

# **People empower each other, information technology helps only in facilitating them**

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# Programme

- Introduction: Environmental NGO and lecturer in IT
- Issues of community activist groups
- Experiences of activist groups
- Facilitating role of IT
- Empowering people
- Building trust

# Environmental NGO and lecturer in IT

- Environmental association, working on issues that need expert knowledge;
- Supporting local community groups;
- Issues: permits of companies, public participation, air pollution, right to know and nanotechnology;
- Building webportals to facilitate community groups access by giving them access to information on air quality and in a wikipedia like manner collaboration possibilities;
- Specialization in Knowledge and Content Management.



# Issues of community activist groups

- Preventing a high school to be build near a motorway;
- To stop the odour nuisance from a mega farm;
- Conserving the little parks in the town
- Preventing the realization of a LPG station near a railway used heavily for the transport of hazardous materials

# Activist groups

- Group is formed by a few active volunteers and a bigger group of sympathizers
- Active people are passionate and with strong focus
- They learn a lot the hard way (by trial and error)
- Are well educated, middle class, age 40+
- Have hardly funding
- Sometimes have a temporary existence

Have (when well organized en well informed) a big impact on enforcement of environmental regulations

# Information need of activist groups

To be effective groups need a lot of knowledge on

- legal procedures
- environmental effects
- possible technical measures
- how to organize itself as an activist group

Important:

Information needs to be customized - advice

# Trust issues

- Generally speaking groups have a mistrust towards (local) authorities
- They feel powerless and tend to feel frustrated
- Working with other organizations is difficult even if they share the aims and objectives
  - emotions involved
  - lack of strategic insight

# Facilitating role of IT

- Provide information on legal, technical, environmental issues
- Contact information of other groups and **possible partners** (but 50% of activist groups often have no websites themselves)
- Web 2.0 tools for collaboration are great, “but why should I help you, I am very busy myself already”



# Empowering people

- Create opportunities for knowledge transfer and networking (personal contact)
- Provide access to (volunteer) experts that can give advice
- Make “stories” of activist groups available
- Build communities of groups that **trust** each other. This costs time and (till now) does not happen spontaneously

# Communities and potential use of IT

- Build trust networks
- Groups feel less powerless and less frustrated
- Are better informed and know their possibilities

## *Benefits*

- Stronger bonds in society
- More awareness on environmental issues in a local context

# Building trust, a few remarks

- Be transparent about objectives
- Take time (building trust can take years)
- Listen
- Invest in personal relations  
(networking)

# My questions...

- Do these experiences reflect the situation in other countries?
- Are these experiences from the day to day practice compatible with theoretical findings?