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Consensus Building for Environmental Sustainability: The Case of Lancashire

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Accepted Version

Doak, J. and Martin, A. (2002) Consensus Building for Environmental Sustainability: The Case of Lancashire. In: Gouldson, A. and Roberts, P. (eds.) Integrating Economic Development and Environmental Management: Strategies for Local Government. Routledge, London, pp. 224-241. ISBN 9781134703685 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/40937/

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Publisher: Routledge

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CONSENSUS BUILDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: THE CASE OF LANCASHIRE

Joe Doak, ***Department of Land Management and Development and School of Planning Studies, The University of Reading***
Angus Martin, ***Pieda plc***

1. Introduction

One of the key features of the drive for sustainable forms of development is the emphasis placed on holistic analysis and integrated action to tackle environmental, economic and social problems. This holism needs to be managed through a process which expands the range of people and interests which decide how these problems are defined and how they should be tackled. Figure 1 provides a definitional framework for sustainability which highlights these two aspects. The chapters in the book are all concerned with these (and other) dimensions of sustainable development; this chapter concentrates on the way in which the principle of 'participation' has been applied in one particular case. However, it raises lessons and issues which have general applicability and which ask difficult questions of attempts to integrate economic and environmental policies and practices through participatory decision-making processes.

One particular mechanism for achieving effective public involvement which has come to prominence in recent years has been that of 'consensus-building'. Consensus-building identifies areas of mutual gain and attempts to construct 'win-win' outcomes from the decision-making process. It builds on earlier attempts at community-based planning but attempts to expand the range of interests involved in order to address and resolve conflicts that exist. However, that process takes place in a political and economic context which has been structured by significant inequalities in power between individuals, social groups and organisations. The assumption that underpins this coming-together of unequal and conflicting parties is that there is one objective which everyone should be able to agree on; the requirement for all forms of economic and social development to be environmentally sustainable.

This chapter looks at the experience of the Lancashire Environmental Forum and the production of the Lancashire Environmental Action Programme (LEAP) as a consensus-building exercise. It begins by outlining a normative model of what consensus-building should involve; describes the application of these ideas in the Lancashire example; and then critically evaluates that experience both against the 'ideal' approach and in relation to more analytical ideas developed as part of a wider political economy of policy-making and implementation.

2. What is Consensus-Building?

In simple terms Acland (1993) describes consensus-building as a process which involves getting people together to talk about an area of mutual concern. He identifies five stages:

- **Assessment and Preparation** - The process begins with a thorough assessment of the current position. The existing processes, the issues and the people and parties to be involved in the process should be considered and these should be built into the participation strategy.

- **Initiation** - The assessment and preparation stage should give an indication of how to initiate the process. How to launch and fund the process is important, as is the venue for negotiation and the timing. Ground rules for the process and how participants will relate to their constituents should be considered.

- **Negotiation**, Exploration and Exchange - There is a need for neutral facilitators and mediators. Shared goals should be built upon. The means of generating and evaluating options must be considered.

- **Decision-making** - Once options have been thoroughly explored it is necessary for commitments to be made. Options should be 'reality tested' ie. who pays and implements them. The chosen options must be 'agreed' in some way.

- **Maintenance** - Once people are committed, the process must continue to function until at least some of the proposed solutions are known to be working.

The essence of the consensus-building process is that a negotiated agreement is not an end in itself. The process is just as important as the agreement it produces, if the agreement is to achieve the objectives of the participants, gain the commitment of implementors and provide for constructive relationships and future negotiation. The benefits of the consensus-building approach include:

- it allows participants to reach a common understanding of the rather difficult and politically contested concept of 'sustainable development';
- it aids implementation by providing a better sense of ownership than traditional 'top-down' policy impositions; and
- it mobilises wider support and concentrates on long term solutions which reduces the tendency toward the narrowly focused short-termism of party-political policy-making, government implementation programmes or market processes.

Others have been less optimistic about the contribution of consensus-building techniques and processes (Hardy,1990 and Marshall,1992). They argue that it:

- smoothers the inherent conflicts with bland compromise positions;

- involves covering-up the inequalities in power between participants;
- lacks the institutional framework (in the UK, at least) to achieve its objectives; and
- lacks continuity; consensus being a temporary and fragile social construct.

In order to evaluate this critique of consensus-building, it is useful to explore a recent attempt to progress environmental sustainability using this approach.

3. Consensus-Building: The Practice

The approach used in Lancashire, in which a forum has been used to formulate and implement an environmental action programme, has received international recognition (ICLEI, 1995).

The Lancashire Environmental Forum was established by Lancashire County Council in December 1989. It now comprises over 80 organisations drawn from national government departments and agencies, industry and unions, local government, interest groups and academic establishments (see Figure 2). Membership is voluntary. Forum members have provided the basis for data collection, acted as the main decision-making mechanism and are the key instrument through which proposals will be implemented.

The new environmental agenda for Lancashire has been progressed in four stages (see Figure 3):

- Stage 1: the production of a state of the environment report for the County, 'Lancashire: A Green Audit', in 1990.
- Stage 2: the production of Lancashire Environmental Action Programme (LEAP) in 1993; a consensus-orientated Local Agenda 21.
- Stage 3: implementation of the 203 proposals in LEAP over periods of between five and fifteen years.
- Stage 4: monitoring and review of both the Green Audit and the LEAP.

The LEAP was produced over three years. The main mechanisms used were:

- Interactive Days which, due to the large numbers involved, were only held about twice a year. These are formal meetings, held at the County Council and chaired by a leading County Councillor.
- Specialist Working Group (SWG) meetings held outside the County Council and consisting of 10 to 15 individuals functioning as an informal workshop. The SWGs used 'brain-storming' methods to generate ideas and provoke discussion.
- The Officer Steering Group (OSG), meeting more regularly and, like the SWGs, operating on an informal and participative basis. The agenda for the OSG meetings was circulated to all members of the Forum for their information and each organisation had the opportunity to include items on the agenda.

The relationship between the Forum and the County Council is illustrated in Figure 4. This structure of communication and influence was established in order to introduce relatively formal lines of responsibility and reporting to what otherwise might have proven to be a chaotic informal talking shop. However, this structure did cause subsequent problems in terms of 'ownership', which will be discussed in the next section.

The LEAP process was one of the first initiatives in the UK (and indeed the World) to apply the principles of sustainable development through a Local Agenda 21 exercise. The key features of the process have been:

- the inclusion of a relatively broad range of interests in the decision-making process leading to the preparation of the Action Programme;
- the use of a consensus-building type exercise to reach agreement on the key issues and proposed actions;
- the relatively informal and co-operative nature of many of the meetings and events leading-up to the final document; and
- the action-orientated emphasis of the process and the final Programme.

Figure 4: The Administrative Framework Co-ordinating Lancashire's Approach to the New Environmental Agenda

4. Evaluating the LEAP Experience

In evaluating the work of the Forum on the LEAP we have used Acland's framework as an initial starting point. However, later on we expand our considerations to place this kind of policy-making process in its wider politico-economic context. The main issues that arise from Acland's ideal-type can be evaluated according to the six stages he outlined.

Assessment and Preparation

As the first step in the four stage process, the development of the Green Audit provided an important baseline of information on which to develop the action programme. There is a wide acceptance by the Forum members of the Green Audit as the key source of information for LEAP, in part because the Forum members were the main information gatherers. Effective participative techniques were used in the consultation process. This enabled members to check the factual accuracy of the Green Audit and allowed both the public and Forum members to be involved in the design of LEAP, by prioritising the issues to be addressed.

The issues covered by the Green Audit recognise the cross sectoral requirements of the new environmental agenda, with economic and health issues being raised alongside environmental considerations. The Environment Unit was responsible, however, for assimilating the information and drawing out the key issues. The Forum, therefore, was rather more indirectly involved in the identification of the key issues than would be expected in a consensus-building process.

The voluntary approach to membership was successful in attracting the involvement and interest of the key sectors. Although the general high level of interest in the environment in the late eighties contributed to the involvement of all the key sectors, the success clearly illustrates a demand for greater participation in environmental decision-making. The one sector weakly represented is that of industry. Although seen to represent a substantial proportion of the membership in Figure 2, the bulk of the participants are representative organisations, such as chambers of commerce, rather than individual businesses. Individual businesses are a vital instrument for implementation and without their involvement from the beginning some members have questioned the credibility of the process.

From the early stages of the process business interests perceived the County Council as having a strong environmental and anti-industry stance. This led to a feeling that they were not being regarded as equal partners. As a result, the Forum was not regarded as a high priority even by those companies who had their own environmental initiatives and were keen to improve their environmental performance.

Central government organisations were well represented on the Forum, although, they tended not to take an overly active role. The Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport both made clear their 'observer' status, while the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food and the Department of Energy (now incorporated into the Department of Trade and Industry) limited their involvement to one of ensuring that debate was well informed, rather than taking a proactive role.

The interest group sector would also seem to be well represented on the Forum. However, as much as 70 percent of the interest groups are organisations which are nationally or regionally based (such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Friends of the Earth) and only 30 percent are local organisations (see Appendix 1). As a

result, the interest group sector is dominated by what can be regarded as the 'institutional' voluntary sector.

The design of the structure of the process is one of the key areas of success. The co-ordination of over eighty organisations is very difficult, yet the structure of the specialist working groups co-ordinated by a steering committee has formed a useful framework. The selection criteria for the OSG has, however, resulted in a large number of local authority representatives and in particular representatives of the County Council (see Appendix 2). Although it is important to have interested parties involved in the steering committee, a poor representation of all sectors is a concern given the considerable responsibilities and influence of the OSG. Another feature is the low representation of specifically 'environmental' interest groups (3 out of 23 OSG members). This might seem rather ironic given the previously mentioned perception of the County Council as pro-environment and anti-industry.

Initiation

As the lead organisation in the process, Lancashire County Council has always been faced with the problem of 'ownership'. For the process to have credibility throughout the community it should not be regarded as a County Council initiative. This has proved to be especially important given the low opinion of local and central government held by local residents which was exposed by a social survey undertaken by Lancaster University (Lancashire County Council, 1995) Although the problem has been recognised, (for example, the launch of the programme was not at the County Hall) the process has had difficulty in removing the perception that the County Council owns the process. Industry in particular has been suspicious of the lead role of the County Council. The Green Audit was very much a County Council document and, as a follow-on, LEAP is perceived to be a County Council document.

Paradoxically, without the strong political leadership of the County Council the whole process would probably not have got off the ground. The considerable political support ensured that resources were made available for the County Council to service the Forum. Similarly, as the County Council is a key implementing agency and an important user of resources itself, it was necessary that the political decision-makers agreed with the objectives of the process.

Financial support for the Forum has always been a problem. Public spending constraints and the effects of recession on business, combined with the non-availability of funds in the voluntary sector, have resulted in a continuing dependence on the County Council to service and organise the Forum. Such a position of dependence does nothing to alleviate the problems of ownership and dependence faced by the Forum.

With respect to the timing of the process, the Forum has managed to keep to the schedules agreed and a remarkable amount of work has been achieved in the time. At the level of individual meetings, however, there has been less success. All meetings are

held during normal working hours and therefore not all the groups who would like to be present have been able to attend. The local interest groups have suffered in particular, with the voluntary representatives finding it hard enough to allocate time to there voluntary work without committing more time to be represented at Forum meetings.

Similarly, the councillor representatives of local authorities and other organisations have found it difficult to attend meetings unless they are already retired or have very sympathetic employers. There is a concern that existing links between organisations are simply being strengthened rather than encouraging new ones and that only the institutional voluntary sector is being represented with a more limited input from voluntary groups at the local level. However, the involvement of local interests in county-wide Local Agenda 21 exercises has been difficult in many other parts of the country given the tendency for these fora to concentrate on issues of a strategic nature.

The majority of the organisations contributing to the LEAP process have no formal and often only weakly developed informal feedback mechanisms for relaying information and experiences back to the constituents of their organisations. It would appear that at no point in the process have participants been made to agree or demonstrate how they propose to keep their constituents informed. As a result, although individuals may agree on an issue there may only be a limited affect on the functioning of the whole organisation a participant is representing. The problem of poor feedback mechanisms is further compounded by the changing nature of organisation representatives. Some of the larger organisations, in particular the national government agencies, do not have a regular representative who contributes to the process.

Negotiation: Exploration and Exchange

The majority of the participants have nothing but positive comments to make on the process of consensus-building used for negotiation, information exchange and the exploration of ideas in the SWGs. Participants generally found the process very constructive and many even 'enjoyed' taking part. Many were surprised at the amount of common ground which was identified during the discussions and the level of awareness and understanding of differing views that could be gained.

Perhaps inevitably some have suggested the process involved too much talking and not enough action and, in particular, those involved in formal politics found the process to be rather slow. Although perhaps valid, such comments are inevitable due to the unfamiliarity with the process of consensus-building. Individuals and organisations are more used to working within existing hierarchical structures, which they are familiar and with which they have had success in the past. As with anything new, there are likely to be those who are not readily convinced.

In Lancashire the quality of the consensus gained by the SWGs varied between the four groups, with some groups producing much more challenging and innovative ideas. The

variations were a result of the different contributions by the individuals and the ability of each participant to adapt to the consensus approach. The contribution of individuals clearly influences the quality of the consensus achieved. The process ensures, however, that if nothing else, the less innovative groups did produce a level of agreement and the participants were better informed about some of the issues.

The role of the mediators, or lack of them, also played an important part in the quality of the consensus. Mediators should have a key role in ensuring that the generation and evaluation of options works to its full potential. However, the Environment Unit officers who were forced to take this role were perceived as having an implicit County Council bias. Thus, the SWGs lacked the direction and independence that a 'non-partisan' mediator could have offered. In the context of the complex range of interests involved in Local Agenda 21, this casts some doubt on the ability of local government officers to develop a role as 'empowering professionals' as suggested by Forrester (1989)

Decision-Making

Once the options have been fully discussed there comes the point where commitment by the participants is required. The use of the interactive day to test the draft proposals in workshop sessions was a good participative technique, which enabled all members of the Forum to contribute to the development of the draft programme. The success of the process can be tested to some extent by examining the response received from the consultation exercise which followed.

Although the response to the consultation exercise was limited, with 65 of the 82 members not responding, this could be regarded as a positive indication as to the success of the process. Indeed, many of the representatives of the organisations interviewed had been continually involved in the process of consensus-building and felt that no further comments were required. The responses that were received were categorised by the Environment Unit and are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Draft LEAP Consultation Response

Response	**Total Number**	**%**
Support Proposal Outright	57	22
Seek Clarification	13	5
Observation	43	17
Suggested modification	83	32
Outright Rejection	62	24
Total	258	100

As much as 24 percent of the responses were, however, an outright rejection, which indicates that the early consensus-building approaches were not entirely successful. A major contributing factor to the rejections was the inability to get all Forum members contributing equally and being represented on the SWGs. However, the fact that some of the rejections were based on the level of detail contained in the draft programme is an indication that the process has clearly produced something more than bland platitudes. Furthermore, considering that 40 percent of the proposals were not commented on at all and out of the responses received over 40 percent were points of observation, clarification or outright support, the draft programme has achieved a good level of consensus between the diversity of Forum members.

The level of consensus achieved has, however, been variable. Unanimous agreement has been achieved for a number of the proposals yet a significant number do not attain such a high level of support. Many of the Forum members have their own environmental initiatives and agree to a LEAP proposal only if the proposal does not contradict or cause problems for their existing policies. Furthermore, in some cases the OSG has used a definition of consensus which is based on at least 50 percent of the members agreeing to an issue or proposal. Although not always the case, a decision could be taken with quite a low level of agreement, especially if the OSG is keen to promote it.

The need for practical and implementable proposals was recognised within the decision-making process. The proposals were 'reality tested' by examining the level of funding required and the organisations which might be involved in implementing them. Dealing with the financial issues, however, was clearly complex and was only considered to a limited extent. The issue of responsibility was addressed more directly, however, with the implementing agencies clearly identified next to each proposal in the final document.

The principles of consensus-building suggest that all participants must be prepared to put their name to the document. If any participant is unwilling to 'sign up' then the issues should be opened-up for further negotiation. However, in Lancashire the items which could not be agreed have been included in the final text of LEAP and mechanisms have been set up to tackle these 'disputes' as part of an on-going process. This reflects the strong desire of Forum members to move from talk into action as quickly as possible.

Maintenance

Contexts and circumstances change and a number of robust review structures have been set up in Lancashire which recognise the need to monitor change and adapt the response as required. In the case of the deferred issues, for example, opportunities for re-negotiation are being organised. To date, the informally constituted framework of the Forum has provided the necessary organisation context for the process. However,

there are two key threats to the maintenance of this achievement: local government re-organisation and problems and delays with implementation.

The outcome of Local Government Review in Lancashire is still uncertain with the possibility of unitary authorities being created, at least for parts of the County. The informal nature of the Forum has been satisfactory so far, given the political support from the County. If this support was weakened through local government re-organisation, however, the Forum may no longer have the strength to survive without some kind of formal status or organisational backing. Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding local government reorganisation has pushed Local Agenda 21 activity further down the list of priorities for the majority of district authorities.

A legally constituted format may also be essential for the implementation stage of the process. To attract funding or to lobby central government will require even stronger co-operative working than has already been achieved. Lobbying of central government cannot be seen to come from the County Council and funding sources such as the EC may question the long term status of the Forum without a constituted body to manage and control any funding which is secured.

So far implementation has not been as successful as hoped. One problem is the fluctuating interest in the environment since the initial upsurge of the late eighties. This is compounded by the fact that some participants feel that the production of the LEAP document is an end in itself rather than being just the beginning of the process. It has been difficult retaining the commitment of participants after the production of the final document because there are no clear objectives for the process. As an illustration, the third interactive day which assessed how best to take the process forward was characterised by very poor attendance and, similarly, the response rate to the annual review questionnaire has been very slow.

One of the main proposals, for the development of a number of 'Centres for Environmental Excellence', has made progress. The most advanced centre is the one proposing to specialise in industry. The centre's key aim is to reach the under-represented sector of industry. Given that industry needs to see some kind of short term benefit and that they are generally suspicious of long term strategies, this may be the only realistic way to encourage industry to become equal partners. Another five CEE have been accepted by the Forum and a further six have now been worked-up. The initial six centres placed a bid for funding under the European Union's LIFE programme during 1995/96.

Since the Forum has no power to impose the agreed consensus and force action, implementation is inevitably difficult. The programme has, however, only been in place for a short period so it is still too early to really judge its overall impact. The process in Lancashire has been well structured and its incremental nature has ensured that the Forum have not taken on too much at once. A number of weaknesses have been identified in this section although, in general, the practice in Lancashire has a close

affinity with the principles developed by Acland and, as such, can be regarded as a moderately successful consensus-building process.

5. Consensus and Economic Interests

One of the clear lessons coming from the LEAP example is the difficulty of integrating key economic interests into the consensus-building process at the local level. Despite the rhetoric of 'economic partnership' which pervades the statements of government policy and the pages of various economic and policy journals, there appears to be little evidence, either in Lancashire or elsewhere, that business involvement in Local Agenda 21 has been substantial or comprehensive. This is worrying given the whole emphasis of Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) to expand the input of business and community interests in this global process of sustainable development.

Many writers have sought to explain this, and other, feature(s) of 'public' policy using ideas about 'policy processes' (Healey 1990) and 'policy networks' (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). This puts emphasis on the fragmented nature of state institutions and the varied avenues through which policy is negotiated, agreed and implemented. In both cases a typology of possible avenues has been constructed and these are briefly outlined in Tables 2 and 3, together with their application to the evidence from Lancashire.

LEAP fits a little uncomfortably into these frameworks and this, in itself, is interesting. It aspires towards open democratic debate and an open issue network but has been modified through various pressures into a more closed decision-making process, at least at certain stages and through certain sub-organisational arrangements. An example of this is the particular role of the OSG at the core of the policy network. Here we find a relatively close set of inter-personal linkages where resources are exchanged and the agenda is set for the rest of the network. At the periphery, in the wider Forum, minutes of meetings are received for comment and a process of consultation, rather than participation, is progressed. Furthermore, as the Environmental Forum begins to implement its action programme, subtle changes are taking place in the composition of interests involved. Bargaining between the key implementation agencies appears to be replacing the more open debate that characterised the production of LEAP.

Another implication of using these (related) frameworks is that it draws our attention to other possibilities. Thus, just because business interests are not engaging enthusiastically with the LEAP process, does not mean that they are excluding themselves from influencing environmental policy. Indeed there is evidence from the interviews in Lancashire to show that business interests feel they can be most effective at furthering their particular interests in this field by interacting with policy-makers at more regional or national levels. On a day-to-day basis, it comes down to asking themselves whether it is worth the effort. The Centre of Environmental Excellence appears to provide distinct (commercial?) benefits, whilst the 'talking-shop' of the Environmental Forum was less useful.

Table 2: A Typology of Policy Processes and the Lancashire Case

Policy Process	Policy and Action Determined by....	Lancashire Case
Clientelist	....the use of patronage in return for direct political support.	No evidence of this. Could creep in during decision-making on details of project beneficiaries from County Council initiatives.
Politico-Rational	....the judgement of politicians in the formal areanas of representative democracy.	County Council committees (Policy and Resources and Planning) formally 'approved' LEAP and politicians chaired the 'set-piece' Interactive Days. However, most of the decisions were taken outside the formal areanas of representative democracy, albeit with political support.
Pluralist Politics	....political debate among pressure groups, with politicians determining the balance of advantage in political terms.	Regionally-constituted pressure groups were influential in debating process but politicians did not mediate the outcomes to any significant extent.
Open Democratic	....open 'rational' debate, where all affected parties discuss the advantages and disadvantages of particular courses of action and reach agreement without domination.	The policy process most clearly sought after in the LEAP process; but not all interests represented or involved at all stages. Lancashire County County found it difficult to relinquish 'bureaucratic' or 'politico-rational' ownership and business interests suspicious of this.
Bargaining	....negotiation with specific groups over a specific issue where mutual dependency between the group and the state is involved.	An increasing feature as LEAP moves into implementation stage.
Special Committees	....discussion and debate by a selected group of experts with a relatively well-defined agenda.	LEAP rejected the tight selection of key interests and agenda items; features which have characterised some attempts to develop 'specialist' components of LA21 in other parts of the country.
Corporatist	....negotiation of a wide range of issues over a long period with specified representatives of specified ('functionally' defined) organisations.	Corporatist negotiation not accepted as appropriate policy process for LA21. However, Officer Working Group is dominated by functional interests and there are other important 'alternative' avenues for them to influence economic, development and environmental policies at the local, regional and national level.
Bureaucratic/ Legal	....the application of formal procedural and legal rules.	Key role of County Council officers and committees instils an residual 'bureaucratic' flavour to the LEAP process.
Judicial/ Semi-Judicial	....formal hearings which consider the arguments of conflicting interests, with an assessor balancing their relative merits.	Not part of the LEAP process; but could be a significant influence on the 'feedback' to LEAP from planning inquiries and the Examination in Public of the County Structure Plan.
Techno-Rational	....the judgement of experts and scientific reasoning.	Influenced the LEAP process, but not a key feature. Possibly more important during implementation (eg. the rationale and requirements developed for the Centres of Excellence)
Market-Rational	....market or quasi-market mechanisms using the principles of supply and demand.	Playing an increasingly important role in implementation; despite the rhetoric of demand management under-pinning the new environmental agenda.

Source: based on Healey (1990) and Healey, et. al. (1988)

Table 3: A Typology of Policy Networks and the Lancashire Case

Network Criteria	Policy Community	Issue Network	Lancashire Network
No. of participants	Limited number with some conscious exclusion	Large	Large number with no conscious exclusion
Type of interest	Professional/ occupancy of a senior position	Encompasses a wide range of interest groups	Encompasses a wide range of interest groups, but limited local and business interest involvement
Continuity	Consistent membership and values	Fluctuating access	Consistent membership with some degree of fluctuation, particularly of individual representatives
Frequency of interaction	Frequent/high quality	Contacts fluctuate in quality and frequency	Infrequent interaction but well structured
Consensus	Participants share basic values	A degree of agreement but conflict present	Initial conflict but a level of consensus achieved
Nature of Relationship	All participants have resources, relationship is one of exchange	Some participants have resources, but limited	All participants have some resources; relationship is one of exchange
Nature of interaction	Negotiation over direction of policy	Consultation, with limited input to policy outcome	Negotiation over direction of policy
Power	Balance among members, mutual expansion of power	Unequal power, winners and losers	Balance among members; mutual expansion of power (at least during policy-making)
Structure of participating organisations	Membership will accept agreement	Variable capacity to regulate members	Variable capacity to regulate members

Source: based on Marsh and Rhodes (1992)

This cautious approach will only be modified if institutional power is seen to be important at the level of the County; at present there is little evidence of this. However, power is a dynamic entity and if important economic policy decisions are transferred to this level of government, then the pendulum could be swayed.

Currently there appears to be some moves to allow this shift in power. Three aspects are worthy of mention: the encouragement of a plan-led system of decision making for planning; the weight now being placed on locally-generated strategies for major Central Government and European funding programmes; and the blessing given to local economic development initiatives by Central Government. It has to be stressed that these trends are fraught with the usual problems of inconsistent application; Central Government retrenchment, caution or apathy; and the ever-present tendency

to ad-hocism and opportunism which can undermine 'agreed' policy. However, there is little doubt that they have helped increase the role and influence of local policy networks, at some expense to the traditional communities of economic policy-making at higher levels of the state apparatus.

6. Conclusion

What does this package of analysis and contemplation mean for the process of consensus building and its contribution to sustainable forms of economic and social development? Firstly, it is obvious from the LEAP example that particular care needs to be taken in devising an approach which is effective in building a locally agreed agenda. In particular it needs to give attention to **all** the dimensions raised by Acland. In the case of LEAP the lack of independent mediators meant that the County Council found it difficult to distance itself from the 'ownership' of the process. This was especially unfortunate given its perceived anti-industry stance in the eyes of the business community. Other local councils (eg. Gloucestershire and Reading) have benefited from the use of independent facilitators in the development of their Local Agenda 21 fora.

Secondly, in order to make policy and implementation processes meaningful and worthwhile there needs to be a measure of subsidiarity in resource and power terms which attracts the necessary stake-holders into the consensus-building process. This appears to have been a reason for the low input from businesses in Lancashire. Similar attitudes pervade the development industry (Carter and Darlow, 1994) although the other chapters in this book suggest that much can be achieved given the right conditions. Local government reorganisation is likely to have mixed impacts in this respect. In areas where unitary authorities are being established the concentration of local government service provision will enhance the potential influence of environmental fora on certain key resources and powers. However, it will also dissipate the energy of local and regional organisations who may be asked to get involved in numerous local fora, rather than a single county-wide forum.

Finally, effective consensus-building requires an institutional design which prioritises open debate and broad policy networking **at the expense** of more closed types of policy processes and networks. If these alternative policy processes are available for certain interests and state agencies to by-pass meaningful public involvement in decision-making and possibly undermine those 'agreements' then the confidence in, and commitment to the consensus-building process will ebb away. This requirement is, of course, closely linked to the second point above; without some significant elements of local autonomy there is little incentive to seek common agreement over the use of locally determined powers and resources. Ironically, one of the reasons for the development of locally-based corporatism in the past has been the important role of local government in certain key economic development activities, such as land use planning, employment training, industrial development and transport (Simmie and King 1990).

Despite the very cautious set of conclusions listed above, there is no doubt that the central rationale of sustainable development continues to offer hope for the growth of broad, participatory policy networks. Thus, the inter-related set of environmental problems we all face means that any 'secondary' conflicts of interest should, in the final instance, be subsumed under the broad umbrella of consensus necessary to tackle them. Following this line of argument, it is in everyone's best interest to promote sustainable development and the search for consensus that this entails. Whether this can work 'in the first instance' in the various fora being developed around the world is still uncertain!

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Appendix 1: Lancashire Environment Forum Membership (1993)

- ***National Government Departments and Agencies***
  - Department of Environment
  - Department of Energy (now DTI)
  - Department of Transport
  - Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
  - English Nature
  - Countryside Commission
  - National Rivers Authority
  - British Waterways Board
  - The Forestry Authority
  - Health and Safety Executive

- ***Business and Industry***
  - Confederation of British Industry
  - National Chamber of Trade
  - Central and West Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and Industry
  - Lancaster and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry
  - Burnley and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry
  - North West Water PLC
  - National Power
  - Nuclear Electric PLC
  - British Nuclear Fuels PLC
  - British Coal Corporation
  - British Gas PLC
  - British Railways Board
  - Lancashire Enterprises PLC
  - NORWEB PLC
  - Lancashire Association of Trade Councils
  - TUC North West Region
  - National Farmers Union

- ***Local Government in Lancashire***
  - Lancashire County Council
  - Blackburn Borough Council
  - Blackpool Borough Council
  - Burnley Borough Council
  - Chorley Borough Council
  - Fylde Borough Council
  - Hyndburn Borough Council
  - Lancaster City Council
  - Pendle Borough Council
  - Preston Borough Council
  - Ribble Valley Borough Council
  - Rossendale Borough Council
  - South Ribble Borough Council
  - West Lancashire District Council
  - Wyre Borough Council
  - Association of Parish and Town Councils
  - Community Council of Lancashire
  - Lancashire Constabulary
  - North West Regional Health Authority

Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Authority
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Health Authority
West Lancashire Health Authority
Preston Health Authority
RADMIL - Radioactive Monitoring In Lancashire
Lancaster Health Authority
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Health Authority

- **Interest Groups**
  County Landowners Association
  Greenpeace
  Friends of the Earth
  Save the Heart of Lancashire
  Lancashire Wildlife Trust
  Council for the Protection of Rural England
  Federation of Lancashire Civic Societies
  Pendle Heritage Centre Trust
  Lancashire County Trust for Conservation Volunteers
  Association of District Councils
  Agriculture Development Advisory Service
  Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
  The Civic Trust in the North West
  The Tidy Britain Group
  Transport 2000
  North West Federation of Sport, Conservation and Recreation
  National Society for Clean Air
  Town and Country Planning Association
  Soil Association
  North West Research
  Fylde Environmental Watch
  The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
  Blackpool Transport
  Bus and Coach Council

- **Academic Establishments**
  Lancaster University
  University of Central Lancashire
  Edge Hill College of Higher Education
  Lancashire College of Agriculture and Horticulture

Appendix 2: The Composition of the Officers Steering Group (early 1990s)

Organisation	Sector	Number of Representatives
Lancashire County Council	Local Authority	4
Association of District Councils	Local Authority	4
Department of Environment	National Government Organisation	1 (Observer)
National Rivers Authority	National Government Organisation	1
Nature Conservancy Council	National Government Organisation	1
TUC (North West)	Industry	1
Lancashire Enterprises Ltd	Industry	1
Chamber Commerce & Industry	Industry	1
North West Water plc	Industry	1
Friends of the Earth	Interest Group	1
Council Protection of Rural England	Interest Group	1
Lancashire Trust Nature Conservation	Interest Group	1
County Landowners Association	Interest Group	1
Lancashire University	Academic Institution	1
Association of Parish Councils	Local Authority	1
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food	National Government Organisation	1
National Farmers Union	Industry	1