in Norway is that democracy (fundamentally understood as representative democracy, a formal decision-making system employing election by a majority and directly-elected bodies) is in decline. The political "purchasing power" of the voter ballot has been diminished. Voter turnout at local elections has declined from around 80% in the 1960s to 57% today, and party membership has dropped by 50% in 10 years.

Trust in government is declining, with three-quarters of the population stating that they thought politicians, once elected, were not interested in their opinions. There is concern too that government formation does not reflect the result of elections, with minority governments being formed through coalitions.

The empowerment of non-elected agencies is another cause for concern. Around 15 to20 agencies now have the power to oversee/regulate various sectors including public services. At the same time, mobilisation around corporate interests is being replaced by lobbying.

Globalization is reducing the scope for national decision-making. The liberalization of capital flows exposes the Norwegian economy to the threat of delocalization.

Norway – Hege Skjeie

The debate around the commission's work is extremely interesting, and has been helped by the fact that the commission split along gender lines, with the two women members rejecting the conclusions of their three male colleagues. The conclusions of the report should thus be seen as majority conclusions only. It is worth noting that gender issues were not in the initial mandate of the commission, but were added later.

The minority thinks that the so-called erosion of democracy is overstated – minority governments are a tradition in Norway. The main disagreements, however, concern the treatment of gender issues and human rights. The main report insists that the judiciarization of politics weakens democracy by according power to the courts, i.e. to non-accountable bodies, including supra-national institutions. However, this evolution should be welcomed since the politics of rights is of the utmost importance to women globally, and the law, including international law, can guarantee minority rights.

Norway (and Scandinavia generally) are often considered as a haven of equality, but the survey of the 2000 people in key positions in Norway paints a different picture. Male dominance of key posts ranges from 63% in politics to 100% in defence. The official discourse is that equality is only a matter of time, but this makes it hard to address systemic discrimination, so legal instruments can help to strengthen democracy by aiding the progress of the politic of rights, especially women's rights.

DENMARK

The Danish commission is generally more optimistic than the Norwegians, and argues that Danish democracy is surprisingly robust , especially given the pessimistic outlook at the end of the 1970s. The commission did however sound warnings about a series of threats which need to be addressed.

The Danish commission set out to answer two broad questions: What is the state of democracy in Denmark at the dawn of the 21st century? And has the democratic system in Denmark developed in a positive or negative direction? In other words, the empirical aspect concerns the distribution of power in Denmark; the normative aspect concerns the extent to which the distribution of power conforms to our democratic ideals.

The conclusions are more positive than the Norwegian study. The Danes are still democratically active, and the political institutions are democratically robust. Political participation has not dropped, and participatory democracy has not been replaced by a passive spectator democracy. However, there has been a shift from collective towards more individualized forms of participation. The gap between people and elite does not seem larger than before, rather the contrary. The comparatively high degree of economic and social equality that has characterized Denmark for a long time has pretty much been preserved. The political parties are weakened and thus their ability to intermediate between people and power holders, but they appear to have found a new stability with fewer members. The media have become a more powerful player in the political sphere, increasingly dictating the terms for political communication, but do not dictate their terms.

Parliament has been strengthened more than it has been weakened, except in relation to the EU, which is assuming an increasing share of legislation in the form of adaptation to EU directives, and in relation to the courts. Another myth is that economic globalization has increased economic inequality or removed the basis for the Danish version of the welfare state. It is true, however, that the rapidly increasing volume of transnational capital movements makes it difficult or impossible to control foreign debts, just as it may be difficult to control the large – including Danish – corporations, which increasingly operate across national borders.

However, there is an increasing gap between the politicians' governing ambitions and their governing possibilities. This feeds a sense of governance failure and loss of democratic influence. The fact that things have gone well and in many cases better than expected is not a matter of course, but a result of the political choices made over the past 20-25 years. The situation can be changed again for the worse through new political choices.

The high level of economic and social equality is a product of the highly redistributive Danish welfare state, which does not seem threatened economically, but which may be facing political pressure if, for instance, a strong coincidence between ethnic and social cleavages should arise – or because of more or less intended effects of political decisions. The significant equality in political participation is a product of the activities of the great class-based movements in the 20th century, and may be jeopardized as a result of the growing individualization and educational demands.

Transfer of competence to the EU represents a democratic deficit because the Danes do not pay attention to the EU, because participation is low, and because the Danes have a low a sense of influence in relation to EU matters.

Parliament has been weakened in relation to the courts, which have come to play an increasingly political role. Not very pronounced so far, but the increasing political role of national and supranational courts must be expected to grow in the coming years. However, the development is not only a democratic problem, because at the same time it also expresses the protection of minorities' rights.

Comparing the actual state of affairs with democratic ideals, the conclusion is not as encouraging. Considerable social cleavages remain, the most obvious being between the well-off and the socially marginalized and between the majority and ethnic minorities. Where growing freedom of choice and respect for individual autonomy are the dominant principles in the state's relations with the well-off and the majority population, there is far more force and discipline in relations with the other groups. Gender disparities remain, and become more pronounced the closer we get

to power. Political participation is widespread, but there is some evidence of educational inequality in participation. The judicialization of the political sphere and the growing emphasis on individual rights strengthen the rule of law and may be useful tools in the struggle for equality by oppressed groups, but another effect is an alarming shift of power from politics to law.

Measured against an ideal of an informed public debate, there are serious deficiencies in the rules about transparency and openness in the legislative process as well as the administration, and the development does not seem to be headed in the right direction. The demands of the mass media in terms of access and content have come to control the political communication, a condition that threatens the quality of the political process. The decision-making processes have become more chaotic: many political decisions are marked by politicians acting like lemmings in relation to single issues, although the media can also show such behaviour. Other political decisions carry the stamp of the opaque influence.

POINTS RAISED IN THE DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introduction, the seminar provoked an extremely lively debate, often reflecting the actual debates in the commissions themselves. Participants raised a number of issues that could not be tackled adequately in the time available, so these are noted as questions at the end of the short summaries.

Direct democracy

Direct democracy can take three forms: referendums on given issues; initiatives, i.e. the right to propose legislation or constitutional changes; and recall – the right to remove an elected official. Some countries such as Switzerland or the USA have a tradition of direct democracy, and there are more frequent calls in other countries to "let the people decide" on a number of key issues. A conference on direct democracy for Sweden held in September 2004 exposed similar arguments to those outlined in the discussion of the Danish and Norwegian studies: critics say direct democracy weakens representative democracy by undermining elected officials and denying the possibility of compromise; while supporters say that it helps reengage voters and acts as a discipline on elected officials.

Will direct democracy become more widespread as technology makes it easier to organise?

Is it suitable at all levels of decision-making?

How can minority rights be guaranteed?

Economy

With the main government and opposition parties sharing essentially the same views on managing the economy, a major source of political debate and identification disappears. This can lead to apathy, and may also represent a danger to democracy by providing opportunities for extremists to set the terms of the political debate around subjective issues and simplistic solutions to complex problems. Several speakers noted that economic exclusion and political disenfranchisement are closely linked. Economic governance can be closely linked to political participation: if participation declines vested interests may be able to block reforms, further worsening the condition of the weaker sections of society.

Can governments tackle the paradox whereby societies are becoming richer, but a significant percentage of the population is becoming marginalised first economically then socially and politically?

If immigrants constitute the poorest sections of the population, is there a danger that social solidarity will be weakened by xenophobic influences?

Education

Schools have a role to play in inculcating democratic values, but this has to be a sustained effort to educate students on the issues, and on the importance of political participation. There is a correlation between individual educational level and political participation, but as the educational level of society as whole is improving, political participation is declining. Governments can help by making voter registration simpler, as in the US "motor-voter" system whereby voter registration is available in many public agencies where it was not available before, e.g. at the department of motor vehicles, voter registration must be incorporated into the process of applying for or renewing a driver's license. National experience on continuing participation differs however: in the USA, many young people who voted at the first election following their registration did note vote afterwards, while several European contributors said that people who vote in the first possible election continue to vote at following ones.

Should politics be incorporated into school curricula, and if so how can this be done in a non-partisan fashion?

Does civic education have an impact on later political participation?

Governance

Politicians have always claimed that their job is more difficult now than ever before. Today, they point to economic globalisation, rapid technological change, and international instability. Governments have to operate in the context of these large-scale supranational trends, but domestic politics is becoming more fragmented, with coalition governments, and even minority governments, becoming more common. For democracies to interact efficiently at international level, strong national governments may be necessary. At national level, trust is essential, but here opposing interpretations of increasing political apathy are possible. Optimists would say that citizens generally trust their governments to do the best they can, and do not feel the need to

mobilise to ensure this. Pessimists would say that the public feels that it has little or no influence on national and international decision-making and is discouraged from participating by the complexity and lack of transparency of political processes.

Are national governments approaching the stage where they no longer have the capacity to govern both democratically and efficiently?

Should electoral systems be modified to ensure that a strong majority emerges from elections? Or do proportional electoral systems enhance a high electoral turn out?

Are minority or coalition governments less representative?

Indicators

Denmark and Norway are stable democracies, but both governments felt the need to examine the state of democracy. However, the question arises of how to measure democracy (and good governance). A number of objective indicators are available (minority rights, press freedom, political participation, etc) but governments are reluctant to participate in exercises such as that proposed by Eurostat to try to define international standards that could be used for cross-country comparisons.

Can democracy be measured?

Should developing countries be assessed using the same standards as other countries?

How should cultural differences be integrated into analyses?

Law and rights

Much of the debate in the 25th October meeting concerned the role of national and international courts in national political life, with no consensus reached. One side argued that rights should not be decided only by the majority and that democracy is reinforced by incorporating rights into law that can be enforced by national or international courts. Moreover, national legislators usually have the last word on whether, when and how a law is adopted. The other side argued that the courts are composed of non-elected representatives with no political accountability, and their increasing power is alienating citizens from the political process. Moreover, there are contradictions between the various levels of law, for example national legislation may emphasize the right to privacy while international conventions enshrine the right to know. The distinction

between legislation and its interpretation is blurred by binding agreements, notably international conventions.

Media

Many contributors expressed the fear that the media were playing too great a role in shaping the political agenda, and that they were both trivialising debate and replacing citizen participation as the major means of influencing policy. The integration of the mass information media into the multimedia-entertainment industry was worrying. The concentration of media power and cost-cutting within the information media (e.g. fewer reporters and greater reliance on news agencies and official sources) were worrying. It remains to be seen whether new media based on ICT will offer a credible alternative to news conglomerates.

Parties

The traditional party provided a number of services to its members, including political education and social organisation, in return for members' contributions to both electoral efforts and non-electoral mobilisations around certain policies or positions. Mass parties seem to be disappearing everywhere, and are being replaced by highly professional structures that appear to many citizens to be more a component of the political career structure than a means to influence the composition of governments and the policies they implement. However, although the number of card-carrying party members are in decline, people still identify with parties, even if they do not support all their policies.

Are parties still defined by ideology, or do they simply represent differing emphases on a given set of issues? Is the move away from "class-based", or "holistic" approaches a good thing? Are issues-based coalitions more democratic?

Would democracy be reinforced if state subsidies to parties were ended and they had to convince the public to fund them? Or would this distort power in favour of wealthy lobbies and special interest groups?

Technology

The discussion of technology centred on internet and other communications technologies. Examples of direct impacts of new technologies on the democratic process included the last

general election in Spain where demonstrations were organised on the eve of the polls using mobile phones and SMS. Such demonstrations are illegal under Spanish law but it was impossible for the authorities to identify who was organising the action. Technology can serve to either disintermediate or reintermediate between citizens and the political system. The most difficult aspect may be exploiting the interactive capabilities of new ICT – the temptation for politicians will be to use web sites etc simply as a further means to inform the public, but not as a tool for listening to them, answering their questions or addressing their concerns.

Who will control the emerging ICT?

How can governments ensure equal access

Are some new technologies dangerous for democracy, notably surveillance technologies?

Terrorism

The objective of "new terrorism" of the type seen in 9/11 is not a specific, negotiable, political benefit such as the release of prisoners, or the withdrawal of troops. It is to replace democratic rule by a theocracy, and this is not negotiable. Given their relatively limited human resources, terrorists rarely opt for direct confrontation. They seek to create a psychological climate in which a majority of citizens feel that they are threatened, and are prepared to sacrifice civil rights to win the war on terrorism.

Are the terrorists succeeding in gradually eroding democracy?

Is there a link between economic growth and terrorism?

FOLLOW-UP

In the short-term, it could be useful to publish a short document comprising a description of the Norwegian and Danish exercises; a summary of the seminar discussions ; and several short contributions from OECD or non-OECD experts on particular topics, e.g. the role of education.

For the longer term, the seminar debated a series of topics which revealed interesting differences in the experience and opinion of participants, and while some of these issues are outside the remit of the OECD (e.g. the role of religion) the Organisation could use its expertise to draw governments' attention to other questions that should be asked and to propose methodologies for exploring solutions. The most obvious of these is the link between economic development and democracy. Another important point is that of the relation between democracy and economic equality.

A first step could be to progress from the concept of the October seminar, which was essentially an analytical exercise on the state of democracy, to consideration of the policy implications for OECD governments. An exploratory workshop could be organised with government and non-government experts to examine how to proceed with such a project.

VOTER TURNOUT IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN DENMARK AND NORWAY SINCE 1945

The following tables are taken from the IDEA database of voter participation worldwide. You can find a link to the IDEA site and the database on the International Futures Programme "Future of Democracy" page (www.oecd.org/futures); the database can also be found here: www.idea.int/vt .

Denmark – voter turnout in parliamentary elections

Year	Total Vote	Registration	Vote/Reg	VAP	Vote/VAP	Invalid	Pop. Size
1945	2,055,315	2,381,983	86.3%	2,548,350	80.7%	0.3%	4,045,000
1947	2,089,015	2,435,306	85.8%	2,611,980	80.0%	0.2%	4,146,000
1950	2,059,944	2,516,118	81.9%	2,690,100	76.6%	0.3%	4,270,000
1953	2,077,615	2,571,311	80.8%	2,752,470	75.5%	0.3%	4,369,000
1953	2,172,036	2,695,554	80.6%	2,752,470	78.9%	0.3%	4,369,000
1957	2,321,097	2,772,159	83.7%	2,827,440	82.1%	0.5%	4,488,000
1960	2,439,936	2,842,336	85.8%	2,840,220	85.9%	0.3%	4,581,000
1964	2,640,856	3,088,269	85.5%	3,115,200	84.8%	0.4%	4,720,000
1966	2,802,304	3,162,352	88.6%	3,168,000	88.5%	0.3%	4,800,000
1968	2,864,805	3,208,646	89.3%	3,256,200	88.0%	0.4%	4,860,000
1971	2,904,096	3,332,044	87.2%	3,326,200	87.3%	0.7%	4,960,000
1973	3,070,253	3,460,737	88.7%	3,514,000	87.4%	0.6%	5,020,000
1975	3,068,302	3,477,621	88.2%	3,542,000	86.6%	0.6%	5,060,000
1977	3,124,967	3,552,904	88.0%	3,561,600	87.7%	0.6%	5,088,000
1979	3,194,967	3,552,904	89.9%	3,837,750	83.3%	0.7%	5,117,000
1981	3,314,424	3,776,333	87.8%	3,841,500	86.3%	0.6%	5,122,000
1984	3,386,733	3,829,600	88.4%	3,936,240	86.0%	0.7%	5,112,000
1987	3,389,201	3,907,454	86.7%	3,947,790	85.9%	0.8%	5,127,000
1988	3,352,651	3,991,897	84.0%	4,052,700	82.7%	0.7%	5,130,000
1990	3,265,420	3,941,499	82.8%	4,060,600	80.4%	0.8%	5,140,000
1994	3,360,637	3,988,787	84.3%	4,111,950	81.7%	1.0%	5,205,000
1998	3,431,926	3,993,009	85.9%	4,128,398	83.1%	0.8%	5,225,820
2001	3,484,957	3,998,957	87.1%	0	n/a	1.0%	n/

Source: International IDEA
VAP = voting age population

Norway – voter turnout in parliamentary elections

Year	Total Vote	Registration	Vote/Reg	VAP	Vote/VAP	Invalid	Pop. Size
1945	1,498,194	1,961,977	76.36%	2,099,840	71.35%	0.9%	n/a
1949	1,770,897	2,159,005	82.02%	2,198,440	80.55%	0.7%	n/a
1953	1,790,331	2,256,799	79.33%	2,250,530	79.55%	0.6%	n/a
1957	1,800,155	2,298,376	78.32%	2,339,640	76.94%	0.5%	n/a
1961	1,850,548	2,340,495	79.07%	2,382,600	77.67%	0.6%	n/a
1965	2,056,091	2,406,866	85.43%	2,418,000	85.03%	0.4%	n/a
1969	2,162,596	2,579,566	83.84%	2,541,000	85.11%	0.2%	n/a
1973	2,155,734	2,686,676	80.24%	2,692,800	80.06%	0.2%	3,960,000
1977	2,304,496	2,780,190	82.89%	2,910,960	79.17%	0.1%	4,043,000
1981	2,462,142	3,003,093	81.99%	2,993,000	82.26%	0.1%	4,100,000
1985	2,605,436	3,100,479	84.03%	3,114,750	83.65%	0.1%	4,153,000
1989	2,653,173	3,190,311	83.16%	3,254,790	81.52%	0.2%	4,227,000
1993	2,472,551	3,259,957	75.85%	3,320,240	74.47%	0.4%	4,312,000
1997	2,583,809	3,311,215	78.03%	3,360,083	76.90%	0.5%	4,363,744
2001	2,517,497	3,358,856	74.95%	3,446,050	73.05%	n/a	n/a

Source: International IDEA

VAP = voting age population

OECD INTERNATIONAL FUTURES PROGRAMME SEMINAR
on
THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

OECD Headquarters, Room 6
25 October 2004

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairman:

Michal Oborne
Director
Advisory Unit to the Secretary General
International Futures Programme

Australia / Australie

Mr. Ian FORSYTH *Ambassador*

Mr. Derek ABBOTT *Consultant*

Austria / Autriche

Mr. Ulrich STACHER *Ambassador*

Denmark / Danemark

Mr. Peter BRÜCKNER *Ambassador*

Prof. Peter Munk CHRISTIANSEN *Professor*
Department of Political Science
University of Southern Denmark

Prof. Lise TOGEBY *Professor*
Department of Political Science
University of Aarhus

Finland / Finlande

Mr. Juuso KAARESVIRTA *Intern*

Germany / Allemagne

Mr. Achim BURKART *Counsellor*

Mr. Clemens VOLKWEIM *Intern*

Greece Grèce

Miss Alexandra MAKRI   *Counsellor*

Hungary / Hongrie

Mr. György SZABÓ   *Counsellor*

Ireland / Irlande

Mr. John ROWAN   *Ambassador*

Italy / Italie

Mr. Francesco OLIVIERI   *Ambassador*

Mexico / Mexique

Dr. Carlos ELIZONDO   *Ambassador*

Netherlands / Pays-Bas

Mr. Joan BOER   *Ambassador*

Norway / Norvège

Mrs. Tanja STORM   *Ambassador*

Mr. Trygve BENDIKSBY   *Second Secretary*
Delegation of Norway to the OECD

Mrs. Helga ERVIK   *Adviser*
The Prime Minister's Office

Mr. Lars FJELL HANSSON   *Senior Adviser*
The Prime Minister's Office

Prof. Øyvind ØSTERUD   *Professor, Department of Political Science*
University of Oslo

Mrs. Ellen RØMMING   *Senior Adviser*
Ministry of Justice

Prof. Hege SKJEIE   *Professor, Department of Political Science*
University of Oslo

Spain / Espagne

Mr. Juan María LÓPEZ-AGUILAR   *Deputy Permanent Representative*

Sweden / Suède

Mrs. Gun-Britt ANDERSSON   *Ambassador*

Switzerland / Suisse

Mr. Lukas BEGLINGER   *Minister, Deputy Permanent Representative*

United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Mr. David LYSCOM   *Ambassador*

United States / Etats-Unis

Ms. Constance MORELLA   *Ambassador*

Mr. John ROBINSON   *Adviser for Science and Social Policy*

EC / CE

Ms. Marie-Francesca SPATOLISANO   *Deputy Permanent Representative*

OECD / OCDE

Mr. Richard HECKLINGER   *Deputy Secretary General*

Mr. Paul E. ATKINSON   *Deputy Director, Structural Policy Branch*
                    Science Technology and Industry Directorate

Mr. Robert BONWITT   *Head of SIGMA Programme*
                    (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management)

Mrs. Joanne CADDY   *Public Governance and Territorial Development*

Ms. Joanna ELLIS   *Principal Adviser, Round Table on sustainable Development*
                    General Secretariat

Mr. Jorgen ELMESKOV   *Deputy Director, Policy Studies Branch*
                    Economics Department

Mr. Thomas HEIMGARTNER   *Consultant, Metagora Project*
                    Development Co-operation Directorate

Mr. Lorents LORENTSEN   *Director,*

	Environment Directorate
Mr. Patrick LOVE	*International Futures Programme*
Mr. Michael J OBORNE	*Director* *International Futures Programme* *Advisory unit to the Secretary General*
Mrs. Odile SALLARD	*Director* *Public Governance and Territorial* *Development*
Mr. Tom SCHULLER	*Head, CERI* *(Centre for Educational Research and* *Innovation)* *Directorate for Education*
Mr. Barrie STEVENS	*International Futures Programme*
Mr. Raul SUAREZ DE MIGUEL	*Project Manager Metagora Project* *Development Co-operation Directorate*
Miss Marit UNDSETH	*International Futures Programme*
Mr. Christian VERGEZ	*Public Governance and Territorial* *Development*
Miss Sylvie WALTER	*Consultant Metagora Project* *Development Co-operation Directorate*

Assistant

Mrs. Concetta MIANO	*International Futures Programme*

18

BUILDING OPEN GOVERNMENT IN OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES

**DIRECTORATE FOR PUBLIC GOVERNANCE
AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT (GOV)**

Contact: joanne.caddy@oecd.org or christian.vergez@oecd.org

From principles to practice of good governance

Good governance is increasingly recognised as an essential factor for economic development and social stability, and is at the core of OECD work in a wide range of public policy fields. Increasingly, the OECD itself invests in policy dialogue with the key partners of governments, such as business, trade unions (through long-standing consultative structures) and, more recently, civil society organisations (CSOs), all of whose contributions are crucial to achieving good governance. Recognition of the valuable insights to be gained from policy dialogue and sharing experiences among a wide range of countries is at the heart of the OECD work with both members and non-members.

Building open government

Among the widely accepted principles of good governance are openness, transparency and accountability; fairness and equity in dealings with citizens, including mechanisms for consultation and participation; efficient and effective services; clear, transparent and applicable laws and regulations; consistency and coherence in policy formation; respect for the rule of law; and high standards of ethical behaviour. These principles represent the basis upon which to build open government – one that is more transparent, accessible, and responsive in its operations.

Building open and transparent government is a challenge shared by all countries. An open government is now recognised to be an essential ingredient for democratic governance, social stability and economic development. While there are multiple meanings of the term, three dimensions appear to be most relevant when describing an "open government", namely one which is:

- *transparent* or exposed to public scrutiny and challenge;

- *accessible* at any time, anywhere, by anyone;

- *responsive* to new ideas, demands and needs.

As used here, "openness" both encompasses and goes beyond the more commonly used term of "transparency". It introduces two further aspects, namely "accessibility" and "responsiveness", in order to capture other qualities of the interface between government and the wider community it serves. While these three dimensions are closely interlinked, they remain distinct and may be present to differing degrees in practice.

These dimensions are not merely abstract notions. Each one can be applied in practice through appropriate legislation, policies, and formal and informal institutional frameworks. For example, laws establishing rights of access to information – as well as the institutional mechanisms to enforce these rights

– are a basic building block for enhancing government transparency and accountability. Government policies stipulating how citizens and CSOs should be consulted during policy making and how policy makers are to account for public input when reaching their decisions are necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for ensuring greater responsiveness. Deeper engagement of citizens and civil society does not mean that elected governments relinquish their responsibility to make decisions in the public interest. It does mean that they have to invest more time and energy in explaining their proposals and seeking citizens' views throughout the policy cycle (from design to implementation), and in providing reasons for the decisions they have taken.

Open policy-making

Several driving forces have led OECD member countries to focus attention on strengthening mechanisms for citizen engagement in policy-making, including the steady erosion of voter turnout in elections, falling membership in political parties and surveys showing declining confidence in key public institutions. Calls for greater government transparency and accountability have grown, as public and media scrutiny of government actions increases and standards in public life are codified and raised. At the same time, new forms of representation and participation in the public sphere are emerging in all countries. Increasingly educated, well-informed citizens want their views and knowledge to be taken into account in public decision making – and governments in all OECD member countries are under pressure to respond.

These new demands are emerging against the backdrop of a fast-moving, globalised world increasingly characterised by networks rather than hierarchy. The Internet has opened up new frontiers in the independent production and exchange of information while providing a powerful tool for co-ordination among players on opposite sides of the globe.

Informing, consulting and engaging citizens are core elements of good governance, means for promoting openness, and a sound investment in better policy making. They allow government to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions. Equally important, they contribute to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity.

The OECD's contribution to an emerging debate

The importance of public information and consultation with social partners has long been recognised in OECD work on a wide range of sectoral policies, including the environment, education, and anti-corruption. However, the significance of these functions for the overall health of democratic systems of government was first explicitly addressed at the annual Meeting of Senior Officials of Centres of Government in OECD member countries held in Bern (Switzerland) in 1998, which addressed the issue of "Information Policy and Democratic Quality". As a result of this meeting, the OECD's Public Management Service (PUMA)[1] was requested to undertake a comparative analysis of how OECD member countries were taking steps to strengthen government-citizen relations in policy making.

The PUMA Working Group on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections met for the first time in February 1999 at the OECD in Paris. In the course of its existence (1999-2001), its bi-annual meetings were attended by representatives from 20 or more OECD member countries and could count on the active input of several others. Members of the Working Group were generally senior officials in central administrations with responsibility for the development and oversight of public information and consultation policies. Under the Working Group's guidance, two surveys of OECD member countries were

---

[1] As of 1 September 2002, the Public Management Service (PUMA) is part of the OECD Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development.

carried out in 1999-2000 on "Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections" and "Using Information Technology to Strengthen Government-Citizen Connections". As a complement to the comparative information obtained via the surveys, nine in-depth country case studies were conducted over the period 2000-2001 to explore the dynamics of government-citizen relations in a number of specific instances and policy fields (including health, education, the environment and social policy). Finally, the insights, experience and regular updates provided by members of the Working Group provided the Secretariat with invaluable guidance.

Comparative data. The results of over two years of joint efforts were published in the OECD report *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation* (2001*b*), which included information from all OECD member countries. The value of the OECD's work in this emerging field and its report lies in establishing some key terms and in providing a framework with which to "map" a highly diverse set of country experiences across the OECD's membership.

Guiding principles. A set of ten guiding principles for public information, consultation and active participation was also formulated, based on the collective experience of OECD member countries (see Figure 1). Such principles may be useful when seeking to improve government performance in this challenging area and in developing national frameworks for evaluation.

What the report cannot convey, however, is the lively debate and climate of open exchange between country representatives that characterised the regular working meetings. Despite their many differences (e.g. with respect to constitutional systems and administrative traditions), all those attending faced the same dilemma: "How to ensure greater citizen engagement in public policy making within the bounds of representative democracy?" This recognition of a common challenge among such a wide range of countries -- from Canada, Finland, and Sweden to Hungary, Korea and Mexico -- simply serves to underscore the importance of this issue for democratic governments the world over.

Policy dialogue with non-members. While it is certainly true that the experience of a given OECD member country may not be appropriate for all other country contexts, the policy recommendations – developed in the course of the group's "discussions among diversity" and adopted by consensus – provide some basis for more widespread applicability. This was borne out by the positive reactions of participants in the International Roundtable on International Roundtable on Building Open Government in South East Europe held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) on 23-24 May 2002, which brought together close to 100 government and civil society practitioners from OECD member and non-member countries (OECD, 2003*b*).

In December 2001, the PUMA Expert Group on Government Relations with Citizens and Civil Society was established to carry forward the work in two specific areas, namely evaluation of government efforts to inform, consult and engage citizens and the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to engage citizens in policy making (e-consultation).

Using new technologies. All OECD member countries recognise the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to provide better public services at lower cost, enhance the transparency and accountability of government, and promote greater citizen engagement in democratic processes. At the same time, few expect new ICTs to completely replace traditional methods for information, consultation and active participation in the foreseeable future.

Most recognise the need to ensure that all citizens, whether online or not, continue to have access to high-quality services and enjoy equal rights of participation in the public sphere. In light of the "digital divide", the integration of new ICT-based tools with existing, "offline" tools becomes essential. A major concern is to ensure that ICTs enable not only a greater quantity but a better quality of citizen engagement

in public policy deliberations (i.e. in terms of information provided and contributions received). Experience to date also suggests that the active contribution of those representing the target audience should be solicited when designing online systems for citizen engagement.

The OECD report on *Promise and Problems of e-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement* (2003*c*) highlights five key challenges to effective online citizen engagement in policy making: *scale,* or coping with many voices; *capacity* of citizens and civil servants; *coherence* throughout the policy cycle; *learning* from experience at the local level and in other countries and *evaluation* of costs, benefits, impacts.

The OECD's Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development (GOV) continues to explore the implications and impact of building open government as part of its work on public sector modernisation, notably with the forthcoming publication of an OECD Policy Brief on "Open Government".

Figure 1 - Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation measures for citizens in policy making

1. Commitment
Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation in policy making is needed at all levels - from politicians, senior managers and public officials.
2. Rights
Citizens' rights to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when they exercise these rights must also be clearly stated. Independent institutions for oversight or their equivalent are essential to enforcing these rights.
3. Clarity
Objectives for and limits to information, consultation and active participation during policy making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all.
4. Time
Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early as possible in the policy process to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.
5. Objectivity
Information provided by government during policy making should be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.
6. Resources
Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy making are to be effective.
7. Co-ordination
Initiatives to inform, request feedback from and consult citizens should be co-ordinated across government units to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of "consultation fatigue" among citizens and civil society organisations. Co-ordination efforts should not reduce the capacity of government units to ensure innovation and flexibility.
8. Accountability
Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of citizens' inputs received through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure that the policy making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing government accountability overall.

9. Evaluation
Governments need the tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in providing information, conducting consultation and engaging citizens, in order to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy making.

10. Active citizenship
Governments benefit from active citizens and a dynamic civil society, and can take concrete actions to facilitate access to information and participation, raise awareness, and strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity building among civil society organisations.

Source: OECD, 2001*b*, p. 15

BIBLIOGRAPHY

OECD (2001*a*),
    "Engaging Citizens in Policy making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation", PUMA Policy Brief No. 10, July.
    (See www.oecd.org/pdf/M00007000/M00007815.pdf.)

OECD (2001*b*),
    Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy making. Paris: OECD.
    (See www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4201131E.PDF)

OECD (2001*c*),
    Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy making Paris: OECD. (See
    http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4201141E.pdf.)

OECD (2002),
    Public Sector Transparency and Accountability: Making it Happen (2002) Paris: OECD.
    (See www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4202081E.PDF)

OECD (2003*a*),
    Engaging Citizens Online for Better Policy-making (2003) OECD Policy Brief, March (See
    www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/23/2501856.pdf)

OECD (2003*b*),
    Open Government: Fostering Dialogue with Civil Society Paris: OECD. (See
    www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4203011E.PDF)

OECD (2003*c*),
    Problems and Promise of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement Paris: OECD
    (See www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4204011E.PDF)