Consensus Conference
Manual

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1. Introduction

1.1 Description of the tool

The model of participatory consensus conferences (often referred to as 'the Danish model') was developed on the basis of the expert consensus conference model of the US Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). The Danish Board of Technology (DBT) developed their method in the mid 1980s and the first participatory consensus conference was organised by the DBT in 1987 on the topic *"Gene technology in industry and agriculture"*. What set the Danish method apart was the fact that here a panel of lay people took centre stage, and thus the method was, and is, being employed to include lay people's views, concerns, arguments and reasons in assessments of issues of societal relevance and, in some cases, to allow for lay perspectives to influence regulation and political decision-making. Over the past 15 years, the use of the consensus conference as a participatory procedure has spread to other parts of Europe and around the world.

This introductory description of the consensus conference as a tool will concentrate on two aspects:
-    The objectives - Why organise a consensus conference?
-    The methodology/application - How do you organise a consensus conference?

A consensus conference could serve a variety of purposes among which might be:
-    broadening and qualifying the public debate;
-    affecting policy making and/or political or legislative decision-making;
-    altering the power balance (i.e. between different interested parties, between the priority given to factual expertise and lay perspectives) in relation to a particular topic;
-    Introducing the use of participatory procedures into a new field and/or into a new national or trans-national context.

It is important to consider at an early stage what purposes the consensus conference is expected to serve and how it might best be organised. With regard to the purposes, attention must be paid to the fact that the consensus conference can fulfil different aims and objectives depending on the different settings in which the tool may be applied. These variations have to do both with the

institutional setting of the consensus conference (what type of institution is organising the conference), as well as the political and socio-historical context of the country in which the conference is being organised.

The institutional setting has implications for what can be achieved by applying the tool. These implications are linked to aspects such as the following:
- What is the role and mandate of the organising body?
- How is the organising body connected with levels of political decision-making?

The political context can be important in terms of the following questions:
- What is the dominant view on public participation?
- What kind of roles do deliberative procedures play?
- Does public participation and deliberation have legitimacy in relation to the decision-making process?

The socio-historical context can be important in terms of the following questions:
- Is there a tradition for applying the consensus conference tool (in the organising body and/or in the country in question)?
- What is the status of the conference topic (is it contested, does it have topical relevance, does it have the public's attention)?

The second aspect of the tool has to do with the methodology - how is the consensus conference carried out? The central participants of the consensus conference include a steering committee, (sometimes supported by) a project group, a panel of lay people, a panel of experts, a moderator, (and possibly) an evaluator. The consensus conference format - although now and then subject to interpretations in different settings and over time - has some core features that characterise the tool:
- a selected panel of lay persons pass through a learning process in which they are informed about the conference issue, and about the main questions debates, and conflicts that are central in relation to this issue;
- using this introductory training the lay panel prepares a list of questions that they feel need to be addressed if they are to form an opinion and formulate recommendations on the matter in hand;
- a panel of experts is selected to consider these questions and present their answers in the form of presentations to the lay panel at a public conference;
- the lay panel withdraws and considers the issue. They then present their conclusions and recommendations in a final document, which is presented to the public on the final day of the conference.

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The stages involved in organising and carrying out a consensus conference will be fleshed out in the step-by-step guide in section 3. Meanwhile, let us give an idea of the practical application of the tool by turning to some illustrative cases.

1.2 Practical applications

Since the first consensus conference was organised in Denmark in 1987 the tool has been employed in several other countries spreading throughout and beyond Europe. The increasing motivation for applying this type of participatory tool should be seen especially in light of the development of new biotechnologies, which prompted public opposition and conflict. The fact that these developments in biotechnology evoked a recognition of the need to consult the public is illustrated by the fact that at least 26 of the consensus conferences organised worldwide between 1987 and 2002 were addressing topics within the area of gene technology (see The LOKA Institute for an overview of "*Danish-style, citizen-based deliberative 'consensus conferences' on science & technology policy worldwide*", updated Oct 2004, http://www.loka.org/pages/worldpanels.htm).

However, since the mid 1990s the proliferation in the use of consensus conferences has led to the tool being used on very different topics and in a wide range of different settings. In order to illustrate the variety of societal problems and issues addressed through consensus conference, let us outline some examples of practical applications of the tool:

- the French citizens' conference on GMOs (1998) can be seen as a case where the tool was employed to allow for a consultation of public views on a type of technology the use of which was giving rise to public opposition and where policy making and regulation was ensuing;
- the Swiss CC PubliForum on electricity and society (1998), being the first in the country, focussed on the development and implementation of a new instrument for participation in a multilingual direct democracy and can be described as an 'icebreaker' for the use of the consensus conference tool;
- the Danish consensus conference on the future of fishing (1998) can be seen as a case where the tool was employed to address issues and concerns in a specialised sector;
- the UK national consensus conference on radioactive waste management (1999) can be seen as a case where the tool was employed to allow for a consultation of public views on an issue representing an existing and pressing problem of general concern to the public;

- the Madison area citizen consensus conference on nanotechnology (US, 2005) can be seen as a case where the tool was employed to allow for a consultation of public views on the advantages and perils of a new range of technologies before they reach the market;
- the first European citizens' deliberation on brain science *"Meeting of Minds"* (Brussels, 2005-2006) includes deliberations with lay people from nine countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Greece, Great Britain and Hungary) and aims at consulting lay people's assessments of the implications of new-found knowledge and at the same time pioneering trans-national applications of the consensus conference tool (for more information see: http://www.meetingmindseurope.org).

1.3 Intended users

A wide range of organising bodies would be in a position to benefit from applying the consensus conference. The types of institutes and organisations, which have up to now applied the consensus conference include:
- technology assessment institutes;
- science museums;
- ethical committees;
- research committees;
- parliamentary offices;
- advisory agencies;
- policy centres/think-tanks;
- independent or private foundations;
- NGOs.

It should be said here that different types of institutional and organisational frameworks would require that different types of considerations be emphasised when planning the actual conference format. The organising of the procedure has to take into consideration varying contexts of application - be they socio-political, national and/or institutional. The most important issues to be considered are spelled out in the step-by-step guidelines (section 3.2).

1.4 Required resources

It is not easy to give an exact price on arranging a consensus conference, as much will depend on the particular choices made by the organising body during

the preparatory phase. Therefore, this section will only indicate the major budgetary posts to be considered in terms of expenditure, manpower and time.

As will be fleshed out further in the step-by-step guidelines, there are a number of decisions to be made when organising a consensus conference. These decisions may not only be decisive for the outcomes in terms of producing valuable ethical and other reflections, they may also influence significantly the costs of the event, in financial terms as well as regarding manpower and time.

1.4.1   Economic resources

Things that may determine the overall costs of organising a consensus conference include:
-    venue of the conference;
-    salaries for organisers during the preparation period;
-    fees for the steering committee (where applicable);
-    preparation of information material and instruction of the lay panel;
-    selection-procedure for the lay people (especially if external consultants are used);
-    travel and accommodation for lay people and expert panel;
-    fees for expert panel (usually voluntary, non-paid participation);
-    compensation for lay panel (usually voluntary, non-paid participation);
-    fees for (external) moderation;
-    printing and dissemination of outcomes.

Depending on the organisation in charge of preparing the consensus conference these budgetary posts may be more or less explicitly included in budgeting (i.e. can the conference be held in-house or should a venue be rented, should the working hours of the organisers be included, can a steering committee be organised without payments, etcetera).

Reports on consensus conferences rarely contain budgetary information, so we can only give an example of the costs of procedures carried out: The Danish Board of Technology assessed in 1995 that the price of a consensus conference was 350.000 DKK, at the time equivalent of 49.000 EUR (Klüver, 1995).

1.4.2   Manpower

The Danish Board of Technology as a rule of thumb calculates half a man-year to organise a consensus conference (ibid). It should, however, be taken into consideration that a significant organisational experience exists at the DBT and

that the manpower needed by organisations with no experience in organising PTA events may be significantly higher.

1.4.3 Time

The Danish Board of Technology assess that it takes 6-12 months to organise a consensus conference (ibid). Other experiences indicate that less than a year's preparation time may be overly optimistic: Joss (1995) reports that the first UK conference was two years in the making from the idea was conceived till the conference was held. Similar preparation time is reported for the first Norwegian conference (Søgnen, 1997). This, however, may have as much to do with the time needed to convince various stakeholders and sponsors of the relevance of such a conference as 'real' preparation time once the decision has been made to have a conference. In the French case - due to substantial political urgency - the time lapsing from the decision to organise a consensus conference (in a context where this had never been tried before) was compressed into seven months (Marris & Joly, 1999).

Generally, however, a longer preparation time must be expected, if the conference is to be set in a context without experiences with such procedural means. More time may be required to establish the necessary contexts and support among responsible institutions and the relevant expert and stakeholder communities. An instructive example of a timeline for the different steps in organising a consensus conference is outlined by Eastlick & Einsiedel (2000).

2.   Theory and practice

2.1   Theoretical background: Consensus conferences as a bio-ethical tool

Strictly speaking the consensus conference tool is not (only) a bio-ethical tool. It belongs to a broader class of procedures running under the label of participatory technology assessment (pTA) (Joss & Bellucci 2002; Abels & Bora; 2004). What characterises the consensus conference as a participatory procedure is the prominence placed upon the role of lay people in the conference process. The question regarding what constitutes lay people can be answered by positive as well as negative characteristics. Negative characteristics of lay people are: They are not direct stakeholders, they are not experts, and they are not directly involved in the (political) decision-making process on the topic in question. Positive characteristics of laypersons are: They are competent as moral subjects, they contribute valid perspectives, concerns, knowledge and ideas relevant in relation to the CC topic, and their role in the CC is that of citizens (potentially) affected by the topic in question. It is fruitful if the laypersons are not only interested in the topic but also into the CC process as a participation procedure. They should be open to act as 'citoyen', signifying the role of a person that feels responsibility to the community and not only for his or her own interests as individuals.

The conception of the CC as a (bio)-ethical tool is one that has grown out of the pragmatic uses of the tool. In many case studies of consensus conferences, it shows that the lay panel are very often the ones that place the ethical issues and perspectives on the agenda. Thus, the format of the CC method allows for it to play the role both of a technology assessment tool as well as an ethical tool.

CC organisers might consider employing a framework to 'map out' ethical considerations in the phase of defining the problem(s) of a particular CC-topic. A framework such as an ethical matrix approach might be employed in order for ethical considerations to be identified and form part of the whole CC process. Such an approach could in some cases be a fruitful complement to the participation of ethical experts filling the role as the sole representatives of ethical perspectives. The employment of a tool such as an ethical matrix approach would introduce more structured procedures for the identification of ethical considerations and ethical issues in the CC, and the discussions would be less dependent on the performance of a few experts serving on the panel. Whether or not the use of a framework such as an ethical matrix approach is

relevant depends upon - among other things - the type of topic that is going to be addressed in the CC. In any case, just as the case studies (referred to here) of CCs in different national settings pointed out that the CC tool is interpreted differently across different contexts, so would a framework for mapping ethical issues have to be employed in a culturally sensitive way.

The consensus conference tool has found application in relation to a number of technological domains where policy makers and stakeholders have assessed a need for participatory and deliberative ways of supporting technological decision-making. The consensus conference model has been included in this guide of different bioethical tools for primarily two reasons:

- In the wider debates about participatory technology assessment the consensus conference methodology has attracted significant international attention as an exemplary manner in which participatory and deliberative ideals in regard to the governance of controversial technologies can be turned into practice. It can be seen as one way of institutionalising ideals from political philosophy, which are less specific about how public deliberation can actually function in real debates and decision-making (Skorupinski & Ott, 2000). As such, the consensus conference model provides one recipe on how to practice ethical reflection in a 'public' mode on a relatively specific technological topic. As such, the consensus conference model represents one procedural format among a number of PTA methods. It is a model that is often mentioned positively in discussions on PTA, often, however, in ways indicating an insufficient knowledge of the actual workings of consensus conferences as a specific procedural tool. Hence, it was seen as desirable to explicate the workings of such conferences in more details to improve the knowledge base for potentially interested users. At the same time, it can be argued that the consensus conference model is exemplary for a number of issues relating to such PTA methods, hence the experiences explicated here will have some relevance also for users working with different PTA methodologies.

- Consensus conferences have in fact been employed in a number of instances as means to address issues in regard to biotechnology, which entailed issues that may be labelled as 'ethical', both in a strict 'bio-ethical' sense and a more general sense of 'social ethics'. Issues raging from considerations of the 'intrinsic value of the living' over the social acceptability of physical risk from biotechnology to broader social effects of particular applications of biotechnology (e.g. monopolies in the agricultural sector, the impact on developing countries, etcetera) have been the object of reflection and deliberation in consensus conferences (See for instance the overview of Schwab (2000) listing and comparing 9 consensus

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conferences in 8 different countries pertaining exclusively to food related biotechnology. The LOKA institutes lists altogether 48 consensus conferences held to date. Of these, 19 were held in Denmark and 29 in 15 different countries throughout the world (www.loka.org/pages/worldpanels.htm)).

3. Guidance on application

3.1 Overview of steps in the guidelines for consensus conferences:

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(1) Selection of topic
(2) Funding
(3) Organisational setting and venue
(4) Recruitment of steering group members, moderator and instructors for introductory weekends
(5) Preparing/selecting introductory material
(6) Selection of lay panel members and expert panel members
(7) Preparatory phase for lay panel members
(8) The public phase of the conference
(9) Deliberations of the lay panel (internal)
(10) Dissemination
(11) Debriefing
(12) Evaluation

3.2 Step-by-step guidelines to organising consensus conferences

3.2.1 Selection of the topic

Objectives of the phase
Organisers may be in a situation where they wish to consult lay perspectives and concerns in relation to a particular topic of societal relevance, and thus seek to employ a suitable participatory tool. In some cases, the initial focus of the organisers may be on employing the consensus conference tool (typically if a CC is being organised for the first time) and then the emphasis may be on selecting an appropriate and relevant topic.

In any case, organisers should consider important issues surrounding the conference topic such as its actuality and relevance, its degree of controversy, and its urgency in terms of decision-making and (possibly) legislation. It is important to take an accurate and sensitive reading of the given political situation with regard to the selected topic, and to consider whether the subject matter is present in public debate and whether it plays an important political role.

These are all factors which set the conditions for organising the conference and which will to some degree determine whether the topic in question can be

fruitfully addressed through the procedures of the consensus conference. If for instance the topic has been widely debated because policy making is imminent, and/or if policy makers have expressed a need for, and interest in, public consultation on the topic, this may contribute to the legitimacy and relevance of the CC both in the eyes of participants and external observers. However, just as much can be gained by addressing new and less controversial topics through CC procedures. Cutting edge scientific fields such as brain science and nanotechnology have very recently been the topics of CCs (see section 1.2), setting in many ways different conditions for the employment of the tool than more contested topics such as GM foods. Consulting public views on science and technology in these early stages can hopefully lead to greater public involvement, possible demands for transparency, sharing of information, and ultimately democratic involvement in terms of important decision-making.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
Selecting a topic is not the same as describing the problem(s) to be addressed in the CC. The task of concretising the problem(s) is usually left to the lay panel. It may be helpful to involve more persons, possibly stakeholders in a hearing before the conference to get a more complex description of the problem(s) at stake. Organisers might consider whether the employment of a framework to identify relevant ethical issues and perspectives should be part of the problem-definition phase (see section 2.1 for a discussion of the use of this type of framework, e.g. an ethical matrix approach).

Public perceptions of the CC topic will also significantly affect the possibilities of recruiting participants for the arrangement. Experiences with consensus conferences in different European countries show that the actuality of the topic and a controversial public debate can serve as a good background to find interested and engaged lay participants for the arrangement. Usually CCs and similar procedures are made use of in a 'technology-induced' approach, which means that there is a technology under development and a public controversy is yet conflagrant. CCs can also be employed in relation to 'problem-induced' approaches, where the point of departure would be the description of a problem with the aim to find the best - technological - solution.

Possible pitfall: The discussions are framed in a way so central concerns are excluded
Some framing of the discussions during a consensus conference is inevitable - but it is worthwhile considering what actions result in such processes of framing. To the extent framings are deliberate as e.g. means to contain the discussions within a predefined field of interest for the organisers, careful presentation of these decisions to participants as well as outside observers may be a good idea. Failure to pay attention to framings may eventually lead to accusations of manipulation, if they have the impact that important lines of argument for or against the technology are excluded from the deliberation.

The French consensus conference on GM plants in 1998 illustrates the importance of paying attention to processes of framing. A member of the lay panel, who raised moral issues pertaining to the technology as such, left the conference at an early stage because she felt that there was no room for her arguments. After the conference, some observers argued that with her the ethical concern was left out the conference more or less reducing it to a deliberation over benefits versus risks for environment and health. This, they proposed, reflected the fact that in France such moral issues are strictly private matters, not to be discussed in a public forum.

Relevant questions at this stage
What are the stated aim(s) of the CC?
How can the process of selecting the topic be managed?
Which criteria should the selection of topic fulfil?
How do the stated aims of the conference affect the selection of topic?
How will the description of the problem(s) be managed?
Who should be involved?
How can ethical issues and ethical perspectives relevant to the topic be identified?
Is the topic controversial enough?
In what ways is the topic related to power struggles or conflicts of interests?
Is there policy pending on the topic?
Are policy-makers interested in a public input on the topic?

3.2.2 Funding

Objectives of the phase
On the one hand a CC can be an expensive procedure, if it is to be successful. On the other hand it is especially for the public necessary to have trust in the procedures. Organisers should ensure independence and transparency of their financial sources and the influence of external actors on the CC must be considered. In any case, sponsors have to be named because otherwise it could be that the trust of the lay participants is lost before the CC-procedure starts. The costs to credibility could potentially weigh out the benefits of funds from sponsors. For instance, a biotech company wanting to fund a CC concerning the pros and cons of biotechnology might have trouble being accepted by

participants as a credible and neutral source. To help ensure credibility of the CC process and its results the organisers should make the funding process, the instances and higher authorities of decision-making transparent and available to participants, the public and the media.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
It may be useful to make a first list of names of possible institutions working with the subject and different sources for money before budgeting personnel, travel costs, food, material offered to the media, etcetera (see 1.4 for an overview of required economic resources).

Relevant questions at this stage
What are the potential sources of funds?
What are the minimum costs for effectiveness of the CC?
What are the potential impacts of funding sources on the project?
Is the credibility of the process affected by funding sources?

3.2.3   Organisational setting and venue

Objectives of the phase
The status of the organising body can be of crucial importance to the successful employment of the consensus conference. The organising body's connection to parliamentary politics or its independence from political institutions are both features which may have a positive effect on how the conference is being perceived by participants and in the wider public.

In our French case study the non-representative character of the consensus conference was considered incompatible with the representative function of the Parliament, which led to the arrangement losing credibility and legitimacy as a result of it being organised by OPECST, an advisory body to parliament. In contrast, in case studies of Scandinavian consensus conferences it was precisely the close proximity to policy makers that enhanced the legitimacy and acceptability of the CC procedures.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
A suitable venue must be chosen for the conference. Depending on the organising institution and the traditions of the context, this may either be a public building affiliated with the target of the output. For instance, in Denmark the conferences are housed in the Parliament building complex, making it convenient for parliamentarians to witness parts of the procedure and giving the participants a physical sense of being close to the centre of power. However, in

some contexts a place that will be considered 'neutral ground' may be preferred, for instance in multilingual contexts, or in contexts where it is considered inappropriate that representative political institutions are closely affiliated with the conference.

It is important that a pleasant climate is ensured for the proceedings. This can be supported by pleasant surroundings, adequately scheduled breaks, availability of drinks, snacks and food, etcetera For the preparatory weekend sessions as well, it is important that the physical surroundings are attractive. Here, it might be considered whether participants would gain from the sessions being located in an urban or rural environment.

Possible pitfall: Consensus conferences at odds with the national political culture
Before choosing to carry out a CC, it should be considered if there is a fair correspondence between the ideas of a consensus conference and level in the political decision-making process it is linked to. The main concern here is if a consensus conference is seen as a legitimate instrument feeding the political processes. Failure to consider this may - in the worst case - result in the public as well as the politicians or other important decision-making actors neglecting or even rejecting the outcome.

An example of this problem is the French consensus conference on GM plants in 1998. This conference took place within the spheres of political decision-making close to government and parliament, as it was organised by the parliamentary technology board, OPECST, on the initiative of the government. This, however, for many observers - even among the organisers of the conference - represented a conflict. Their argument was that a lay panel, only representing, a small group of citizens, has no legitimate voice in a representative democracy where the parliament have has already been given the mandate by the public.

Relevant questions at this stage
Which organisations/institutions should be hosting the conference?
Where should the CC take place?
What are attractive surroundings supporting the procedure and promoting good results?

3.2.4 Recruitment of steering group members, moderator and instructors for the introductory weekends

Objectives of the phase
In this phase suitable personnel must be recruited to fulfil various functions in the CC. A steering group must be appointed to oversee that the conference is balanced and just. Various instructors with the necessary skills to inform the lay panel ahead of the conference must be identified. Finally, a suitable moderator must be found.

The steering group in general has an advisory function. In the beginning of the CC-process this group is necessary to support the project management and to drive on the first steps of the CC by giving further information about possible aims and competent experts. Additionally, the steering group should preferably be able to ensure feedback to stakeholder communities. This group also assists the organisers with the preparation of initial information packages for the participants. The steering group can give relevant recommendations but must not aim for a specific result of the process. However, organisers must be prepared for steering group members having diverse interests in the topic and perhaps pursue agendas not necessarily fully in the intended spirit of the conference purpose.

The group can include scientists, representatives of non-governmental organisations, policy-makers and others, who are engaged and informed concerning the topic. It should be open for other competent members e.g. like journalists. The group should represent all aspects of knowledge and a diversity of viewpoints concerning the topic. Pro- and con-groups should be equally represented. This does not guarantee correct and unbiased information for the participants of the CC but it is probably the best available social mechanism to ensure a substantively and socially well-balanced conference. If the steering group is well balanced, it is easier to produce efficient information and also different instructive experts will be selected. If the group's composition is imbalanced and/or there is lack of competence, this can be a handicap for the CC, e.g. if they do not suggest competent experts and/or give imbalanced information concerning the controversies within the field. Generally, there is no objective truth about 'the controversy' in a given field, but a CC must aim to cover existing lines of contestation as well as possible. The steering group is responsible that the lay panel get all significant available information concerning the subject of the CC to have the best chance for a well-balanced final document mirroring concerns of the public.

There have been examples of CCs where lay panel members wished to invite steering committee members to serve on the expert panel. The implications of such choices on the part of the lay panel should be taken into consideration, in terms of whether they might result in conflicts of interests and/or lack of transparency. It should be noted, however, that the selection of participants to the expert panel is entirely up to the lay panel. The autonomy of the lay panel is one of the defining characteristics of the consensus conference method, which means, ultimately, that any decision to invite a steering committee member to function in the expert panel should be respected. This central feature of the CC should be balanced against another essential principle, namely that members of the steering committee should not influence the process

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of opinion forming. Unlike the members of the organising group, they usually do not join the preparatory weekends and the closed session of the CC. Their resolutions are open for the members of the lay panel. Experience indicates that it may be preferable for the steering committee to agree on some common ground rules regarding their contacts with the media to avoid that the press is used as an instrument in the internal debates of the steering committee.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
The moderator is required for the preparatory weekend(s) and the final conference itself. One condition is to be professional, at best with experience in participatory processes. His/her role is to support and facilitate a fair dialogue among the lay panel members and to ensure substantial and competent information transfer by the experts. With respect to the credibility of the whole procedure it is very important that the moderator is neutral with regard to the substantive topic of the conference and does not try to push the lay panel in any particular direction. The moderator has to take care of the participants and to make sure that the lay people are enabled to fulfil their tasks within the process. Many lay people are not used to such procedures, so they may require both encouragement and practical support in organising their dialogue.

Some tasks of the moderator belong to the aspect of control. He has to make sure that basic rules of argumentation are kept. He has to ensure that procedural ground rules agreed by the participants are upheld, unless all participants have agreed to change it. Other tasks belong to the aspect of encouragement. The moderator has to counteract intimidation; he has to encourage the participants to get involved in the discourse, he has to make sure that chances to express one's opinion are equitably allocated and that the dialogue between laymen and experts is held in a language comprehensible for the laymen. The combination of both tasks is demanding with respect to psychological sensitivity.

Instructors or teachers (and possibly translators) are necessary for the preparatory weekend(s) for the lay panel's first approaches to the topic. They should be able to mediate pros and cons, conditions of scientific uncertainty, as well as the difference between questions of facts and questions of norms and values in a well-balanced manner and in an understandable way.

Possible pitfall: The major lines of controversy are not represented in the steering committee
When setting up the steering committee, it should be considered if the main lines of controversy are all represented by proponents as well as opponents. A steering committee without persons representing central concerns or interests may be judged as an incompetent body when it comes to organising an unbiased conference.

The critique of the UK national consensus conference on plant biotechnology in 1994 is an example of this (Purdue, 1995). The organisers of the conference, the Science Museum in London, was accused of organising a biased - or not neutral - conference, since the steering committee had representatives from a major biotech industries and a pro-biotech journalist - but no environmentalists to represent the environmental concern.

Relevant questions at this stage
What are the relevant kinds of expertise for the topic in the context of the conference?
Where are controversial dividing lines in the debates?
How may a broadly accepted steering group best be put together?
How are potential members motivated?
Will the steering group be considered legitimate - internally and externally?
Who would be a suitable moderator in the context?
Who would be suitable instructors?
What do different participants need to know about the process?

3.2.5   Preparing/selecting introductory material

Objectives of the phase
In order for the lay panel to fulfil its functions, it is important that they know what is expected of them. Therefore, they need introductions to the procedural format as well as the specific topic of the conference. In order to interact with experts in a fruitful manner, e.g. obtain factual knowledge and evaluations. It is important that they are provided with some background information on the topic of the conference.

The laypersons should be informed about the principles guiding both the public as well as the closed session of the final conference, and they should have the possibility to agree to these principles. This could be a rather formal rule, like the obligation to be present at all sessions and the right to exclude the moderator. The organisers may in addition suggest a set of further procedural guidelines, which the participants may debate and adapt as they see fit. This may concern questions such as how are lasting disagreements dealt with, when can a topic legitimately be put aside even if agreement is not yet reached, etcetera The moderator must then be informed about the decisions of the lay panel.

To provide an example of what such procedural guidelines might be an elaborated version of principles has been presented in the Swiss PubliForum format (an adapted version of the CC method). The lay panel agreed to the following rules (among others):

- all participants have the right to present their point of view;
- statements can be questioned and rejected;
- the communication between participants has to be a genuine dialogue;
- any statement or comment has to be included in the deliberation;
- any resolution, made in the CC, will be documented.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider

Concerning the introductory material it is again important that the fact sheets contain pros and cons and that they are easily understood by lay people. The material should be presented in a brief and transparent form providing an easily accessible overview of relevant aspects of the topic. For example the fact sheets provided for the lay panel on the Swiss CC on *"Gene technology and nutrition"* (1999) contained on the first page introductions to the topics, information concerning the organiser and the CC procedure. The following pages were titled: *"Ethics and gene technology"*, *"Safety, usefulness and ethics"*, *"What can we buy in shops?"*, *"What contains gene technology"*, *"Right and politics"*, *"Gene technology and health"*, *"Gene technology and environment"* and *"Gene technology and economics"*.

Organisers should be prepared for the fact that controversy may be endemic to certain topics and full agreement within the steering group and between organisers and other stakeholders may not be achieved. As long as such disagreements are communicated to the lay panel, this need not be invalidating for a CC. It is exactly the task of the lay panel to give their evaluation of the controversies.

An information package should contain an introduction to the procedure and aims of the CC. This should also clarify the role of the participatory arrangement in the process of political decision-making, or how the results will otherwise be used. E.g., if the CC is organised by an institution closely linked to parliament, the lay panellists need to know that they have their function in counselling but they are not in charge to decide in the place of politicians. This is necessary to avoid overestimation of the participatory arrangement as well as underestimation - both may create unnecessary frustration among the participants if expectations are not fulfilled.

A last point to be explained in the introductory material is the role of the experts. This role will be to function as informants, answering the questions of the laypersons. It is a well-known problem that the dividing line between facts

and values may in itself be a matter of controversy in disputes about technology - or that different facts may be brought forward to support some positions rather than others. However, experts should be made aware that they are invited to present the specialised knowledge they possess to the lay panel, not to pre-empt the deliberations of the panel. If asked, experts may be allowed to express their personal opinion about the questions at stake but must do so in an open manner, not dressed up as facts. Self-evidently they are not allowed to manipulate or to give wrong or incomplete information. Moreover the experts have to use a language understandable for the lay panel and show respect for the opinions of the other (counter-) experts and the laypersons. The role of the scientific expert is to give correct information about the facts and problems concerning the topic. If particular ethical experts are invited, their task should be to clarify basic positions within the field.

Relevant questions at this stage
What kind of information does the lay panel require to fulfil its task?
Which approach will generate the most balanced presentation of the subject?
How can disagreements in the steering group regarding the information packages be handled?
How can the aims of the conference and the procedural format best be explained to the participating experts and lay people?

3.2.6   Selection of lay panel members and expert panel members

Objectives of the phase
The clearer the definition of the roles of participants, the principles of the process itself and the placement in the context of political decision making, the more credible and effective is the output that is achieved by the procedure. Different opinions exist on who qualifies to serve as an expert in a CC. Some organisers think that competent experts are those who worked in the field for many years (and not for instance those who represent institutions as speakers for media and/or the public). Other organisers have a more broad conception of what an 'expert' is or can be. For instance, the Danish Board of Technology often include representatives of NGOs and companies if they possess knowledge and competences deemed relevant for the topic, even if they do not have formal, scientific credentials.

An innovative strength of the CC is the active use of the self-confidence, autonomy and plurality of the laypersons. The low number of participants in the CC is not representative for a whole population. The deliberation of the lay panel is not a democracy 'en miniature', since its members are not elected. However,

the fact that the procedure is based on a thorough deliberative process may provide it with legitimacy both internally and in the eyes of external observes.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
The recruitment of the laypersons has to be done at the latest about 3-4 months prior to the first preparatory weekend. Lay people can be selected, found and invited to the process by survey-institutes, within non-directed random selection processes or in more directed activities by means of newspapers or newsletters, by mailed letters or by broad cast media within a defined region. The organising management should decide the method or a combination of these methods in close connection with the advisory or steering group. It may be a good idea to consider a balanced mixture concerning age, gender, level of education, occupation and geographic variation.[1] As mentioned it enhances the credibility of the CC that the members of the lay panel are not direct stakeholders involved in the decision-making processes concerning the topic. This helps to avoid external loyalties and produces more openness of the results.

It is an aim of the CC to ensure that laypersons have equal access to all information. In accordance with this aim, the steering group should present an extensive list of experts with individual profiles to the lay panel very early in the planning process. After listing and finalising the questions to be addressed at the conference the lay panel has to decide who should be invited on the expert panel to answer the questions. If experts for special questions are not in the pool presented by the steering group, there is time to find them before the public session of the CC starts - but an agreement with the lay panel is necessary.

With regard to the selection of experts it is important to note that the autonomy of the lay panel should be absolute in the sense that their decisions to select one or the other type of expert, to answer one or the other type of question, must be respected and should not be steered by organisers, moderator or steering group members. The absolute autonomy of the lay panel is one of the defining characteristics of the consensus conference method. Thus, for instance when French lay panel members in the CC of 1998 expressed a wish to invite one of the instructors from the training weekend on to the expert panel, this was

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[1] For the recruitment of lay panels the Danish Board of Technology makes use of a procedure where a randomly selected pool of citizens are invited by mail. Then the final panel is selected by cross-sectional criteria. In the case of a Swiss CC procedure a mailing list of about 1000 citizens was acquired by the organisers from a market research institute. If the citizens reacted to the first inquiry they got a list with further questions concerning the special CC process. The organisers selected the members of the lay panel considering different regions of language, age, gender, profession, etc.

strongly criticised by the steering committee who tried to explain to the lay panel members why this, in their view, was not an advisable decision. However, the lay panel members insisted and so the steering committee had to follow their wishes.

The experts invited to participate in the panel should be aware of their own role in relation to the lay panel on the consensus conference. In some cases, experts have been known to speak very derogatively to the laypersons, accusing them of asking 'the wrong questions'. This is obviously an undesirable reaction as it does not respect the autonomy of the laypersons as main actors in the CCs. Preferably the CC should provide a forum where experts are able to learn from the laypersons as well as vice versa.

Possible pitfall: The major lines of controversy are not represented in the experts' panel
When choosing experts to answer the questions outlined by the lay panel, it is a good idea to consider if all relevant concerns are represented in the panel and no important groups of actors are systematically excluded. Not doing so may result in accusations of manipulation and deliberate framing of the discussion and the removal of the focus from the issue itself to procedural problems.

An example of this was the accusations of exclusion scientific experts who in the public debate had voiced scepticism towards GM agriculture in the 1999 consensus conference on GM foods in Denmark. As a result, it was argued, the experts' panel was biased towards the GM positive position.

Relevant questions at this stage
What are the criteria for the selection of participants for the lay panel?
How will the selection process be managed?
What kind of expertise is required for the conference?
How should relevant experts be approached and motivated to participate in the conference (if deemed relevant/selected by the lay panel)?

3.2.7 Preparatory phase for lay panel members

Objectives of the phase
Due to the very limited number of participants in a consensus conference's lay panel, the panel cannot be representative of the citizenry in any numerical sense. As such, it is a defining characteristic of the consensus conference methodology that the panel must be established as 'representative' of the citizenry or 'ordinary people' in a qualitative manner. An essential aspect of this alternative mode of representation is the learning process the panel is going through during their preparation for, and participation in, the conference. One could say that the lay panel is conceived to mimic how the larger citizenry would evaluate a given

technological issues if it was adequately informed and given the opportunity to deliberate in a focussed manner. This makes the process of informing the lay panel critical to the success of a conference, both internally and in the eyes of external observers - although what exactly the lay panel is required to learn and what weight is ascribed to their pre-existing knowledge might vary across contexts.

The planning of the training process of the lay panel should provide the panel with different types of information and competences. As time and attention inevitably is limited, it is essential that the objectives of the training process be balanced against each other in a very conscious manner by the organisers. The required learning objectives obviously must be adjusted to the specific technological issue(s) put up for deliberation (e.g. when debating regulation of GM food, some technical intricacies of molecular biology, which is probably quite removed from the life worlds of most people, may be required, whereas debating urban planning may not require introductions to how cars work). They must also be adjusted to the institutional and politico-cultural context the outcomes of the conference are meant to feed into. However, as a minimum the following topics should be considered:

- a basic knowledge of the scientific and technological principles in play (e.g. what is genetic engineering and what can potentially be done with it). This must include also an awareness of the uncertainties and unknowns in knowledge related to the field;
- the relationship between scientific and technological developments and societal effects (e.g. for what purposes can genetic knowledge be applied in different sectors of society and what impacts this presumably will have). This must include an awareness of the central lines of contention in the social appropriation of knowledge and technologies (e.g. who stands to benefit from what developments, who will potentially be (adversely) affected in what ways?);
- what are the principle questions to be addressed in the political and regulatory processes to which the conference is supposed to deliver a contribution;
- in so far as a consensus conference is perceived as a (bio-)ethical tool, the training of the lay panel should also include introduction to the issues of an ethical nature involved in the choice between different possible technological and policy options and provided with cognitive tools to deliberate on such issues;[2]

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[2] In our French case study, 'ethical reflection' is excluded from the range of objectives formulated or accepted for the conference. However, then organisers should ask

- finally, an introduction to basic techniques of argumentation may be desirable, for instance how to distinguish between factual and evaluative propositions. The members of the lay panel may not be accustomed with such distinctions but require them when formulating questions to the experts and interpreting the answers they receive.

It is essential for the credibility of a consensus conference that this learning process is perceived as unbiased, both by the participating panel members and by external observers and stakeholders. As a lot of technological controversies entail fundamental disagreements about what actually is a stake or what the (important) facts really are regarding a particular technological development, these objectives are best achieved through an approach, which is both socially and thematically inclusionary. It is the responsibility of the organisers and the steering committee that the viewpoints of all major stakeholders and interests of those potentially affected (but perhaps not able to articulate concerns themselves) are available to the lay panel, just as major unresolved scientific disputes or competing ways of organising knowledge must be introduced (e.g. molecular biology vs. systemic ecology). In areas where the public debates are characterised by strong polarisation, it may be important to ensure equal representation of 'pro and contra' viewpoints in terms of pages of information material and the number of instructors. One possible strategy is to rely on independent academics the steering committee can agree upon for instruction. In other cases professional communicators, such as journalists, may be considered.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
This step usually consists of two weekend sessions about a month apart, where the panel is instructed and get to know each other, the project managing team and perhaps the person appointed to moderate the actual conference.

The first weekend session should (at least) entail the following activities: The lay panel should be given a thorough introduction to what the consensus conference is, what the goal of this particular conference is, what they are expected to do and what effects they can expect or hope to see from their participation. In order not to create frustration among the participants during the process, they should be informed from the outset about the specific planned steps of the procedure, including its links to political institutions and the media attention the organisers expect. In order to carry out their task, the lay panel need

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themselves whether the CC format is actually the right one for their problem, since one of the obvious forces of a CC is the ability to confront the cognitive competences of experts with the 'moral compasses' of ordinary lay people.

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to know and understand exactly what is expected from them, including what are fixed parameters of the procedure (e.g. time restraints, deliberation as the (primary) mode of interaction, whether only consensual statements are expected in the outcome or if conflicting positions are accepted, etcetera) and what aspects they are able to shape (the details of the agenda, the selection of the experts, the form and content of the final document. etcetera).

The lay panel should be introduced to the full range of issues relevant to the topic of the conference. For this end introductory presentations must be given, which are neutral, pedagogical and informative. With the support of a moderator, they should begin to identify areas of concern and interest to them and possibly indicate in what directions their questions will be specified. The moderator can either be the person foreseen to moderate the conference or a member of the organising team.

The organisation of a consensus conference can be considered as a process of gradually increasing procedural control by the lay panel. Therefore, the panel should be supported in setting the agenda for the second preparatory weekend. However, depending on the topic of the conference they will probably need support regarding substantive as well as process issues at this stage.

During both weekends the availability of 'free time' for the participants to get to know each other personally may enhance the ability of the panel to perform as a group. This may be particularly important when writing up the final document, which is known to be a taxing process. Not all panellists may have time for studying further the topics individually between the two weekends, and this should not be made an obligation. However, typically they are keen to learn more and information packages should be available. These should be compiled to entail material pertaining to all the areas mentioned above and of course provide accessible and unbiased information. It may be considered whether certain preparatory activities can continue in the period between the two preparatory weekends, e.g. in the form of electronically linked chat forums.

The second weekend session should (at least) entail the following activities: The lay panel should be supported in formulating, in their own words, the topics they think should be elaborated during the conference and structure these into thematic blocks, according to which the expert panel can be compiled. The panel should also formulate in their own words the specific questions they would like the experts to provide answers to. This may require both structured discussions involving the entire panel and the division into smaller subgroups and informal discussions (for which time must be allowed)

From the pool of potential experts compiled by the organisers, the lay panel should be helped to select the experts they believe will be most suitable to answer these questions. Where relevant, the panel should be encouraged to select

experts representing both pro and con positions on contentious issues. In the time between the second weekend session and the actual conference the organisers must ensure the participation of the selected experts or find acceptable substitutes if necessary. These experts should be instructed in their tasks and given the questions from the panel well in advance of the actual conference.

Possible pitfall: The lay panel is deprived the option to reflect and deliberate on the presented information

Key characteristics of the consensus conference are on the one hand the balanced dissemination of knowledge about the issue at hand to the lay panel, and on the other hand time and space for the lay panel to deliberate on this information making use of their lay experience and values. Hence, it must be considered firstly how it is ensured that the information passed on the lay participants during the preparatory months is fairly balanced, and secondly how the lay panellists can be provided with a space where they can develop their arguments on the basis of the (new) knowledge.

   The reconvened consensus conferences on plant biotechnology in New Zealand in 1996 and 1999 highlights the importance of securing the time and space for lay deliberation. During the preparatory weekends of the conference emphasis was put into feeding as much knowledge and information about the science of plant biotechnology as possible. During the conference itself, priority was, similarly, given to the experts' presentations altogether leaving little time for reflecting on the information and developing a consensus on the issue. As a result of this 'squeezing out of deliberative time' is was unlikely that the lay panel was able to bring in their lay values and concerns and construct a different frame for discussion of the issue (Goven, 2003).

Relevant questions at this stage

What information/preparation does the lay panel need in order to fulfil their tasks in the CC?

How can a balance be achieved between the acquisition of factual knowledge and other types of competences?

How is a fair and unbiased representation of a full range of issues in relation to the CC topic ensured?

What is needed in order to produce easily accessible and comprehensive introductory material?

3.2.8   The public phase of the conference

Objectives of the phase

A defining characteristic of a consensus conference is the deliberative interaction between the panel of lay people and the panel of experts. It has been criticised that some conference organisers and moderators have actively enforced this strict role-division between experts and lay people. Arguably lay people need not only be passive recipients of knowledge but can also contribute actively to the

creation of knowledge relevant for policy makers and the wider public (Purdue, 1995/1999). Our case studies indicate that the actual role-definition of both the lay panel and the experts vary significantly with the political culture of the context and the institutional embedding of the conference. Hence, prior to the event the organisers and moderators must reflect on what kind of interactions should be admitted and supported in the public proceedings, and what kind of results these interactions are expected to produce.

Especially in the eyes of the media and perhaps also in the perceptions of the participating experts, the consensus conference is likely to be understood as a one-way flow of information and learning from the experts to the lay people. However, some observers are keen to stress that the conferences are better understood as forums for interaction between expert communities and lay people in which the learning process should be mutual. They argue that consensus conferences can also be a means for the expert communities to achieve a better understanding of the concerns of 'ordinary people' in relation to their fields of expertise, which is important for the democratic governance of technology (Joss, 1998; Joss & Klüver, 2001). If this goal is accepted (which is not necessarily the case), it is important that the lay people - whom by now should be quite knowledgeable - are allowed to challenge the experts, both in regard to the normative presuppositions underlying their accounts and how they assess competing views in their field of expertise. This may need active support from the moderator.

The central task at this stage of the procedure will be to facilitate as rich a confrontation as possible of the knowledge (and perhaps values) of the experts with the everyday life competences and values of the lay people in a deliberative and dialogical manner. This requires that some argumentative and procedural ground rules are laid out and accepted by all participants and enforced by the moderator, e.g. in order to overcome pre-established status-hierarchies and facilitate a pleasant climate for the dialogue. Such ground must obviously be adjusted to the cultural context in which the conference is taking place. However, for a consensus conference to function, we suggest that the moderator as a minimum must ensure that members of the expert panel do not 'speak down' to the lay panel or indicate that they are asking the 'wrong kinds of questions'.

The interaction between the lay panel and the expert panel is taking place in public, i.e. the press is usually invited, as are politicians, central stakeholders and possibly interested citizens. It is important that interest in the event is generated in advance and that press material is available explaining the objectives of the conference as the organisers have defined them. If the conference is the first CC in its context, attention should also be devoted to explaining what a consensus conference is and what the underlying ideas of procedural format are.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider

An experienced, neutral moderator must be engaged to direct the procedure. It is important that the moderator is instructed in the ideas behind consensus conferences and the specific purposes of the conference the person is going to moderate. Significant communicative and process skills are required from the moderator, who can be either a professional consultant or a person of public standing, whose integrity and neutrality will be evident for the participants and the public alike.

Experience shows that the moderator need not be an expert in the topic. In fact it may be an advantage if the moderator does not represent a position of specialised knowledge or expertise in regard to the topic of the conference. It may be preferable but not essential that the moderator is acquainted with the lay panel in advance of the conference. This can be achieved by the moderator participating in (parts of) the preparatory weekends, for instance to support the lay panel in formulating the question to the experts independently of the organisers.

The actual consensus conference usually takes 3 or 4 days. Day one is usually reserved for the presentations of the expert panels, which can be expected to last 6 to 8 hours. Depending on the number of experts and the topics to be covered, these should give presentation of 15-30 minutes based on the questions already prepared by the lay panel, followed by a brief round of clarifying questions from the lay panel. It is important that the experts are instructed in presenting in terms comprehensible to ordinary people and that they stay within their allotted time slots.

Adequate breaks should be scheduled, both in order not to exhaust the lay panel and to allow for informal discussion among the participants. Some of the participants may not be used to or comfortable speaking to larger audiences and may wish for opportunities to ask clarifying questions. However, the moderator or the rest of the panel must weigh this option against the fundamental demand of transparency of the procedure and the danger of 'manipulation' that is not controlled. At the end of day one, the lay panel should meet in private to discuss which of their questions are still outstanding and whether new issues have emerged during the day for which further questioning of the experts is required. The moderator should facilitate this process, for instance by helping the panel to distribute issues among them to pursue the next day.

Day two is usually reserved for the lay panel 'cross-examining' the experts and debating with them. As the experts should be selected to represent a spectrum of expertises and positions, exchanges between the experts are likely to occur. This may be informative for the lay panel but it is important that the moderator ensures that the debate is set on the lay panel's terms and fulfils the

needs of the lay panel for information and assessments. Furthermore, the moderator needs to ensure that in this process, experts keep to the agreed upon rules.

Once the lay panel are satisfied with the interactions with the expert panel, the floor may be opened for questions from the audience to the experts. In this phase, it is important that the audience is not allowed to highjack the event, for instance by asking leading questions. If the conference is scheduled as a three-day event, the lay panel will retire to deliberate among themselves and write up the final document. If this is the case, it must be ensured that the cross-examination of the experts does not exceed half a day, leaving adequate time for the internal deliberation of the lay panel. If the conference is a four-day event, the third day can be reserved entirely to cross-examination. Obviously giving the lay panel more time to this task can ensure a higher quality of the document.

Relevant questions at this stage
What are perceived to be the respective roles of lay and expert panel members in the conference?
How can an open and fruitful confrontation between lay and expert panel members best be facilitated?
How is a pleasant climate ensured for these confrontations to take place?
In what ways can sufficient media/public/political attention be achieved for the conference?

3.2.9   Deliberations of the lay panel

Objectives of the phase
The internal deliberations of the lay panel are an important element in the consensus conference. This is where the insights achieved in the training period and the discussions with the experts is confronted with the values and 'common sense' of the laypersons and turned into assessments and recommendations for decision makers. Prior to the conference the organisers must make the expectations to the end product clear to the participants, for instance whether unanimity must be achieved on all points or conflicting statements are allowed. Obviously, the end product is likely to have more effect if people with very different backgrounds can reach unitary conclusions, but the document should not digress into platitudes on which everyone can agree.

In this phase particular attention must be devoted to the group dynamic of the lay panel. The moderator must ensure that no one dominates the discussions disproportionately and that all viewpoints are explored as thoroughly as time permits. Even if minority positions are accepted it should be kept in mind that a consensus conference in essence is an attempt to explore how far a diverse group

of people can 'travel together' on a controversial topic. It is important for the moderator to keep in mind that the conference is meant to be deliberative and that 'bones of contention' should be settled through argumentation among the participants, insofar as this is possible. Organisers should consider encouraging participants to find dialogical ways to terminate discussions, rather than resort to bargaining or voting. The final document will obviously be more valuable to policy-makers, etcetera, the more elaborate the reasoning behind the outcomes are documented, what issues were considered and on what grounds conclusions were reached.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
It is the task and responsibility of the lay panel to formulate in their own words what they have learned and what their evaluations and recommendations are. Experiences from past conferences indicate that the lay panels usually take their task as representatives of the public and alternative advisors to policy makers very serious. As such they are 'self-motivating' at this stage of the process. However, it should be kept in mind that the members of the panel may have no experiences with this kind of activity. Therefore, the role of the moderator in facilitating the process is essential. Adequate secretarial support is also important for the typing and editing of consecutive drafts of the document.

Experiences indicate that the process of agreeing on the wording of the final document can be a very prolonged and exhausting process for the lay panel, often continuing far into the night. Organisers must be prepared for this and ensure a pleasant working environment with adequate facilities and refreshments. In this phase, the role of the moderator is very delicate and must balance the need to achieve a result within a very constrained timeframe and not being excessively directive.

Possible pitfall: Central actors ignoring the agreed upon rules for the conference
It is important for the process and outcome of the conference that there is a common agreement between the lay panellists and the organisers about some basic rules for the deliberation. These may include e.g. the climate for debate (obligations to listen to others arguments as well as presenting ones own arguments), the importance of arguments and what tools may be used how in the process of reaching a consensus (advisory votes, discussions in thematic sub-groups, etc.) and norms for communicating with the press.

The Swiss consensus conference on gene technology and nutrition in 1999 demonstrated the importance of having agreed upon rules - and comply with them. As part of the process towards a consensus, the lay panel carried out an advisory vote. Votes may be a good procedure to clear the positions in the group and thus provide a better point of departure for further debate. However, a member of the lay panel told the press about the result of the vote and the PubliForum was, in the press coverage, to some extent reduced to the numbers of votes at the expense of qualitative arguments.

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3.2.10   Dissemination

Objectives of the phase
We have argued that it is important that the organisers have clarified for themselves and with their sponsors what the exact purpose of the conferences is. This will obviously influence the way the results should be disseminated. Nonetheless, some general considerations can be made. Independently of whether the primary purpose of having the conference is to feed (particular types) of recommendations into policy making institutions or to raise the awareness of the general public about a particular topic, or a combination of these and yet other purposes, the effects of a conference depends critically on the attention it receives. Therefore, a well-planned dissemination process is essential, both in regard to the events of the final conference day and subsequently. It is of critical importance that the planning of the dissemination process is integrated in the initial planning of the conference itself. The dissemination process should be taken into consideration from the very first stages of planning and organising the procedure, and not be seen as an add-on phase at the end of the conference.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
On the final day (3rd or 4th depending on the chosen length) the lay panel's document is presented to the interested policy makers, the press, interested stakeholders and (possibly) individual members of the public. At this point printed copies of the document should be available to those present. Often the members of the lay panel take turns reading aloud the document in its entirety. This symbolises the collective endeavour of the panel, but other solutions may be chosen if members of the panel do not feel comfortable speaking to large audiences. The expert panel is usually allowed to correct factual mistakes, but most organisers insist that the document must be respected as the product of the lay panel's deliberations, which should not be modified subsequently.

The organisers must consider in advance whom it would be appropriate to invite for the presentation, e.g. parliamentarians, stakeholders, etcetera Obviously, the conference is more likely to get media attention if the audience has a 'high profile' such as parliamentarians working on the topic, whose participation it may be a good idea to ensure in advance, although this may not

be possible for a variety of reasons. Members of the audience can now be given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to the lay panel, but the moderator must of course ensure that no intimidation is taking place. The organisers can consider whether particular members of the audience should be given priority in asking questions (e.g. politicians).

After the conference a report is usually issued. This should preferably happen a quickly as possible to benefit from the media attention (hopefully) generated by the conference in stimulating the interest of the targeted audiences. The report contains the final document of the lay panel (proof read but otherwise unaltered). In some cases the written material prepared by the expert panel (handouts, overheads, power point slides, etcetera) is included as background material. If the conference is the first of its kind in the context, an explanation and motivation of the method can also be included. This report should be distributed to interested parties, such as parliamentarians (all or members of the relevant subcommittees), relevant government departments, NGOs, stakeholders and the press and whomever else the organisers wish to reach with the outputs of the conference. A number of copies can be given to the members of the lay panel for personal use, just as the report should be available to all interested citizens either upon request or on the Internet.

Relevant questions at this stage

Are the appropriate addressees (stake holders, politicians, NGOs) invited for the presentation of the final document?

Is dissemination to the general public maximised (in terms of availability of the report, access to the public part of the conference, media coverage)?

3.2.11   Debriefing

Objectives of the phase

Some organisers choose to debrief the members of the lay panel a month or two after the conference. As the process is rather intense, a lot of issues may continue to occupy the participants in the time after the conference. This can concern the topic and the output of the conference, but it can also pertain to the process itself. The panel may also be quite interested to hear what has happened to the outcome of their effort, e.g. what kind of interest and reactions politicians and stakeholders have expressed. As such, the debriefing can be considered a gesture of politeness on the side of the organisers, a way of saying 'thanks for your participation', but if the organisers intend to carry out similar projects in the future a debriefing may also be an opportunity to collect valuable experiences to improve future conferences.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
A minimal debriefing could consist in just informing the members of the panel about the dissemination process, the responses received by the organisers from stakeholders, media coverage, etcetera in a letter. However, a proper debriefing will require that the panel is brought together again for half a day or so. The organisers should prepare this event. If such a debriefing is planned, resources most be made available to cover the expenses.

Relevant questions at this stage
How do the organisers assess the need for a debriefing of the lay panel and what should this entail?
How can such a debriefing best be organised to cater for the needs of the lay panel members?

3.2.12   Evaluation

Objectives of the phase
Not all consensus conferences are evaluated. If the conference is a known tool in the context and carried out by an experienced organising team, a formal evaluation may not be required. However, in contexts less familiar with the tool it may be an important lesson not only for the organising team (if they have intentions of carrying out further conferences in the future), it may also be essential to convince sponsors of the value of supporting such conferences by explicating and documenting what was actually achieved.

Activities of the phase and issues to consider
Evaluations can be done in many ways and be more or less extensive. It must be decided whether the evaluation should focus on internal or external aspects of the conference or both. Internal aspects pertain to the appropriateness of the selected experts, the quality of the interactions between the two panels, the competence of the moderation and the quality of the output. On this topic there is an emerging research literature where inspiration can be sought (e.g. Renn et al., 1995; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). External aspects pertain to the effects of the event, i.e. whether the relevant audiences were reached, satisfactory media resonance achieved and the evaluations and recommendations of the lay panel made a difference in the debates on the technology in question among policy makers, experts and the wider public. Here standard evaluation tools can be applied.

The evaluation can be carried out either by the organising team or be outsourced to external evaluators depending on budgetary restraints and the perceived need for independency of the evaluation. If external evaluation is

required, it is important that they are involved and able to monitor the process from as early on as possible. In this case clear agreements should be made between the organisers and evaluators on the tasks to be carried out and the methods to be applied. In case this involves sound or video recordings of the procedures, the acceptance of the participating lay people must be obtained in advance.

Whether the evaluation is focused on internal or external aspects and carried out by the project team or external evaluators, it is important that the conference is evaluated in relation to the goals formulated in advance. External evaluators must be aware of the premises on which the conference has been organised to deliver a precise evaluation. Likewise, if the conference is evaluated by the organising team, it may be worth confronting their post hoc perceptions of the conference with the aims originally formulated to explore whether the criteria of evaluation has been (or ought to be) changed in light of the experiences made.

Relevant questions at this stage
What would be the advantages of having an evaluation of the CC?
What should be the (primary) focus of the evaluation (internal or external aspects)?
Who should carry out the evaluation?

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Further reports

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