Evaluation of a Multi-National Peer Review Process for Progressing Sustainability in European Cities (The PRESUD Project)

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A NOTE TO THE GENERAL READER ON THE READING OF THIS EVALUATION

1. The Contents List shows at a glance what was done, the main areas of investigation and the main findings. The section titles within the Findings are sometimes deliberately phrased as judgements that attempt to convey, simply but approximately, what has been found within that section. Read the Contents first. The document divides into Parts A, B and C.

2. Part A is a Summary with Recommendations. It contains a brief executive summary with key points and recommendations, and a full summary of methodology and findings with additional notes on the recommendations. The summaries can be read as stand-alone overviews, and can be cut from this larger document and circulated more widely. They do not present any evidence. If detached and circulated the larger report should always be referenced and there should be a means for others to access it. Read the Summary if nothing else.

3. Part B & C. Part B contains the essential background: the Introduction and the Evaluation Methodology. Part C contains the indicative Evaluation Evidence and Findings. These are necessarily large sections. Firstly, the methodology must be explicit so others can criticise or support it as findings and their limitations come out of the methodology. Secondly, this is primarily a *qualitative* evaluation; the many statements of the many different participants *are* the evidence. It cannot be significantly reduced without losing significant evidence (in my view). Nevertheless it must be noted this is still a selective interpretation of much data that is *not* recorded (30 one-hour interviews alone would require 600 pages). Therefore I have selected extracts that I believe covey something of the collective nature of the participant's experiences. The digital findings are also colour coded as questions: red=weakness? green=strength? pink=fact? blue= improvement?. I would encourage readers to draw their own interpretations. Read Part B & C selectively; perhaps those sections that interest you most, or those you agree or disagree with (after viewing the Contents and Summary).

4. A Final Note. The evaluation is limited, but I believe it exceeds what local government and EU programmes often do with evaluation: ignore it, bluff it, or do it badly so it shows how well everything went. This evaluation is essentially one that critically comments on the process, methodology, assumptions, aims, inputs, outcomes, and project potential, from the viewpoint of participants in the project with the aim to improve these in future. The evaluation had no aim to judge the participants: the project managers, teams and team managers, coordinators and city stakeholders - and now the evaluation is complete, my view of participants (incidentally) is entirely positive. Furthermore, without these people this evaluation would not have been possible; there would be nothing to evaluate and nobody to do it. Any conclusions the reader may draw which are critical of the participants are therefore not my conclusions and I would not wish to be associated with them.

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Evaluation of a Multi-National Peer Review Process for Progressing Sustainability in European Cities (The PRESUD Project)

PART A: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Executive Summary: Key Findings

The full summary of findings is contained in the full evaluation report. The ten key points below are drawn from that more detailed summary.

1. POSITIVE OVERALL QUALIFIED SUPPORT FOR PRESUD, FOR ITS CONTNUATION AND EXPANSION IN REVISED FORM (Chapter4)

2. PARTICIPANTS WISH FOR REVISION AND SIMPLIFICATION OF METHODOLOGY TO BE LESS UK-AUDIT FOCUSED, MORE FLEXIBLE AND MORE PARTICIPATIVE (Chapter 5)

3. REVIEW PREPARATION OF TEAMS AND CITIES FOR REVIEWS JUDGED VARIABLE AND CAN BE IMPROVED (Chapter 6)

4. VARIABLE VIEWS ON QUALITATIVE DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS: OPPORTUNITY FOR USE OF GOOD EVALUATION PRACTICE (Chapter 8 & 13).

5. IMPACT OF LANGUAGE, CONTEXT AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES REDUCE REVIEW EFFECTIVENESS AND VALIDITY. REQUIRES STAKEHOLDERS TO BETTER VALIDATE REVIEW FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Section 8.2)

6. IMPROVEMENTS IN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & DATA GATHERING POSSIBLE THROUGH PARALLEL WEB-BASED REVIEW. (Chapter 7 & 11)

7. REVIEW REPORTS AN ISSUE; PEER REVIEW IMPACT SEVERELY REDUCED IN EFFECTIVENESS IN MANY CASES, SUGGESTS NEED FOR BETTER INVOLVEMENT OF CITY STAKEHOLDERS IN DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION (Chapter 9)

8. SIGNIFICANT UNMEASURABLE QUALITATIVE CHANGE ON PEOPLE DIRECTLY INVOLVED AND ADMINISTRATION, HIGHLY VALUED BY PARTICIPANTS (Section 10.4) NEED TO DEVELOP THESE.

9. LITTLE (OR DISPUTED) EVIDENCE OF MEASURABLE AND ATTRIBUTABLE CHANGE AND IMPACT OUTSIDE THE ADMINISTRATION UPON THE WIDER CITY & A NEED TO MAKE MORE REALISTIC CLAIMS (Section 10.5)

10. WIDESPREAD ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL FOR LEARNING POSSIBLE AND DESIRED BY STAKEHOLDERS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT OWNERSHIP AND BEST-PRACTICE TRANSFER. (Chapter 12)

1.2 Executive Summary: General Recommendations

The General Recommendations draw upon strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, noted in the evaluation findings, and also participant suggestions for change and improvement. They are guidelines to give direction to revision and aims, and are discussed briefly in Section 1.6.

1. SUPPORT A SECOND STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT TO CONTINUE, EXTEND AND DEVELOP A REVISED AND IMPROVED PRESUD

2. REDUCE AND REVISE METHODOLOGY: SHIFT AWAY FROM UK-AUDIT APPROACH TO A MORE FLEXIBLE AND PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH

3. CREATE A PARALLEL WEB REVIEW TO IMPROVE PREPARATION, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS, AND REPORT DEVELOPMENT.

4. SHIFT EMPHASIS TOWARD LEARNING AS AN EXPLICIT GOAL OF PRESUD; DEVELOP EVALUATE AND ADOPT MECHANISMS TO REALISE FULL POTENTIAL

5. IMPROVE TEAM AND CITY PREPARATION: CREATE CITY EVIDENCE IN NARRATIVE FORM WITH SOME SELF-ASSESSMENT (TO BE REVIEWED)

6. IMPROVE TEAM COMPETENCIES IN QUALITATIVE DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS THROUGH TRAINING - ADOPTING GOOD EVALUATION PRACTICE. AND DEVELOP A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR REVIEW MANAGERS UTILISING IDeA AND PRESUD EXPERIENCE

7. MAXIMISE STAKEHOLDER CREDIBILITY, ACCESS, DIVERSITY, AND NUMBERS THROUGH INDEPENDENT TEAM CONTACT, WEB REVIEW, AND CITY RECORDS

8. MAKE THE REPORT PRODUCTION PROCESS MORE PARTICIPATIVE: DEVELOP THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AFTER REVIEW

9. BROADEN PLANS BEYOND SMART: ADOPT MIXED CRITERIA AND INDICATORS OF ORGANISATIONAL AND EXTERNAL CHANGE (AND REVIEW THESE ALSO).

10. INCLUDE PARTICIPANT EVALUATION OF: THE REVISED PROCESS AND CLAIMS, THE REVIEW REPORTS, THE REVIEW, AND THE LEARNING ACHIEVED.

11. CONSIDER HOW TO PROMOTE PRESUD DIVERSITY, COMPETITION, AND CHANGE, AND HOW TO ENCOURAGE CROSS-PROJECT UNIONS AND EXCHANGE TO IMPROVE PROCESS & INCREASE IMPACT ACROSS EUROPE

1.3 Executive Summary: Specific Revisions Proposed

1.3.1 Detailed recommendations for Improving Overall

Aspect/Issue	Current PRESUD	Revised PRESUD
Themes	13 overview themes little social and economic; 3 governance, 4 integration, 5 environment	Reduced number of themes, broader balance (e.g. 2-5 themes: Governance and sustainability or Governance, Environment, Social, Economic, & Integration). Details and emphasis negotiated by city and teams and emphasis critically and constructively reviewed.
The Process	A single stream process (City Evidence, the Team Peer Review, Team Report then SMART)	A Two-stream process. As Current but also with a parallel Web-Review of stakeholders to gain data in advance of review and perform initial analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. This gives 'Web Evidence' which informs team before review, and can be developed during review with a more restricted range of stakeholders. It also forms a discrete part of the review report. Web Review includes stakeholder feedback on initial review team findings in draft report.
Approach	Independent Critical Friend, based on UK Audit Approach, Review Team leave city and develop judgements	Independent Peer Review Team regarded more as a Review Management Team, to act as facilitators of a larger Peer Review, with stakeholders considered as informed peers to be more involved in the review process. More participative.
Evaluation	Independently managed Participant Evaluation Little report evaluation by stakeholders; Largely qualitative Evaluation as an add-on, not part of methodology	As Current, but also evaluation with new cities & teams, full Report Evaluation. Mixed qualitative and quantitative with larger numbers of people. Participant Evaluation part of methodology as teams and coordinators can not represent wider views.

1.3.2 Detailed Recommendations for Improving Preparation

Aspect/Issue	Current PRESUD	Revised PRESUD
Training	Review Process & Interview techniques	As Current but also including qualitative analysis and interpretation of data & also good practice from evaluation practice & literature (e.g. grounded theory development and theory-based evaluation). Training of participants should be developed which better draws upon best practice in evaluation and qualitative research (see bibliography section).
City Evidence	Imposed theme structure	Reduced structure including some imposed but also customised structure chosen by the city/teams.
	Weak use of possible criteria and indicators	Include municipality defined criteria and indicators, resulting in evidence-based narrative. Outlining situation, evidenced progress, and including best practice proposals. This to be reviewed.
	Largely quantitative; initially focused on external city situation	Mixed quantitative and qualitative; focused upon both internal administration and external city situation (social-economic-environmental)
	Not all stakeholders receive this	All stakeholders receive this in advance.
	Sometimes not developed or used in review	Also to include a list of municipality and external stakeholders to be important in sustainability, contact details, and this to be reviewed. This to form basis of the Review
Web Evidence	Not part of Methodology	A parallel Web Review as part of methodology. This prepares and informs the Peer Review and additionally engages stakeholders.

1.3.3 Detailed Recommendations for Improving the Review

Aspect/Issue	Current PRESUD	Revised PRESUD
Review	By team in city	As current but also includes and additional ½ or 1 day to draft initial findings. Circulation of evidence to colleagues of team members for comments, questions and shared learning. Circulation to external stakeholders for consideration comments questions and views.
Accounting for Cultural and Context Differences	Introduction on review with some team members speaking the language where possible	As current but also team member from same country (national context) and better engagement of stakeholders in report development and validation (before and/or after review)
Engagement of Internal stakeholders	By Review, usually led by environmental Coordinator	As current, but 2-3 coordinators in different departments, and stakeholders also engaged by internet.
Engagement of External stakeholders	By Review, led by coordinators. Not transparent	As current but also by internet, and also more initiated independently by Review team (before and/or during review). City keeps record/ database which grows. More transparent - stakeholders involved are visible and can be reviewed
Stakeholder Engagement Period	During Review by Interviews and workshops	As Current, but also before review by internet to gather data from broader base, and after review by internet in Developing Validating and Evaluating Report.
Gathering Data	Notes and Post-it and flip charts	As Current, but also some tape recording for memory aid, team sharing, and evaluation. Additional data gathered by internet survey before review from maximum group of stakeholders.
Qualitative Data Analysis	Team discussions and some Training	More Formal Training and inclusion of some Review Members with Qualitative Research Skills on Team review and Web Review
Presentation	Generally small, one-way presentation, of initial findings	As current, but trial also senior management and stakeholder feedback groups, to comment upon validate & revise initial findings.

1.3.4 Detailed Recommendations for Improving Post-Review

Aspect/Issue	Current PRESUD	Revised PRESUD
Report Writing	Done (with difficulty) by team members only upon return home, with little further stakeholder contact .	Begun on last or additional day. A brief draft findings report (not recommendations) circulated to stakeholders (in the week following review) who then participate in its further development (through anonymous web comments).
	Too large and late, findings and recommendations challenged, with little dissemination readership validation and ownership	A short & early *draft findings*, to re-engage stakeholders, gain further information and early validation, With greater dissemination readership and ownership. Team receives this amended second draft including comments and produces a final report from this.
	Negligible systematic report evaluation. Not a requirement.	Final Reports evaluated by stakeholders as requirement of the methodology.
Action Plan	SMART only	SMART and also non-measurable/ Qualitative but Verifiable Plans Including criteria for verifying changes, these to be reviewed.
Administration Change	Short-term, externally reviewed after 18 month	Short-term. Self-reviewed on internally (e.g. yearly) basis Independently reviewed in 2-5 years
External City Change	Short-term, externally reviewed after 18 month	Need longer-term. With self-reviewed internally On (e.g. yearly/biyearly) basis Independently reviewed in 2-5 years.
Cross-City Learning	Ad hoc, not explicit, little cross-city learning in comparison with potential and desire of stakeholders	An explicit aim of PRESUD, creation of mechanisms to enable and test this, evaluated and improved by participants, aim to realise potential and wishes of stakeholders involved in the reviews.

1.4 Summary: Evaluation Methods and Sources

This summary condenses the full evaluation report. The full report should be referred to for the details (and the supporting evidence) of the mixed findings from the evaluation of the project. This is a participant evaluation, it gives the perspectives of those involved in the project. The evaluation of the PRESUD process and its potential has been primarily a qualitative evaluation with some quantitative aspects. Questions have focused upon (a) eliciting strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and suggestions for improvement, (b) identifying changes in municipalities and the impact upon sustainability resulting from the project, (c) views of the future potential and preferred form of peer reviews.

Data has been gathered by several methods:

1. Direct contact with participants
2. E-mail and web-based surveys of all review teams and selected stakeholders in selected cities
3. Telephone and face-face interviews with the different stakeholder groups (all coordinators, city stakeholders involved in selected reviews, and all team managers)
4. Participant observation[1] within the project roles (on peer review teams, coordinating a review, developing the methodology, organising teams, and placement within the lead municipality)
5. Additional web survey and engagement trials to address identified but unresolved weaknesses

The evaluation methods and data sources are summarised in the following table:

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[1] Participant observation is a standard sociological research method whereby the researcher takes on roles within the social system of interest, and actively contributes, thereby experiencing and observing the system, roles, and people from the 'inside'. This gives data and insights that complement data from other methods (in this case interviews and surveys). See for instance Robson (2002), or Bryman (2000)

Possible Evaluation Cities & Reviews	Actual Evaluation With City Coordinators	Actual Evaluation With Teams	Actual Evaluation With Stakeholders	Actual Evaluation From Other Data Sources
9 European Cities. 9 Coordinators 7 European Countries. (3 UK Cities 6 Non-UK). 19 reviews in total 5-8 people per review team (50 review team member in each review round)	17 Coordinator telephone and e-mail interviews (1 hour) across all cities Numerous additional informal discussions contacts and communications	8 Team Manager interviews (1 hour) 1 Focus Group of 5 managers (4 hours) 40 responses to team surveys in first review 42 (out of 50) responses by review team members to a web survey after 2nd reviews.	30 people directly interviewed (1 hour) from 3 cities. 40 people in short direct interviews (15 mins) from 3 cities. 50 short post-review e-mail questionnaires returned from 4 cities. 24 out of 80 web based survey on report in 2 cities.	Access to Review Reports, Presentations, and Action Plans.
Between 25-50 people involved in each city review; 300-400 stakeholders involved in each review round. Of which around less than 1/3 (100) were external stakeholders	Participant observation as city coordinator on 2 reviews. (4 weeks) in one city.	Participant observation: Team Planning for 18 reviews in first and second round (4 weeks) Participant observations on 5 review teams and 4 report write-ups (15 weeks) Observation on 2 Team Training Sessions (4 days)	External stakeholder (5 1 hour intercviews, 4 telephone interviews, several e-mail responses) 180 responses to pre-review web trials on increasing stakeholder engagement in 3 cities.	Observations on 4 Management meetings in 4 cities. (6 days) Observations within lead city LA21 Team (across project life). Reflections on Management of Project Evaluation and Web Development (6 months activity)

1.5 Summary: Evaluation Findings

The following is a summary of the main findings with reference to the evidence within the main report.

Overview of Evaluation

OVERALL VIEWS: red – critical, green - supportive, black - mixed neutral

	Coordinators	Teams	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Methodology	core support but revisions	core support but revisions	Unknown But supportive of core idea	Supportive of core idea
Pre-review preparation	Mixed	Mixed some question city evidence	Mixed	Mixed
Review process	Supportive, a valuable internal process	Supportive; positive about their interviews and analysis	Overall Supportive; some question analysis & understanding, & validation	Mixed views of workshops; generally supportive of recommendations
Report and SMART Plans	Reports have problems. Mostly Supportive of SMART	Positive about reports Some sceptical of SMART	Mixed views of reports, supportive with SMART some question evidence & validation	welcomed and supported Sceptical of Redrafting & SMART plans some question evidence & validation
Qualitative Change within the municipality	Positive views of actual and potential change	Positive if widespread ownership and engagement	Mostly positive if ownership and engagement	Mixed Expectations but no evidence and sceptical
Measurable Impacts on city outside municipality	Limited or Uncertain; limited expectations	Limited or Uncertain	Limited or Uncertain; limited expectations	Unknown and Sceptical
Continuation & Extension of peer review	Very Supportive with modifications	Very supportive With modification	Supportive if involved	Supportive if involved otherwise sceptical
Value of personal and organisational Learning and its potential	Fully supportive of learning through review; limited development of potential	Fully supportive of individual; but little systematic learning	Wish potential was realised no evidence and little opportunity	Positive Expectations but no evidence and little opportunity

Positive and Widespread Overall Support For Peer Review and for its Continuation And Expansion In Revised Flexible Form

The vast majority of stakeholders involved in this evaluation were positive concerning the core idea of peer reviews, although this was subject to qualifications and corrections of existing weaknesses. The vast majority of stakeholders involved in this evaluation were supportive of further development of the core peer review process, and would wish to be involved, and would advocate them to colleagues in other cities. This again was qualified in that the identified weaknesses and remaining issues be addressed. The vast majority did not believe that PRESUD could claim to deliver significant measurable change in city sustainability in the short-term, and that it remained uncertain whether this was possible in the longer-term. However the vast majority felt that PRESUD had influence but the potential was largely organisational and transformational and in learning at many levels, from personal to inter-city.

The evidence in this section shows that there is a net positive view of the project from all groups of stakeholders, although many suggest support is conditional upon modifications in the process, or evidence of sufficient impact and change, or subject to revision of methodology or aims. See Section 4.2. PRESUD is positively regarded and is supported by the participants for numerous reasons. The idea of peer review is welcomed in that it is believed that people with similar jobs share a common understanding and can therefore supportively and critically assess each others' activities and issues. The act of interviewing stakeholders gets them to think about change. The review generates a snapshot of the current situation. See Section 4.2

Team members judged the strengths of the process, and these included the team views of themselves, and the wider PRESUD project roles: Coordination, Team and Management, Team Working, overall PRESUD Management (as expressed in the comments above). Most other aspects of the review process were judged (net) positively (and additional comments and observations supported this). But it is noted that around one third to one half of the team members suggested that improvement was still possible and desirable. See Section 4.2. The most significant weakness reported in the first round (defined here as more mixed and negative views than positive views expressed) were: the evidence and documentation received from cities before reviews; the involvement of external agencies and community and business (external stakeholders); process of recording information, analysing findings and developing recommendations; various difficulties with interpreters; the preparation of the report after the review. In the second round of reviews aspects of reviews judged most positively included: Team Building; Interviews and workshops; The involvement of internal stakeholders; Team processes of recording information; Team draft recommendations; Team presentation and audience involved. These will be discussed in detail in the sections below. See Section 4.2. It is worth noting that the views of processes, analysing findings, recommendation, and presentations have improved since the first round of reviews. Nevertheless, the review teams judged that weaknesses remain, and improvements are possible in: Preparation for the review; Involvement of external stakeholders; Impacts resulting from the previous review; Preparation of the report and final recommendations. It is noted that the 'evidence and documentation provided' has improved in the view of the 2nd review teams, but that preparation for the review, involvement of external stakeholders, and the preparation of the final report are judged by *both* first and second review teams to be the weakest points in the PRESUD process. Furthermore of all the issues the review teams had been asked to evaluate, the issue which is the weakest of all is

'the impacts from the previous review', which is the only issue with a net *negative* evaluation from review teams themselves. These issues and associated comments from teams will be explored in the following sections. See Section 4.2

Positive beliefs and comments were also received across the different review teams during the second round. These generally concerned beliefs in potential of the tool to assist, benchmark, and aid learning or they referred to the further development potential of the project. The majority of coordinators had a positive view of the project and for its continuation in some form. Yet their judgement of the overall methodology and process was nevertheless qualified with mixed positives and negative on the details. Positives included: the way in which PRESUD supports the coordinators; the methodology which gave another perspective on their city; the rewarding nature of the team work; change in the municipality itself; the changes in the people directly involved; and the development of people. The internal stakeholders rated the process positively, and felt it would lead to changes within the municipality (but were uncertain about it leading to change in the city) yet still felt the process should be repeated and extended in future. Internal stakeholders also commented upon their judgements. Positives included the way in which the review could highlight weaknesses in a city, the potential for learning and comparison across cities. The external view was welcomed, even if there were few new findings (PRSUD could still contribute in awareness raising). See Section 4.2. Criticisms included the time involved and difficulty in getting involvement within their city, the UK focus, the complicated detailed methodology; the lack of socio-economic competence, and the difficulty in preparing evidence; gaining commitment within the city; the time involved and the stress in organising a review; the long reports and delays; and the SMART plans being what was planned anyway. Other criticisms included bland questioning of some teams; the superficial questioning and depth of the interviews, and the lack of preparation for reviews; the ways in which PRESUD could easily be overridden by political winds; the lack of flexibility in the methodology to act upon learning; the ambition of the project; the long report delays; the difficulties in producing effective SMART plans, and uncertainities in whether or not improvements had occurred because of PRESUD requiring better hard and soft evidence. See Section 4.2

It can be a rewarding (but intense and sometimes stressful) experience within a peer review network. Team members generally find it a great learning and social experience, coordinators find it stressful and time consuming but also gain contacts and credibility when it goes well, team managers and project managers need to be well organised and thrive on stress. A good review depends upon the team and the stakeholders from the city, and these are joined by the activities and efforts of the team manager and city coordinators, requiring a collaborative approach, where the efforts of one translate into the benefits of the other. See Section 4.2.

The majority of stakeholders conditionally support the further development and continuation of some form of PRESUD (with diverse views of the best form of future PRESUD processes). See Section 4.3. A large majority of team members stated that they would like to see PRESUD continued and developed in their own cities in future, and that they would recommend it to other cities in their home country. On continuing into the future, some team members commented that it was important to develop it, as the potential for impact had increased as the interest and ownership had increased, and the knowledge pool was now significant. See Section 4.3

Although there was support for its extension there were different opinions on how this should be done and on the exact form of the future peer review. This suggests that any future process have additional flexibility to cope with these different views. Some wanted the OECD to adopt it, others suggested a NORDIC PRESUD, others EUROCITIES or in collaboration with projects such as URBAN AUDIT, or INTERACT. Some wanted it to be funded externally others that it be funded by the municipalities to demonstrate commitment and ownership. Most (but not all) suggested the time between reviews should be extended (as 18 months did not allow much time for evidenced change to come through). Some wanted measured and steady organic growth to encompass other municipalities. See Section 4.3.

Internal stakeholders wanted increased external and internal engagement, fewer themes, language problems addressed, amendments on learning, closer collaboration in writing report, extending review activities before and after the review. See Section 4.3.

There were noted a variety of opinions proposed on the best format for review and therefore flexibility in satisfying these. Diversity of Views on Ideal and Improved PRESUD Format Included: Continuation as Existing Group, Bilingual PRESUD (Host country and European). Voluntary Expansion in Europe; Local Government self-funded (Mixed Semi-Commercial funded Management) Full Commercial Development, Regional Nation PRESUD (e.g. NORDIC PRESUD), National PRESUD, Bilingual PRESUD Shared Language PRESUD (English, German, etc) Integrative PRESUD (Join with complementary EU projects such as. Urban Audit), Reduced PRESUD, Extended PRESUD (to include Southern European and Eastern Bloc Countries). See Section 4.3.

Currently the EU partially funds the project, with some time in kind, but the EU covers a significant fraction of officers and councillors time, all travel, accommodation, and subsistence. Several people noted the costs of the project, in staff time, time, travel, accommodation. But equally there are the preparation costs and follow-up costs absorbed by the host municipality (A commercial review is costed at around £20k). Most people argued that ways must be found to reduce the costs. See Section 4.3.

Wish to Reduce and Revise the Detailed Methodology and Approach to be more Flexible and Customisable by Municipalities

Many felt the methodology was too large, had too many themes, was too prescriptive, and was too much UK-based (and that this should not be transferred into European settings – one objection was the top-down audit approach implicit in the methodology) See Section 5.2. There were many who felt the methodology did not balance the social and economic aspects, but some others felt that it did. See Section 5.2. There were some who felt the methodology and approach did not adequately consider, incorporate nor account for the cultural and contextual differences between municipalities and countries. See Section 5.3

Participants therefore require reduction and revision of the methodology and approach in future, and that adequate flexibility and openness be built into the methodology and approach to enable municipalities to change or customise some aspects of review and methodology (the themes, the balance between social,

environmental) and to account for cultural and contextual factors of that municipality.

These findings suggest a more participative approach is required in the development and revision of the methodology and this should be explicit in the current methodology.

Further findings on required or desired modifications to the methodology and approach are noted below.

Pre-Review

Preparation has been mixed across reviews, cities, and teams; some have been good others poor. A consistent finding is that preparing the evidence and the teams consideration of this before review is difficult and sometimes not absorbed by the team. The methodology needs to emphasise: the city evidence is a draft city understanding of sustainability; the main problems and the main improvements; proposed best practice examples to consider and review, issues that known but are not being dealt with (and if possible why); a summary of the different perspectives of stakeholders known by the city; city criteria of circumstances and criteria of actual and proposed change; municipality responsibilities, an informative appendix of all stakeholders invited to be engaged in review (with contact details if possible and areas of interest). This document should be circulated to all stakeholders and team members weeks or months in advance of the review, to be considered and reviewed.

Team members were viewed as variable in expertise, language, seniority, interviewing and analysis skills, by the team managers and coordinators. See section 6.2. Generally there was a limited competency to examine social and economic aspects of sustainability as teams were primarily drawn from environmental departments. The breadth and number of themes meant that some themes were dealt with superficially by teams composed of generalists. Some felt that continuity across first and second review teams would help, others felt that using additional personnel from outside the municipality would help. See section 6.2. The training was well received but focused upon the psychology of interviews, interview skills, and team building. See section 6.2. It did not deal with issues such as qualitative data analysis and interpretation and this will influence the validity and reliability of the review findings (as was noted by some stakeholders). It is not clear how well the training informed and influenced the actual interviews across reviews and this could be evaluated. See section 6.2. The methodology and process needs to be amended to account for these points.

Preparation for reviews was variable across reviews, and this depends heavily upon the teams individuals and city coordinators. See Section 6.5. Preparation has improved between first and second reviews. It is still an area where particular teams and cities could improve further. Preparation weaknesses had an impact upon the quality of review and report, as teams often began from zero, so that better preparation could raise the starting point of the review, and would free up interview and workshop time for deeper or broader investigation. Preparation criticisms came also from the internal and external stakeholders, who often did not know enough about the review. One improvement could be for the manager and teams to have contact with the city before review, to check preparations and gather some basic

information. See Section 6.5. Coordinating a review takes time and a hurried review affects the review quality through lack of engagement of wide and senior stakeholders, and through weak documentation. Section 6.3. A review can be organised by one coordinator but this adds to the fragility of the process. It should be arranged well in advance (estimates vary from 2-6 months) by 2-3 people from different departments.

The evidence and documentation received by the teams from the municipalities has been variable. See Summary 6.4. Good documentation is possible but the main criticisms relate to late, inadequate, or non-english evidence submissions. This stage is largely dependent upon the city coordination staff, but coordinators also point to the difficulty in assembling information which is defined by PRESUD or held by others. This suggests greater participation of the relevant municipality departments and some flexibility in defining what is locally relevant and should be used locally as evidence. See Summary 6.4. The aim is to produce a readable introduction to the city written by the city, which can be reviewed by the review team *and* other municipality stakeholders. Some coordinators managed the job well and were complimented, in other cases they did not. The time taken should not be underestimated and the relevant information needs to be collected well in advance.

Stakeholder Engagement in Process

Satisfactory stakeholder engagement requires: significant numbers, significant diversity of representation, significant time for all to contribute, and enough pre-briefing and post-involvement to satisfy stakeholders. On each point there is some room for improvement in PRESUD.

External stakeholders questioned the credibility of a review process, where engagement of stakeholders is largely controlled and organised by the municipality. Stakeholders often did not know who the other participants in the review were, and were not asked by teams to comment upon key missing stakeholders or potential bias in this group. There were occasions where the involvement of certain stakeholders was too politically charged or they would have critical or very different views, and they were effectively excluded from involvement the review process. There were also stakeholders within cities who had wished to be involved (to some degree) in the review process but did not have an opportunity or mechanism.

This can be achieved by cumulative development of stakeholder databases, independent approaches by the review teams, and through Web-based Research Surveys (around 170 additional stakeholders were involved in the pre-review gathering of information. in web-based trials in two cities).

Teams were generally positive about the engagement of internal stakeholders during the review, with some reservations about the involvement of politicians, senior staff, non-environmental staff, and the time available for stakeholder engagement. Furthermore the teams felt a need for the inside 'party line' to be better balanced against other stakeholders. See section 7.2. Coordinators tended to be more satisfied with external stakeholder engagement than either the review teams or the external stakeholders themselves. Some coordinators were sometimes resistant to the idea of open access between team and stakeholders (and on rare occasions some external stakeholders were effectively excluded by coordinators). This suggests that external engagement can be 'staged' and therefore external engagement should not be solely

left to the city and coordinators judgement. See section 7.3. External stakeholders were generally positive about PRESUD and peer review *when involved*. Those who were not directly involved called the process into question and challenged its credibility. See Section 7.4. Suggesting that stakeholder engagement should be maximised and broadened where possible with open access routes not controlled by the city. The view of external stakeholders was generally less positive concerning the independence, purpose, impact and value of PRESUD. Teams and coordinators tend to have more favourable views of the process than other stakeholders. Therefore the review evaluation should maximise involvement of all stakeholders. See Section 7.4. Even external stakeholders involved in the review were sometimes sceptical of the review independence - given the control of the city, and the many ways in which the municipality could influence the review in its own favour. See Section 7.4. External stakeholders wished for more independent engagement routes & methods which were outside municipality control and also with open anonymous access for critical external stakeholders. See Section 7.4

Teams felt a broader range of stakeholders could be involved in reviews and numbers could be increased (see also the section on web engagement of stakeholders). This will develop with time but there should be an attempt to include a broad range of departments and stakeholders from front-end staff to those in managerial and political positions. See section 7.2. The engagement of external stakeholders was weak in the first review, but had improved in the second review round. In the second review round however the engagement of external stakeholders was judged more negatively than the engagement of internal stakeholders (which was judged good by teams). See section 7.3. This was also noted by external stakeholders, as the external stakeholders involved had varied from the 1st and 2nd round reviews and this was criticised. External stakeholder numbers could have been increased through use of a growing database, giving continuity, improved numbers, and increasing diversity. See Section 7.4.

The 1st round review teams comments on engagement included criticisms of: the stakeholder organisation types; numbers; depth; and time of involvement. The 2nd round review teams were more positive but improvements were still possible: better triangulation of findings, more and broader representation from stakeholders, and a more equal balance of external and internal stakeholders. Reviews differed: some cities organised little external involvement whereas others had significant networks of NGOs or data bases they could draw upon, suggesting a need to better standardise the expected levels of engagement across reviews, through explicit methodology changes and independent access routes initiated and managed by review teams or external stakeholders themselves.

The involvement of a broad and diverse range of internal stakeholders (including senior managers and politicians) was important not just for information gathering during review, but also for increasing awareness, gaining ownership, improving validation, and widening dissemination of findings and recommendations. Additional engagement will additionally facilitate this. It was observed that not all stakeholders who wanted to be involved were involved and this was a missed opportunity which might have led to additional potential for change. See section 7.2. Teams also felt they had weak access to other internal stakeholders and information during the first review but this had improved by the second review, suggesting that experience had improved the situation, and might improved by explicit methodology and training. See section 7.2. A broader range of external stakeholders could also be involved in

reviews and numbers could be increased (see Chapter 11 on web engagement of stakeholders). This will develop with time but there should be an attempt to include a broad range of external stakeholders; from the public, to front-end staff to those in managerial positions. See Section 7.4. The involvement of a broad and diverse range of external (including senior) stakeholders is not just for information gathering but is again instrumental in increasing awareness, ownership, validation, and dissemination of findings and recommendations. Earlier and broader involvement will facilitate this. It was observed that not all internal stakeholders who wanted to be involved were involved and this was a missed opportunity which might have led to additional potential for change. See Section 7.4

Internal stakeholders wanted more two-way engagement with review team members (and with other cities) but this did not generally occur It presents an opportunity which would stimulate stakeholder engagement (See Chapter12). Stakeholders also wanted more time, better prior warning briefing and explanations before the review. And Stakeholders were not generally given feedback on their workshop contributions. As is good practice in such situations. See Section 7.4. The engagement of external stakeholders was relatively superficial in comparison with internal stakeholders, being more limited to workshops. Pre and Post involvement was negligible. External stakeholders wanted agendas and some indication of the question areas before the review. External stakeholders noted that satisfactory stakeholder engagement requires: significant numbers; significant diversity of representation; significant time for all to contribute; and enough pre-briefing and post-involvement to satisfy stakeholders. On each point there is room for improvement in the both methodology and process. See Section 7.4. There were (some) cases of exclusions of external stakeholders across different reviews, which (although small in comparison with numbers actually involved) still suggests that some external stakeholders should doubt the credibility of the current methodology and process. See Section 7.4

Finally web-engagement trials (Chapter 11) show that additional engagement is both possible and desirable from the viewpoint of internal stakeholders. See section 7.2. The findings of the web trials and the views of external stakeholders themselves also show that better engagement of external stakeholders is possible, and is sometimes not utilised, thereby excluding some stakeholders from contributing. See section 7.3 Furthermore independent web pre and post-engagement can gain information and disseminate the workshops and reports more widely to external stakeholders. This is an opportunity which has been tested and could be incorporated. See Section 7.4.

Data Gathering and Analysis in Reviews

The quality and effectiveness of interviews and workshops were dependent upon the people running and organising them. Some were judged poor others were judged good. See Section 8.2. There are sometimes different views of the interviews and workshops; team members sometimes have a more favourable opinion than do the stakeholders involved. This should be noted in considering the views of PRESUD members within the evaluation. As teams cannot give an accurate view of the interviews and workshops alone, participant evaluation should be included in the methodology. See Section 8.2. Common issues raised concerning interviews and workshops were the lack of background (cultural and contextual) understanding of the review team and the time taken for the interviewees to explain the basic facts of the municipality and culture to the foreign interviewers. This meant that relatively little time was spent in discussing the issues raised by interviewees. Another issue mentioned was that interviewees wished for more two-way dialogue but had little opportunity to ask questions of their own of the visiting review team. See Section 8.2. Attempts to bypass such problems (translators or introductions to cultural and contextual differences) always helped the review team but this did not always lead to removal of problems of language and context differences. Translators often mis-translated technical terms, and contextual differences remained as judged by the stakeholders. In such cases the stakeholders in the city (usually coordinators) had to reject and correct such problems and misunderstandings. But this also involved some loss of credibility with other stakeholders who simply saw faulty, impractical, or weak statements. See Section 8.2

Most stakeholders described their interviews as enjoyable but despite this, problems remained and were mentioned repeatedly (lack of time, lack of prior explanations and advance briefing, team not understanding the local situation, lack of feedback, validation and cross-checking mechanisms). Stakeholders mentioned these issues even when they felt the review team were well-prepared and they found the interview enjoyable. Furthermore (in the view of stakeholders) some of the criticisms of final reports can be traced to the weaknesses in the interviews and workshops (including lack of contextual understanding, limited engagement of stakeholders in the review, lack of validation and cross-checking) See Section 8.2. Some workshops were poorly attended (in numbers of people or variety of organisations) as noted by both teams and stakeholders, resulting in less valid and reliable information (see also the section on external stakeholder views). See Section 8.2

Team recording and analysis was judged weak in the first round of reviews but satisfactory or positive by the second round of reviews (by team members themselves). The fact that analysis and recording have improved might be attributable mostly to the increasing experience of teams and team managers (as analysis was not part of the training) and partly due to training (as recording was part of the training). See Section 8.3.

The teams generally supported the mechanisms of recording information (on flip-charts with post-it notes). Teams also positively evaluated their learning, discussions, and analysis. However the approach taken does not follow good evaluation practice (See Section) Where teams themselves made criticisms were raised these referred to the lack of time and rushed nature of the data gathering in an actual review, with too many interviews, too little time for discussion, reflection, and analysis. See Section 8.3. Stakeholders however suggested the limited time available meant the

review could only develop a shallow view of the municipality, and some wanted the team (somehow) to develop a deeper view. The analysis was also limited in time and that the teams needed more time (somehow) to reflect on the data gathered before giving their analysis and recommendations. See Section 8.3

So teams were generally satisfied with their own analysis but some stakeholders were critical of this wishing it to be deeper, better evidenced, and better validated. (See also Chapter 9 on Reports). The unsatisfactory view of analysis (judged by first review teams and some stakeholders in the second review) suggests that analysis and recording should be part of the initial training in PRESUD. This is independently supported by good practice in the evaluation literature. See Section 8.3

Presentations and responses to these were extremely varied. Some presentations were very well attended (50-70 people), including those most involved in the reviews, some senior managers and politicians, and also media. In other cases presentations were very poorly attended, with no interest of senior people and little attendance from those involved in review. This had disappointed the presenting review teams and had embarrassed the organizers, reflecting limited municipality interest in PRESUD or hurried last minute organization within the host municipality. See Section 8.3

Stakeholders were mostly positive about presentations, but there was often little dialogue between the teams and those at the presentation which was a missed opportunity for feedback and validation. It was suggested that the presentation could be followed up with an intensive session with the senior managers to discuss the findings in more detail and smaller break-out workshops groups to gain initial criticisms and validation, and that the presentation be converted into a brief document immediately after (or on an additional day in the city). See Section 8.3

Finally, These findings link to those of Chapter 7 on Stakeholder Engagement where teams were found tend to have a better (or equal) view of the effectiveness and quality of interviews and workshops than the stakeholders involved. Internal stakeholders felt that the teams did not understand the local and cultural context, and that team validation and cross-checking mechanisms were weak and should be strengthened through additional engagement of stakeholder expertise. Teams were generally positive about the engagement of internal stakeholders during the review, with some reservations about involvement of politicians, senior staff, and non-environmental staff, and the time available for engagement which might lead to a distorted view with limitations on the data and subsequent analysis. Furthermore the teams felt a need for the inside 'party line' to be better balanced against other stakeholders. See Section 7.4. Workshops differed and were variable, and different external stakeholders felt different things about the *same* ones, some felt them superficial and disliked them, others that they were valuable and rewarding and satisfactory, which raises questions about the effectiveness of some interviews and workshops. Common problems included language cultural and context differences which create confusions and take up significant interview time. Language difficulties could be reduced by bi-lingual reviews utilising the host language (but in practice very few could do this). Context and culture difficulties could be reduced by inclusion of review team members from same country. See Section 7.4

Review Reports

Reports and report delivery were consistently criticised, across both the first and second reviews, and across *all* cities and *all* teams. In addition, different reports were criticised for several different reasons. These collective findings point to a major problem in the PRESUD process, and an extreme departure from the experiences of the original IDeA Peer Review. Report issues included: lateness, being too large, variable quality, being too broad, difficult to translate, patchy highly-variable contributions from team members, patchy and sometimes superficial and unconvincing content, too many themes, and the relative neglect of social and economic review. These difficulties had knock-on consequences and weakened: subsequent dissemination, feedback from stakeholders, stakeholder re-engagement with change, broad and senior ownership across departments, and the creation of a challenging subsequent action plan. Therefore the resulting change and impact of the PRESUD review process is greatly reduced below its potential. If this problem is not addressed then the peer review process collapses in value, in utility, in credibility, and in momentum. The review effort (and investment in a review) are significant and underestimated (for both the host city and the teams) but the resulting report did not significantly nor widely motivate or re-engage stakeholders to implement change. The review report must be more usable, quicker, shorter, direct, headlined, challenging, , clearer, evidenced and supported by many city stakeholders, convincing, designed to keep the process moving, re-engage and motivate stakeholders, be a negotiated jointly constructed document, a next step and not a the review end. The problems can be addressed by considering the underlying causes of the difficulties and through rethinking the report writing stage.

Furthermore, the suggestions offered for improvement of reports also have potential to improve *other* aspects of the review process. Early validation of findings is important, as is further engagement of stakeholders in the development of reports after the review, to reduce cultural and contextual misunderstandings and gain their engagement in the developing recommendations.

Team members mentioned difficulties in delivering reports; their variable quality contributions; the lack of time; lack of information (or access to it); the size of the task, and other things getting in the way after the review. The preparation of reports remained a major issue during the 2nd round of reviews with significant delays in the majority of cases. See Section 9.2.

Coordinators noted that delays created significant adverse knock-on problems and further weaknesses: in decreasing the consultation time, in re-engagement of stakeholders, in developing the smart action plan, and in the internal credibility of the PRESUD process. These experiences of delays were common throughout the project. Analysis of this issue and attempts to address these issues in first round had failed - despite amendments to the methodology; the experience of the problems in the first review, and the creation of assistant managers. See Section 9.2.

The reports were judged to be of variable quality by both team members and coordinators. Reports were sometimes superficial, weak in evidence, inaccurate, difficult to understand, had impractical recommendations, and had not been widely validated. It was recognised that there were clearly limitations to an external review, but improvements were still possible and necessary. See Summary 9.3.

In one (limited) evaluation by internal stakeholders, the respondents agreed that: the report covered their interests; the issues identified were important; the report was of good quality, was helpful, and practical. The least agreed point was that the report contained new findings. The stakeholders criticised the depth, evidence, accuracy, expertise, participation of public and recording of criticisms of the report, and wanted simpler language, more time to create it, to be less patchy, and more objective. There were mixed views but some criticised the understanding of the review team, the weak consideration of cultural differences, the limited or selective engagement of stakeholders affecting data gathered, the anecdotal use of evidence, or weak evidence, invalid generalisation on limited evidence, and limited team analysis with invalid conclusions. See section 9.3.

Most external stakeholders welcomed the initial critical findings expressed in the draft reports, but were themselves critical of the non-transparent changes made between the draft and final report (which excluded them and favoured the municipality view - thereby questioning the independence of the review). They also criticised what they often saw as a soft challenge to the municipality. In addition although stakeholders were involved in the review, they nevertheless did *not* receive a copy of the draft report for comments (which is deemed good practice in most consultation guidance). This was the case in *all* the reviews and this practice should be challenged and be changed. See Summary 9.2. The credibility of the review with external stakeholders was further weakened through unsupported or incorrect statements in the review report (quoting from a first review report) and through the municipality control in negotiating changes in report redrafting. See Summary 9.3

The need for shorter clearer summarised reports with direct messages was often mentioned (but not by all as a few coordinators were unconcerned). Long, detailed, and thorough English reports were not always welcomed as these had several adverse consequences for the project objectives. Firstly, they were not widely read even by the municipality staff and managers, and this weakened dissemination, ownership and buy-in. Secondly the messages and recommendations were not clear, which adversely influenced the smart action planning. Thirdly it gave (non-UK) coordinators extra work (or extra work would be needed) to convert the documents to smaller ones. Fourthly, the reports were not validated as well as they should have been, leading to flawed findings and recommendations within the report which further weakened the potential impact of the peer review, Fifthly, it added to the delays in the draft report delivery (it takes longer to write and edit). Finally it leads to a delayed final report (taking longer to comment upon when read).

Furthermore the long reports required more translation, introducing further delays and further errors as translators struggled with the wide-ranging technical language, and translation itself caused other problems: when the original style was English the translated style maintains that English feeling which makes the reports even less readable in some countries. See Summary 9.4.

So paradoxically what may be a thorough lengthy and detailed report in English will be weaker (in actually prompting change) within non-UK cities than would be a shorter and more superficial report. See Summary 9.4. This view was supported by external stakeholders who were frustrated by report delays and large reports in English were simply not wanted. They wanted simpler short and direct reports with the main headline findings and recommendations.

Note finally that teams sometimes had a better view of their analysis, reports, and recommendations, than did the municipality stakeholders and external observers. This suggests a need for validation or evaluation of the reports, findings, and recommendations in future, from all participants in the project. This is additionally needed as the stakeholder evaluation of reports in this project did not occur as planned due to project slippage, changes, and report delays. Such validation and evaluation will possible using web-based mechanisms.

Changes and Impacts

There were variable and mixed views the smart plans, but these had widespread support across stakeholders groups, with some scepticism from teams and external stakeholders on the challenge in the plans and in the evidenced progress achieved through them.

There was some difficulty in attributing changes and impacts to PRESUD and the importance of other factors, meant that PRESUD cannot determine nor guarantee levels of change and impact.

There were significant non-measurable qualitative impacts resulting from PRESUD *within* the municipality administration and for those stakeholders *directly* involved in the process. These impacts were the main impacts of PRESUD, and they largely explain the positive support for the peer review process (Chapter 4) but they are understated and underdeveloped and often unrecorded by cities and teams within the PRESUD reviews and within the methodology and training.

Uncertainty and doubt on the measurable impact of PRESUD at the city level with little evidence of change demonstrate that PRESUD has overstated its measurable impact and shows a need for revision of such claims. But also the weak use of evidence is partly attributable to an imposed methodology, which should be revised to be more flexible, including the participative development of mixed (qualitative-quantitative, local-national) locally-relevant indicator sets by all municipalities themselves which should then critically reviewed. It would then be a review aim to examine and challenge the mixed indicator sets could be improved through critical peer review and best-practice exchange.

Variable and Mixed views of SMART Plans with Support and Scepticism

The SMART action plans were welcomed by most stakeholders, as they gave clear actions to implement, with responsibilities, and this is one of the important mechanisms behind change, which can be referred to later. See Summary 10.2. Once the plan is written then managers and politicians follow the progress of change through it. Most (but not all) stakeholders felt the SMART plan should be a compulsory aspect of PRESUD, Most stakeholders asked about the SMART plan felt that it was a valuable and important component of the project, if various limitations were addressed. See Summary 10.2.

The mechanisms of development of SMART action plans varied from city to city, but to be effective they required re-engagement of responsible municipal staff. See Summary 10.2. The major problems with report (Chapter 9) had caused significant

problems in the development of the SMART plan. The recommendations adopted (from those made in the review report) were decided by coordinators and stakeholders on criteria of practicality and through local knowledge of what could be realistically achieved. Often plans included or incorporated recommendations that would have been carried out anyway, and were not attributable to PRESUD alone. See Summary 10.2.

Plans needed to be resourced supported and verifiable to be of use, and this was not always the case. See Summary 10.2. The action plan could be a source of change if widely agreed, agreed owned, and with senior and political support, if this did not occur there would be limited impact; in some cases wide ownership but was not necessarily gained nor sought. Some judged the plans to be weak, where they were vague, lacked challenge, or were unresourced. See Summary 10.2. It was necessary to consider both hard and soft indicators of change. The timescale was frequently judged too short to see measurable change. Some felt the SMART plan needed to be approached in a pragmatic way and needed political astuteness in what was put forward for recommendation to be consistent with existing municipality directions. PRESUD then acts as a parallel pressure rather than a unique single factor. See Summary 10.2.

The SMART plan was noted to be restrictive and limited in a number of ways. See Summary 10.2. Some saw the SMART plan as relatively unimportant in comparison with other effects such as the effects upon those involved or the non-measurable and qualitative changes. Some participants were sceptical of the development and scope of the SMART plan; both from external stakeholders and review teams. Firstly it did not record relevant and important non-measurable (qualitative) change that occurred (see a later section). Secondly, it was not always clear to what degree actions had arisen from the PRESUD review, nor to what extent changes were planned anyway (some argued this would always be the case, and that PRESUD should not be judged on this basis). Thirdly, some team members and external stakeholders additionally criticised the SMART plan as not being challenging and instead setting easily achievable targets making little significant progress towards sustainable development. Fourthly, the time for significant change was thought to be beyond the timescale of the PRESUD project (i.e. little measurable change in 18 month). Fifthly, there was high uncertainty and doubt on the actual levels of measurable change, as reliable and robust indicators were not generally utilised by review teams, Sixthly, PRESUD recommendations were adopted or rejected without explanation nor public disclosure so many could be ignored without comment, which brought the credibility of the process into question; stakeholders were sceptical that the municipality would actually act upon the plans, of the ability and intention of the municipality to deliver measurable change, and in the absence of data used and independent verification of claimed changes. Finally, the SMART Plan did not necessarily lead to significant nor measurable change outside the administration, in some cases it had no effect, in most cases it resulted in modest impacts or secondary measures[2]. The review teams themselves expressed mixed views on the impacts due to the previous reviews and SMART Plans (indeed of all the questions asked of the review teams this generated the least positive response). Nevertheless most (but not all) were supportive of the idea of some form of Planning Stage following review. Later sections suggest a revised approach which should *include*

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[2] e.g. the numbers of recommendations adopted, underway, and implemented became used.

SMART but not be restricted to it, to include non-specific (generalised) and non-measurable (qualitative) but verifiable aims. See Summary 10.2.

Difficulty in Attributing Changes and Impacts to PRESUD, and the Importance of other Factors

Impacts and change were rarely simply attributable to PRESUD and PRESUD could not guarantee any change. See Section 10.3. PRESUD does not demand that its recommendations be adopted, but that these recommendations be used to prompt practical change in the local context, only some recommendations become actions. Sometimes recommendations were known before review, or were re-suggestions. Change was sometimes planned anyway but PRESUD raised them up the agenda. See Section 10.3. It was noted that PRESUD could not generally claim sole credit for the changes occurring. Furthermore political, managerial, cross-departmental, and stakeholder support ownership, and engagement is required Without this change will not occur and PRESUD can never therefore guarantee levels of change as originally stated in the EU proposal. See Section 10.3

Significant Non-Measurable Qualitative Impact Resulting from PRESUD within Municipality Administration an understated impact of PRESUD.

There was a difference between measurable and verifiable change; measurable change is verifiable, but non-measurable change does not imply it is non-verifiable. There were many verifiable but non-measurable changes noted, but few verifiable measurable changes. See Section 10.4. Most review team members felt that there were many positive impacts of PRESUD, but these were mostly non-measurable and qualitative. These included raising of awareness, focusing attention on sustainability, gaining a fresh and external perspective, organisational and individual learning and potential exchange of best-practices, understanding how other cities work. But this positive view was balanced by a negative view of change expressed by team members. These related mostly to the absence of evidence, the limited ownership and engagement in the process and SMART plans, the lack of support and commitment for the approach and evidenced change. Coordinators had higher hopes for organisational and personal change than for changes in the city environment due to PRESUD. See Section 10.4.

These positive and negative viewpoints of change were supported by team managers who noted that although it was difficult to measure important changes, change could still be described. See Section 10.4. Positive qualitative changes resulting from PRESUD included: additional stakeholder engagement, a less fragmented approach to sustainability, and directly gaining commitment of key decision makers through interviewing. One important qualitative criteria of impact was whether a recommendation had been mainstreamed in the municipality plans and strategies. However only a limited part of the organisation (usually the environmental department) owned PRESUD and this was commonly recognised as an issue which compromised the potential of the project; change and impact was therefore limited and perhaps could be doubled simply by increased ownership and engagement. One way to increase the impact is to have greater engagement in the review, but this could be supplemented by creating interactions between those that were involved in the review, sometime after review to re-engage them. External stakeholders were typically only involved in the review and saw this as the major outcome, so they

would benefit from re-engagement as they were not aware nor informed of any consequences or changes, which could also be rectified. See Section 10.4.

Providing evidence of change was often not about quantitative measurement against targets with data, but often a statement of what had happened. See Section 10.4. Such qualitative assessments of change can be done by a municipality through a self-assessment process (by re-engaging the stakeholders through individual meetings or by workshops). So preparing to evidence impact in the second review involved something like: 'here is what we have decided to do, here is what has been done' and that could provide evidence for the second peer review team. But not all coordinators nor teams followed this approach. It should be noted that many qualitative and non-measurable changes and impacts were generally not recorded. These have been underestimated by the project and were generally valued by most stakeholders. This is relevant because change depends upon senior involvement and stakeholder engagement, which would be increased by recording all changes. See Section 10.4.

Uncertainty and Doubt on Impact at City Level with Little Evidence of Change and Need for Revision of Overstated PRESUD Claims and Participative development of Mixed Indicator Sets by Municipalities.

There was a net positive belief that PRESUD could lead to changes within the municipality, but no net belief that this would lead to measurable change of between 10 and 25%. See Section 10.5.

Team members were unsure that all improvements in sustainable development were generally measurable at all, or that stated targets could be achieved, and their views on this were more negative than positive. See Section 10.5. Participants doubted the 10-25% target, its meaning, its measurement, and criteria, and its attainment, and they further doubted that significant external change could be achieved in such a short (18 month) time scale. Many team members felt that the degree of change was uncertain. They also commented upon how change in the municipality depended upon the particular context, the city, administration, politicians, and coordinators, ownership and commitment, and therefore PRESUD could not guarantee levels of measurable change. See Section 10.5.

Coordinators and stakeholders also noted difficulties in measuring and stimulating change. See Section 10.5. Some felt the project, cities, and review teams had not created measurable criteria and indicators. Some felt measurable changes would probably not be possible. Some felt that changes would be small changes and slow, perhaps leading to notable changes in the longer term (5 years). Stakeholders wanted to see better use of evidence and targets, and questioned how PRESUD could state changes had occurred without the use of such evidence. Stakeholders also agreed that change depended upon the political context, and the level of engagement in the project. If this changed in the course of the project then it could reduce or remove the possibility of change, if it was weak then impacts would be negligible. See Section 10.5.

Evidencing change would require mixed qualitative and quantitative criteria and indicators of change. See Section 10.5. It was important to better develop the data that would evidence change, yet this had been weak in the project, and it indicators should be flexible to reflect the differences in the different municipalities, it must

include clear measures relevant to the timescale, it needed a combination of local and national indicators, which were mixed qualitative and quantitative, referring to changes within the municipality and externally in the city also. Such a 'mixed indicator basket' would require participation of the municipality to develop it, and this would also be relevant to the needs of the municipality utilising existing data and measures, and would be relevant to the organisations strategic plan. This would ensure both practicality of the task and relevance to the municipality. The mixed indicators basket would be critically reviewed by the review team, who also draw on their knowledge of their own indicator baskets thereby exchanging ideas and best practice. See Section 10.5.

It was noted that PRESUD was a useful tool but the changes could be subtle and depended upon how the tool was used by participants and municipalities. Furthermore PRESUD could aid progress but conversely if PRESUD went badly (such as with delayed or weak review reports, See Chapter 9) it could impede progress towards sustainable development, as it then damaged the credibility of those associated with it. See Section 10.5.

Overall there was doubt, uncertainty and variability across all participant groups on the resulting measurable change occurring in the municipality and on the measurable impacts of PRESUD upon sustainability within the time scale and if this was possible at all. See Section 10.5. In this sense PRESUD has overstated what it can achieve. Part of the problem is linked to difficulty and inconvenience in generating, agreeing, gathering and monitoring similar indicators across all cities. Partly it is that coordinators do not have power to engage others in this work. Partly it is that significant change takes longer than the project envisaged. Finally the changes and impacts associated with PRESUD reviews are mostly qualitative and therefore are not recorded. See Section 10.5.

Learning Potential

The learning possible on the project was often mentioned positively when discussing PRESUD. However it is worthwhile distinguishing between actual learning and potential learning, individual learning and organisational learning in the following findings.

Learning occurred mostly by those experiencing the project directly:

- Personal learning through involvement within the process
- Team learning about the city through peer reviews and by experiencing them
- Cities learning from the review findings, and through trying to implement actions
- Project learning during the trials (e.g. evaluation)

There was additional potential for learning which was recognised but *not* systematically developed or part of the process and methodology:

- Review teams and stakeholders learning from performance monitoring progress, or lack of it
- Home cities systematically learning from returning team members
- Team learning occurring across the reviews
- EU systematically from the many reviews learning from the project experiences

There was additional generally unfulfilled learning that had considerable potential and was requested or suggested by participants as part of a revised PRESUD:

- Municipalities learning from each other including sharing of best practice
- Stakeholders learning from the incoming team members, and through their networks to their home cities
- 2nd Review teams learning from 1st review teams
- Cross-project learning: PRESUD learning from other projects (EU, national. Local) and other projects learning from PRESUD
- External stakeholders of one city learning from other external stakeholders in other cities

Learning is one of the main positive drivers for involvement of stakeholders in the project - both team members conducting the review and city stakeholders receiving a review, but the actual levels do not achieve the potential.

There is little doubt that positive personal learning results from involvement in coordination and teams. See section 12.2. However, many stakeholders wanted more two-way learning to occur. See section 12.3. Some suggested this occur during reviews, in interviews, workshops and during presentations, although there was some scope for this (particularly after presentations, which also might give an opportunity for more feedback) team members and coordinators generally rejected this idea due to the limited time in a review. Therefore satisfying learning requirements would require development of additional up activity and communications across the PRESUD networks outside the review.

Although learning was recognised as important within the project itself, the project had not been set up this way, and the contractual promises and objectives made at the project onset, were not fully supportive of the principle of flexibility and learning, so this potential was never fully explored. The learning of team members returning to home cities was mentioned positively by those directly involved in the project. This clearly had more potential but was possibly aspirational (as there few explicit evidenced cases offered to show such learning had occurred and this was not a requirement of the methodology or process). See Section 12.3.

Many wanted learning within and across cities to be explicitly built into the methodology and the project (outside the actual review week). See section 12.4. Learning from each other was regarded by stakeholders as weak in the existing process and current methodology, but this was equally seen as a huge opportunity for development. Furthermore the widespread interest in learning through peer review would be an additional incentive to become involved and therefore may increase engagement in the peer review process. See section 12.4.

Stakeholders wanted a return of information. See section 12.4. Possibilities noted included: learning from the reviews of other cities; access to information on projects elsewhere; more active learning in the review or outside it; review team members responsible for bringing back learning from other cities; success stories from other cities recorded; e-mail communications more widely between cities; exchanges of review reports; a web site; recording of who is involved in each review and their roles and contact details (either in the report or on a web site), with an invitation to contact; and evidence reports to include best practice examples from the cities in advance of review (to be reviewed). Other suggestions included deeper analysis in

follow-up reviews, or after reviews. learning how to solve problems, not just hearing about known problems but how to do things better, and exchange visits between cities. See section 12.4.

External stakeholders also shared this view, furthermore they would be more inclined to be involved if they were also able to contact other external organisations in other cities, to learn (which the first trial of PRESUD did not attempt). This would also help to increase external engagement. See section 12.4.

There were few mechanisms mentioned for team members to share learning more widely on return home, although some mentioned debriefing and sharing meetings of all team members (possibly informal). The need for PRESUD facilitating networks and contacts, was important if learning was to result. This would require additional systems to share knowledge and best practice. Reports could include best practice from cities and review team members would have a responsibility to contribute examples of their own best practice. It was felt such exchanges would help maximise the impact.

Several stakeholders suggested that learning should occur by linking to other projects which had strengths which were complimentary to PRESUD, for instance Urban Audit, DISCUS, INTERACT. See section 12.4.

It was suggested that the desired learning beyond the review could be achieved via systematic development of networks - identified and recorded as outputs of PRESUD. See section 12.4. One idea for trying to sustain learning across cities (without trips abroad) was made that the output of PRESUD would include, for instance, a list of everyone involved in a review, who they are, what their interests are, and their contact numbers and e-mail. PRESUD could also form a website which would include everyone from the each review, with all the reports and lists of people that have been developed and involved. Someone interested in transport or social inclusion could then search for these things and see everyone involved, read their reports, and contact one another. If done through web based chat group this could have verifiable outcomes. This output was not systematically gathered and disseminated (another potential opportunity or instance of missed potential).

Furthermore, the second review teams in fact had to *re-learn* about the city, organisations and systems, as these were not generally recorded by the first PRESUD teams and again refers to short-term or potential learning of PRESUD, by recording some information this would aid any future team returning to the city. Other examples included background learning about cities and systems; learning about the organisational structure, culture, national contexts etc was often implicit in reports and not available to others or the second review team.

Finally there was additional potential for the EU to learn from such an exercise provided it was conducted and reviewed systematically. The overview lessons could be of major importance for the governance structures in the European Union.

In summary the learning possible far exceeds that actually transferred, achieved or evidenced. There was a clear expression by all stakeholders that the unrealised potential of peer review be recognised, developed, and realised.

Theory-based evaluation

Peer Review is a particular form of evaluation of a municipality, a form of organisational and sustainability action research. It can therefore compared and judged against good practice reported in the literature; this is theory-based assessment.

The PRESUD Peer review is primarily a qualitative action research methodology that engages practitioners, and this approach is recommended within the evaluation literature and therefore this is a strength of the peer review approach. See Section 13.4. The social and cross-organisational nature of peer review is also an underlying strength and is supported by the academic literature on organisational learning. See section 13.4. Peer review is strongly supported by the evaluation literature on dissemination and utilisation. Findings would be better received, disseminated, and utilised than would academic approaches, thereby increasing the likelihood of impact[3]. These components are a major strength of peer review and should be retained and developed. See Section 13.8. So the strengths of Peer review as an evaluation methodology include that: it utilizes qualitative action research conducted by practitioners, it utilizes social and cross-organisational learning, and it maximizes dissemination and uptake of its findings through the engagement of practitioners within the process.

However the current Peer Review has limitations. In both data gathering and analysis it falls short of the good practice in the evaluation literature. There may be an opportunity for peer review to improve and adopt some good practice from the literature including: tape-recording of interviews as a memory aid (recordings need not be transcribed) for the benefit of follow-up reviews or in support of cross-site comparative meta-analysis; more rigorous and inclusive sampling of stakeholders; the use of additional and mixed methods for data gathering and triangulation; and transparent and reflexive qualification of the review findings. See section 13.5. Furthermore qualitative analysis and interpretation is not a strength of practitioners nor of the peer review process; yet this is an important implicit aspect of the methodology. This may require additional training and compensation through additional methods, engagement, and personnel. See Section 13.7. Finally, the peer review and evaluation by practitioners is weak itself in terms of theory-based evaluation and foundation as recommended in the evaluation literature. It is important to understand how programmes are thought to operate and to test these expectations, and its important to develop grounded theory during the review from the empirical data gathered. This requires training or compensating approaches. See section 13.7.

So the weaknesses of Peer review as an evaluation include that: it does not utilise good practice in data gathering and analysis, and it is weak in theory-based evaluation and foundation; it does not explicitly consider how programmes are thought to operate, nor does it explicitly state how PRESUD will operate to bring about change, and test these expectations against reality (although this evaluation contributes information to this perspective).

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[3] Impact necessarily requires uptake but this not sufficient; the findings and recommendations must reflect the organisational and social reality, and then activate effective causal mechanisms, see the section on theory-based evaluation and realistic evaluation.

Overview of the Whole Review Process

The Current PRESUD process is fragile and sensitive to problems at earlier stages. Early problems create later problems and the process is not robust. The process is essentially a single thread without parallel processes or built-in redundancy. THis leads to knock-on effects. Weak preparation gives weaker evidence and engagement, weaker engagement gives distorted data, distorted data gives inaccurate report, weak team recording and analysis gives weak contributions from team members, weak time management gives delayed reports, delayed reports give less consultation for SMART plans, which leads to less ownership and subsequent impact.

The absence of parallel paths is a weakness of the methodology which should be addressed.

Wide ownership, engagement and commitment are essential pre-requisites for usefulness of the review. Therefore ownership and engagement should be maximised by all means possible.

The limited engagement of stakeholders is a weakness of the process and methodology which should be addressed by any means possible.

1.6 Some notes on Recommendations

The recommendations are presented as an interacting and overlapping package (rather than as isolated recommendations addressing isolated issues). This section records some notes linking recommendations to issues, strengths and opportunities.

1. SUPPORT A SECOND STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT TO CONTINUE, EXTEND AND DEVELOP A REVISED AND IMPROVED PRESUD

There should be a second stage of refinement to revise, continue, extend, develop, and re-evaluate a fully effective, widely supported, flexible peer review methodology and process, suitable for use in any and all European municipalities. This follows from the following findings:

▪ Net positive view of inherent strengths of the PRESUD process
▪ Positive conditional support for continuation by participants
▪ Positive conditional support for extension to other municipalities
▪ The support and desire of stakeholders to develop learning in future
▪ Identified weaknesses, with suggestions for correction, and a need to test and evaluate the suggested revisions

2. REDUCE AND REVISE METHODOLOGY: SHIFT AWAY FROM UK-AUDIT APPROACH TO A MORE FLEXIBLE AND PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH

A shift a way from the UK-audit approach to a more flexible and participative review process was requested by many participants. It requires increased participation of stakeholders and Peer Review teams need to function more as facilitators to summarise stakeholder views and less as judges or expert auditors. This recommendation will address the following issues:

▪ Negative views of imposition of UK audit/judgement approach
▪ Calls for flexibility and customisation for different municipalities in themes, balance, and benchmarks; differences in definition of sustainable development; weak consideration of socio-economic aspects of sustainability
▪ Report delivery delays and difficulties, and stakeholder criticisms of analysis and validation of reports
▪ Language and Contextual misunderstandings and their consequences
▪ Limited ownership of process limiting change and impact

The revised and reduced methodology should retain the core peer review idea. revise objectives to be more learning focused, and revise targets to be more realistic. The reduced methodology could focus on 2-5 broad sustainability themes:

• A Governance Theme (e.g. leadership, performance, engagement, cooperation). Focus upon the organisational & municipality practices.
• A Sustainability Theme (e.g. environment, social, economic, and their integration). Focus upon sustainability and the city circumstances.

Or alternatively: Governance, Environment, Social, Economic, and Integration themes.

3. CREATE A PARALLEL WEB REVIEW TO IMPROVE PREPARATION, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS, AND REPORT DEVELOPMENT.

There is a need to develop a more robust approach with independent streams and parallel methods, so that the process is not as fragile and as sensitive to downstream problems as it is currently. A Web based review was trailed in the PRESUD project and it engaged additional stakeholders, gave more information, could be used to inform and prepare review teams, and to disseminate and validate draft reports. This recommendation addresses the following issues and opportunities:

- Fragility and sensitivity of existing process (a single stream of information gathering by the current review) and the need to make it more robust.
- Limited engagement of types and numbers of stakeholders
- Questionable credibility of the process controlled by the municipality (as seen by external stakeholders)
- Additional inclusion of political representatives and internal stakeholders possible
- The need to strengthen the preparation of the review teams before review
- Stakeholder involvement was increased by 170 people before team review in trials in two cities
- Stakeholders were able and willing to validate and evaluate a final report in another web trial after review
- More stakeholders wish to be involved than are currently involved, and this would provide more time during the review week.

4. SHIFT EMPHASIS TOWARD LEARNING AS AN EXPLICIT GOAL OF PRESUD; DEVELOP EVALUATE AND ADOPT MECHANISMS TO REALISE FULL POTENTIAL

There was widespread support, and anticipation, of learning resulting from the project. Yet this was not an explicit aim and it was not realised in the project, and the methodology was focused upon a critical audit function rather a mutually supportive learning function. Mechanisms were not set up to deliver the learning possible, and this opportunity to further engage people and widen ownership was missed. Learning could occur before and after the review week, but te review could stimulate it, focus it, provide contacts and issues to examine.

- A potential learning network is created during reviews that could be sustained, communicated, and developed.
- Processes and pathways to develop learning could be a result of peer review
- Trial mutual learning and exchange mechanisms and evaluate and improve these
- Record and share networks and learning across municipalities

5. IMPROVE TEAM AND CITY PREPARATION: CREATE CITY EVIDENCE IN NARRATIVE FORM WITH SOME SELF-ASSESSMENT (TO BE REVIEWED)

Better preparation of teams and city stakeholders is required. Cities could present good practice examples, their sustainability criteria and indicators, the main issues and problems, and the main sustainability stakeholders in the city. This gives a Baseline Document. An overview of situation, good and bad circumstances, good and bad practice, criteria and evidence of progress and comments on little change. Teams then prepare questions in advance perhaps with external stakeholders locally through a survey by internet review or e-mail contact.

6. IMPROVE TEAM COMPETENCIES IN QUALITATIVE DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS THROUGH TRAINING - ADOPTING GOOD EVALUATION PRACTICE. AND DEVELOP A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR REVIEW MANAGERS UTILISING IDeA AND PRESUD EXPERIENCE.

There were mixed views of data gathering and analysis. Teams tended to have an inflated view of their analysis than did the city stakeholders. Teams were not trained in qualitative data and analysis techniques. Contextual and language differences made communication less efficient. There was a need to rely less upon the team member (peer) knowledge and more upon the tacit knowledge within the city. Shift focus from 'interviewer' to 'facilitator' of a dialogue between other people to get them to develop their own assessments and generate recommendations. Stakeholders know the local issues and context and could be better involved. Teams need additional skills in qualitative data analysis. Report validation was questioned, teams need to be more reflective, and better validate their findings with stakeholders. Training should include qualitative analysis and interpretation. Validation should be a major component of the analysis and peer review process (e.g. including small group discussions with 2-3 interviewees of similar status to facilitate exchange while reducing errors).

Finally, it was noted that reviews often presented information detached from meta-information - which can be misinterpreted or over-generalised. The review report should state its known weaknesses (e.g. no young or old business nor politicians involved in review) as it is useful information for the city and for future review teams. The reflexivity and qualification would add to the quality of the review in reducing exaggerated or over-generalised claims in findings (see 11.3)

In this project the initial team managers were all drawn from the IDeA, and their management and review skills were generally greatly valued. Furthermore they also trained the review teams (and therefore the later review managers) through experience and by example. The training of review managers will be a crucial (but unresolved issue) in any future PRESUD and IDeA and PRESUD staff are well placed to deliver (a component) of the required training.

Two approaches were noted (i) have a central single training team responsible for training all newcomers, or (ii) train people in review and also in how to train others. In practice a combination approach could be taken.

7. MAXIMISE STAKEHOLDER CREDIBILITY, ACCESS, DIVERSITY, NUMBERS AND OWNERSHIP, THROUGH PROJECT REQUIREMENTS, INDEPENDENT TEAM CONTACT, WEB REVIEW, AND CITY RECORDS

The stakeholders are internal and external to the municipality. Within the municipality there should be ownership by 2 or 3 departments rather than just the environment department. This will help link to internal networks. External stakeholders should be noted in an accumulating city database or equivalent so that there is some continuity across the process and involvement is recorded and transparent. Engagement is not simply about numbers or data gathering – the ownership, validation, credibility, and dissemination of the review will be enhanced.

- Create open access mechanisms for use by pro-active stakeholders
- Use internet for pre- and post-review engagement
- Teams to be responsible for independently accessing stakeholders
- Record interested stakeholder contact in city databases and grow this
- Stakeholders to be re-conceptualised as peer reviewers themselves
- Engage internal and external stakeholders in production of documents and reports or in recorded commentaries on them, as well as in preparation of review (e.g. stakeholders can advise the team on issues and question areas)

8. MAKE THE REPORT PRODUCTION PROCESS MORE PARTICIPATIVE: DEVELOP THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AFTER REVIEW

Write a short draft at review end based on presentation and feedback and delivered to city stakeholders shortly after review. Develop a second draft *interactively* with selected city stakeholders over weeks; using web capability, stakeholders as both sources of data and critical team guides.

9. BROADEN PLANS BEYOND SMART: ADOPT MIXED CRITERIA AND INDICATORS OF ORGANISATIONAL AND EXTERNAL CHANGE (AND REVIEW THESE ALSO).

There were significant non-measurable qualitative impacts resulting from PRESUD *within* the municipality administration and for those stakeholders *directly* involved in the process. These impacts were the main impacts of PRESUD, and they largely explain the positive support for the peer review process (Chapter 4) but they are understated and underdeveloped and often unrecorded by cities and teams within the PRESUD reviews and within the methodology and training. Incorporate mixed criteria and indicators (qualitative and quantitative, local and national, locally decided and defined) for tracking both internal administration changes and external city changes).

- Participant cities to propose criteria and indicators themselves and use mixed qualitative and quantitative verifiable criteria and indicators
- Report the changes and improvements in the organisation and city
- Develop understanding of circumstances, change, and contexts.
- Include SMART but add to this qualitative actions and targets, and give balanced attention to both.

10. INCLUDE PARTICIPANT EVALUATION OF: THE REVISED PROCESS AND CLAIMS, THE REVIEW REPORTS, THE REVIEW, AND LEARNING ACHIEVED.

This Evaluation applies primarily to the second round of reviews. Therefore a great deal of learning and solving of problems has occurred in this period. Therefore the evaluation here is likely to be better than might be found for a municipalities entering the network. The roll-out to other cities, and modified methodology, need to be evaluated as they create new circumstances and processes. All reports, in particular, need to be evaluated (by all participants) as this was not achieved in the development phase and this stage was weak and had adverse consequences. Learning as a new goal will require evaluation to judge and improve learning mechanisms developed and trailed. Coordinators tended to judge their engagement of stakeholders and SMART Plans and progress more highly than teams and external stakeholders. The management group tended to judge their methodology more highly than did the coordinators and team. This suggests that the review needs to also be independently evaluated by all participants. Finally there should be regular review the Peer Review Process itself every 3-6 years, to account for changing circumstances, needs, and partners.

CONSIDER HOW TO PROMOTE PRESUD DIVERSITY, COMPETITION, AND CHANGE, AND HOW TO ENCOURAGE CROSS-PROJECT UNIONS AND EXCHANGE TO IMPROVE PROCESS & INCREASE IMPACT ACROSS EUROPE

Significant impact upon European sustainability will require a process that works not in 10 municipalities but in 1000s, and the methodology, roll-out, and process must aim for that level of coverage. The management of such a large number needs thought. One option is to have partnerships of between 10-100 municipalities participant (views differed on the best way forward) formed and exchanging personnel and best practice. This can be at EU level (counter to the views of many participants and involving an unfinished methodology) or it could be voluntary. Another suggestion was to have a doubling of membership every 5 years to cover Europe in tens of years. In order to develop the European perspective, the methodology may need to consider how to encourage diversity of models, collaborations, and evolutionary adaption and growth, possibly with breakaway models that can themselves grow and develop.

PART B: INTRODUCTION & EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The IDeA Peer Review

The PRESUD Peer Review takes its basic form from the UK Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Peer Review.

The IDeA peer review team (ref IDeA 1) conducts an evaluation against an aspirational benchmark. The national context prompting development (IDeA 1: p24) included the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000, Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services White Paper the English CPA Comprehensive Performance Assessment[4] and the English Best Value[5] Review. The process was developed over a three-year period in over 160 local authorities.

A peer review team comprises six or seven members external to the local municipality being reviewed (typically, a serving local municipality chief executive; one or two senior members of a local municipality; a senior local municipality officer at chief or assistant chief officer level; an external person representing the private or voluntary sector or an academic; and a review manager from the IDeA). The peer review team interview senior internal managers and politicians and hold workshops for other staff and external stakeholders. They also examine quantitative data on circumstances and progress towards targets, key documents giving plans and policies, and observations of process or neighbourhoods within the local government boundary. The team begin on Monday morning ending interviewing on Thursday. Typically 2 or 3 interview streams occur in parallel. Each interview may have one or two team members interviewing. The team consider their findings from Thursday afternoon into evening, leading to a headline presentation to the stakeholders on Friday lunchtime. The team then write a short report (within weeks) and circulate for comment. Changes are negotiated, the final report is made public, and is then used to develop an action plan. The municipality may commission a second review.

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[4] The CPA is an external review for improving performance of all single tier, county, and district English Councils. It includes a five-category judgement (excellent, good, fair, weak and poor) based on (i) core services and (ii) ability to improve. Six core services (e.g. environment education housing etc) are each marked out of four (with weights to reflect national priorities e.g. education). Corporate assessment includes leadership, managing performance, and engagement and is partially self-assessed. Successful Councils receive freedoms from further audits.

[5] Best Value is another review of Councils including: Council-wide objectives and performance measures based on local needs and wishes, Best Value Performance Indicators reported annually in the Performance Plan, performance and efficiency targets set and published in the annual Performance Plan; with independent audit and inspection.

2.2 Background to the PRESUD Project

Participating Cities

This project involves 9 European cities participating in the project:

- Birmingham, UK
- The Hague, Holland
- Leipzig, Germany
- Malmo, Sweden
- Newcastle, UK (lead partner, project management)
- Nottingham, UK
- Tampere, Finland (participating and meeting all costs)
- Venice, Italy
- Vienna, Austria

Cities participate in the development, testing and application of the review process. The lead agency is the local government body (referred to as 'the municipality'). The municipality also provides personnel to fill a number of roles including: management representation on the project steering group (to guide the project), two or three named co-ordinators to organise reviews within the home city and provide a permanent point of contact, three nominated experts to be trained and act as review team members and travel to other cities, and finally the municipality provides personnel to participate in interviews and workshops during the review of the home city.

Participating Partners

In addition to the participating cities there are a number of technical partners, each partner facilitates different aspects of the project and the review process:

IDeA have expertise of peer reviews of local government authorities in England. They are invited to conduct these reviews which are funded by the local authority. During these reviews they assess the authority on a range of high-level issues and initiatives. The aim of this partnership is to apply and modify the IDeA review process to European cities and sustainability issues. IDeA provide review management expertise, prototype review structures and guidance materials, as well as advice and training on review processes.

OECD have conducted reviews of sustainability at the national level in most of the OECD countries. Their approach includes the use of sustainability indicators which are organised into ten themes such as air, water, waste, natural resources, regional co-operation, environmental and economic integration, energy, transport, social and environmental integration, social and economic integration. The aim of this technical partnership is to provide expertise on national-level indicators of sustainability and test the application of these at the city level.

EuroCities are involved in networking and previous inter-city project experience linking many cities, responsible for dissemination of project to European stakeholders.

University of West England (UWE) are responsible for digital communications and dissemination; aim to practically facilitate preparation and process of reviews, to store relevant information and outputs, produce an output CD useful to other cities, they are also collaborators in the evaluation through the co-design of web-based surveys.

2.3 The Peer Review Personnel And Roles

This section records the key personnel roles involved in implementing a multi-national peer review

The Project Management Team. Responsible for the overall management budget, people, process and planning (in conjunction with steering group for shared discussion and decisions). Contact with the auditors and European management.

Management Steering Group. Includes members from all of the partner cities and all of the technical partner organisations. Responsible for negotiating agreements and shared decisions. Steering group members roles and other roles below may in practice overlap. Roles require that overall project direction is maintained, and project objectives are satisfied.

City Coordinators. Co-ordinators act as a focus point for operational and planning communications between managers, review team members and the home city. Co-ordinators lead on identifying stakeholders for participating on reviews (with supporting guidance documents), they plan the interviews and workshops of the review in advance, brief the participants, and co-ordinate the delivery of evidence summaries as background information. Co-ordinators organise translations and interpretation where necessary. It is not recommended that co-ordinators interpret for the reviews, but often help in this respect in supporting the review team.

Review Managers. Generally taken from the UK Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) with previous experience of LGIP reviews. On occasion this role has been taken by members of the PRESUD team with previous experience of PRESUD reviews. The review manager will liase with city co-ordinators and team members to ensure that the review preparations are satisfactory, and to prepare for the review. On arrival at review the manager will lead team building and organise team working, revise the schedule and arrangements (if necessary) with the city co-ordinators, organise the review team activities, reflections, discussions and recording, leading on presentations and report compilation and delivery.

Review Team members. Taken from the participating network of cities. Most often sustainability generalists (sometimes experts), senior managers and local politicians. On a city review there will between four or five core team members. Team members are nominated to reviews by the steering group members and cordinators. Team members prepare for the review in advance, through reading and independent investigation, they share their understanding with one another, take responsibility for investigating two or three of the main themes, and the writing of the section corresponding to that theme in the report. Occasionally a city (or team) may wish to involve an individual with specific expertise or alternative viewpoint within the review. This is encouraged where it occurs to give an alternative perspective, Such individuals need not have been trained in the review process but bring clear additional expertise to the review.

Municipality Stakeholders. The participants within the host municipality are involved in interviews and workshops during the reviews. These can be categorised as internal to the administration and external to it. Internal participants include; municipality managers, sustainability generalists and experts, and local politicians. External participants include: community members and representatives, businesses, and other agencies able to contribute to the review. The total numberof stakeholders (both internal and external) varied for each city but typically between 30-50 people were involved in interviews and workshops during each review.

Interpreters and Translators. The project language is English, so that key host city documents require translation. The interviews between review members and city participants may require interpretation. When needed interpreters are crucial to the success of the review, and should be regarded as review team members. Interpretation skills required include the capability to translate sustainability, management, and socio-economic concepts, accurately.

Evaluator-Observers. To evaluate the process at a distance or directly experience review activities (and difficulties) with some detachment. The evaluator/observer may lead on surveys and interviews or take active roles in the team, in the management groups, in city coordination or as an interviewee, but here has a role to reflect upon findings, formulate proposals and mechanisms for improving the process.

2.4 PRESUD Peer Review: Content and Methods

The PRESUD Peer Review focuses upon certain themes and gathers information by different methods.

Themes

The following themes are explored within the peer review:

Governance Themes:
- Leadership
- Performance management
- Democratic and community engagement

Integration Themes:
- Regional Co-operation
- Integration of environmental and economic
- Integration of environmental and social
- Integration of social and economic

Environmental Themes:
- Air
- Water
- Energy
- Transport
- Waste

Review Methods

The review team members examine city sustainability in a number of ways:

- Reading of city documents, additional research, and evidence summaries supplied by the city to be reviewed.
- Through Interviews and workshops with people responsible for different aspects of sustainability (also external agencies, community and business representatives)
- Through tours and visits (formal and informal) within the city
- Through reflective comparison between reviewed city and the team members own home cities and experiences

2.5 The Early Development of the PRESUD Peer Review Methodology

The basic methodology was formed the through previous experience before the proposal was agreed, and then through the process of proposal negotiation and agreement between partners when contributions were agreed in advance of any detailed review plan and trials. Here the overall membership, role contributions, and overall review plan was decided. By the proposal submission stage the objectives within the original report were set and partners had agreed:

- Peer review teams to undertake two-day site visits of the partner cities, presenting draft conclusions and recommendations at the end of the second day.

- Peer review teams to complete performance assessment reports within one week of site visit.

The review process developed further with the first steering group meeting through direct city partner involvement. Planned review dates were altered to better suit the circumstances of cities (many objected to work across summer periods and holidays of July and August), there were also objections to the decisions that had been taken without consultation of the wider project members. For example, the management team had created guidance documentation and theme tables without consultation. When this was then given to the steering group there was a lot of time spent in arguing this. However there had not been time to consult with the partners before the meeting and built into the project (which effectively started late). One general compromise and outcome of this negotiation stage was that it was agreed that the project would be one of continuous learning – all proposed materials, processes, methodologies were to be regarded as adaptable and the views of project members would be consulted – but this would be constrained by the project plan. All reviews would be regarded as trials from which project members would learn. This learning would be captured and could then inform the project and European Commission. Actions resulting required that the project management team put together a draft review schedule covering all cities.

Following the return to home cities each city co-ordinator nominated three municipality members prepared to be trained and attend reviews. With this information the project management group assigned named teams to review each and every city. The dates were passed onto the city co-ordinators who then began early preparations for their review.

At this stage the team members resisted the ideas of extending review beyond the time allotted in the original proposal (as this was seen as an excessive demand on time). As recommended by IDeA who had experience of this (they had 5 day reviews). Also this was resisted initially for time and finance constraints.

Before conducting in depth reviews a pilot review was held in Newcastle. This pilot aimed to test the preparation for review materials, the briefing process, and the organisation required with in the host city. In addition it tested the functioning of the mixed language incoming review team and the management of their activities to review of sustainable urban development.

The trial lasted for 2.5 days only. A report was written but it was recognised that this would not be of the required depth to form the basis of improvement plans. It was found that the time allotted was possibly adequate for interviewing managers and officers in the local authority, but it was not adequate for involving the required external and community representatives. The team members on the project themselves felt rushed and expressed wish for more time. In addition it was not possible to get the most senior members with short notice. This was the first evidence that suggested an effective and comprehensive peer review process (encompassing all OECD themes) could not be achieved within a 2 or 3 day period, and the methodology was revised to at least 3.5 days long.

In the first round of reviews providing the information was difficult using the theme table format, and many areas lay outside the responsibility of the local authority. It was decided the theme tables should be supplemented with 'evidence summaries' which covered the ten OECD themes and the three governance themes of IdeA. Verbal evaluation by interview participants was attempted by in short follow-up discussions after interviews. The incoming team and interview approach were generally well received by interviewees. However both reviewers and interviewees would have preferred to have been better briefed on each others responsibilities and expertise, and the incoming team required better briefing on the city context (management and political structures). The review managers had some difficulty in gaining the contributions from review team members and co-ordinators towards the report. The review was held on the week of 26th of Feb, and the final report was received on the 26th of April. The methodology was revised to allow a longer reporting period of 4-6 weeks rather than the one-week as originally proposed.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Overall background to the Evaluation

Responsibility for formal evaluation changed hands 13 months before the project ended (to the current author from the Improvement and Development Agency, IDeA). The evaluation in this report applies primarily to the second round of peer reviews conducted in the final year of the project. Observations and informal evaluations had been conducted on the first round of reviews and these informed the final approach. The evaluation process was created over a three month period in consultation with city coordinators and the project manager, and was presented for overall agreement at a joint meeting of partners. Following this new and additional evaluation processes were agreed and others would be trialed to test their effectiveness.

The overall approach taken within this project was to stimulate, facilitate and manage *participant* evaluation. Participants are those people involved in the project. Participants were distributed across cities, reviews, roles of the project. This evaluation was been augmented by observations within the project (management and coordination of reviews, observations on review teams, management groups and training) and (to a lesser degree) theoretical evaluation.

Although some quantitative investigation has been undertaken (web survey questions of teams and participants in reviews) the dominant approach has been that of qualitative investigation (participant observations, interviews, and web and e-mail questions). The PRESUD project language was English. Therefore the evaluation was conducted in English. However in some cases evaluation by city stakeholders was conducted by survey in the home language.

Because of the geographical spread of participants most interviews were conducted by telephone, e-mail, and through qualitative questions on surveys. Informal and unstructured contact was utilised as well as formal and structured contact. To better access stakeholders receiving evaluation included visits to selected cities to interview stakeholders in addition. Different methods and stakeholder groups engaged to give different perspectives on the project to aid triangulation or to highlight agreement and disagreement on evaluation.

The following table summarises the evaluation activities conduced by city, stakeholder sources, and methods.

3.2 Evaluation activities and methods by city and data source

City	Coordinators	Teams and Team Managers	City Stakeholders	Other Data Sources Used
Birmingham	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (First and Second Reviews) Team manager Interview	7 (1hr) Interviews after 2nd review	Web pre-survey of 50 stakeholders, 1st Presentation (Taped and transcribed) video of interviews
The Hague	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview. Participant observation on 1st review team, observation of 2nd review team.	16 (of 33) 1hr Interviews during 2nd Review	1st and 2nd Reports and Presentations, and Action Plan.
Leipzig	1 Interview and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview Participant observation 2nd review team.	11 (of 30) Short Interviews during and after 2nd Review E-mail Questionnaire after presentation.	2nd Report contributions. Negligible results from stakeholder pre-engagement web trial.
Malmo	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview	(20 of 35) E-mail Questionnaire After 2nd review (20 of 46) Web Post-Survey on Translated Report	
Newcastle	2 Interviews Direct contact and observations observation On pilot and 1st review coordination	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview Observation of 1st and 2nd Review teams from host city perspective.	(10 of 30) Short Interviews during 1st Review. (10 of 30) E-mail questionnaire after presentation. Observation on both reviews on stakeholder engagement	Extended Long-term Participant Observation on City and LA21 Involvement 1st Presentation (observed taped and transcribed). 1st Report and 2nd Draft Report 120 responses to Web pre-survey of stakeholders, but Proposed public post-survey of report blocked.
Nottingham	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview	8 (1 hr) Interviews after review.	
Tampere	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview. Participant observation on 1st review team.	Web Post-Survey on Translated Report (7 responses)	1st Report, Action Plan.
Venice	2 Interviews and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview	12 Short telephone interviews after review.	
Vienna	2 Interview and distance contacts	Team web surveys (1&2). Team manager Interview Participant observation 2nd review team.	10 Short Interviews during Review	
Additional Sources and Methods	General Discussions observations, & contact across project. final questions to all 9 coordinators	Manager focus group. Participant Observation of 2 Training Sessions & Overall Team Planning. Observations and discussions with project manager across one year.	Observation on novel trials to improve engagement of stakeholders	Validation comments Video of training Participant Observations on Management Group. Observations within Lead City. Experience of Management of Evaluation and Web Surveys Development. IDeA Documents on Peer Review

COLOUR KEY: Blue = long interviews, purple = short interviews, green = observation, red = web or e-mail survey, black = documentary/video record

3.3 Summary table of evaluation methods and sources

(With estimated involvement and approximate/average duration of engagement)

Possible Evaluation in Cities Countries & Reviews	Actual Evaluation With City Coordinators	Actual Evaluation With Teams and Team Managers	Actual Evaluation With City Stakeholders	Actual Evaluation From Other Data Sources
9 European Cities. 7 European Countries. (3 UK Cities 6 Non-UK). 19 reviews in total 3-5 people actively involved throughout project in each city. Approx 5 people per review team (50 review team member visits in each review round) Between 25-50 people involved in each city review; estimate around 400 people involved in each review round.	17 Coordinator telephone and e-mail interviews (1 hour) across all cities Numerous additional informal discussions contacts and communications Participant observation as city coordinator on 2 reviews. (4 weeks) in one city.	8 Team Manager interviews (1 hour) 1 Focus Group of 5 managers (4 hours) 40 responses to team surveys in first review 42 (out of 50) responses by review team members to a web survey after 2nd reviews. Participant observation: Team Planning for 18 reviews in first and second round (4 weeks) Participant observations on 5 review teams and 4 report write-ups (15 weeks) Observation on 2 Team Training Sessions (4 days)	30 people directly interviewed (1 hour) from 3 cities. 40 people in short direct interviews (15 mins) from further 3 cities. 50 short post-review e-mail questionnaires returned from 4 cities. 29 (out of 60) web surveys of reports responses in 2 cities. Observation of ongoing stakeholder involvement and engagement in 1 city. 180 responses to pre-review web trials on increasing stakeholder engagement in 3 cities.	Access to Review Reports, Presentations, and Action Plans. Observations on 4 Management meetings in 4 cities. (6 days) Observations within lead city LA21 Team (across project life). Reflections on Management of Project Evaluation and Web Development (6 months activity)
Reflection on evaluation breadth, depth and outcomes				
Significant spread over Europe (UK over-represented others under-represented no acceded countries and weak on southern European countries, all urban municipalities) Evaluation concentrates towards 2nd Reviews (expect more positive than total view)	City Managers and Coordinators views very well represented across process. Significant breadth & depth with additional support from other sources.	Team managers views well represented. Over 2/3 of team members views represented on reviews, some independent triangulation. Mechanisms shallow with little depth but overview insights and broad comments have resulted across all reviews.	Selected internal stakeholders involved across cities. Indicative findings supported by other sources and findings. External stakeholder least well engaged and understood. Relatively uncertain & weak findings (given report delays, surface engagement, and time constraints). Findings only if supported by other sources.	Review reports have not been Evaluated as intended nor compared across all reviews

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3.4 Potential Audiences of the Evaluation Report

The potential audiences of the report are diverse. Firstly, Participants need the collective interpreted feedback (with the methodology and evidence accessible) to identify areas of weaknesses (beyond their immediate experience) with suggestions for improvement, and to have a record of their contributions to the evaluation. Secondly, it is a requirement of the EU funding regime and the external monitoring team that independent evaluation be conducted, and that evaluation recommendations be acknowledged and considered in the final project report:

"I note you are soliciting and evaluating feedback on the PRESUD process and model. You are advised that any significant recommendations arising out of this evaluation should be acknowledged, considered, and where appropriate accommodated, in any final documents to justify the process" (Point 9 in a letter from external monitoring team (SOGES-HTS) Head Bruno Julien, D1/JS/sb D (2004) 510305 to the Project Manager).

So, thirdly, the potential evaluation audience includes all those who receive the final project report. Fourthly, those people and organisations that implement, are affected by, included in, or are neglected by, peer review findings and recommendations who may wish to critically judge findings through consideration of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the evaluation. Fifthly, other municipalities and local governance organisations, that might come to consider multi-national peer review in future, may wish to independently consider the views of the participants in this early trial, before setting up such programmes and during their own evaluations. Finally, others may be interested in peer reviews, either wishing to learn from past experiences or critique multi-national peer reviews in future (such as academics and NGOs for instance).

3.5 Choice of a Qualitative Realist Evaluation Methodology

The factors influencing the choice of a qualitative methodology are outlined in Patton (1987: p9-13) and Clarke (1999: p53-63). These include: qualitative data provides depth and detail through direct quotations and experience; responses are neither systematic nor standardised the researcher which does not impose a framework upon participants but enables them to give their own perspectives; it is better suited to developing elaboration, explanation, meanings and new ideas; the use of interviews and observations are complimentary, reinforcing, and can give insights into process from an inside perspective; and the approach has the advantage of flexibility and building upon tacit knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p13).

Furthermore (Patton, 1987: p23-43) notes qualitative methods are useful for process evaluation (and peer review is a process) when the interest is in the internal dynamics of the program and the factors that make it strong or weak; gaining the perceptions of those involved in the program; how outcomes are produces or not; gaining understanding inductively across participants and different sites (as with peer review); unravelling what is happening and searching for patterns and nuances and identifying unanticipated (positive or negative) consequences of programmes; and gaining the perceptions of people close to programmes within organisations.

A qualitative methodology is also useful for implementation evaluation – judging to what extent a programme is actually implemented; describing diversity across sites;

for formative evaluations which are useful in the early stages of development; and for determining the *quality* of a programme; where there are no acceptable, valid, and reliable quantitative measures (such as sustainability, learning or creativity); where an evaluation is exploratory and seeks to identify key issues or variables; seeks to add depth and understanding to quantitative data (clear, specific, and measurable); and it is useful in goal-free evaluation (Scriven, 1972) where data is gathered without being restricted to the stated goals of an organisation or programme, to find out what actually happens rather than what is stated to happen.

Finally (Patton, 1987: p39-40) notes that evaluation is largely non-theoretical and often ignores theoretical issues but a qualitative methodology is useful in developing grounded theory, which is inductive, pragmatic, and concrete (and therefore likely to be appealing to practitioners). This approach may help practitioners understand how programs or organisations work, why they function as they do, and how impacts follow. Practitioners can 'reality-test' their own theories, the relationship between actions and effects, encouraging engagement with the empirical to test these theories. Grounded evaluation is an important product of demonstration programmes and multi-site evaluations as in the peer review programme.

The choice also arose out of earlier observations on the first review which showed that much of the change and impact of peer reviews, and were non-measurable. A qualitative research methodology can identify and capture such outcomes of reviews and process weaknesses that cannot be measured. It was hoped that through this research process new information relevant to *improving* the process would emerge from this work. Firstly, process difficulties could be better identified and noted, leading to improvements. Secondly qualitative *criteria* might be identified which could then be used within reviews and action plans themselves. Thirdly a better and more explicit 'theory of change' or 'theory of PRESUD' might emerge which could then be tested and further improved upon through future testing, learning and evaluation.

The Realist approach to evaluation is one that is described by Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Clarke (1999). Important aspects of this approach include the acceptance of mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, the search for underlying explanations, and causal mechanisms, and an understanding of the importance of context, in evaluating whether and how programmes work. They argue that programmes should not be conceived as externally imposed forces – but that programmes are effective ''if subjects choose to make them work and are placed in the right conditions to enable them to do so' (quoted in Clarke, 1999: p53). The realist approach recognises a level of social reality acting below that of events; that of the process and mechanisms - and it is the role of the realist evaluator to clarify these – as it is not a programme which 'works' but: ''..for the realist evaluator, outcomes are understood and investigated by bringing to the centre of investigation certain hypotheses about the mechanisms through which a programme seeks to bring about change, as well as considering the contextual conditions which are most conducive to that change'' (quoted in Clarke, 1999: p54).

In other words realist evaluation recognises that a programme is based upon an (often implicit) theory of change held by the participants, and part of the role of evaluation is to make this theory (and the mechanisms of change) more explicit, and also to examine how well it describes the actual programme under the influence of different contexts.

3.6 Evaluating the Different PRESUD Components

The PRESUD Process included 2 rounds of Reviews; the 1st Round of Reviews (9 reviews) was developmental and was informally and observationally evaluated, the 2nd Round of Reviews (9 reviews) was formally evaluated.

In the Second Round of Reviews, each city each review was broken down into its elements and resulting products:

- Training
- Review Preparation and Evidence Documentation (1st product)
- The Review
  - Interviews and Workshops
  - Team Processes of Recording, Analysis, and Recommendation
  - The Presentation
  - The Draft Report (2nd product)
  - The Final report (3rd product)
- Development of the Action Plan (4th product)
- Implementation of the Action Plan
- Change, Impact and Learning resulting

The aim of evaluation design is to achieve adequate coverage over these different components, processes & products. Given the time, cost, and resource constraints the evaluation must be selective and managed. The strategy on this project has been to share evaluation over the reviews and participants in the project, to use both common standard evaluations and customised methods.

3.7 Question Areas and Data Gathering methods

Questioning was generally both mixed qualitative and quantitative questioning. These included semi-structured and open-ended questions. Most focused upon (a) the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and possible improvements to the process, (b) the different review stages (c) degrees of agreement and disagreement with various statements about the project, and their attitudes of it from very positive to very negative on aspects of PRESUD, and (d) participant comments upon the value, changes and impacts to sustainability. These questions were asked of different stakeholder groups through different methods.

Team Surveys and contact

A web survey was developed, trialed in the first review and modified for the second round. All team members were contacted after each review (between 1 week and 2 months afterwards).

Coordinator contact and interviews

Each coordinator was formally interviewed a minimum of two times, but there were many informal contacts in addition. Interviews were mostly telephone and e-mail based, but with some face-to-face interviews also.

Stakeholder surveys and contact

Four different approaches to engage stakeholders in evaluation were used:

1. Team questioning of interviewees on evaluation during the review interviews (attempted in 5 cities).
2. Post-review e-mail questions to all those involved in the review immediately after review (attempted in all cities)
3. A web based survey 2-5 months after review either when the final report was completed and translated (attempted in 5 cities only – 4 cities would receive their report after final evaluation deadline). For those cities where there was not time to evaluate the final translated report, evaluation of a draft English report was attempted. However because of report delays this was nly possible in two cities.
4. Dedicated researchers travelled to five cities; three involved interviews in Parallel with the 2nd review, two followed after the 2nd review.

Observations on Project, within Roles, and in Trials

Participant Observation was utilised throughout the project, and included (a) observation on all management steering group meetings, co-development of the methodology, responsibility for planning and organising first round of reviews, (b) city coordination within one city organising and hosting a review, (c) review team member on four reviews, (d) and final year observations within the lead city LA21 team. The findings from observations on the project are sometimes recorded within the findings under 'Additional Observations' but more generally they perform a function of suggesting issues, questions, and validating.

3.8 The Analysis Process

Patton (1987: p144-164) outlines considerations in analysing and interpreting qualitative data. Analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, creating organisation, patterns, categories and basic descriptive units. Interpretation involves the attachment of significance and meaning to this, explaining, relationships, and patterns. The two stages are not separate but interact. Organising the data is described above, and it involves organisation into broad themes and sub-themes of interest; it is a creative process. The data are organised as cases (usually the interviewee in a particular evaluation, or a site in evaluating across sites). The records of cases can be analysed by content analysis (identification of coherent important examples, themes, and patterns). Patton notes that different people can give different interpretations and that important insights can emerge from these. Qualitative evaluations are particularly suited to inductive analysis (the patterns, themes, categories come from the data rather than been decided prior to collection, and the evaluator looks for variations and similarities in the data). The idea is not to impose pre-existing expectations on the data. Inductive approaches begin with the specific data and build toward general patterns. Qualitative analysis is guided by the search for patterns and issues, not hypotheses (contrasting with the hypothetical-deductive approach where hypotheses are stated before data collection). In practice it is possible to have a mixed approach.

Stakeholder Triangulation

Here the data is considered from the different stakeholder groups; those who prepare, conduct and report the reviews (the team members and team managers) and those that organise, receive, and attempt to act upon the reviews (the coordinators and the other stakeholders – internal and external). This is a form of triangulation by stakeholder perspective and is a useful way to organise and present the different perspectives on the process.

Thematic Organisation of Data

There are significant amounts of data generated in the evaluation, this can be organised into themes (e.g. preparation for review or report delivery). Under each of these themes will be the views of team members, team managers, coordinators, and municipality external stakeholders.

Method of Organisation and Interpretation of Data

Raw data was classified and separated by source; data from teams and team managers, data from coordinators, city stakeholders, and additional observations.

Transcribed (digital) interviews were read, and then colour coded in terms of negatives, weaknesses, and issues (red), strengths, positives, and opportunities (green), relevant facts and factual-like statements (pink), and suggestions for improvements (blue). These were then assigned to major themes (the review, wider issues, the future etc) and sub-themes within (particular aspects of the review, particular issues etc). This colour coded data was firstly cut and pasted into thematic sections of the report, and secondly the colour coded interviews were summarised by extracting a section from each coded section, and this was interpreted as a overview of the interview.

Survey data included quantitative information relating to views and feelings (grading of views from strong positive to negative, or strength of agreement with statements) and qualitative comments associated with these judgements to clarify or elaborate. Quantitative survey data was (automatically) collectively compiled to show the aggregated results and the spread of views from all the respondents. Where there were more positive views than there were mixed and negative views this was interpreted as an indicator of a clear strength. Where this was not the case it was interpreted as an area in which improvements were desired and/or possible. Where many issues had been surveyed, it was possible to compare all respondents views across issues to see which issues had generated more positive uncertain or negative responses than any other issues. This then was interpreted as a possible weighting of issues; the most positive, uncertain or negative (e.g. the strong uncertainty associated with measurable impacts and change or the very positive views on continuation of peer reviews or the very negative views on report delivery). The individual comments received within the surveys were generally brief (often a sentence). Individually these were not informative but collectively they gave a multi-site and multi-participant impression. These were first collected together (automatically) and then organised into positive, mixed, negative sections, and recombined. These recombined collective comments are recorded in the report. Where the individual comments were mostly positive, mixed, or negative they were collectively interpreted and summarised as such.

Summary data from the different sources was collected under the broad theme headings and the specific sub-theme headings by its source. This summary data was itself then hierarchically and outwardly summarised (a summary was made of each sub-theme and then later of each theme).

As data accumulated in the developing findings report, theme headings were changed to more directly reflect the data accumulating within the theme. For example: the theme of 'preparation and documentation' was modified to 'weaknesses in preparation and documentation' or 'Impacts and Change' was spilt into two themes 'Uncertainty and Doubt on Measurable Impacts and Change' and 'Unrecorded but Positive Qualitative Change and Impact'. Further data accumulation required further changes in theme headings, but the aim was to directly communicate the developing summary points by the theme heading (for ease of understanding and to increase the utility of the evaluation to participants and managers).

Clustering of summaries was used. Here a particular section was considered and a summary made of that section. Another section was considered and another section made. The two summaries were then summarised.

Theory-Based Evaluation and PRESUD comparison with LGIP Peer Review

As the PRESUD peer review is primarily a qualitative evaluation of local government by practitioners it can be considered against relevant norms and standards in the literature on evaluation, qualitative research, and practitioner learning and research.

Evaluation is often largely non-theoretical and often ignores theoretical issues such as specifying how a programme or organisation is supposed to operate or theorising from empirical results (Clarke, 1999, p30-34, Patton, 1987: p39-40, Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p 55-82, Patton, 1986 p150-176), A qualitative methodology such as this one is useful in developing grounded theory (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, or Patton, 1980, p80-83), which is inductive, pragmatic, and concrete, and grounded evaluation is an important product of demonstration programmes and multi-site evaluations as in the peer review programme. Argyris & Schon (1974) consider integration of thought and action (real-time evaluation) in organisations. They claim that such situations can be best considered through a conceptual framework which analyses the 'theories of action. 'They suggest explicit practical informed theory building and testing. Theories on how the project intends to influence the external world need to be considered, clarified, and tested. Conceptualisation of such change and causality in the social world is informed by a theoretical perspective (in this case realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley,1997), complexity and critical realism (e.g. Byrne, 2002). It is important to consider how and why the programme has the potential to cause change, and identify the anticipated or actual causal mechanisms, why it does not, and to penetrate below the surface of observable inputs and outputs, to begin to understand how the causal mechanisms (which generate problems) are actually removed or countered, to understand the contexts in which mechanisms operate, and to understand the outcomes and how they were they produced.

These perspectives are explicitly used in this evaluation. Firstly (besides gaining the view of participants) the peer review process is assessed from a theoretical viewpoint and these findings are triangulated with the empirical findings. Secondly, in

diagnosing issues and interpreting the empirical findings a grounded theory approach is taken, which the attempts to explain the data from theoretical perspectives, which then inform recommendations.

Furthermore the UK LGIP Peer Review process is well documented in terms of methodology, summary findings, and in particular LGIP assessments of UK local government. These are publicly available on the web (e.g. refs IDeA 1 to 5) and can be examined in conjunction with the PRESUD peer review model to compare the two approaches. This comparative consideration enabled further evaluation of PRESUD.

Finally, findings are presented as issues to be addressed and strengths and suggestions to build upon. These findings and suggestions have been interpreted, and the approach taken in analysis and interpretation (and well confirmed by participant evidence) is[6] that:

- Some issues have several different underlying causes
- Some issues also relate to overarching causes or context
- Some causes interact or are related
- Different issues sometimes share similar underlying causes
- Identifying and addressing causes (and also the contextual factors that operate) is therefore an aim of the evaluation and the recommendations
- Suggestions and recommendations should aim to address these causes (where possible) rather than tackle the issues themselves directly
- Individual suggestions and recommendations should impact upon several different weaknesses identified.

Therefore recommendations and suggestions should be regarded as an interacting package to implement and further evaluate in future (rather than as isolated recommendations addressing isolated issues).

3.9 Validation and Consistency Cross-Checking

Limited validation and consistency cross checking was attempted by several mechanisms.

Circulations of Pre-Draft Summaries, Findings & Recommendations

Many participants were not interested in reading more than several pages and the draft report was around 250 pages, with a summary of around 20 pages; some wanted 1 or 2 pages with key points. It was decided that a summary of the summary would be made and then circulated around the coordinators and team manager for comments. People were asked to respond in an open so that others could see their comments and also had the opportunity to respond.

As a follow up to this the same stakeholders were sent the contents list of the draft report and people were invited to request information on a section or chapter basis.

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[6] For those with deeper interests in conceptualising social systems, causes and change, this interpretation and approach is entirely consistent with, and mirrors, certain perspectives within the evaluation and academic literature; 'critical realism' and 'complexity' - which have informed the evaluation and analysis. For readable introductions to these perspectives see the bibliography and References for instance: Pawson and Tilley, Collier, Byrne, etc.

Several people asked for specific sections to be sent to generally inform them or to inform their final conference presentations. They were asked to give further views on this. For those interested in the detail a draft summary, a draft report with draft findings, containing most of the evidence, and also draft recommendations was circulated. These participants were asked to read and comment upon the findings and recommendations, and return written comments and criticisms.

These approaches gave some limited feedback, leading to some re-wording, but did not provide enough evidence or argument to radically alter findings and recommendations.

Conference Presentation and Findings

The draft findings were presented at a final project conference, and the conference itself gave further data and interpretations relevant to the evaluation. Observations and notes on this were added into the evaluation in the final editing stage.

Integration of validation findings

Where use of the validation data demonstrated additional support for a finding or a recommendation then additional weight was given, where significant differences or disagreements with the findings or recommendations occurred these were given less weight or were amended. Where new findings emerged, these were then introduced into the final report with the evidence and new recommendations added.

PART C: DETAILED FINDINGS OF EVALUATION

4 POSITIVE OVERALL QUALIFIED SUPPORT FOR PRESUD, AND FOR ITS CONTNUATION AND EXPANSION IF REVISED

4.1 Overview

The evidence in this section shows that there is a net positive view of the project from all groups of stakeholders, although many suggest support is conditional upon modifications in the process, or evidence of sufficient impact and change, or subject to revision of methodology or aims. See Section 4.2. PRESUD is positively regarded and is supported by the participants for numerous reasons. The idea of peer review is welcomed in that it is believed that people with similar jobs share a common understanding and can therefore supportively and critically assess each others' activities and issues. The act of interviewing stakeholders gets them to think about change. The review generates a snapshot of the current situation. See Section 4.2

Team members judged the strengths of the process, and these included the team views of themselves, and the wider PRESUD project roles: Coordination, Team and Management, Team Working, overall PRESUD Management (as expressed in the comments above). Most other aspects of the review process were judged (net) positively (and additional comments and observations supported this). But it is noted that around one third to one half of the team members suggested that improvement was still possible and desirable. See Section 4.2. The most significant weakness reported in the first round (defined here as more mixed and negative views than positive views expressed) were: The evidence and documentation received from cities before reviews; The involvement of external agencies and community and business (external stakeholders); Process of recording information, analysing findings and developing recommendations; Various difficulties with interpreters; The preparation of the report after the review. In the second round of reviews Aspects of reviews judged most positively included: Team Building; Interviews and workshops; The involvement of internal stakeholders; Team processes of recording information; Team draft recommendations; Team presentation and audience involved. These will be discussed in detail in the sections below. See Section 4.2. It is worth noting that the views of processes, analysing findings, recommendation, and presentations have improved since the first round of reviews. The review teams judged that weaknesses remain, and improvements are possible in: Preparation for the review; Involvement of external stakeholders; Impacts resulting from the previous review; Preparation of the report and final recommendations. It is noted that the 'evidence and documentation provided' has improved in the view of the 2nd review teams, but that preparation for the review, involvement of external stakeholders, and the preparation of the final report are judged by *both* first and second review teams to be the weakest points in the PRESUD process. Furthermore of all the issues the review teams had been asked to evaluate, the issue which is the weakest of all is 'the impacts from the previous review', which is the only issue with a net *negative* evaluation from review teams themselves. These issues and associated comments from teams will be explored in the following sections. See Section 4.2

Positive beliefs and comments were also received across the different review teams during the second round. These generally concerned beliefs in potential of the tool to assist, benchmark, aid learning or referred to the further development potential of the project. The majority of coordinators had a positive view of the project and for its continuation in some form. Yet their judgement of the overall methodology and process was nevertheless qualified with mixed positives and negative on the details. Positives included way in which PRESUD supports the coordinators, and the methodology which gave another perspective on their city, the rewarding nature of the team work, change in the municipality itself, the changes in the people directly involved. Positives included the development of people. The internal stakeholders rated the process positively, felt it would lead to changes within the municipality (but were uncertain about it leading to change in the city) yet still felt the process should be repeated and extended in future. Internal stakeholders also commented upon their judgements. Positives included the way in which the review could highlight weaknesses in a city, the potential for learning and comparison across cities. The external view was welcomed, even if there were few new findings (PRSUD could still contribute in awareness raising). See Section 4.2. Criticisms included the time involved and difficulty in getting involvement within their city, the UK focus, the complicated detailed methodology, and the lack of socio-economic competence, and the difficulty ion preparing evidence, gaining commitment within the city, the time involved and the stress in organising a review, the long reports and delays, and the SMART plans being what was planned anyway. Other positives included the personal rewards of involvement, other criticisms included bland questioning of some teams, the superficial questioning and depth of the interviews, and the lack of preparation for reviews, or the ways in which PRESUD could easily be overridden by political winds. And the lack of flexibility in the methodology to act upon learning, another was the anbition of the project. Other criticism included the long report delays, and the difficulties in producing effective SMART plans, and uncertainities in whether or not improvements had occurred because of PRESUD, requiring better hard and soft evidence. Suggested a contacts list of stakeholders should be developed. Negatives from stakeholders included impact and accuracy, and the superficial limitations of the review. See Section 4.2

It can be a rewarding (but intense and sometimes stressful) experience within a peer review network. Team members generally find it a great learning and social experience, coordinators find it stressful and time consuming but also gain contacts and credibility when it goes well, team managers and project managers need to be well organised and thrive on stress. A good review depends upon the team and the stakeholders from the city, and these are joined by the activities of the team manager and city coordinators, requiring a collaborative approach, where the efforts of one translate into the benefits of the other. See Section 4.2.

The majority of stakeholders support (neither unconditionally nor totally) the further development and continuation of some form of PRESUD (with diverse views of the best form of future PRESUD processes). See Section 4.3. A large majority of team members stated that they would like to see PRESUD continued and developed in their own cities in future, and that they would recommend it to other cities in their home country. On continuing into the future, some team members commented that it was important to develop it, that the potential for impact had increased as the interest and ownership had increased, that the knowledge pool was now significant. See Section 4.3

Although there was support for its extension there were different opinions on how this should be done and on the exact form of the future peer review. This suggests that any future process have additional flexibility to cope with these different views. Some wanted the OECD to adopt it, others suggested a NORDIC PRESUD, others EUROCITIES or in connection with projects such as URBAN AUDIT, or INTERACT. Some wanted it to be funded externally others that it be funded by the municipalities to demonstrate commitment and ownership. Most (but not all) suggested the time between reviews should be extended as 18 months did not allow much time for evidenced change to come through. Some wanted measured and steady organic growth to encompass other municipalities. See Section 4.3.

Internal stakeholders wanted increased external and internal engagement, fewer themes, language problems addressed, amendments on learning, closer collaboration in writing report, extending review activities before and after the review. See Section 4.3.

There were noted a variety of opinions proposed on the best format for review and therefore flexibility in satisfying these. Diversity of Views on Ideal and Improved PRESUD Format Included: Continuation as Existing Group, Bilingual PRESUD (Host country and European). Voluntary Expansion in Europe; Local Government self-funded (Mixed Semi-Commercial funded Management) Full Commercial Development, Regional Nation PRESUD (e.g. NORDIC PRESUD), National PRESUD, Bilingual PRESUD Shared Language PRESUD (English, German, etc) Integrative PRESUD (Join with complementary EU projects such as. Urban Audit), Reduced PRESUD, Extended PRESUD (to include Southern European and Eastern Bloc Countries). See Section 4.3.

Currently the EU partially funds the project, with some time in kind, but the EU covers a significant fraction of officers and councillors time, all travel, accommodation, and subsistence. Several people noted the costs of the project, in staff time, time, travel, accommodation. But equally there are the preparation costs and follow-up costs absorbed by the host municipality (A commercial review is costed at around £20k). Most people argued that ways must be found to reduce the costs. See Section 4.3.

4.2 Overall Strengths and Weaknesses of PRESUD

Section Summary 4.2

The evidence in this section shows that there is a net positive view of the project from all groups of stakeholders, although many suggest support is conditional upon modifications in the process, or evidence of sufficient impact and change, or subject to revision of methodology or aims.

PRESUD is positively regarded and is supported by the participants for numerous reasons. The idea of peer review is welcomed in that it is believed that people with similar jobs share a common understanding and can therefore supportively and critically assess each others' activities and issues. The act of interviewing stakeholders gets them to think about change. The review generates a snapshot of the current situation.

Team members judged the strengths of the process, and these included the team views of themselves, and the wider PRESUD project roles: Coordination, Team and Management, Team Working, overall PRESUD Management (as expressed in the comments above). Most other aspects of the review process were judged (net) positively (and additional comments and observations supported this). But it is noted that around one third to one half of the team members suggested that improvement was still possible and desirable.

The most significant weakness reported in the first round (defined here as more mixed and negative views than positive views expressed) were: The evidence and documentation received from cities before reviews; The involvement of external agencies and community and business (external stakeholders); Process of recording information, analysing findings and developing recommendations; Various difficulties with interpreters; The preparation of the report after the review. In the second round of reviews Aspects of reviews judged most positively included: Team Building; Interviews and workshops; The involvement of internal stakeholders; Team processes of recording information; Team draft recommendations; Team presentation and audience involved. These will be discussed in detail in the sections below.

It is worth noting that the views of processes, analysing findings, recommendation, and presentations have improved since the first round of reviews. The review teams judged that weaknesses remain, and improvements are possible in: Preparation for the review; Involvement of external stakeholders; Impacts resulting from the previous review; Preparation of the report and final recommendations.

It is noted that the `evidence and documentation provided' has improved in the view of the 2nd review teams, but that preparation for the review, involvement of external stakeholders, and the preparation of the final report are judged by *both* first and second review teams to be the weakest points in the PRESUD process. Furthermore of all the issues the review teams had been asked to evaluate, the issue which is the weakest of all is 'the impacts from the previous review', which is the only issue with a net *negative* evaluation from review teams themselves. These issues and associated comments from teams will be explored in the following sections.

Positive beliefs and comments were also received across the different review teams during the second round. These generally concerned beliefs in potential of the tool to assist, benchmark, aid learning or referred to the further development potential of the project. The majority of coordinators had a positive view of the project and for its continuation in some form. Yet their judgement of the overall methodology and process was nevertheless qualified with mixed positives and negative on the details. Positives included way in which PRESUD supports the coordinators, and the methodology which gave another perspective on their city, the rewarding nature of the team work, change in the municipality itself, the changes in the people directly involved. Positives included the development of people. The internal stakeholders rated the process positively, felt it would lead to changes within the municipality (but were uncertain about it leading to change in the city) yet still felt the process should be repeated and extended in future. Internal stakeholders also commented upon their judgements. Positives included the way in which the review could highlight weaknesses in a city, the potential for learning and comparison across cities. The external view was welcomed, even if there were few new findings (PRSUD could still contribute in awareness raising).

Criticisms included the time involved and difficulty in getting involvement within their city, the UK focus, the complicated detailed methodology, and the lack of socio-economic competence, and the difficulty ion preparing evidence, gaining commitment within the city, the time involved and the stress in organising a review, the long reports and delays, and the SMART plans being what was planned anyway. Other positives included the personal rewards of involvement, other criticisms included bland questioning of some teams, the superficial questioning and depth of the interviews, and the lack of preparation for reviews, or the ways in which PRESUD could easily be overridden by political winds. And the lack of flexibility in the methodology to act upon learning, another was the anbition of the project. Other criticism included the long report delays, and the difficulties in producing effective SMART plans, and uncertainities in whether or not improvements had occurred because of PRESUD, requiring better hard and soft evidence. Suggested a contacts list of stakeholders should be developed. Negatives from stakeholders included impact and accuracy, and the superficial limitations of the review.

It can be a rewarding (but intense and sometimes stressful) experience within a peer review network. Team members generally find it a great learning and social experience, coordinators find it stressful and time consuming but also gain contacts and credibility when it goes well, team managers and project managers need to be well organised and thrive on stress. A good review depends upon the team and the stakeholders from the city, and these are joined by the activities of the team manager and city coordinators, requiring a collaborative approach, where the efforts of one translate into the benefits of the other.

Team managers & team members

PRESUD is positively regarded and is supported by the participants for numerous reasons. The idea of peer review is welcomed in that it is believed that people with similar jobs share a common understanding and can therefore supportively and critically assess each others' activities and issues. The act of interviewing

stakeholders gets them to think about change. The review generates a snapshot of the current situation.

'I think there is intrinsic strength and value: it is a review by peers people doing a similar job, people being supportive as a critical friend, the actual act of interviewing key decision makers has a enormous potential for change"
(team manager city 3)

'The review process gives a diagnostic snapshot, on a journey to becoming a sustainable city, the outcomes and recommendations of the review can identify and point the city where they can go. To take it forward…. The value as a change agent I think is good and useful. I think this process has been quite interesting - generally across all the reviews I suspect the reviews have been a catalyst for raising things onto the agenda, getting it on the map" (team manager city 5)

'The review process can point out the preconceptions of the city, stimulate thinking outside the box, particularly with the procedural and organisational aspects – - cities often challenge themselves with technical rethinking but not so often the procedural and the organisational. The process can help change priorities and principles, it can challenge the norms"
(team manager city 4)

1st Round TEAMS

When questioned in more detail on the components of the review the following responses were obtained form the first round of reviews:

Table 4.1b

	Negative	Mixed	Positive
Preparation for the Review	4	16	24
Documentation received	**2**	**23**	**19**
Travel and Hotel Accommodation	0	11	33
Team Building and Briefing	3	12	29
Team Venue and Interview Locations	6	8	30
Interviews with Internal Stakeholders	0	14	30
Involvement of External Agencies	**6**	**19**	**19**
Involvement of Community and Business	**6**	**18**	**20**
Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders	3	17	24
Process of Recording Information	**4**	**19**	**21**
Team Discussions and Reflection	2	16	26
Analysis of Findings and Recommendations	**5**	**18**	**21**
City Presentation and Audience	6	7	31
Preparing the Report After Review	**6**	**28**	**10**
City Co-ordination	0	9	35
The Team Members	0	5	39
PRESUD Observer	4	8	32
Review Management	1	9	34
Interpreter(s)	**5**	**20**	**17**
Overall Team Working	1	5	38
Overall PRESUD Organisation and Management	2	6	36

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Team members judged the strengths of the process, and these included the team views of themselves, and the wider PRESUD project roles: Coordination, Team and Management, Team Working, overall PRESUD Management (as expressed in the comments above). Most other aspects of the review process were judged (net) positively (and additional comments and observations supported this). But it is noted that around one third to one half of the team members suggested that improvement was still possible and desirable.

The most significant weakness reported in the first round (defined here as more mixed and negative views than positive views expressed) were:

- The evidence and documentation received from cities before reviews
- The involvement of external agencies and community and business (external stakeholders)
- Process of recording information, analysing findings and developing recommendations
- Various difficulties with interpreters
- The preparation of the report after the review

Comments were received on each of these points highlighting the uncertainty or mixed views. These points will be discussed in more detail in the relevant sections below.

In taking an overview of the 2nd reviews from the viewpoint of the review teams the following survey results give an overview of the issues.

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Team Training	11	18	12	1	0
Team Preparation for the Review	**4**	**20**	**15**	**3**	**0**
Evidence and Documentation Received from the City	5	22	9	5	1
Initial Team Building and Briefing	13	20	9	0	0
The Interviews and Workshops	8	28	4	1	1
Involvement of Internal Stakeholders	11	25	4	2	0
Involvement of External Stakeholders	10	18	11	2	1
Impacts Resulting from Previous Review	**3**	**15**	**14**	**9**	**1**
Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders	6	23	11	2	0
Team Processes of Recording Information	5	28	8	1	0
Team Learning, Discussions and Analysis of Findings	12	19	9	1	1
Team Draft Recommendations	6	26	10	0	0

Team Presentation and Audience Involved	15	21	6	0	0
Preparation of the Report and Final Recommendations	**1**	**21**	**19**	**1**	**0**

One way to read this table is to examine the relative numbers of mixed-and - negatives relative to the positives expressed. Where the positives significantly outweigh the negatives and mixed combined. This can be then taken as an indicator of 'net positive views'.

In the second round of reviews Aspects of reviews judged most positively included:

- Team Building
- Interviews and workshops
- The involvement of internal stakeholders
- Team processes of recording information
- Team draft recommendations
- Team presentation and audience involved

These will be discussed in detail in the sections below.

It is worth noting that the views of processes, analysing findings, recommendation, and presentations have improved since the first round of reviews.

In considering areas requiring attention the cut-off is of course arbitrary; but for the purposes of this study this has been assigned as any area where the negatives and mixed views are 1/3 or greater of the total. On this definition there is room for improvement (as judged by the review teams).

The review teams judged that weaknesses remain, and improvements are possible in:

- Preparation for the review
- Involvement of external stakeholders
- Impacts resulting from the previous review
- Preparation of the report and final recommendations

It is noted that the 'evidence and documentation provided' has improved in the view of the 2nd review teams, but that preparation for the review, involvement of external stakeholders, and the preparation of the final report are judged by *both* first and second review teams to be the weakest points in the PRESUD process.

Furthermore of all the issues the review teams had been asked to evaluate, the issue which is the weakest of all is 'the impacts from the previous review', which is the only issue with a net *negative* evaluation from review teams themselves.

These issues and associated comments from teams will be explored in the following sections.

How would you rate the PRESUD process and model from your overall experience of it?

Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
13	25	3	1	0

A large majority of team members in the second review (38 of 42) reported that their overall experience of the PRESUD project was positive or very positive.

Positive beliefs and comments were also received across the different review teams during the second round. These generally concerned beliefs in potential of the tool to assist, benchmark, aid learning or referred to the further development potential of the project.

'It has significant potential to assist the city understand its barriers and to develop new approaches, instruments and tools…..an interesting model for benchmarking and integrating process, activities and intentions………. there is a lot of knowledge within all the participant cities which should be built on further and extended……it's very important that the tool is further developed and made widely available……..the second review has shown quite clearly that all involved people learned a lot of lessons. In the time between the first and the second review there were not so many changes, but time was needed. PRESUD has enabled people to initiate changes in the future. That should definitely be explored in a continuing process………my experience of the peer review process and subsequent PRESUD reviews have again confirmed and validated to me the value of peer 'critical friends' - challenging and bringing external experience and learning to support improvement elsewhere……….I think the process and principles of peer review are very useful and promote mutual learning and development." (various team members across teams involved in 2ⁿᵈ reviews)

Coordinators

The majority of coordinators had a positive view of the project and for its continuation in some form. Yet their judgement of the overall methodology and process was nevertheless qualified with mixed positives and negative on the details. Positives included way in which PRESUD supports the coordinators, and the methodology which gave another perspective on their city, the rewarding nature of the team work, change in the municipality itself, the changes in the people directly involved
Criticisms included the time involved and difficulty in getting involvement within their city, the UK focus, the complicated detailed methodology, and the lack of socio-economic competence, and the difficulty in preparing evidence, gaining commitment within the city, the time involved and the stress in organising a review, the long reports and delays, and the SMART plans being what was planned anyway.

'I think this has been good for us because when I started the sustainable development course…….it has been a good help for my job I believe our mayor thinks this is a good project the administration is at this moment supportive of peer reviews, if it happens every four or five years as these issues are not progressing very fast '' (Coordinator City 7)

''The biggest problem I encountered was human resource time. More than money, it's time. Time to do the things I have just described and this I think is the biggest problem and there's not an easy solution because then you have to make somebody

free for them but there is not a real solution because the money isn't there to buy time" (Coordinator City 2)

'The method uses an established OECD method, it's a comprehensive and rigorous methodology, which covers all aspects of sustainability including the social and economic, and it includes many stakeholders not just from the municipality but from other organisations and the public, and you are reviewed by many different observers from different countries and cultures'. On the other hand, it has weaknesses. Firstly, we all think here that it's has too dominant a British element – for example how they involve the public and pass over the politicians, it's a bit foreign to us. Secondly, all the team members agreed that it is complicated and might be simplified – let cities visit each other – show each other best practice and collate experiences, without being so formal and critical – we should try to improve that – meet with other people and try to improve it, PRESUD should combine with projects like INTERACT – we had some very good experiences with that. Fourthly, its too comprehensive and detailed – teams have expertise in sustainability and in the other themes also, so the methodology does not need to tell us as much what to do. Finally, the non-technical themes (governance, democracy, and integration) are bigger than we initially expected, we did not have the socio-economic competence - but that improved as the project went on"   (Coordinator City 4)

'It's quite difficult to know what the limits are of what kind of information theme tables does organise basic information but I think we've seen that that in itself is not enough there are lots of things about your own city that you don't know…….you become more informed Basic team work is quite interesting and useful I think with the other people who are involved with the preparation start from an ideal list of figures end up with a realistic list of people that is something we should all acknowledge you also have to deal with possible changes between the first and second review………ensure that the people who know the least are the people who you address…………overall we had difficulties in getting people to take it particularly seriously, for a lot of commitment from a lot of different people……..it does take time to stress to people who do have power to get them once you've got them sort of on the case it becomes a lot easier…….it's incredibly stressful a very intensive week……..as long as you are well organised it can go fairly smoothly. co-ordination role is more of a team effort………it would be good if PRESUD touched external stakeholders more……….doesn't have an impact to merit involving great loads of external stakeholders…….the most we can hope for is that PRESUD brings about changes in the administration itself I think we need to make sure that we are engaging people better……..but I think you have to be very careful because maybe politically it's not the right thing.there is nothing wrong with going and speaking to communists or activists or whatever……..butPRESUD is not there to rock the local boat………happy with the idea of independent approaches by the team but wherever possible through agreement or conversation with the city itself,most people have seen the report quite late and with very little time to make comments received the draft after two and a half months………. about circulating the report and getting stakeholder comments Well I cant because its too big and too late……….I need this report to be as summarised……..Shorter, clearer you know less clever **very direct** messages……..Or I want the freedom to make another version……….the biggest changes that it can make are in the people who are actually involvedI see it very much internal to the city…….it's not about the target you've come up with in your smart action plan……..increase the number of exchanges……..I see the moment of contact between people is perhaps more powerful and more able to bring about

more impact on the part of PRESUD than the actual smart action plan one way of increasing the impact of PRESUD is to increase these interactions in some way……..the Smart action plan to be realistic and honest, not just basically a collection of things you were doing already. (coordinator city 8)

Other positives included the personal rewards of involvement, other criticisms included bland questioning of some teams, the superficial questioning and depth of the interviews, and the lack of preparation for reviews, or the ways in which PRESUD could easily be overridden by political winds. And the lack of flexibility in the methodology to act upon learning, another was the ambition of the project.

some pretty good pre-review homework but then the questions that came were fairly bland……..wasn't able to see some of the key individuals people did not get cross-examined in sufficient detail or to the depth affects the quality of the output substantially. It becomes superficial……..the review felt hurried and a little bit ill prepared it was rushed There are enormous numbers of lesson…….start off by making sure that the individuals are competent to examine the areas of concern…….I think we have to have the peer review individuals have to be competent, they have to have access to the right people, they have to have the necessary information……….consider whether what the local authority is saying is actually substantiated by stakeholders…….. That may be one of the positive things that's come out received the draft……..I've been told politically that they are to be embargoed…….its consultation within the authority at a political level has been stopped…….it's not within my control regardless of the contract with the European Commission………it's much easier to test out somebody else's assessment and move on from there than to start with no base at all………..we gave them the comprehensive performance assessment that had been undertaken by the audit commission rather than starting from zero……….new administration, new politician……..show they want to move forward with it, I really don't know……..It's only of use if those people actually want to listen to it……project developed out of the Euro EMS project Each of the cities got a different level of buy in, politically, technically and financially……at no stage can you actually push those cities too far, you've got to build a partnership flexibility to change is pretty limited……..into the project then politics have changed, officers have changed, frameworks, everything has changed…….the project is very limited by the contract limits your flexibility."
not being anywhere near as beneficial as I had hoped We should have had two members of staff, full time……Personally I've gained enormously……….had we invested more in it, then we would have got more out. What we have invested I think is paying dividends……what we've done here is not only run a project, but enabled people to disseminate the best practice too ambitious To address the cultural issues, to address the technical issues, to develop methodology, to do the assessments……..now we've got a tool which is pretty well tested but hasn't been sufficiently refined for widespread us. It still needs more refinement. (Coordinator city 5)

Other criticism included the long report delays, and the difficulties in producing effective SMART plans, and uncertainities in whether or not improvements had occurred because of PRESUD, requiring better hard and soft evidence. Suggested a contacts list of stakeholders should be developed

''long delay in a city receiving its report….lose a lot of impetus and motivation review itself involves a bit of extra time positive development from the first review organised

more interviews, tried to get a larger selection of people biggest difficulty in this process is not so much about the project and its methodology, its more about the context within which it operates I've been trying to do is to fight that and get it back up so in some respects PRESUD has been helpful if giving the council a vehicle I think the problem to it is that we are overloaded with different kinds of initiatives it isn't coming from a statutory thing, it isn't something we have to do, its something we've chosen to do particular difficulty has been getting this to the attention of the senior officers……….these are contextual difficulties……..an output of PRESUD would include a list of everyone you have spoken to, who they are, what their interests are, and their contact numbers and e-mail.we contact one another……I think that's quite a sensible proposal…the smart action that's where for me the process fell down I'm the only person who has got really significant interest how do you then spread out and share that responsibility around. Without a degree of political and managerial commitment that was quite a hard process……….we were able to pull together like a progress report………we were able to produce a kind a self assessment of how much progress had been made simply contacting all the responsible people and asking them what progress had been made on each specific point its quite useful to have some kind of working group to try and share out the responsibility whether you've got senior involvement or not influences hugely what happens if we were able to provide concrete evidence of what the project has achieved in the past already, I think that would be the strongest appeal to people.   this project needs to be acknowledged in some way by the government……..The big attraction to it is the fact that it is a learning process **can we say that we have improved practice**? Its about having some form of internal monitoring system within each participating city that tries to record all the hard and the soft evidence about what changes are taking place as and when they happen. (Summary of Coordinator 6)

Positives included the development of people.

'Its not something you can judge in money, its enriching people – developing your human resource – that's why I involved a wide range of people form my city into doing reviews, its useful for the organisation, and it's a great asset." (Coordinator City 2)

City Stakeholders

A group of 20 stakeholders were individually asked: How would you **rate** the PRESUD process and model from your overall experience of it? The following gives their individual statements. They were also asked an additional series of questions.

The internal stakeholders rated the process positively, felt it would lead to changes within the municipality (but were uncertain about it leading to change in the city) yet still felt the process should be repeated and extended in future.

C1. How would you **rate** the PRESUD process and model from your overall experience of it?

Very Positive	2
Positive	14
Mixed or neutral	8
Negative	2

Very Negative	0

C2. The PRESUD process is likely to lead to **changes within** the municipality.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	12
Neither/Nor	9
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0

C3. The PRESUD process is likely to **improve sustainable development** (by around 10-25%).

Strongly agree	0
Agree	8
Neither/Nor	16
Disagree	3
Strongly disagree	0

C5. The PRESUD process should be **repeated and continued** in the future.

Strongly agree	6
Agree	16
Neither/Nor	6
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

C6. I would **recommend** the current PRESUD process to **other** cities in my country.

Strongly agree	3
Agree	15
Neither/Nor	6
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	2

Internal stakeholders also commented upon their judgements. Positives included the way in which the review could highlight weaknesses in a city, the potential for learning and comparison across cities. Negatives included impact and accuracy, and the superficial limitations of the review.

'I doubt it will effect our way to deal with different issues. ………It may be an effective process that highlights weaknesses in our system……….. A good way to learn about other cities and their way to handle things………… Furthermore a possibility to get someone from outside the municipality (and even your country) to have a critical look on you……….The review team was conscientious and tried to be objective…………It is an interesting methodology which may lead to discovery of

problems as well as assets of your own city……….It is good to put your own reality in a greater whole by comparison with European cities……….The report gives a false and unclear picture of the waste management………..Both the process and the methodology are very rewarding. Already the practical work in international groups with both politicians and officers adds value that unfortunately not can be regarded in the report…One problem is the sometimes bad connection between the methodology, the practical work and the content of the report. My reflections, after a brief study of the report, are that the measures stated in the manual (methodology handbook) are not always used, not least in the report………. It seems to be have been too much for the team to penetrate the situation here in such a short time. I would suggest fewer issues but deeper penetration……….Maybe it is much work-even too much work for what you get………..The peer review method is very interesting and useful. It can surely be used in other connections"
(20 stakeholders in city 4)

The external view was welcomed, even if there were few new findings (PRSUD could still contribute in awareness raising).

"on strengths, we saw the review as an interesting exercise to hear the views of outsiders, we got their recommendations and translated it into actions, these actions were already in motion before PRESUD, but because they were in the review the senior politicians and managers get to hear about them, PRESUD does help, I cant quantify how much" (Stakeholder 5, City 2)

It can be a rewarding (but intense and sometimes stressful) experience within a peer review network. Team members generally find it a great learning and social experience, coordinators find it stressful and time consuming but also gain contacts and credibility when it goes well, team managers and project managers need to be well organised and thrive on stress. A good review depends upon the team and the stakeholders from the city, and these are joined by te activities of the team manager and city coordinators, requiring a collaborative approach, where the efforts of one translate into the benefits of the other.

"I personally found working with other professionals, experts in their own field from other places in an extremely dynamic situation extremely rewarding. Time is short and you have to understand how other people work very quickly. Having the opportunity to learn about a city in this manner, i.e., through interviews with internal and external stakeholders is an incredible experience. We have also seen that the experience of being a review team member makes us better host cities, in that we think about the kind of information we would have liked to have received beforehand, where we can take up positive experiences and incorporate them in the planning of the review to take place in our city. The role of the team manager is essential and perhaps more effort could go into team manager training, particularly with regard to the presentation preparation when everyone is tired and information is plentiful but not organised. The manager should be concentrating on time and people management at that moment". (Team member City8)

"I think it's incredibly stressful because you become the centre of attention from a number of points of view, the logistics and technical, and basically people want to know where they can go and buy stamps from you, and at the same time have you organise the interview with somebody who knows something about health!. It's

basically a very intensive week but as long as you are well organised, as long as the city and the city PRESUD team are well organised then it can go fairly smoothly." (Coordinator City 8)

When asked about the balance of effort and return, some felt it had not been as beneficial as hoped (because it needed greater resourcing and this was not possible), but PRESUD had helped develop personal profiles of coordinators.

''it's not being anywhere near as beneficial to us as I had hoped it would be, to the city. Part of that was because I misjudged the resources that were required for the project and I've not had the dedicated officers' support to run the project that we should have done. We should have had two members of staff, full time, just working on PRESUD. That would have enabled us to make sure that we had put in the effort, we made the linkages, we used the material coming out of it and we reinforced the gains. As it happened I've had to run the project and tried to do the necessary work here and that's a lack of judgement on my part." (Coordinator City 5)

''And you know you get seen and yes, certainly my profile has developed over the last year and a half, two years." (Coordinator City 1)

Coordinators often get involved in translations or direct support of the reviews:

'The coordinator did take that on board and with me when we got to some more technical interviews she was really good at supporting my interviews, so she actually did those with me and she took notes, so there were certain behaviours on the translation side which were exemplary - but they came from the coordinator" (Team Manager City 8)

'The whole team depends on the quality of the people that the host team have actually put in place, and this includes the translators, I was not happy with ours". (Team Manager City 8)

Some Additional Observations on the main roles in PRESUD

Generally the team member role was recognised as an enjoyable role with little by way of overwhelming stress, however team members often enter reviews with little preparation, which then takes time from interviews, which decreases the information gained, which produces a more superficial report. Furthermore on returning to write-up, some members gave late or weak contributions (sometimes a weeks work might translate into a half-page of notes, and occasionally nothing). This then gave a weaker report, leading to disagreement, pressure on the manager and coordinator, a weaker subsequent action plan, leading to little real change or additional improvement in sustainability. Some team members had difficulties upon returning to their cities and in finding the time to write up notes, others simply refused once they had returned. The review report was then incomplete and this had a negative impact on the potential for change. This should not necessarily compromise timely delivery of the report, some managers sent draft reports with missing sections and named responsibility for those missing sections, but this does then affect the quality (and return in investment in training and funding the visit of the non-productive review team member).

Project and Team managers had mixed experiences of PRESUD and the reviews, but this role can be one of the high-stress and critical pathway roles (dependent on other circumstances and personality etc). Where a team manager is ill-prepared, or has not the time due to other responsibilities, or has personal home or job difficulties, or is perhaps changing jobs, then the delivery of the review report can be significantly compromised in quality checking and in delivery on time. This difficulty was recognised in the first round and an assistant manager role was created with an aim to avoid such difficulties. Although this removed the possibility of a leaderless team, it did not prevent the delays in the report delivery. Report delivery remains one of the weakest critical links in the process, and this places further pressure on the team managers. The project manager was often placed under severe stress and time constraints in responding to EU requests and requirements while dealing with many other aspects of PRESUD. Although it could be argued management is inherently dealing with difficulty, the partners in the project need to recognise the dependence upon key individuals is an unacceptable risk to achieving desired outcomes.

Coordination of a review is a significant task requiring planning over months and several weeks of dedicated effort. It cannot be achieved by one person over a few weeks. The best prepared reviews were those with significant advance planning (3-6 months). This usually required a small team of two or three people (but occasionally one person did achieve this). There were several occasions were (otherwise dedicated and committed) coordinators found themselves in difficulty and under pressure, this had adverse knock-on effects for the incoming team and the review stakeholders, resulting in a relatively weak review, and requiring additional work of the teams, with stress being 'transmitted' around the PRESUD network; in some cases blame was shifted around, and there were cases of this influencing coordinators employment and career prospects.

4.3 Majority Support for Continuation and Expansion of a Revised PRESUD

Section Summary 4.3

The majority of stakeholders support (neither unconditionally nor totally) the further development and continuation of some form of PRESUD (with diverse views of the best form of future PRESUD processes).

A large majority of team members stated that they would like to see PRESUD continued and developed in their own cities in future, and that they would recommend it to other cities in their home country. On continuing into the future, some team members commented that it was important to develop it, that the potential for impact had increased as the interest and ownership had increased, that the knowledge pool was now significant

Although there was support for its extension there were different opinions on how this should be done and on the exact form of the future peer review. This suggests that any future process have additional flexibility to cope with these different views. Some wanted the OECD to adopt it, others suggested a NORDIC PRESUD, others EUROCITIES or in connection with projects such as URBAN AUDIT, or INTERACT. Some wanted it to be funded externally others that it be funded by the municipalities to demonstrate commitment and ownership. Most (but not all) suggested the time between reviews should be extended as 18 months did not allow much time for evidenced change to come through. Some wanted measured and steady organic growth to encompass other municipalities.

Internal stakeholders wanted increased external and internal engagement, fewer themes, language problems addressed, amendments on learning, closer collaboration in writing report, extending review activities before and after the review.

There were noted a variety of opinions proposed on the best format for review and therefore flexibility in satisfying these. Diversity of Views on Ideal and Improved PRESUD Format Included: Continuation as Existing Group, Bilingual PRESUD (Host country and European). Voluntary Expansion in Europe; Local Government self-funded (Mixed Semi-Commercial funded Management) Full Commercial Development, Regional Nation PRESUD (e.g. NORDIC PRESUD), National PRESUD, Bilingual PRESUD Shared Language PRESUD (English, German, etc) Integrative PRESUD (Join with complementary EU projects such as. Urban Audit), Reduced PRESUD, Extended PRESUD (to include Southern European and Eastern Bloc Countries).

Currently the EU partially funds the project, with some time in kind, but the EU covers a significant fraction of officers and councillors time, all travel, accommodation, and subsistence. Several people noted the costs of the project, in staff time, time, travel, accommodation. But equally there are the preparation costs and follow-up costs absorbed by the host municipality (A commercial review is costed at around £20k). Most people argued that ways must be found to reduce the costs.

Team managers & Team members

In addition to this evaluation of past experience stakeholders were asked about the future of PRESUD would they their cities to be involved in peer review in future? Would they recommend it to other cities in their country? The results of these questions suggested that they additionally had positive views of the process which further confirms the general conclusion of this section: that the peer review process has enough merit and potential to develop it. The following questions were asked of the team members in the second round of reviews.

Evaluating PRESUD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The PRESUD process should be repeated and continued in the future.	18	19	4	1	0
I would recommend the current PRESUD process to other cities in my country.	18	17	4	2	1

A large majority (37 of 42) of team members stated that they would like to see PRESUD continued and developed in their own cities in future, and (35 of 42) stated that they would recommend it to other cities in their home country.

On continuing into the future, some team members commented that it was important to develop it, that the potential for impact had increased as the interest and ownership had increased, that the knowledge pool was now significant,

`it has significant potential to assist the city understand its barriers and to develop new approaches, instruments and tools…….An interesting model for benchmarking and integrating process, activities and intentions……..The whole project had a very small impact as consequence of the first review, because there was not enough interest in the administration and the involved people had to learn themselves. There is a lot of knowledge within all the participant cities which should be built on further and extended….Very important that the tool is further developed and made widely available…….The second review has shown quite clear that all involved people learned a lot of lessons. In the time between the first and the second review there were not so much changes, but these time was needed in order to make essential experiences. PRESUD has enabled the involved people to initiate changes in the future. That should definitely explored in a continuing process…….`It needs to reduce in cost…My experience of the IDeA process and subsequent PRESUD review have again confirmed and validated to me the value of peer 'critical friends' challenging and bringing external experience and learning to support improvement elsewhere…….I think the process and principles of peer review are very useful and promote mutual learning and development……See the value in the process but unsure how thorough a picture we can get - therefore seems a bit superficial………Depends on wider findings but from my own experience can't say confidently that it should be repeated…….For what ? To produce more paper?.`

Coordinators & Other Stakeholders

Although there was support for its extension there were different opinions on how this should be done and on the exact form of the future review. This suggests that any future process have additional flexibility to cope with these different views. Some wanted the OECD to adopt it, others suggested a NORDIC PRESUD, others EUROCITIES or in connection with projects such as URBAN AUDIT, or INTERACT. Some wanted it to be funded externally others that it be funded by the municipalities to demonstrate commitment and ownership. Most (but not all) suggested the time between reviews should be extended as 18 months did not allow much time for evidenced change to come through. Some wanted measured and steady organic growth to encompass other municipalities.

'in an ideal situation this would be picked up by the OECD as part of their territorial reviews to balance their economic bias the have, and would also be done jointly with the European Commission and member states so that at a sub-regional or city level, this would take place and be coordinated through the European Union, OECD, and member states, as is at the moment where city regions can request the OECD that this review to take place; cities could do this again through a central clearing house – financed to do this - and resourced to get the necessary people - as the city would be paying to do this – it would be in the cities interest to ensure all the necessary information and resources were there, because it would have a value, part of the problem here is that the cities have been piloting this, testing it out, it has not been owned by all cities sufficiently and centrally, it is marginally owned by specific *parts* of the municipality organisation, and therefore those areas that have not owned it have not participated and the value has been lessened." (team manager city 4)

''In theory yes.. from the point of view of resources, I see this as more difficult. How can a city self- finance such a process? I haven't got any ideas on this one. However I think we will quite possibly do something, I'm not sure what; there's this idea of drawing up these urban environmental management plans but having a type of peer review process built into it, we work a lot with Euro cities and PRESUD has pretty much been taken on board by them perhaps not every eighteen months, but a bit longer, something like that." (Coordinator City 8)

'We would like to tell others about our experiences and organise a Nordic PRESUD, its no use getting people only from our own country as our cities are similar, but if we involve the Danish, Norwegians, Swedish, and Finnish, then they will understand the differences between the cultures which are not so great, they are smaller than now, and there may be less misunderstanding – it would be easier, and it would be a bit easier for the language too. But we are very different to the British, Italian, or French say" (Coordinator City 4)

'I think it should be repeated, but not as quickly as in the current methodology, because sustainable development takes a longer time – it takes a longer time to see improvements, it should be repeated but every 4 or 5 years - perhaps linked to political cycles and election timescales" (Coordinator 7)

'I think we should continue with PRESUD but we should *not* look for external funding – if you are committed then you are prepared and willing to pay for it (as for instance Tampere did). ''Without any doubt I would advocate further use of PRESUD

– it's a valuable tool and it's worth it. Also its valuable to have different countries **learning together and working together**, including the personal and small contacts. It could be done in each country alone with only "natives", but you would miss stuff – it adds value to do the reviews with different nationalities. In doing so you are forced to get out of your own daily focus, you see and discuss different ways of government and sustainability issues. The PRESUD working process enables you to **step out of the normal framework** and see how things can be done or how to approach problems differently. Even more important than the new idea's you gain in PRESUD, is the capability to look with different eyes to your own problems and working processes. This enriches people, it certainly enriches me. You can't learn this anywhere else on courses or on other (national) projects." (Coordinator City 2)

'I think that PRESUD would be useful for most municipalities and I would recommend it to other cities in my country, however, it is an extremely resource intensive method which makes it worthwhile only if there is real buy-in on the part of at least a part of the City administration". (Coordinator City 8)

'I would recommend it to other cities in my country, the last review was really good – but I think this depends a lot on the particular review teams - the recommendation depends on having a good review team". If the city promises to work hard and sees this as a tool to develop their sustainable development work. If you are going to sell this as a product you need to have perfect professional teams, otherwise it won't work. Now, when you got funding from the EU it is acceptable to be not so perfect". (Coordinator 7)

'PRESUD should continue, because of the impact it had within our organisation – but maybe not in the same way, its good to have a pool of cities and use them maybe once every three years, but not with the same intensity, but this whole project has been helpful with agenda setting and getting sustainability on the agenda. I would say to other European cities join"   (Stakeholder 7, Manager City 2)

'It should be more of an organic and natural growth process – not a sudden rise – if it's a good project people will link to it automatically. It would be a good idea to get all the big cities to participate from my country, to include others from our country is a good idea, and all members of Eurocities, but not just as a national project – but keep it European. There is (for us) no extra value in just having a national system, we speak to the main cities anyway – if you do it at a national level there is a lot of competition between the cities and lots of politics between them which we do not have with the European. Although there are cultural differences - we are all European we are confronted with the same legislation" (Stakeholder 7 Manager City 2)

'like to enlarge the group of cities involved as it was very relevant but I would like a system to evaluate more quickly" (Senior politician, City 2)

When 20 stakeholders were asked: Do you have any specific suggestions for **improving** the overall PRESUD process and model?

Internal stakeholders wanted increased external and internal engagement, fewer themes, language problems addressed, amendments on learning, closer collaboration in writing report, extending review activities before and after the review:

''More participation from NGOs, public and some independent researchers…………You try to capture so many complex and comprehensive issues and that is always a difficult task. Maybe you should limit the review to fewer issues. It would also be of advantage to use ones own language. Only few influential politician have been involved which makes it impossible to implement in the departments…….Amend and revise the method based on the experiences made. Comparisons to other is important to your development…..See to that the process is anchored and accepted in the organisations, engage the involved write the report in closer co-operation between the organisations involved……Better preparations and better anchoring in all the cities' political institutions…….Still better communication…..I think it is important to involve more stakeholders, for instance arranging public meetings before and after the peer review week. It will probably increase participation, not only as interviewees. It also support the implementation……..I think it would be a good idea to let the cities inform each others political leadership how they have instructed their administration to carry out the project''

There were noted a variety of opinions proposed on the best format for review and therefore flexibility in satisfying these. Diversity of Views on Ideal and Improved PRESUD Format Included: Continuation as Existing Group, Bilingual PRESUD (Host country and European). Voluntary Expansion in Europe; Local Government self-funded (Mixed Semi-Commercial funded Management) Full Commercial Development, Regional Nation PRESUD (e.g. NORDIC PRESUD), National PRESUD, Bilingual PRESUD Shared Language PRESUD (English, German, etc) Integrative PRESUD (Join with complementary EU projects such as. Urban Audit), Reduced PRESUD, Extended PRESUD (to include Southern European and Eastern Bloc Countries).

Currently the EU partially funds the project, with some time in kind, but the EU covers a significant fraction of officers and councillors time, all travel, accommodation, and subsistence. Several people noted the costs of the project, in staff time, time, travel, accommodation. But equally there are the preparation costs and follow-up costs absorbed by the host municipality (A commercial review is costed at around £20k). Most people argued that ways must be found to reduce the costs.

''we make a note of all the time that people have spent on it, everybody internally and we make sure we claim that time back the time of Councillors and Officers paid for the EU does fund all team members on the reviews for their time, in addition to the hotel and costs'' (coordinator 1)

''There is something of a reluctance to engage in international and European projects because there is always the concern, which is quite right in some respects, that going on trips abroad is seen as a jolly rather than a serious attempt to learn and contribute to policy and debate in a wider context. But that is a problem because we have this big concern about being seen not to be sending large numbers of people abroad when there is always the issue of how much council tax the local people pay, is a regular feature in the local media and this is seen as a potential waste of taxpayers money. That is a bit of a difficult balancing act (Coordinator City 6)

To make it widely applicable and go beyond a development project we need to reduce the costs – onsite days, number of people, and number of themes The whole

thing could be done on a much smaller basis, smaller review teams, fewer days on sight shorter reports, shorter presentation (to the management team), and a shorter turn around time on the report, looking at 20-25 page report instead of the larger documents– you still interview the leader, executive, one or two key politicians, one or two key officers, but still external stakeholders – that is important its vital for a review – so narrow the themes, maintain the high level management presentation, involve very senior people, external stakeholders but **not the municipality staff**, perhaps a few from the sustainability office at maybe 3rd tier, alternatively you could engage them using a survey or a workshop – there are other mass techniques – use them to bounce ideas off and get them to generate ideas which you then check out with the senior" (team manager city 3)

5 REVISE AND REDUCE THE METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE

5.1 Overview

- Many felt the methodology was too large, too prescriptive, and too UK-based requiring reduction, revision, and some additional flexibility and participation of municipalities to customise aspects, combined with some standardised aspects across municipalities. See Section 5.2

- It is believed by some that there is too much of a British approach in the methodology that is not appropriate. The approach and themes do not always transfer well into new European settings. This suggests revision of the methodology to avoid this criticism, and greater participation of municipality staff (and others from the home country) to ensure that the review and report reflect the cultural and contextual reality. Introductory instruction on context has been useful to the review team but has not fully removed the misunderstandings nor criticisms of reports. Steps need to be taken to address this more comprehensively and effectively. See Section 5.3. This also links to the validation of reports.

- There was a commonly expressed need to slim-down the methodology, to reduce the numbers of themes, and to use generalised themes rather than detailed forms, enabling each city to customise the areas and issues to be included.   See Section 5.2

- There is disagreement about whether or not the methodology has the right balance between social, economic and environment. Some think it does others think it does not. This again suggests a need for flexibility and participation of municipalities in designing the details. See Section 5.2

- There are mixed views as to whether PRESUD adequately reflects national and cultural differences. Section 5.3. Significant cultural and contextual differences across municipalities, and these can be responsible for misunderstandings or weak recommendations.

- These findings suggest a more participative approach is required to customise the methodology and review and also to avoid the cultural misunderstandings of an external review team through better engagement of those with local knowledge.

- Other chapters in this evaluation indicate further revisions necessary.

5.2 Creating an Appropriate Balance of Themes requires Flexible Reduced Methodology and Municipality Participation

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Section Summary

There are some who feel the methodology is too broad and the number of themes should be reduced, and others that feel there should be flexible and participative engagement of municipalities in offering local definitions of what sustainability entails and defining the choices of themes.

There is uncertainty and disagreement on whether PRESUD adequately balances the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability. The evidence comes from teams, team managers, coordinators, internal and external stakeholders, and observations. This requires a more flexible and participative methodology to adopt local balance and to encourage wider ownership across municipality stakeholders.

''I also think its too broad and it attempts to cover 13 separate themes which is ambitious so one of the changes I would consider is reducing the number of themes. In its current format I think it would not have a commercial application using a team of 6 or 7 for a week with another week for write up and preparation. 'If I was doing this again as commercial or redesigning PRESUD; one of the lessons would be to concentrate on the 4 key themes (leadership, performance management and engagement, with another on an overall integration theme) and ditch the technical ones. That would be looking at corporate management for sustainable development not corporate management generally – so slim down the themes and relate them directly to sustainability themes. (team manager city 3)

''One of my concerns is that the scope across 14 themes is too large, and that influences a lot: in the city - preparation, evidence, internal support – I don't think its manageable, and in teams - if you are also asking people to look at certain themes amongst the 13 - there is the inherent danger that what comes out is potentially not giving you the answers, which then exposes the review in the end, because it is rather light and not explicit enough. I think the themes fit together but they need to be slimmed; perhaps governance of sustainability, technical aspects of sustainability, and an integration theme, as maybe 3 headings''. (team manager city 5)

''I would challenge the emphasis on environmental performance and I would challenge the number of themes addressed……. ……. having thirteen themes is difficult to examine in any real detail -fewer themes with a clear focus agreed by the host city may be something to consider……. if its focussed on improvement in Cities then it should be tailor made to suit individual circumstances within the broad model. …..Too much environment, too little urban and social'' (team member comments)

''The meaning of sustainable development is different in different cities and the team members must be aware of the differences and what sustainable development means in each of the cities that they visit. So the benchmark must be flexible for all cities and maybe the cities need to help to develop their own benchmark. (Coordinator 7)

An external stakeholder felt the meaning of sustainability and strategic considerations should form part of the review:

'I think the review should be on a strategic level (also) and what does sustainability mean – I work a lot with other sustainability departments and organisations, the issues here belong to the environmental department, but this is completely different to the other departments so we need wider ownership in process, in people, policy involvement, communication across departments, does our responsible politician really have influence in economic issues? I think this is the core of sustainability, not only environmental issues, we proactive plans on broader issues. (External Stakeholder City 2)

In team surveys there was uncertainty on whether PRESUD balanced the social and economic:

Evaluating PRESUD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The PRESUD process balances the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability.	6	13	**18**	4	1

In the teams not all people agreed that the PRESUD process balanced the social economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. Mixed comments were given by team members on the balance of sustainability (from across all the 2nd reviews):

'The methodology is weak in the economic and social sectors and is heavily dependant on the competencies of the team members in each theme…The balance has become much better during the life of the PRESUD process, as we have been learning from each other…….Well balanced in the course of time, latest between 1st and 2nd Review……Yes it does, but we need to ensure that the client City balances these as well in integrated planning and resourcing….Yes the process does but that is not to say the cities do!…… Leipzig review followed different critieria which addressed this in more balanced way….. in Malmo and from what I noticed in Vienna we do not know how to engage politicians responsible for economic and social aspects to go further. PRE_SUD is handled by the Environment departments who feel that they can not force their colleagues to continue the economic and social parts of PRE_SUD…It is obvious that the approach wants integrate environmental, economic and social actions in involved cities. I think the methodology has the right balance chosen."

And furthermore:

'I think the balance has improved between the first and second review rounds. The depth attention given to the corporate themes could be dependent on who is in the review team…..I do not think it balances, because the project tries to integrate all of the 3 aspects. But in every case it is an environmental based project …..it balances much more the environmental aspects…….methodology seeks to do this -again driven by local conditions, vision, legislation, SD treaties etc… The process draws attention to this and reflects gaps/barriers where it is not happening. If the process receives due attention internally and actions are taken - then the balance is likely to be achieved…..I suspect economic and social drivers will

always take the lead over environmental sustainability in some cities?... it's really a sustainable development review and an environmental review....The environmental side is well understood and established. The governance side still requires some development.....There is a lack of people with economic and social education in the team, but the aspects are considered.....mostly environmental I think....The major focus of the model itself in on environmental aspects. However, according to the team ability to use the model, it is possible to include and give proper space to social and economic issues as well.....There is to greater emphasis on environment....too skewed to technical aspects of sustainability which means it does hook in right people in strategic places so peer methodology also has limited benefits....main focus on environmental themes...

''....the methodology is both for sustainable development and for environmental concerns; and it needs to be more honest about that.....Appropriateness of methodology to technical service aspects of sustainability - more skewed to environmental services aspects and not sustainable communities approach which has since superseded it.......Integration and balancing of environmental, social and economic aspects needs to be taken on board not only by the visiting review team but also fully by the City being reviewed and thus reflected in the interviews organised......Since I have dealt with the two themes of social and environmental + social and economic integration, I would challenge the formulation of these two headlines. They address very complex issues and they cover two extremely wide fields of policies, actions and concerns. To be better targeted, they might need some sort of reformulation........The integration themes have proved the hardest to assess - the links and relationships are the most important aspects of SD and the process probably demonstrates that practitioners struggle with integration as much as reviewers. This area needs to be looked at further to refine and produce some steer to all ......'' (review team members across all reviews)

Difficulties in dealing with the integration (social and economic) themes:

''people have struggled with the integration themes as they are too broad, the need to be more focused on what exactly we are looking to assess''
(team manager city 4)

'we should pick up the elements of social, economic and environmental properly... So those integration themes, which I think are more important, that's where they need the help of joining all of them up'' (Team Manager City 8)

'The two big sustainability departments here are different and have different cultures, this is a difficulty, e.g of a specific project it is also difficult to implement a sustainable approach, with people from different departments; e.g. the economic, traffic, and planning is separate from the environment''
(Team member City 7)

There were varied views on the 'appropriate' balance of the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability mentioned by coordinators:

''PRESUD first round of reviews didn't do this. As the issue has come up repeatedly I think most cities have taken on board the need for better balance both in the type of evidence/documents they provide and the interviews they organise.''
(Coordinator City 8)

''No this is not the case - PRESUD is far from balanced, environment is the main thing, in organising PRESUD within the city we had an environmental emphasis on the first round. For the second round I tried to minimize the weight of the environmental issues. Economic issues were very well taken care of in our second review. I think that it depends from the review team that how balanced view you get and also from the need of the municipality. It is also important to know what sustainable development really means in the municipality, how it is defined.''
(Coordinator City 7)

''Normally PRESUD is initiated from environmental departments, the environmental person has to cope with all departments: ''may I have your plans, may I have time of your officers''. So little by little, even if they are small steps making the connections because you have to - PRESUD is all those three pillars. You see new faces, new policy documents and you are aware that you should do it. Then the team comes along and says ''yes you should do it, you should integrate''
(Coordinator City 2)

''The project should better define what is meant by sustainable development in local level and how well does it fit to PRESUD methodology (13 themes) – what are the things that need to be covered in order to get sustainable cities. It must be flexible, they must clarify integration themes, it must be different for different cities and the team members should know what the difference is. Maybe there should be some common benchmark for some special issues, maybe the review team would have to comment on the benchmark as well, maybe the benchmark itself could be something that the review team looks at because it will be different for each city'' (dialogue with coordinator 7)

''One positive was that people in our city were interested and impressed with the PRESUD methodology. However people felt that there was too much of an environmental bias (in the report, in those interviewed, and in the interviewers) that did not match with the idea of sustainable development, this **suggests that that the social and economic aspects need to be better** taken into account and that this will improve the process. (Coordinator 8)

This weakness in the methodology was reflected in the ownership of PRESUD in each municipality was noted by internal and external stakeholders also:

''a possible weakness (or opportunity) is that only two people in my (non-environmental) department knew about PRESUD, more people could be involved ''
(Stakeholder 5, City 2)

''the main issue is how you link to other departments who have different priorities, we are on a different level to two years ago, attitudes have moved, now we are more creative in how we can link – sometimes it doesn't work or most of the time it's a financial problem'' (Team member City 7)

''There are two departments; the environment department and department 2, the PRESUD project started in one department, but there are two main departments, they have different senior politicians, and department 2 was not involved, the senior politician of department 2 was not involved…….I informed my director, that the PRESUD was useful for environment department but not department 2. There were

recommendations about how the environment department could improve, but no recommendations about how they could improve together.....the action plan was specific actions, and environment department had mentioned: what to do, who is responsible, and how to get money for these actions, but when you look at the scheme there were several actions not just for the environment department but other departments, but the person responsible for the action was still someone from the environment department – they were the only ones involved' (Stakeholder 13: City 2)

'I think the review is limited as its very much down to the city coordinator and sometimes the senior politician, nobody else is very interested – Europe is far away – its more about here and now, for the senior politician its important as its his face outside the doors. You should have interviews with the economic part of sustainability, and the people in transport and traffic, you need to work more closely with the stakeholders within the municipality also, the peer review should say something about the three Ps of sustainability and review that, and the way the government operates, with partners outside the city also, what I see is that process needs a lot of attention; communication, common goals, and the way to get there. Not just the actions but *how* can we do it, who do we need, what kind of organisational structure do we need, where is the structure, how do you do it – its easy to say in 2050 will achieve a target – but who has to work with who and how'' (External Stakeholder City 2)

5.3 Differences and Difficulties across Cultures and Local Context

Section Summary 5.3

There are mixed views as to whether PRESUD adequately reflects national and cultural differences. It is believed by some that there is too much of a British approach in the methodology that is not appropriate. The approach and themes do not always transfer well into new European settings. This suggests revision of the methodology to avoid this criticism, and greater participation of municipality staff (and others from the home country) to ensure that the review and report reflect the cultural and contextual reality. Introductory instruction on context has been useful to the review team but has not fully removed the misunderstandings nor criticisms of reports.

Team Members & Team Managers were asked whether the process adequately reflects national and cultural practices. The following responses were obtained:

Evaluating PRESUD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
PRESUD adequately reflects national and cultural practices.	2	13	15	11	1

Review team members across all reviews added comments on these judgements:

'The governance model needs to be adjusted to reflect the national legislative framework…..Perhaps too UK biased ……It could be, but the British scrutiny culture is now too dominant. In my opinion it kills taking own initiative, and own responsibility. And that while taking initiative and responsibility are key drivers for change towards sustainability. Remember also that this is a peer review and not an audit……..Not really, there are some real differences in administration and responsiblities in each country that need to be used as a premise for each assessment…….It can't…….Still an inherent tension within the process-particularly with the differences in the LG system in England-central control/inspection/audit/funding etc.... The Governance themes require further development to reflect non-UK cities political and municipal organisation……….There is a "culture of administration" which is different from country to country and sometimes these differences can obstacle communication, especially when interviewing people that are not particularly familiar with working in a trans-national environment…….political and cultural differences make aspects of the model difficult to rationalise, especially the governance themes…………My impression is that the whole approach based too much on a culture of permanent assessing and changing like it is in Britain…………Not sure that it does reflect cultural differences. English cities are more constraint/governed and regulated than European………Leadership styles/ political governance and scrutiny and resource allocation to sustainable development are different which makes direct comparisons and learning difficult……….every city should be considered as unique………..The greatest difficulty lies in national and cultural differences, that you have to penetrate to understand things. Much of the assessment is based on the "British way" At the same time this gives you new impulses (to be seen with the foreigner's eyes…………… It seems important that at least one member of the visiting team has 'expert' knowledge about the cultural and other context of the city visited……………In each country there are different political, cultural and administrative systems. I realized it was for the peer review team member not easy to understand that framework properly, but that fact is essential for giving proposals for change. My impression is PRESUD has underestimated the difficulties which occur because of these difference…. (review team member comments across reviews)

These comments suggest that the teams feel the different cultures and contexts are a significant issue. Additional team comments supported this interpretation:

'The system of Governance and managing in municipalities is based on different traditions; the relations to national and other levels of the political system are different in different countries. That point was not dealt with adequately in the methodology…….The governance themes should remain compulsory but I suggest can be changed to reflect national and cultural practices…….the Governance themes should be revisited as they appear to be too UK orientated…………. The Leadership themes need to be modified to fully reflect the differing types of democracy across Europe (too UK centred at present)……still to British in its approach and assessment - possibly at times using a rather inflexible concept of sustainable development……….Differences in culture and national ways of handling with sustainable development issues is not taken into consideration enough….As I have written earlier: so far there was not proper understanding of the differences of the political and administrative systems in the countries, The political and legal framework can vary very much and not every municipality has the power to initiate all the changes, which the project wanted to reach…Provide mentor/buddy for people dealing with governance process to explain political/democratic system and to help understand the culture and approaches taken

by the municipality in order to be able to better contextualise it against the model…… In every team there should be one member, who is coming from the country where the city is located or somebody who knows the country excellent. So this person can give the other team-members a lot of useful information and advises for better understanding of the city and evaluation of the findings…Methodology isn't flexible enough - the peer review tool and benchmark in UK took 3 years to develop, PRESUD was initially used without a benchmark and relied on performance indicators which is not the same as driving change in culture and approach… One of the team members in each team should be a national expert representing for example the national ministry of the environment. The same team members should take part in first and second review…… Adaptation into relevant EU state context - it was difficult for colleagues to understand he UK governance context and equally, difficult to understand other EU states during such brief visits" (Comments from review team members across all reviews)

6 VARIABLE PRE-REVIEW INPUT BY TEAMS AND CITIES

6.1 Overview

Team members were viewed as variable in expertise, language, seniority, interviewing, and in research and analysis skills by team managers and coordinators. See section 6.2. Generally there was a limited competency to examine social and economic aspects of sustainability as teams were primarily drawn from environmental departments. The breadth and number of themes meant that some were dealt with superficially by teams composed of generalists. Some felt that continuity across first and second review teams would help, others felt that using additional personnel from outside the municipality would help. See section 6.2.

The training was well received but focused upon the psychology of interviews and team building. See section 6.2. It had very little on relevant sociological perspectives (such as qualitative data analysis and interpretation) and this will influence the validity and reliability of the review findings. It is not clear how well the training informed and influenced the actual interviews across reviews and this could be evaluated. See section 6.2. The methodology and process needs to be amended to account for these points.

These factors interact with weaknesses in both methodology and ownership within the municipality; all affecting the depth and breadth and balance of the sustainability review. Teams generally did not understand the local culture, city, and context and this creates problems in effective communication during interview. The theoretical assessment also adds support to the need to develop the analysis skills of the peer review team.

Coordinating a review takes time and a hurried review affects the review quality through lack of engagement of wide and senior stakeholders, and through weak documentation. Section 6.3A review can be organised by one coordinator but this adds to the fragility of the process. It should be arranged well in advance (estimates vary from 2-6 months by 2-3 people from different departments).

The evidence and documentation received by the teams from the municipalities has been variable. See Summary 6.4. Good documentation is possible but the main criticisms relate to late, inadequate, or non-english evidence submissions. This stage is largely dependent upon the city coordination staff, but coordinators also point to the difficulty in assembling information which is defined by PRESUD or held by others.

This suggests greater participation of the relevant municipality departments and some flexibility in defining what is locally relevant and should be used locally as evidence. See Summary 6.4. The aim is to produce a readable introduction to the city written by the city, which can be reviewed by the review team *and* other municipality stakeholders. Some coordinators managed the job well and were complimented, in other cases they did not. The time taken should not be underestimated and collection of relevant information needs to be collected well in advance.

Preparation is variable across reviews, and this depends heavily upon the teams individuals and city coordinators. See Section 6.5.   Preparation has improved between first and second reviews. It is still an area where particular teams and cities could improve further. Preparation weaknesses had an impact upon the quality of review and report, as teams often began from zero, better preparation could raise the starting point of the review, and would free up interview and workshop time for deeper or broader investigation. Preparation criticisms came also from the internal and external stakeholders, who often did not know enough about the review. One improvement could be for the manager and teams to have contact with the city before review, to check preparations and gather some basic information. See Section 6.5.

6.2 Selection of teams, competencies, and training

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Section Summary 6.2

Team members were viewed as variable in expertise, language, seniority, interviewing, and in research and analysis skills by team managers and coordinators.

Generally there was a limited competency to examine social and economic aspects of sustainability as teams were primarily drawn from environmental departments. The breadth and number of themes meant that some were dealt with superficially by teams who were generalists. Some felt that continuity across first and second review teams would help, others felt that using additional personnel from outside the municipality would help.

The training was well received but focused upon the psychology of interviews and team building. It had very little on relevant sociological perspectives (such as qualitative data analysis and interpretation) and this will influence the validity and reliability of the review findings. It is not clear how well the training informed and influenced the actual interviews across reviews and this could be evaluated.

The methodology and process needs to be amended to account for these points.

Linkage to other Findings: These factors interact with weaknesses in both methodology and ownership within the municipality; all affecting the depth and breadth and balance of the sustainability review. Teams generally did not understand the local culture city context and this creates problems in effective communication during interview. The theoretical assessment also adds support to the need to develop the analysis skills of the peer review team.

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'The team members were variable. We had a number of people in teams who were inexperienced, for whom the process of peer review was new and challenging.., in a language that was their second language, this meant that reviews got off to a relatively poor start, I would have to say that certain individuals had more experience than others. Team members need to have acknowledged competencies and have the experience needed, we need to verify people's competencies, communication skills, language, and pan-european perspective." (Team manager city 4).

''If we are discussing how we move this onto another level of development then the lack of seniority of some of the review members and with that the lack of experience of the peer review process, most of us are technical specialists, very few are senior mangers in local government – the fact that there have been elected members on many of them, does give it strength – but a peer review in IDeA terms tends to be led by a senior officer, maybe a chief executive or director, whereas our members tend to be much more junior than that, I think that is a weakness. You could bring someone in with a bit of a title to head it up. I think the lack of experience is due to the fact that this is a funded project it is not a commercial operation" (Team Manager City 3)

The teams members themselves commented:

''Teams should have voluntary sector professional or representative on as aspects of community and democratic engagement, social and environmental integration are weak and some of this is lack of team/reviewer awareness; state clearly to all reviewers what is expected….the competencies of some review members is not sufficient for the themes they have taken on, ………question on quality of reviewers - certainly in my own case I felt greater specialist knowledge (which I didn't have) would have improved the product……I think a strong and very competent leader is necessary and competent team members are also important. so i think is important to think twice about who joins the team……competent reviewers for each theme with more time to research the pressures and state and to understand the (complex) reasons for the particular suite of responses from the city…..Somehow we should find a right balance between the time spent and the depth we go… I think it would be better if the members of the first review had done the second, too. They have a better understanding of the existing political, economical and cultural system in the city. They know the role of municipalities in the political system of the country and can assess the possibilities and limitations which the responsible staff and politicians in the city has to deal with. And they can use that knowledge for better and useful recommendations. Secondly, they know problems, deficits and the good things in the performance of the cities and can therefore more in depth assess what has changed after the first review. And in a more qualified way they can decide what is going more well, what has worsened and what measures and strategies were initiated by the PRESUD Project." (Team members across all reviews)

There are enormous numbers of lessons. You start off by making sure that the individuals are competent to examine the areas of concern. As soon as you move into some of the integration themes and to some of the environmental themes, the competencies are lacking amongst the team, therefore their assessment is suspect ……the whole process is a little bit undermined by people not being sufficiently competent to do the peer review. So I think we have to have the peer review individuals have to be competent, they have to have access to the right people, they have to have the necessary information. I think to be honest that's about it, it's as simple as that. (Coordinator City 5)

''A huge weakness is to get the right people in the review team. People with the right set of mind, people with the knowledge required and getting a team instead of seven individuals. I do find that a major weakness and that can be resolved if you have a greater pool of people. Now we are doing it over nine cities we should have at least forty. Forty I think is the minimum if you want to have a follow up of this

project, which I wish for, we should have at least forty but I think hundred would be more. Then you can create a pool of people." (Coordinator 2)

The team members themselves were generally positive about the training received before the second round of reviews:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Team Training	11	18	12	1	0

This had clearly improved upon the previous position in the first round of reviews. It gave a good overview of the review process and prepared people for the psychology of individual interviews, of putting interviewers at ease and conducting a satisfactory interview. It was noted some trainers spoke quickly and this might have lost something in the translation by the non-english speaking participants.

It was observed that the training did not deal with the sociological aspects of interviewing. For instance: qualitative data, analysis and interpretation, the accumulation of many competing qualitative viewpoints; analytical induction, grounded theory qualitative comparative analysis approaches; the team processes of analysis of qualitative data, the social construction of shared meaning, critical realist and complexity views of social reality reported, nor the necessity of reflexivity in judging reviews or in interpreting qualitative reports in unusual social contexts. This was confirmed by team managers:

'It's a lot more complex to evidence that change than we thought it would be, and part of the inexperience of the team is that we didn't train them for this or they don't have understanding of what counts as evidence of change – we have used ordinary officers and they are not trained as researchers and they are not trained to do this, and they have struggled in gathering evidence of change'' (team manager city 4)

'Although the interview training was better than before –it was still inadequate – two days for a group of 40 people is just not enough – I think the lack of experience and maybe the junior nature of many of the reviewers made some of the interviews I was part of not as competent as they should have been in an ideal world. I still found that in the last reviews I've done sitting in with other people asking questions – they really were not asking them in a way that was likely to elicit helpful answer – their interview styles I would still describe as poor" (team manager city 3)

There was some additional evidence that, although useful, the interview training did not translate into practice during interviews:

From my own experience of undertaking a review, and my observations from attending some other reviews, I noticed that the skills and methods that we were taught during the Vienna training were not always adopted during the interviews during a review. Did everyone prepare hypotheses as we were required to do according to the training? Did we all use the different kinds of questioning to get a deeper understanding? Is this even possible unless you have many years of Local government experience?   Ultimately, much of the content of the final report may be dependent on the information extracted from the interviews, and if this has not been

effective then the reports may be less beneficial. I think the training in Vienna was excellent, perhaps we need some kind of evaluation of how well it was adopted in practice? (an active partner in the project)

Furthermore the view that the training did not necessarily translate into interview practice was supported by examination of the video recording of the training and of actual review interviews.

6.3 Coordinating and Scheduling a Review: Views from the Cities

Section Summary 6.3

Coordinating a review takes time and a hurried review affects the review quality through lack of engagement of wide and senior stakeholders, and through weak documentation. A review can be organised by one coordinator but this adds to the fragility of the process. It should be arranged well in advance (estimates vary from 2-6 months) by 2-3 people from different departments.

Preparation for the review organisation was the responsibility of the host city and coordinator. Preparation for reviews varied from very poor to very good, much of the difference was simply related to the advance notice, resources, effort, time, and experience of the coordinator (or coordinating team) in relation to other tasks.

Reviews require a great deal of advance notice, time, and resources devoted to them:

'First thing is it's a huge thing to organise. Absolutely massive. There are issues around resources project coordinators got responsibility for doing everything, basically. We were all trying to do it on a shoestring is it is very time intensive and that if you don't spend enough time, and you don't get it right, you don't make it work smoothly like clockwork, you can have a crap time. And it is actually quite expensive. Because we have to buy in catering and there's a huge amount of travel involved, you know stuff like that. I started booking hotels six months in advance, so I started working on it six months before. I would say that a month of extremely intense activity, working on it every day in the office and in the three weeks, two weeks leading up to it we spent two full weekends in the office you haven't got a review unless you've got an interview schedule. And in order to do that here in an organisation like this, you have to give people a huge amount of noticeI left it till about four months this time and even then, you know, we weren't getting people that we wanted" (Coordinator City 1)

Organising the review. Co-ordination role needs to be a team effort:

"I think somebody needs to think of all the things there are to do and then you have to basically delegate, decide together, agree on and have a constant dialogue, a single work plan that everybody has a copy of because you're all in different places at different times that week, you need to know what the other ones are doing." (Coordinator City 8)

'we need a co-ordinating team at PRESUD not just a person ever but that team must itself go across departments.. We did it in the first review and it went very well. I did it. I had a team of four persons who prepared first review and I would have

liked to have such a team preparing the second review and I must say that within my organisation, time wasn't there and human resources weren't there and I was too busy to organise broadly in the organisation but I should have done that." (dialogue with Coordinator 2)

More frequent contacts between the city and project management to check everything is on course may be needed. But equally having two or more coordinators working would also make the preparation more robust to changes and individual difficulties.

There were positives in coordinating a review:

'' there are lots of things about your own city that you don't know, I don't work very much in the social sector so having to get all that information means that you become more informed about what your city is actually doing in those fields. Basic team work is quite interesting and useful I think with the other people who are involved with the preparation process" (Coordinator City 8)

improvements had occurred between reviews in some cases (but not all):

''a positive development from the first review to the second review here because I knew it was going to be a bigger review team I've deliberately organised more interviews, tried to get a larger selection of people for the team to talk to so that it enriched there understanding of what was happening. There is a limit to how many people you can involve but that seemed to me to be sensible to try and allow plenty opportunity for people to talk to a wide range of stakeholders, internal and external (Coordinator City 6)

However on some Reviews there was a fairly unanimous feeling that the review felt hurried and a little ill-prepared:

'we handed it over to (others) to manage it and we didn't brief them, we didn't hold their hands well enough, and the people who scheduled all the interviews had never done it before. So yes it was ill prepared, it was rushed because we didn't have the human resources sufficient to do it" (Coordinator City 5)

An assistant coordinator however denied the problem was lack of resource, support, or experience, but simply identified the time that the manager and coordinator had given their assistants to begin preparation:

'I think the main problem was lack of time so that arranging meetings with sometimes senior people was difficult due to their availability. Otherwise I thought it went very well. Most people asked to attend meetings were happy to do so. It was very time consuming setting up meetings." (Coordinator 5b)

the second assistant coordinator estimated the time required:

''about 6/8 weeks' notice is realistic, particularly to get meetings into senior officers' or external stakeholders' diaries, It took (three of us) about 2 weeks of working on this non-stop to get the meetings and venues organised. This is in addition to the support we provided whilst the visitors were here." (Coordinator 5c)

When city coordinators delegate details to others they should remain responsible for this (in the case above responsibility had been delegated with only 2 weeks notice before the review). Note also that this time taken does not include the identification, assembly, and delivery of evidence from across the municipality which is discussed in a following section. Although timescales are stated in the methodology they were clearly not always adhered to and this meant the quality and extent of the review was compromised. When this occurred it was the teams and team managers and interview participants that felt the knock-on effects of this, and the assistant coordinators were unnecessarily stressed. Team managers could be involved in stimulating and checking the review preparation.

One difficulty is change between the reviews in municipality personnel:

''Getting the city actually prepared for PRESUD you also have to deal with possible changes between the first and second reviews. You have to basically ensure that the people who know the least are the people who you address" (Coordinator City 8)

''There were changes in personnel, my predecessor left, and that left us with a only few days to gather and write the evidence" (coordinator 4)

The final point again suggests a need for some built in safeguards – such as using 2-3 coordinators in a team. Preparation for reviews was also criticised by teams, and internal and external stakeholders:

''In the first round – it was a surprise to find myself involved in PRESUD I got papers two weeks before – in the second round it was a surprise again!. It was a surprise that PRESUD was still going on – so it did not have the visibility in the last two years for me, it would help if all the actions stay alive as PRESUD actions, otherwise you cant link with PRESUD, before the interview I saw the coordinator - but id like to know what subjects are going to be in the interview, are we discussing project results, is it the organisation, so I could tell the team" (Stakeholder 13: City 2)

''We were surprised that interview was about environmental themes - we were asked different questions to what we expected…the reviewers came to discuss one plan but we were told they would want to hear about another. We should have been told: what do they want to know, what do they want to talk about, so we can prepare, its more time effective, the first half hour was just getting the level, just getting ready, we could have used the time better. We should be told well before the interview and get a little bit more information about the people interviewing. Maybe a brief e-mail or telephone call before, just the basic information, but not too much or you will just get the politically correct answers if you prepare too much"
(internal stakeholders 8, city 2)

''Team preparation weaknesses - its very difficult to get all the information that you need, I don't know where to get it, certain people select information, you just have to trust the people giving you the information. During the review week you get a feel but it's a little too late, not flexible enough. The first time the team meets is on the review – this should be done earlier – especially in the 2nd review. People I spoke to had same experience. Team communication weaknesses between the team members before and after the review week - there are all these possibilities of e-mail and so on, but everyone is so busy doing their own job, no one communicates to share findings or interests, to make a circle of information 1 week or 1 month before the

review, and it should continue until the review report. Don't leave it up to the individual in the team – there should be some provision in the methodology for facilitating communication, focus more on that" (Stakeholder 6, City 2)

"a possible weakness (or opportunity) is that only two people in my (non-environmental) department knew about PRESUD, more people could be involved " (Stakeholder 5, City 2).

6.4 Evidence and Documentation Received from the City

Section Summary 6.4

The evidence and documentation received by the teams from the municipalities has been variable. Good documentation is possible but the main criticisms relate to late, inadequate, or non-english evidence submissions. This stage is largely dependent upon the city coordination staff, but coordinators also point to the difficulty in assembling information which is defined by PRESUD or held by others.

This suggests greater participation of the relevant municipality departments and some flexibility in defining what is locally relevant and should be used locally as evidence. The aim is to produce a readable introduction to the city written by the city, which can be reviewed by the review team *and* other municipality stakeholders. Some coordinators managed the job well and were complimented, in other cases they did not. The time taken should not be underestimated and collection of relevant information needs to be collected well in advance.

Team members judged the evidence largely positively but there were exceptions:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Evidence and Documentation Received from the City	5	22	9	5	1

The detailed comments from team members reflected the mixed views, and included positive comments towards the coordinator but also negative criticism of the timeliness of the evidence and the limited availability of English translations:

"late but very comprehensive when it came…The coordinator did an excellent job. We were delivered with a lot useful documents during the whole time in december till the review. So it was plenty of time to read all these documents. Even in the during the review we got plenty of documents. …….this was very good. well prepared and updated. Allowed insight into progress made by the city…….The Action Plan from the last review was only in draft format, and the evidence "pack" was provided during the review week - would have been better to have received it in advance………Detailed and comprehensive (although rather last minute) - additional information provided during the review……… There was no new evidence. We had to use the old one and the first report…….Much better than the last time - again this was due to clear expectations outlined in training. Could have been better on more in depth but when we got there, there was lots of great stuff awaiting us..This looked sufficient but it would have been better had it arrived more in advance (at least 4 weeks)………..quality partly excellent but date of receive too short before the review…Although the co-ordinators sent the information two weeks before the

review the envelops came not right on time to the most team members…needed more in English, made difficult to really understand the issues and political processes…….Arrived a bit late. And in some cases not so conclusive but thats maybe the situation…Not enough; and a bit late……..Was always going to be hard to get stuff in English…….We didn't receive it until the day before we arrived! It was incomplete so we spent the week requesting supplementary papers. We really should have received this earlier so that we weren't distracted during the review by having to check for documentation……..The evidence was not received sufficiently in advance and was patchy in quality……….Evidence was scant and received too late for thorough review prior to the visit" (team members across reviews)

'The weaknesses start with the evidence provided by the cities, it has often been late, in two cities it was vary late, which meant it was difficult to review the evidence to go back to the city, and to make further requests. It also meant that for the teams were ill-prepared for interviews. Cities need to be well prepared in terms of the technical evidence and information – the need to provide what they say they will provide and in good time" (team manager city 4)

Coordinators commented upon the difficulties in gathering and forwarding evidence from their perspective:

'Problem with the evidence is that it is something that has to produced separately just for PRESUD. But I also think that it is more or less 'inside information' that cannot necessarily be found from official documents". (Coordinator City 7)

't's quite difficult to know what the limits are of what kind of information you should be collecting because you can go on and on and on collecting information & theme tables does organise basic information but I think we've seen that that in itself is not enough so we usually give more and there's no formal framework of how we give that information" (Coordinator City 8)

'On both occasions it has been incredibly difficult - you are talking about providing detailed evidence for each team. One key issue is that not all of the Review themes fall into the remit of my department or my job specification for example. So I have to access the information from other places, and from other people and, you know, it's very very difficult to ask people who are very busy in another department to have a look at something and to get it back to you. You know, and to get them to give you anything sort of substantial. I would absolutely put my hands up and say we didn't give ourselves enough time to do it…and so I think the team did get, on both occasions a rather sort of rushed job. we probably should have taken it up to senior management level and asked for somebody to send out a request saying look, this is an important project, we need certain departments to come up with this kind of information. It's not that it's impossible or anything. I didn't just prioritise it well enough. I think that somebody ought to send a very clear message that the evidence is absolutely vital, because at the end of the day, that's the best, it's the bedrock of the review" (Coordinator 1)

6.5 Variable Preparation for the Review

Section Summary 6.5

Preparation is variable across reviews, and this depends heavily upon the team members and city coordinators. Preparation has improved between first and second reviews. It is still an area where particular teams and cities could improve further.

Preparation weaknesses had an impact upon the quality of review and report, as teams often began from zero, better preparation could raise the starting point of the review, and would free up interview and workshop time for deeper or broader investigation. Preparation criticisms came also from the internal and external stakeholders, who often did not know enough about the review.

One solution offered was for the manager or teams to have contact with the city before review, to check preparations or gather some basic information.

'They had evidence late, and with the teams not being very well prepared, that often meant they did not understand who they needed to interview; they had not had their hypotheses well thought through, and so going into the interviews quite often the questions were unfocused – better to have thoughts in advance, and we need to bring in more experts and better prepare" (Team manager city 4)

The team members had a more positive than mixed view of the preparation:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Team Preparation for the Review	4	20	15	3	0

So the evidence and documentation received by the team was regarded positively overall, but around 1/3 of respondents felt it could be improved. The teams members themselves had variable and mixed comments on the preparation:

In my opinion there is an issue about the preparation together with assigning topics well in advance to team members, and to provide them with the background documentation at least 4 weeks before the evaluation takes place, an idea could be to have some sort of database of the PRESUD past experience. This way team members could get a picture of what is done in the different cities which could help judging whether the evaluated city is doing well or whether it is just moving its first steps towards sustainability…many did not do their preparation on my team reviews and it showed…………. Peer reviewers need to get deeper in the analysis of the city's background…..better evidence in advance and more time for doing PRESUD work" (team members across reviews)…….the Team was well prepared. First arrangements were made in November. In the period from November till the review there were good exchange with information via e-mails. On the Sunday before the review the whole team met in order to arrange all details and discuss the process of the whole review in a broad and intensive way….This was probably not the norm but the team manager pulled out all the stops to ensure the prep for the review and the review itself ran smoothly…..Not sure that everyone on the Panel was well prepared,

particularly about specific issues that we needed to plan for and focus on…We had a few changes to the team shortly before the review began, so we had to make last minute adjustments……Very good - due to training but also because Venice team sent us major docs in English; I worked through them all to share hypotheses with the team…All the documents were in english so there were lots of documents to read. Maybe they arrived a bit late but it was ok….There was a preparing meeting for the uk based team members. It was very useful and detailed. On that meeting we dealt with a lot of essential issues of organisation of the review… we did the best we could do given time constraints and other pressures on all team members….Some team members were asked to cover themes that they were not entirely comfortable with …….It would have been better to have been identified who would lead on which review theme and who would take each interview before arriving in the City but I think this would have been difficult to finalise before the team met for the first time…..I communicated and emailed with all team members in advance of the review and sent regular emails with direction and information attached. If this did not occur however there is the potential for a lack of individual preparation and the review getting off to a bad start-onus is very much on the team manager in this respect. Some members did not do their homework and werenot sufficiently expert…..I reckon I did receive assistance to prepare for the review, but there was no "whole team preparation…time for preparation too short….Preparation was virtually non-existent. I would have expected a much more thorough debate before the actual review - could small internet diuscussion forums be a solution?

Furthermore:

'All of the reviews I have been involved in could be improved; half were very good half were very poor, the ones that were poor were ones with very little pre-preparation – particularly the evidence from the cities – it was always difficult to catch up, and one made me quite cross, the coordinator hadn't done a very good job, and that was puzzling because they were generally quite competent, there wasn't enough on how things work, nor on the benchmark as there should have been. On the well prepared reviews there was possibly too much information, but in all cases it was difficult to make sense of until you got there, it doesn't click into place until half way through the week – its not easy to understand how a city works – and its **easier if you are from the same country as the city you are reviewing** even in the well-prepared ones thought they were still not quite as well prepared as made sense to me – I think we could put more effort into being clearer about what we expect the host city to prepare – but whether or not we can get them to do it I don't know**"** (team manager city 3)

One solution offered was for the manager or teams to have contact with the city before review, to check preparations or gather basic information.

'"time is spent making sure interview knows why we are there..this stage puts people at ease..if they were, we could give a standard briefing note, and everyone being interviewed should write a few paragraphs about themselves - who they are – where they stand in the organisation - and send it to the team before the week starts"   (team manager city 3)

'"we could provide them with an overview of the questions to be asked; but you don't formulate the questions really until you are on your way into the interview virtually" (team manager city 3).

7 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

7.1 Overview

Teams were generally positive about the engagement of internal stakeholders during the review, with some reservations about the involvement of politicians, senior staff, non-environmental staff, and the time available for stakeholder engagement. Furthermore the teams felt a need for the inside 'party line' to be better balanced against other stakeholders. See section 7.2. Coordinators tended to be more satisfied with external stakeholder engagement than either the review teams or the external stakeholders themselves. Some coordinators were sometimes resistant to the idea of open access between team and stakeholders (and on rare occasions some external stakeholders were effectively excluded by coordinators). This suggests that external engagement can be 'staged' and therefore external engagement should not be solely left to the city and coordinators judgement. See section 7.3. External stakeholders were generally positive about PRESUD and peer review *when involved*. Those who were not directly involved called the process into question and challenged its credibility. See Section 7.4. Suggesting that stakeholder engagement should be maximised and broadened where possible with open access routes not controlled by the city. The view of external stakeholders was generally less positive concerning the independence, purpose, impact and value of PRESUD. Teams and coordinators tend to have more favourable views of the process than other stakeholders. Therefore the review evaluation should maximise involvement of all stakeholders. See Section 7.4. Even external stakeholders involved in the review were sometimes sceptical of the review independence - given the control of the city, and the many ways in which the municipality could influence the review in its own favour. See Section 7.4. External stakeholders wished for more independent engagement routes & methods; outside municipality control and also with open anonymous access for critical external stakeholders. See Section 7.4

Teams felt a broader range of stakeholders could be involved in reviews and numbers could be increased (see also the section on web engagement of stakeholders). This will develop with time but there should be an attempt to include a broad range of departments and stakeholders from front-end staff to those in managerial and political positions. See section 7.2. The engagement of external stakeholders was weak in the first review, but had improved in the second review round. In the second review round however the engagement of external stakeholders was judged more negatively than the engagement of internal stakeholders (which was judged good by teams). See section 7.3. This was also noted by external stakeholders, as the external stakeholders involved had varied from the 1st and 2nd round reviews and this was criticised. External stakeholder numbers could have been increased through use of a growing database, giving continuity improved numbers and increasing diversity. See Section 7.4.

The 1st round review teams comments on engagement included criticisms of: the stakeholder organisation types; numbers; depth; and time of involvement. The 2nd round review teams were more positive but improvements were still possible: better triangulation of findings, more and broader representation from stakeholders, and a more equal balance of external and internal stakeholders. Reviews differed: some cities organised little external involvement whereas others had significant networks of NGOs or data bases they could draw upon, suggesting a need to better

standardise the expected levels of engagement across reviews, through explicit methodology changes and independent access routes initiated and managed by review teams or external stakeholders themselves.

The involvement of a broad and diverse range of internal stakeholders (including senior managers and politicians) was important not just for information gathering during review, but also for increasing awareness, gaining ownership, improving validation, and widening dissemination of findings and recommendations. Additional engagement will additionally facilitate this. It was observed that not all stakeholders who wanted to be involved were involved and this was a missed opportunity which might have led to additional potential for change. See section 7.2. Teams also felt they had weak access to other internal stakeholders and information during the first review but this had improved by the second review, suggesting that experience had improved the situation, and might improved by explicit methodology and training. See section 7.2. A broader range of external stakeholders could also be involved in reviews and numbers could be increased (see Chapter 11 on web engagement of stakeholders). This will develop with time but there should be an attempt to include a broad range of external stakeholders; from the public, to front-end staff to those in managerial positions. See Section 7.4. The involvement of a broad and diverse range (including senior) is not just for information gathering but is again instrumental in increasing awareness, ownership, validation, and dissemination of findings and recommendations. Earlier and broader involvement will facilitate this. It was observed that not all stakeholders who wanted to be involved were involved and this was a missed opportunity which might have led to additional potential for change. See Section 7.4

Internal stakeholders wanted more two-way engagement with review team members (and with other cities) but this did not generally occur, and presents an opportunity which would stimulate stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders also wanted more time, better prior warning briefing and explanations before the review. And Stakeholders were not generally given feedback on their workshop contributions. As is good practice in such situations. See Section 7.4. The engagement of external stakeholders was relatively superficial in comparison with internal stakeholders, being more limited to workshops. Pre and Post involvement was negligible. External stakeholders wanted agendas and some indication of the question areas before the review. External stakeholders noted that satisfactory stakeholder engagement requires: significant numbers; significant diversity of representation; significant time for all to contribute; and enough pre-briefing and post-involvement to satisfy stakeholders. On each point there is room for improvement in the both methodology and process. See Section 7.4. There were (some) cases of exclusions of external stakeholders across different reviews, which although small in comparison with numbers actually involved still suggest that some external stakeholders should doubt the credibility of the current methodology and process. See Section 7.4

Finally web-engagement trials (Chapter 11) show that additional engagement is both possible and desirable from the viewpoint of internal stakeholders. See section 7.2. The findings of the web trials and the views of external stakeholders themselves also show that better engagement of external stakeholders is possible, and is sometimes not utilised, thereby excluding some stakeholders from contributing. See section 7.3 Furthermore independent web pre and post-engagement can gain information and disseminate the workshops and reports more widely to external stakeholders. This is an opportunity which has been tested and could be incorporated. See Section 7.4.

7.2 Engagement of Internal Municipality Stakeholders Satisfactory but Improvements Possible and Desirable

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Section Summary 7.2

Teams were generally positive about the engagement of internal stakeholders during the review, with some reservations about involvement of politicians, senior staff, and non-environmental staff, and the time available for engagement. Furthermore the teams felt a need for the inside 'party line' to be better balanced against other stakeholders.

A broader range of stakeholders could therefore be involved in reviews and numbers could be increased (see section on web engagement of stakeholders). This will develop with time but there should be an attempt to include a broad range of departments and stakeholders from front-end staff to those in managerial and political positions.

The involvement of a broad and diverse range (including senior) is important not just for information gathering during review, but is also important for increasing awareness, gaining ownership, improving validation, and widening dissemination of findings and recommendations. Additional engagement will additionally facilitate this. It was observed that not all stakeholders who wanted to be involved were involved and this was a missed opportunity which might have led to additional potential for change.

Teams also felt there had weak access to other internal stakeholders and information during the first review but this had improved by the second review, suggesting that experience had improved the situation, and might improved by explicit methodology and training.

Finally the sections on web-engagement show that additional engagement is both possible and desirable from the viewpoint of internal stakeholders.

The team members were generally positive about the involvement of internal stakeholders (staff of the municipality):

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Involvement of Internal Stakeholders	11	25	4	2	0

Team comments clarified this conclusion (linking to earlier comments about weaknesses in review preparation, time available, which could be better, and engagement of more politicians and non-environmental staff):

'Very cooperative. However, some did not know about or understand our remit….felt they really worked hard to support us……..Very revealing - confirmed most of our initial findings………..very good……..I really appreciated the time and often preparation of the internal stakeholders. Given the importance of politicians to the

success of the Pre_Sud process it was disappointing that more were not available…some no shows in quite important areas e.g. the energy company…..t was evident that the interviewees came from different departments. So variety of the adminstration were invited (urban planners, cultural affairs, olymc games bid, social affairs, economical affairs.). So, there was not a limited focus on civil servants from the environment department…….The schedule - there was insuffcient time allowed to speak with some internal interviewees……..Well organised and seemed quite inclusive……….Well prepared schedule -key stakeholders interviewed as requested. Party line given during most interviews! …Good but more accuracy on what they actually did was needed - a couple of reviewers were thrown off guard and there was a lot of posturing by politicians; those dedicated to sustainability issues gave most time and took PRESUD seriously but I'm uncertain how seriously others took it… could have been some more officials………Officers from Chiefs to front-line - were all extremely helpful and provided supporting information when we requested it during interviews. …….very good range………some very good people but these are already committed, but few at senior level and their input, with the exception of deputy leader, was more tolerating us rather than any interest to work with us, no senior people at presentation………..The most interviewees were part of the environmental department. That does mean there was no real opportunity to get to know the understanding of sustainability in other departments (health, education, culture, social). The range of interviewees was not sufficient for the broaden and integrating approach of PRESUD………No internal workshop but otherwise staff well involved through interviews… city council not engaged enough."   (team members cross reviews).

On municipality stakeholder involvement is easier well where there is senior support:

"we had the mayor involved who is supportive of the project, so everyone else agreed, everyone was there for the review, and they all supported it. I think it is very important to have high level commitment to this project." (Coordinator City 7)

people are generally interested in involvement and others can become involved because of the review process:

"The interviews were interesting and successful in terms of peoples willingness to be engaged. The workshops were less successful in that in the business workshop few people came and the following exchange was not particularly dynamic. In the citizens stakeholder workshop, the necessity for translation made the exchange slow and less spontaneous than was hoped for, though this could be a cultural observation" (Coordinator City 8)

"You start from an ideal list of figures that you would like people to talk to and end up with a realistic list of people who you know are willing to be involved in a project like this. I think that is something we should all acknowledge if nothing else. I'm not saying it's a weakness or a strength, it's just a fact and I'm sure in happens in most cities. I think overall we had difficulties in getting people to take it particularly seriously, PRESUD, so you know the review week in itself is actually asking for a lot of commitment from a lot of different people…….. I think it does take time to stress to people who do have power to get them warmed up and going and then once you've got them and it becomes a lot easier" (Coordinator City 8)

Satisfactory Access to Additional Stakeholders and Information during Review:

Access to additional stakeholders and information was judged to have been relatively weak in first review but has improved in the second round:

                                                      Negative Mixed Positive

Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders 3   17   24

And this was both confirmed and improved in the 2nd round of reviews:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders	6	23	11	2	0

It is worth noting a few additional observations here on internal stakeholder engagement here. Ownership of the PRESUD process, input, recommendations, and action plans, has been identified as an issue. This requires both depth of ownership (from senior to junior levels) and breadth of ownership across different (socio-economic-environmental) departments and governance organisations. Engagement of internal stakeholders is therefore not just for information gathering it is for engagement, ownership, dissemination, and validation of findings.

In some cities, internal stakeholders claimed they would have liked to have been better involved in the process or knew little about it. This was observed in some cases. Furthermore engagement of internal stakeholders was usually by interview, but it might be better to have more doubled interviews of people from the same area, of similar status, to enable cross checking and avoidance of misunderstandings, and to smooth out and diverse messages.

The section on web trials engaging additional stakeholders show that engagement, though often judged satisfactory by teams and coordinators, could be improved and that more stakeholders wish to be engaged.

7.3 Improve Engagement of External Stakeholders: Different Views of Team Members and Coordinators

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Section Summary 7.2

The engagement of external stakeholders was weak in the first review, but had improved in the second review round. In the second review round however the engagement of external stakeholders was judged more negatively than the engagement of internal stakeholders (which was judged good by teams).

Coordinators tended to be more satisfied with external stakeholder engagement than either the review teams or the external stakeholders themselves. Some coordinators were sometimes resistant to open access and transparency (and on rare occasions some external stakeholders were effectively excluded by coordinators). This suggests that external engagement can be 'staged' and therefore external engagement should not be dominated by the city and coordinators judgement.

The 1st round review teams comments included criticisms of the stakeholder organisation types, numbers, depth, and time of involvement. The 2nd round review teams were more positive but improvements were still possible, such as better triangulation of findings, more and broader representation from stakeholders, a more equal balance of external and internal stakeholders. Reviews differed: some cities organised little external involvement whereas others had significant networks of NGOs or data bases they could draw upon, suggesting a need to balance engagement across reviews, through explicit methodology changes and independent access routes initiated and managed by review teams or external stakeholders themselves. When the suggestion of teams independently engaging external stakeholders, or having open access routes for external stakeholders themselves to use was raised, some coordinators suggested this would not occur, should not occur, or was unnecessary, further emphasising that an independent review requires independent routes for interested stakeholders to engage and contribute to the review.

The findings of the web trials and the views of external stakeholders themselves show that better engagement of external stakeholders is possible, and is sometimes not utilised, thereby excluding some stakeholders from contributing.

Involvement of 'external' stakeholders includes a broad range of people; citizens, citizens representatives, politicians, other agencies and business for instance.

In the first round of reviews there were more mixed and negative views expressed by team members than there were positive):

Review stage	Negative	Mixed	Positive
Involvement of External Agencies	**6**	**19**	**19**
Involvement of Community and Business	**6**	**18**	**20**

On the engagement of external stakeholders, teams in the first review round felt this to be one of the weakest points of the review.

It furthermore remained an issue on the second round of reviews:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Involvement of Internal Stakeholders	11	25	4	2	0
Involvement of External Stakeholders	10	18	11	2	1

So although the view of stakeholder engagement had improved relative to the first set of reviews (in the view of teams). The external stakeholders involvement was judged less positively than the involvement of the internal stakeholders.

Comments from the 1st review included many negative comments, particularly in terms of the organisation, numbers, depth, and time of involvement and the absence of types of external representatives (such as business):

"Sometimes too many for a short time interview…Interviews with more than 1 partner are difficult……3 people only!! Representing NGOs, and there were Also council employees…….A bit limited …..Too limited - Review Team should have had more input to this………..Insufficient/none, more workshops………insufficient time available to meet a representative sample of external stakeholders, the workshop organised was very poor with no briefing by the city of the attendees…….Not enough time given. Felt rushed. Felt not particularly professionally followed through by local organisers in case of research workshop… was limited involvement of external agencies, a weakness in the methodology…Some key people were there but I am not sure we got the best from them - as workshops limit depth……..Limited and selective. City should not have been present at these interviews as it appeared to hinder/restrict contribution of NGO's ……..Would have liked to have got more of them involved……..there where not so many……I've not seen any persons form businesses. The appointment we had was cancelled with no replacement……..Should have included the environment day protest – we just ignored it! Poor…….. good but need more workshops..No business involvement. Community involvement was good though not representative……Business not well represented…….Some key people were there but i am not sure we got the best from them. Example the director of X - if we fully understood his responsibility we would have interviewed him separately…Selective to the extent of exclusion of some… Business was not so good involved…….Would liked to have got more of them involved…….still there is always a need to do this better; somehow to get more critical views from outside and to be able to verify how true they are…….Business partners were not involved……." (team members across the first review).

The comments of the 2nd review teams were more positive but still there were negative comments and areas where improvements were possible, such as triangulating analysis of interview finding, having more and broader representation from stakeholders, having a more equal balance of external and internal stakeholders, better involvement of the public, and variability in this respect requiring a need to balance engagement across reviews:

We had access to everyone we asked for…very positive ….Several of our interviewees are not working in the municipality………Also revealing, and useful in re-checking some assumptions………good……….far more commited……not as extensive as required…….The range of stakeholders seen by the review team was good and provided an insight into the 'perceptions' and realities of progress being made by the city……Care is needed to ensure and 'objective' assessment is made of the views and opinions shared by external stakeholders as these can be slanted by extreme comments, bad experiences and passion around the subject matter ie environmental activists………Positive and useful workshop……….Good, much improved on the first review……Companies good………could have been some more…..As internal stakeholders…Given the importance of the X initiative to the future of the City, it would have been helpful to have more input from members of the X Board….Not as good as I had hoped and limited to some extent…….External stakeholders were less represented, but if the focus of the performance assessment is on the activities of the municipality this is somehow comprehensible………We had no meeting with the public only some representatives from different organisations…….In this city the co-ordinators did not organise workshops. All interviewees were part of the administration of the municipality. So, there were no involvement of stakeholders and residents. In one other city they organised a lot of events for meeting with stakeholders. Therefore the project should make sure in future that all involved cities take the same actions in order to involve stakeholders. That has to be controlled properly.

Coordinators

Coordinators tended to be more satisfied with external stakeholder engagement than either the review teams or the external stakeholders themselves. This suggests that external engagement should not be left *entirely* to the city and coordinators.

On external involvement, there was sometimes a relatively low expectation of external involvement:

'This went quite well, involved NGOs, researchers from the university and open meeting for citizens was advertised in local newspaper we also got business involved in the review. Not so many people came to open meeting, but this is normal. And always the same people come to complain about the same things that we have heard thousands of times." (Coordinator city 7)

The importance of engaging external stakeholders in the review was generally recognised as valuable by coordinators:

'I think the other lesson is to actually be able to challenge the local authority's view to get the external stakeholders, so that they can consider whether what the local authority is saying is actually substantiated by stakeholders. I think that actually has worked quite well in our second review where the external stakeholders have challenged the municipality's perspective. That may be one of the positive things that's come out of the review." (City Coordinator, City 5)

An opposition politician in the same city was asked to comment upon his understanding of the PRESUD process, had a different view:

''I am a member of the minority group on the Municipality. I have not checked with all of my colleagues but understand few - if any of us - have been previously involved in this process. I was not aware that there were any workshops or "interviews". As a member of {one of the key political sustainability groups} I received two of three days in advance a bundle of badly produced documents that seem to indicate a "first review and action list" had been agreed about sixteen months ago. This is not surprising to me given the nature of the Ruling Political Group, the Cabinet structure and the content of the review. A single political party controls all aspects of policy, scrutiny and communication within the Council. If PRESUD produce another review like the last one they should invite broad comment from other political parties and other interested groups, it may actual change something. It is unlikely to change very much. Only external crisis sway the controlling group/officers to consider reaction, logic, debate and argument never have''. (A local opposition politician, city 5)

This provides some evidence that the opposition parties were not included as they would have wished in the process, and the stakeholder challenge claimed by the city coordinator above, is contested from external stakeholders *not* involved in the review as they are sceptical of their exclusion and the intentions of the ruling political system in participating within PRESUD.

So some cities organised little external involvement whereas others had significant networks of NGOs or databases they could draw upon:

'An official organisation that has been set up or lets say been foreseen by the city itself, which brings together all the local environmental NGO's and they have to be consulted on any act that the city wants to push through the council regarding sustainable development issues. So this organisation decided that it would be interesting to hold a workshop we basically asked them would they mind being part of a workshop and they were absolutely fine about it" (Coordinator City 8).

However the same coordinator questioned the forms and aims of engagement in PRESUD:

I think here PRESUD needs to practice a bit what it preaches because there is an awful lot of nice blah that get written about how cities should be better at engaging their local communities etc. I think we need to make sure that we are engaging people better." (Coordinator City 8).

But when the suggestion of teams independently involving external stakeholders, some coordinators became wary, cautious, or defensive, further emphasising that PRESUD can not be considered a truly independent review, but one that negotiates its independence with the city through diplomatic in reaching external and oppositional stakeholders:

''I think you have to be very careful about what kind of promises you make saying why don't you come to this press conference or why don't you do this to certain people, because maybe politically it's not the right thing. I think there are some things that the city itself has got to decide so a word of caution to anybody who is part of a review team. I think there is nothing wrong with going and speaking to communists or activists or whatever, but I think this is something that would have to be really well paved with the politician in your city who is championing yes they can

contact communists, activists, whatever but they shouldn't perhaps invite them out to dinner, expect them to rub shoulders with the politicians, you know PRESUD is not there to rock the local boat. (Coordinator City 8)

Although happy with the idea of independent approaches by the team but wherever possible through agreement or conversation with the city itself:

go off and interview them by all means but don't maybe bring them into a forum where two people would never ever normally see each other in some kind of local arena where they would never both be in the same place. PRESUD would just create antagonism then". (Coordinator City 8)

One coordinator commented on the mix needed, and also the continuity needed (which was generally lacking in local governance):

"I think it is ideal to try and get a mixture of politicians, senior managers, specialist technical officers from within the council and I think you do need to try and get a reasonably representative mix across different departments or directorates to ensure that this is properly kind of corporate involvement but then of course you do need significant involvement from outside. I think that's about looking at different sectors so perhaps the voluntary community sector, private sector, other bits of the public sector. . Its time consuming and it's a bit resource intensive and it's a lot of co-ordination work. I think the more difficult bit is how do you retain that degree of involvement outside of the actual peer review week itself. I think the real benefit of this stuff is that it should be ongoing, it should be a sort of long term process and ideally PRESUD should complement and support something which is already there. That may or may not be the case." (Coordinator City 6)

So ideas included recommendations for ongoing engagement of stakeholders. ''couldn't you build that in the process and shouldn't we?"

"Yes you can. I think the reason I'm ahead is that because what makes the peer review week so attractive is the fact that you've got some visitors coming in from other places and from overseas. That for me is a big attraction and obviously you cannot replicate that beyond the week an international exchange of ideas and views and really getting into some depth. I think that brings in a degree of excitement and its difficult to continue that kind of excitement over a longer period." (Coordinator City 6)

7.4 Stakeholder Engagement: Views of External Stakeholders Themselves

Section Summary 7.4

- External stakeholders were generally positive about PRESUD and peer review when involved. Those who were not directly involved called the process into question and challenged its credibility.
- The view of external stakeholders was generally less positive about the independence, purpose, impact and value of PRESUD. Teams and coordinators tend to have more favourable views of the process than other stakeholders. Therefore evaluation should maximise involvement of stakeholders.
- Even those involved in the review were sometimes sceptical of the review independence (given the control of the city), given the many ways in which the municipality could influence the review in its own favour.
- External stakeholders wished for independent engagement routes & methods; outside municipality control and also with open anonymous access for critical external stakeholders.
- The engagement of external stakeholders was relatively superficial, limited to workshops. Pre and Post involvement was negligible. Stakeholders wanted agendas and some indication of the question areas before the review.
- Stakeholders noted that satisfactory stakeholder engagement requires: significant numbers, significant diversity of representation, significant time for all to contribute, and enough pre-briefing and post-involvement to satisfy stakeholders. On each point there is some room for improvement in the methodology and process.
- Workshops differed and were variable, and different stakeholders felt different things about the *same* ones, some felt them superficial and disliked them, others that they were valuable and rewarding and satisfactory.
- External stakeholders were generally frustrated by report delays and process loses credibility and support; large reports in English were not wanted. They wanted simpler short and direct reports with the main headings.
- They also wanted to see best practice examples from the different cities and more inter-city dissemination of this, some mentioned that PRESUD could serve a useful function connecting NGOs and external stakeholders across municipalities.
- External stakeholders varied from 1st to second review and this was criticised, stakeholder numbers could be accumulated in a growing database, giving continuity..
- Independent web pre and post-engagement can gain information and disseminate the workshops and reports more widely. This is a opportunity which has been tested and could be incorporated.
- Finally there were (some) cases of exclusions of external stakeholders across different reviews, which although small in comparison with numbers actually involved still suggest that some external stakeholders should doubt the credibility of the current methodology and process.

Stakeholders Scepticisms on Stakeholder Engagement

External stakeholders themselves were generally positive about the idea of PRESUD, and welcomed the initiative (*if* they were directly involved in the process). Nevertheless most expressed some concerns associated with credibility or external critical involvement or real impact of the process, much of this was attributable to scepticism about the exercise (ticking boxes, public relations exercise, exclusion of critics, power of participant selection in the hands of the city, the superficial or erroneous comments of the review teams in reports)

It was further noted that the city controlled who was involved in the reviews and this also raised credibility questions in the external stakeholders:

''How can independent and critical groups and specialist get involved in PRESUD? We got involved through a workshop but it was superficial, the facilitator first asked us for our positive view of the municipality, talked about his own city and then we had little time to say anything – it was useless. The city completely controls who is involved. Its important that PRESUD team get to know the people who want to criticise – and a lot of people who know that things are wrong – they have the knowledge because they are involved –they get work from local government, so they are not independent." (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

'You need ways to get that independent view which is anonymous and you must stress that, for instance on your web site idea you could have everyone write something and its anonymous, if it will be translated and it will be used by the team that will be a revolution, but I don't think the municipality will listen." (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

This applied to internal stakeholders also:

'you need a way to reach these other people – in every organisation there are critical officials – maybe there is a way to let them speak, and tell you who else should be involved, the team could do this, and get the information, and then meet and talk with other people. Perhaps the cities should have a independent municipality-funded organisation – as part of the professionalised environmental movement …or PRESUD review teams should ask: 'who are the independent critics in this local community, and do you support them, do you give them the means to do it?..PRESUD should also speak to the press, and the political opposition in the local government, because they also have a lot of knowledge they are involved in the process…and that's important..but they are not involved….." (External organisational stakeholder 12: Manager, City 2)

I asked another key external stakeholder organisation how in practice they were involved by the city in the review process, it was found their involvement was more limited and superficial than they would have liked, and sometimes their involvement was limited to show-piece appearances in the review itself:

'I am not well involved! What I say may be too extreme - but I always hear that (*my external stakeholder organisation*) is in an important position especially when outsiders are looking in, but we find that we are not priority for the council –I am interviewed, and I organise other stakeholders for the interviews, which takes a lot

of time to push people to come, but that is it – I am not the only one – I am not involved; I don't write I don't review and neither do my senior colleagues, I think I commented on the draft, but I also saw that my questions were not answered, because the things I really liked and found interesting in the draft I didn't find them in the final report, nothing was recorded, I understand how it happens, I have worked a long time in this field and I know how it works, the senior politician can say 'we have made a major step with this (*external organisation*) but we don't feel that, its good, but its not really true. " (External Stakeholder 1, Manager, City 2)

Opportunities for teams to gain insight from external stakeholders were not utilised in the review:

no stakeholder had seen the review schedule nor list of participants. Nor were they asked by the team to comment upon it. It was noted that this was a further way in which an additional check could be placed upon the openness of the review and the engagement of diverse stakeholders by the review team. This was discussed as a possible suggestion for improving the transparency of the process, and as a means for the team to check the balance in the review; everyone involved should receive (or at least see) the schedule and list of names involved and be given opportunity to comment on the inclusions and omissions during the interviews.

In addition to the view of the external stakeholders criticising engagement this was also noted as important by internal stakeholders: "the main question is how to get the municipality involved" (Stakeholder 13: City 2)

Reasons for involvement and expectations

External Stakeholders wish to see external assessment of their municipalities and see this as a way to perhaps alter a given set of circumstances in their favour, this was expressed by several external stakeholders:

'"We think the report recommendations are good and fully support them. Local employees and politicians don't willingly criticize their own city or accept criticism of it or guide other persons (as PRESUD)Their planning and acting are dependent of where the **power** is – this steer a city and there will be only praise from the city officials ..for instance,…. in my city, the city works in the interests of business, and city officials and press are controlled by this, the businesses and municipality work for mutual interests and not for the environment; we told PRESUD about the cheating and business-driven interests but this criticism was then censored in one of the translations (the press ignored PRESUD totally)".

A senior external stakeholder was aware of the whole PRESUD process, and explained their initial involvement:

'What had happened was that an e-mail had come round our sector and frankly there hadn't been any great enthusiasm with it, people in our sector are, how do you say - pissed off - with the municipality. When I saw that it was peer review and that it was outsiders and it wasn't people in the municipality I thought it might be worth giving it a bit of a push so I volunteered. I went along to the first review."
External Stakeholder 1, City 1

Stakeholders may feel in a strong position to assess the municipality yet doubt that they will be enabled to:

There's no two ways about it, I would be happier with a process whereby a local government improvement came about because of people like ourselves being engaged discussions about what's wrong with our city then having some anonymous people from the audit commission coming along and saying this, that and the other. It's definitely preferable but it's not going to happen."
External Stakeholder 1, City 1

Views of the overall process

City 2

Limitations and fragmentation were noted by a senior organisational external stakeholder:

'I think the review is limited as its very much down to the city coordinator and sometimes the senior politician, nobody else is very interested – Europe is far away – its more about here and now, for the senior politician its important as its his face outside the doors. You should have interviews with the economic part of sustainability, and the people in transport and traffic, you need to work more closely with the stakeholders within the municipality also, the peer review should say something about the three Ps of sustainability and review that, and the way the government operates, with partners outside the city also, what I see is that process needs a lot of attention; communication, common goals, and the way to get there. Not just the actions but *how* can we do it, who do we need, what kind of organisational structure do we need, where is the structure, how do you do it – its easy to say in 2050 will achieve a target – but who has to work with who and how''
Improvements were combination of strategic and operational levels on sustainability issues with wider involvement of all relevant stakeholders and measurement of impact, or the impacts would be limited by the political responsibility power and situation:

'I think the review should be on a strategic level (also) and what does sustainability mean – I work a lot with other sustainability departments and organisations, the issues here belong to the environmental department, but this is completely different to the other departments so we need wider ownership in process, in people, policy involvement, communication across departments, does our responsible politician really have influence in economic issues? I think this is the core of sustainability, not only environmental issues, we proactive plans on broader issues.

7.4.1 Views of stakeholder engagement in PRESUD

Variable engagement before and after review

City 1

External stakeholders may sometimes not be engaged as well as they would wish before and after the review:

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'The thing that would have been much better is if they had circulated the agenda before. At the first session we got it when we arrived but it was a very straightforward thing and it structured our discussions and our thoughts. I think there should have been at least an agenda for both of them. Also I was promised the power point presentation, I haven't unfortunately seen it, but I look forward to reading the report when it comes out. '"

The balance of stakeholders is as important as the numbers of stakeholder:

'My only criticism of engagement was the balance of the stakeholders one group was there in larger numbers that I would have liked. In another workshop it was more balanced, all the major organisations were there, there was more notice given in advance. To be honest (between you and me) the coordinator doesn't have much an idea of engaging with the voluntary sector.

Another stakeholder noted the web-based trial to engage more stakeholders in *before* reviews, sent out widely by a coordinator, may have contributed to the breadth of turnout of the workshops:

'The fact that the questionnaire had been on the website and lots of people had seen the previous report and read the questionnaire meant that more people knew what it was and so various organisations did take the trouble to turn up. That's why the second one had a better balance of organisations represented."

City 9

Three of the four participants saw the low numbers of attendees as a weakness of the workshop e.g. a business person:

"… For example the project should be better communicated amongst companies, because numbers of participants from companies in this workshop with business managers was extreme low. That was a thing I was angry about, but this is more a weakness from our city and not from the project…"

Another perspective on this lack of involvement was given another participant:

"…The other problem is that for our companies and the economic aid by public budgets sustainability is not a high-ranking criteria. That was made clear by the debate in the workshop: nobody is against sustainability, but if you are establishing a new business here you think about other economic needs. Sustainability has under these circumstances no priority. The typical company in our city has less than 10 employees and then amongst the first 10 strategic aims you won't find sustainability. Liquidity and the maintenance of research capacity ect. are more important and you can't change this with ideology…"

in short better information may not increase attendance; the workshop would have to fit in with the interests of the external stakeholders, and this may be a limiting factor.

Variable views of the preparation workshops and presentations

City 1

The review workshops differed between first and second reviews, the preparation and structure (or lack of it), and the contribution made by the stakeholder had influenced their view of PRESUD:

'I've been involved in the collective sessions that were held with the external stakeholders. I've been involved with the first and second review, and I read the final report. In the second review I've heard verbal reports from people who were involved also they were totally different. The first one was structured, the second one was totally unstructured. That was a strength of the first one and a disastrous weakness of the second one. I was quite happy with the first one, I was frankly pissed off at the second one, as simple as that. In the first one we went in and they gave us an agenda with all the issues they wanted to go through and we went through them in sequence and you knew what was coming up, you could mark through your thoughts. Even when we were running out of time towards the end you knew what you would want to speak to on the items we were having trouble with and you'd get your points in but you knew where it was going and you knew where it had come from. The second one had no agenda, it was like a random therapy process to be honest. I sort of didn't say anything and then somebody just started talking and that's the way it proceeded, it was rambling. The chair didn't like to say, has anybody got any more before we move on to something else. The chair didn't do that at all, it was really bad, I wasn't very happy with it to be honest, the chairing was crucial. I left that first session feeling that we had said everything that needed to be said. By comparison, the second session I couldn't even remember what we had said frankly because there was no structure at all."

Note that the earlier review workshops were *better* than the later ones, the same stakeholder felt the same about the presentations:

'I would say that the first presentation was very good and the first review team was very good whereas I didn't like the second team. I think part of it was there was no continuity between the two which was disastrous in my view. '

City 9

In another city, the criticism of external stakeholders focused mainly on the few workshop attendees the advance information given before the workshop, the preparation of the workshop, the fit between the stakeholders and the aims of the workshop, and their expectations which were not met, and not been able to contribute as expected. Some participants criticised the preparation of the workshop. The information provided was not sufficient and created misunderstandings, and attendees were not forewarned of the questions:

I had no preparation at all and was answering quite spontaneously and were capable to give better quality answers. I had not the feeling that I had not the occasion to say what I would like to say related to the topic of the workshop Even now I am not prepared about the purposes of the PRESUD-project and what it supposed to do

Another stakeholder:

''there were only advisory bodies, but no single enterprise or company…..I didn't know that the city is involved in this project, the questions were dealing with the issue what companies here have done in the field of sustainability, but the problem was that no representative of a company took part in order to answer these kind of questions….if I get the same invitation again I wouldn't go again to these kinds of workshop

An external stakeholder, an academic, noted:

"I heard about PRESUD shortly before the workshop…the information was absolutely not sufficient: I only heard that there was a delegation, which wants to discuss with representatives of the city. As I came to the workshop I was very astonished with framework within which the event took place. I had expected something completely different. I expected a huge event and not small working groups."

This was supported independently by another external stakeholder, in the same workshop, a representative of a technology and research liaison company:

'If I check my e-mail account I have mails from 30 or 40 of projects contacting me. everybody says their project is the most important. I have to make my choices on the basis of question: Will this project have any positive effect for the companies I have to deal with. A project, which should be interesting for me, must make clear that it is focused on business of small or middle size.

It was not clear for me in the pre-information that the project is addressed to the companies I work for….and, I was expecting to *get* information instead of be *giving* information."

A senior business person confirmed this:

"…I expected that concrete plans will be discussed and that is said who will do what things in the future. So, it should clear what obligations everybody has, but obviously it was only an exchange of ideas. That was not I was expecting."

It should be noted however that two other participants from the same workshop said the information they got before the workshop *was* sufficient:

… I would say the information were sufficient and felt I was kept informed properly, I found the workshop proper prepared…,

Positive Views of the Presentation & Negative on Reports & Impacts with Suggestions for Improvement

City 1.

Following presentation and before the report external stakeholders also (in addition to coordinators) wanted something written in brief and hard copy:

'**The presentation - I couldn't unfortunately make that, I believe it goes on the internet. But I just think it would have been easier, or have been a little bit nicer if they just actually sent a hard copy to the people that took**

part. You know - what the general views were, purely and simply I must confess I keep on saying, oh its on the internet, but I must go and look at it and you never get round to it. Whereas if you've got a resume of what they have been saying, and I'm talking a sheet of A4 - you can quickly look at it and if you want to go into more detail you can then go into the internet and get the depth. I think it's a pity that they don't do just a very very brief resume"

The reports themselves were not particularly welcomed by stakeholders:

I don't want to sort of be able to have to go and read through thousands and thousands of words to come to that. Just a few one-liners, that would to me would be very useful.

One of the problems in having impact despite a possible positive process, is if you are not going to use or enter into dialogue with the findings:

''So I think there are lots of things where you can get a lot of good ideas from, so I think there is a lot of positives in it. A lot of positives in it. I think the downside is the one where you assume, oh well yes they might do that but we are not going to. I can't see much point in taking part if you are not going to use it"

Impacts could include statements of best practice across cities and analysis of why it works and doesn't, and this could be captured in some form such as a report or book, with contacts and people to talk to, e-mail across different cities:

''I would look at taking some of the examples of what I have seen as good practice, look at them, look at how they came to come about, the design processes relating to them, the consultation processes relating to them, and how they dealt with the particular problem of that City had. And then, those are put in a book that people can look at, and you send them to all the participating authorities, and you may put in it this sort of concept could be used in other situations - like if you wanted to do this that and the other, you may just leave it at that, but then the people can look at it and they can read it they could pick up the best bits if they so wish, day 'oh I fancy doing that, we could do that, or we could do that'''

TW: This lead onto to the idea that the peer review process should include such tools and information as outputs and inputs and material to be developed and worked upon. The peer review process could (a) have review teams and city stakeholders critically judge the offerings of each city in terms of best practice and (b) city stakeholders could generate such offerings as an input to the review process, (c) compile and circulate these around with contacts and judgements. It may yalso be the job of the team to draw attention to bad situations and practices in each city, but that would require a significant level of openness, so possible focus upon 5 best practice and 2 or 3 of the worst practice issues also. What is important is not the number but the surfacing of them to be tackled.

City 9

Attendees were positive about the aspects of the presentation of the findings on the last day of the review:

''PRESUD presentation was very well especially the professional competence of the presenter as well of the chairmanship of this presentation. And the audience was very committed in the debate''

"I found it excellent to introduce the PRESUD project and to say there and there we have problems and should improve certain things. For me was interesting that the remarks of your British colleague made it clear to me that our cities performance on waste disposal is very good in comparison with Great Britain, because I have to deal with that in my work. For me what was new was that we are a leader and in Great Britain there is a need to catch up. Even if I had to travel to Great Britain for professional reasons I was not aware that we have a reasonable sorting of waste and rate of recycling. For me personally it was an enrichment for my knowledge by this presentation."

That was supported by another quotation of a different interviewee:

"What I found very good was that we get to know how it is done in other places. For example the colleague from City 9 was introducing the concepts of the city during a regulars' table (once a month stakeholders meet) and talk about European topics between interested stakeholders beyond municipality. That event was more interesting for me than the workshop, because there better and more information for me…"

City 1

The impacts were dependent upon the reports, and delays frustrated external stakeholders:

'The first report didn't get written up and the report didn't appear so I repeatedly, every couple of weeks would ring up the coordinator and ask if he'd heard anything about it yet. But it didn't get written – the coordinator had to do it I even talked to the coordinator about one of the things and I said when the report appears we must organise some more widespread discussion of it some environmental partnership they have that they could actually host the meeting of the (external) stakeholders, the follow up. But it never happened because by the time the report came out they were launching the second round. We spent ages waiting for the report, absolutely ages. I had mentioned it because I thought it would be quite useful so I gave them a bit of publicity: 'look out for this report' I said, but you can only say that for so long really. It took months and months.''

Note in this case the team manager had not completed the report and it was not within the power or responsibility of the coordinator to deal with. But nevertheless this (and other factors) created some external disillusionment. Perhaps team managers and team members numbers should be given to stakeholders and responsibilities clearly defined.

The involvement in the wider process may be acceptable but the stated process must be seen to work:

'I have no real problems with the degrees in which we are involved, it's just making the thing work properly. In the experience I've had so far, it's not worked properly.''

External stakeholders were sometimes astounded at the erroneous, gullible or sweeping statements in reports:

In the first report the municipality received a lot of criticism of the city plans for developing X, the coordinator showed me the report wording before it was finalised which I was happy with as a report. Then when the second team came - they said they were ever so pleased and 'wowing' about X. I thought to myself: they didn't ask us about X in the workshop session, they didn't structure it in such a way that we actually brought these issues up. The team get 'wowed' by what they hear from people whose job it is to bullshit like that".

This suggests that feedback from stakeholders and more rigorous checking of draft statements may be appropriate.

Many external stakeholders seemed unaware of impact of PRESUD:

'I got involved in peer review process thinking it might be a very good way of putting critical pressure on the city council and maybe if the report had come out under different circumstances - there were other things the municipality had to deal with - it might have had an impact but it didn't".

Some stakeholders may respond to web-based dissemination and feedback of reports

One of the UK external stakeholders offered an explanation why very little happened out of the peer review in the UK system:

'The national audit came out with comprehensive performance assessments and if you know anything about that and you know what was said about our city that completely swamped any impact the PRESUD review could possibly have had. The CPA process is anything but peer review - it's got a completely different methodology and its politically so hard profile that it will always grab the attention of the political establishment and the press and everything. The coordinator said to me that anything they thought they could do out of PRESUD would have to fit into this comprehensive corporate improvement plan - it was very minor what they would be able to do there because the politically high profile of other issues were going to have to take precedence and so I mean that is the bottom line of it and I don't frankly know whether they ever got anything into the corporate improvement plan"

The peer review process simply did not carry much weight in the priorities of the council relative to the other commitments.

Additional Observations on External Stakeholder Involvement

Generally external stakeholders are less engaged than internal; fewer in numbers breadth, usually 5-25 people in workshops (as opposed to one-one interviews given to internal stakeholders) and consequently less time spent per participant. This may not have an adverse influence but it should be noted that the engagement of external stakeholders is different from that of internal.

When I raised involvement of external stakeholders with coordinators a significant number seemed to be resistant to the issue. The issue that has been raised is this: that however trusting or sincere the coordinators are in a particular project, the City controls the external stakeholders engaged in this process; the external stakeholders themselves see that as having a significant credibility issue attached to it. It is possible for the coordinator to control the external stakeholders involved in the project, that's true without question. The question then becomes does that make any difference? A common response was ''well it's not like that here'' in a defensive tone, which often went off down some other path, and I more than once needed to re-explain the point – how could the project attain external credibility when from an external stakeholder point of view the credibility of the process can be questioned if all the power lies with the coordinator. More than one coordinator pointed out ''it does not – the teams have power to engage people''. Although this is true in principle in practice it is severely limited by practicalities: teams do not generally make independent contact before a review (when this was tested in one city it caused a coordinator to withdraw from the meeting) and time is not set aside in the review week to do so (it could be). Also there are no independent mechanisms for interested stakeholders to come forward.

Some coordinators noted that this could be changed (in dialogue with the author):

TW ''I think the problem is one of perspective. Imagine that you are an external stakeholder and you receive from the Municipality an invitation for a review and they, (as you say) are cynical and sceptical of it. Now that's going to get a different sort of response to if you had received it from an incoming independent review team manager. For instance, I'm not saying it would be better, I'm just saying it would have a slightly different response''.

A Coordinator: ''Yeah I can see what you are saying..it might perhaps be more interesting for all that lot to get an invitation from the review manager. Maybe that would have worked very well.   But I mean it's a very good idea actually'…that probably is a very good way of making it look like a well organised objective assessment.''

So if team managers could independently gain access to stakeholders in a city or any stakeholder who *wished* to get involved could do, would see that there was an access route.   Then this credibility issue would decrease. Once the different coordinators got past a certain point they often became much more open positive creative and radical:

A Coordinator: ''..I think e-mailing people and asking them to do a survey or something or doing an on-line survey is actually quite an interesting way of getting people's views''… maybe we could have contracted engagement out to (people like Friends of the Earth) to do it. Perhaps we should have asked them to do it''

TW: 'The suggestion is that the teams themselves might have contacts in the city who they can engage; we can suggest modifications to PRESUD, get around that problem then you cannot be accused of fully controlling the process''

Coordinator: "I even think its good that if a review team manager doesn't even ask the permission to the city. This is now in the PRESUD methodology very explicitly,

they have the right to do so, simply send out mail to anybody who is on databases and active in this area.

TW: '' but the whole list of stakeholders you have now is a potential resource in the future, we can still be accused that the city does control who is involved, therefore, controls the picture that the team will receive. ''

Coordinator: ''You don't want to have fully comprehensive over all, everything was happening in the city. That's not your target. Your target is general setting of the main problems - you get the 80% you need to set the main headline and to set the agenda. 'Just an example – we did invite organisation last time, not in this review but the one before, they didn't make use of it. They were invited a second time, they didn't make use of it. They were invited a third time for the presentation they didn't use it. You have to keep in mind if people want to complain and already you have given them plenty of opportunities, they just want to complain and they just don't see that they are given the opportunities"

TW: ''In some cases actually involving improving engagement coordinators had tried to reach everyone you could, but with more mechanisms and possibilities, those people could then not say to the team or city, ''we knew nothing of this" (which I think is a huge criticism of the process). If they knew about it and chose not to get involved, then that's a separate thing entirely. No one should be banging on the stakeholders door saying 'were were you?!' but the doors should open inward if any are interested. Many municipalities had only one door, whereas there could be more. I ask you are there any independent mechanisms that the coordinator then cannot control? Websites, teams themselves with power etc. Review members may have met some people that they think are extremely interesting then you can talk to them if you like. from the point of view of credibility and to have some sort of mechanism which allow it just gives you credibility, whether or not people would use it is another question in itself, it might not even get used. But then you can say there is a mechanism, don't tell me you didn't have any say, you could have, you knew about it and you didn't use it".

In one encounter, credibility clearly had nothing to do with trusting the coordinator, external stakeholders thought the coordinator competent, considerate and open. However more than one external stakeholder said, ''yes but the coordinator is answerable to the senior people, the coordinator works for the authority". And they said to me, ''you tell us how we could have told you anything if they didn't want you to hear - you tell us how the team managers could receive information from (such and such a group')'. I had to admit that this external stakeholder had a point - I had met some resistance to the idea of improving external stakeholder engagement, and there were some instances of unnecessary exclusion of stakeholders from the review. Different examples illustrating this included:

- A case where a strong activist group were not aware of, nor directly involved in, the PRESUD review. This despite the fact that they were simultaneously engaged in a major protest the same week of the review. In this case a team member was advised by an internal stakeholder to 'go see them yourself' after they had assembled a petition of several thousands against a particular policy of the municipality. This omission may have reflected the sensitivity of the situation. The team member independently spoke with the protest organiser. It was only though this means that an erroneous and dismissive

viewpoint expressed by a senior ruling politician during interview could be questioned and corrected. Without this independent contact the politicians mistaken view might have been accepted by the review team.

- A review with no workshops for citizens, and only 2 or 3 interviews with people representing external organisations. The impression of the evaluator observing the process was that there were few attempts to engage external people widely in the process by the city.

- A case where an opposition politician received a copy of the draft PRESUD report. This caused trouble and drew anger from ruling politicians and senior managers. The fact that an opposition politician had the report was described as 'a leak' rather than 'dissemination of information' or 'engagement of additional stakeholders'.

- A case where an opportunity to engage many opposition politicians easily and feasibly in the PRESUD review process was declined by the coordinator as ''unnecessary''.

- A case where a team member independently contacted an opposition party in a general e-mail, and this led to a contact with an opposition politician and oppositional academic, who were then invited to meet the review team to give their perspective on sustainable development. In this case the city coordinator in the city felt so compromised (and unable to be seen in the company of the opposition councillor) that this clearly caused discomfort. Strongly suggesting that the coordinator would not have sought the involvement of that stakeholder if the team had not independently done so.

- A case where a respected activist organisation were not invited into the review because they ''had no idea how local government worked'' according to the city coordinator.

- A case where it was technically and practically feasible (and also suggested) to reach all local politicians in a single e-mail shot (ruling and opposition parties) to (a) gain their views on sustainable development in the city through a brief web questionnaire to further inform the review team, and (b) to expand the dissemination of the final report when produced. The opportunity was not taken and the views of all politicians were not sought although it was possible.

Although in themselves these do not indicate anything alone, taken together they are suggestive. Taken with the views of external stakeholders (who are not well represented in PRESUD nor in the evaluation), and the observations of the evaluators upon the project, with the resistance of some to open access to PRESUD, and this evidence points to a peer review process that can be (and sometimes is) responsible for the exclusion of important external stakeholders.

8 DIFFERENT VIEWS OF DATA GATHERING & ANALYSIS

8.1 Overview

Interviews and workshops were dependent upon the people running and organising them. Some were judged poor others were judged good. See Section 8.2. There are sometimes different views of the interviews and workshops; team members sometimes have a more favourable opinion than do the stakeholders involved. This should be noted in considering the views of PRESUD members within the evaluation. <u>As teams cannot give an accurate view of the interviews and workshops alone, participant evaluation should be included in the methodology</u>. See Section 8.2. Common issues raised concerning interviews and workshops were the lack of background (cultural and contextual) understanding of the review team and the time taken for the interviewees to explain the basic facts of the municipality and culture to the foreign interviewers. This meant that relatively little time was spent in discussing the issues raised by interviewees. Another issue mentioned was that interviewees wished for more two-way dialogue but had little opportunity to ask questions of their own of the visiting review team. See Section 8.2. Attempts to bypass such problems (translators or introductions to cultural and contextual differences) always helped the review team but this did not always lead to removal of problems of language and context differences. Translators often mis-translated technical terms, and contextual differences remained. In such cases the stakeholders in the city (usually coordinators) had to reject and correct such problems and misunderstandings. But this also involved some loss of credibility with other stakeholders who simply saw faulty, impractical, or weak statements. See Section 8.2

Most stakeholders described their interviews as enjoyable but despite this, problems remained and were mentioned repeatedly (lack of time, lack of prior explanations and advance briefing, team not understanding the local situation, lack of feedback, validation and cross-checking mechanisms). Stakeholders mentioned these issues even when they felt the review team were well-prepared and they found the interview enjoyable. Furthermore (in the view of stakeholders) some of the criticisms of final reports can be traced to the weaknesses in the interviews and workshops (including lack of contextual understanding, limited engagement of stakeholders in the review, lack of validation and cross-checking) See Section 8.2. Some workshops were poorly attended (in numbers of people or variety of organisations) as noted by both teams and stakeholders, resulting in less valid and reliable information (see also the section on external stakeholder views). See Section 8.2

Team recording and analysis was judged weak in the first round of reviews but satisfactory or positive by the second round of reviews (by team members themselves). The fact that analysis and recording have improved might be attributable mostly to the increasing experience of teams and team managers (as analysis was not part of the training) and partly due to training (as recording was part of the training). See Section 8.3.

The teams generally supported the mechanisms of recording information (on flip-charts with post-it notes). Teams also positively evaluated their learning, discussions, and analysis. However the approach taken does not follow good evaluation practice (See Section) Where teams themselves made criticisms were raised these referred

to the lack of time and rushed nature of the data gathering in an actual review, with too many interviews, too little time for discussion, reflection, and analysis. See Section 8.3. Stakeholders however suggested the limited time available meant the review could only develop a shallow view of the municipality, and some wanted the team (somehow) to develop a deeper view. The analysis was also limited in time and that the teams needed more time (somehow) to reflect on the data gathered before giving their analysis and recommendations. See Section 8.3

So teams were generally satisfied with their own analysis but some stakeholders were critical of this wishing it to be deeper, better evidenced, and better validated. (See also Chapter 9 on Reports). The unsatisfactory view of analysis (judged by first review teams and some stakeholders in the second review) suggests that analysis and recording should be part of the initial training in PRESUD. This is independently supported by good practice in the evaluation literature. See Section 8.3

Presentations and responses to these were extremely varied. Some presentations were very well attended (50-70 people), including those most involved in the reviews, some senior managers and politicians, and also media. In other cases presentations were very poorly attended, with no interest of senior people and little attendance from those involved in review. This had disappointed the presenting review teams and had embarrassed the organizers, reflecting limited municipality interest in PRESUD or hurried last minute organization within the host municipality. See Section 8.3. Stakeholders were mostly positive about presentations, but there was often little dialogue between the teams and those at the presentation which was a missed opportunity for feedback and validation. It was suggested that the presentation could be followed up with an intensive session with the senior managers to discuss the findings in more detail and smaller break-out workshops groups to gain initial criticisms and validation, and that the presentation be converted into a brief document immediately after (or on an additional day in the city). See Section 8.3

Finally, These findings are link to those of Chapter 7 on Stakeholder Engagement where teams were found tend to have a better (or equal) view of the effectiveness and quality of interviews and workshops than the stakeholders involved. Internal stakeholders felt that the teams did not understand the local and cultural context, and that team validation and cross-checking mechanisms were weak and should be strengthened through additional engagement of stakeholder expertise. Teams were generally positive about the engagement of internal stakeholders during the review, with some reservations about involvement of politicians, senior staff, and non-environmental staff, and the time available for engagement which might lead to a distorted view with limitations on the data and subsequent analysis. Furthermore the teams felt a need for the inside 'party line' to be better balanced against other stakeholders. See Section 7.4. Workshops differed and were variable, and different external stakeholders felt different things about the *same* ones, some felt them superficial and disliked them, others that they were valuable and rewarding and satisfactory, which raises questions about the effectiveness of some interviews and workshops. Common problems included language cultural and context differences which create confusions and take up significant interview time. Language difficulties could be reduced by bi-lingual reviews utilising the host language (but in practice very few could do this). Context and culture difficulties could be reduced by inclusion of review team members from same country. See Section 7.4

8.2 Mixed Opinions of Interviews with Language and Culture Difficulties

Section Summary 8.2

There are sometimes different views of the interviews and workshops; team members sometimes have a more favourable opinion than do the stakeholders involved. This should be noted in considering the views of PRESUD members within the evaluation. As teams cannot give an accurate view of the interviews and workshops alone, participant evaluation should be included in the methodology.

Common issues raised concerning interviews and workshops were the lack of background (cultural and contextual) understanding of the review team and the time taken for the interviewees to explain the basic facts of the municipality and culture to the foreign interviewers. This meant that relatively little time was spent in discussing the issues raised by interviewees. Another issue mentioned was that interviewees wished for more two-way dialogue but had little opportunity to ask questions of their own of the visiting review team.

Attempts to bypass such problems (translators or introductions to cultural and contextual differences) always helped the review team but this did not always lead to removal of problems of language and context differences. Translators often mis-translated technical terms, and contextual differences remained. In such cases the stakeholders in the city (usually coordinators) had to reject and correct such problems and misunderstandings. But this also involved some loss of credibility with other stakeholders who simply saw faulty, impractical, or weak statements.

Most stakeholders described their interviews as enjoyable but despite this, problems remained and were mentioned repeatedly (lack of time, lack of prior explanations and advance briefing, team not understanding the local situation, lack of feedback, validation and cross-checking mechanisms). Stakeholders mentioned these issues even when they felt the review team were well-prepared and they found the interview enjoyable. Furthermore (in the view of stakeholders) some of the criticisms of final reports can be traced to the weaknesses in the interviews and workshops (including lack of contextual understanding, limited engagement of stakeholders in the review, lack of validation and cross-checking)

Some workshops were poorly attended (in numbers of people or variety of organisations) as noted by both teams and stakeholders, resulting in less valid and reliable information (see also the section on external stakeholder views).

Interviews and workshops were dependent upon the people running and organising them. Some were judged poor others were judged good.

Communicating across languages and cultures slowed down and restricted the information exchange, this also meant that interview time was reduced and some concepts did not translate. It was necessary to include adequate preparation and reflection time before and after interviews, which did no always occur.

''it was going slowly and we found that in reality we were only going to get twenty five minutes out of the hour we had been allocated because of translation, we pressed quite hard for the five "must get" things and that's about preparation.

Where we did find that people were interested, we actually said at the beginning of the interview this is how we would like to conduct the interview, again it's just basic but it's discipline. Introduce the project, said who we were, we had issues we would like to raise with you and then we said, and towards the end we would quite happy to share our experience from our own authority so that was pushed to the end which meant that if your interviewee was anxious to get that they would work with five to get things and you got those. We presented in their language that worked very well they engaged and they had pertinent questions, their body language was positive. Bi-linguilism I think adds value insomuch as people don't lose something in the division message but I think you can get around that if, bi-lingualism" (Team manager city 8)

''the language is a barrier, but of course also a opportunity to come closer the other countries………..Language does appear to be a barrier to in depth understanding of a city - in particular many documents are not available in English. It's probably not feasible but a working knowledge of the host municipalities language would be hugely beneficial…….." (team members)

''there were concepts which were not translatable and we had to slip back into English and then try and explain it by commentary - what we meant…..some of these concepts are completely new around, you know performance management, tracking change, impact assessment and so on. So I think maybe in the conference, you know, some attention needs to be paid to, whether some of these concepts are transferable or whether they are acceptable who want to report on them rather than forcing. Because I don't believe learning happens when it is forced" (Team Manager City 8)

'we need a half hour gap in between interviews, and this helped us to reflect and prepare, but in the earlier reviews this did not happen, its in the methodology, but needs to be emphasised" (team manager city 3)

Interviews and workshops were judged positively overall by the team members in the 2nd round of reviews:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
The Interviews and Workshops	8	28	4	1	1

However the team qualitative comments on interviews and workshops revealed mixed views in the fine detail; both positives and negatives, showing the team members had different views overall. Criticisms included the numbers and types of participants attending interviews and workshops, the unavailability of interviewees, time for reflection and between interviews, the language difficulties, the preparation of interviewees, and the late organisation of the interview schedules.

''excellent …..I was not impressed with the manner in which interviews were allocated. More as a result of availability then actual expertise…..Participants very cooperative and transparent…….. Good interviews but one workshop (with business) not well attended………….Generally positive and well conducted but the workshop I was involved in was poorly attended and people arrived late so constant re-briefing needed which conspired to some extent against its success!………..The interviewees were very helpful and it was an advantage to speak their language….Workshop was

good except for the loud indiscrete and unprofessional translator……But not enough time……..but depends on the organisation of the host city……too much time spent moving between interviews meant little no time for regular informal debriefings and updates between team members…… Only one interview with a Councillor in the week proved disastrous for our team - purely because the Member wasn't on top of his brief and not willing to meet the team. So not the team's or host's fault! All interviews went well and people were more than co-operative and welcoming. I think the rapidity with which UK people talk proved difficult for some EU colleagues even though all had an excellent command of the English language…...the interviews where I took part were excellent. Mostly the interviewees were well prepared. Some times the team got additional documents and there were a broad willingness to answer the team questions. In both workshops there was only a very small amount of participants. In the stakeholder-workshop were only 5 from 25 people And only two, three participants in the stakeholder workshop were really active. But even in that case the team got very interesting information. In the citizen work shop there were 6 participants. So far I heard about it useful information were given in an interesting discussion. The quality of the interviews varies immensely, some are great and some seem meaningless…….For the interviews we had good conditions. There was sufficient time for asking questions. And between each interview there was a time gap for preparation. But there were two problems: the interviewees were very badly prepared. Even interviewees, who were questioned for the first report and who got that report did much about the content of the report. So, they have not read it again. Secondly, there were no workshops……The schedule was prepared but not finalised and circulated to the team until the friday before the review started. Work-shop opportunities did not arise (we attended committee meetings and forums with formal agendas)……..Some interviews where with the wrong persons, some interviews where with too many subjects and people. At one interview people did not turn up. At the start of the week the week review schedule was totally unclear and remaind so during the first half of the week.

Language differences were sometimes a problem in interviews. Teams and team managers needed to think carefully about the language issues in assigning interviewers. Many stakeholders mentioned time spent in explaining background, cultural, and structural issues which took a significant amount of time away from discussing the details of the problems.

''at the end of the first day what the interview team said was ''it didn't go well, in fact it was awful, it was dreadful, because we don't have enough English between us to be able to make the most of the time''.   And that was really good, because then we were able to revisit the pairings and to match those two people with English people on the team so that they had enough English to sort of get by''.
(Team Manager City 8)

''One hour is so little time to explain to an outsider – I could talk about it for days – and about 90% of my time was just explaining how it works here, the background, how our system works, it takes time, but I still think its relevant, because our type of system has its problems, this could be improved by more time, or having people from a similar background, or the same country, or perhaps by answering questions in advance'' (Stakeholder 5, City 2)

''You have an hour, you have the language problem, you lose time translating specific sustainability and organisational terms, maybe a list of common terms would

help, or on the internet to help prepare? Translation is possible but that is strange and takes time also. The time could be doubled anyway and this would be better, to have the possibility, also had the feeling that it was too fast – we talked about the how we handled problems but we could have mentioned many more, I needed more time, maybe we should have an agenda – a list about what we are talking about, by having more information before the interview we would save time"
(Stakeholder 13: City 2)

Often questions were limited, and team resource issues compounded the difficulty:

''Some pretty good homework had been done by (a team member) but then the questions that came were fairly bland… because of conflicting appointments with other people he gave the questions to other team members, it meant that interviewees not get cross-examined in sufficient detail The ideal is clearly that you make sure that the lead person for each theme manages all of the interviews that they need to and they don't have conflicts. That hasn't been possible on any of the reviews. Which affects the quality of the output substantially. It becomes superficial and you don't test the hypothesise thoroughly." (City Coordinator, City 5)

When 22 stakeholders who were interviewed were asked: What did you think of the interview? What were its strengths and weaknesses? Did the interview meet with your expectations? Have you any suggestions on how the interviews might be improved? Most described their interviews as enjoyable and well prepared (this city was purposely given a very able team) but despite this, problems remained and are mentioned repeatedly. These included language problems, too little time to convey information, questions outside the interviewers field of competence, lack of prior explanations and advance briefing, the team not being well-prepared or understanding the local situation and culture, the lack of opportunity to ask questions to the interviewers, inaccuracies in findings and recommendations, the acceptance of statements without adequate confirmation, the superficial nature of the analysis, and the lack of feedback, validation and cross-checking mechanisms.

''Language was sometimes a problem and vocabulary was not always what it might have been. The questions were, however, relevant and the interviewer well prepared……..Strengths: good type of question, well prepared and informed. Weaknesses: I felt there was too little time to answer the questions, especially when there are two persons answering, in which case it easily happens that one of you answers and, before the other has time to fill in, you get the next question. Generally speaking, I felt it was a strain to give a proper answer. Sometimes, you´re searching for a word and suddenly up comes the next question. One hour 20 mins. would have been better. The interview was much broader than I had expected, and the questions wide-ranging. Moreover, there were many questions outside one´s field of competence. Improvements: more time to answer; make sure that everyone involved in the questions can be present so that the answers are as correct as possible……….Too little time. Dealt mainly with what we do (don´t do). There wasn´t time for questions to the interviewers. Did not seem too well informed about the situation. Didn´t they have access to the previous interviews?……..Very well prepared and well focussed interview. Furthermore, very pleasant – we could have discussed all day. It is a little frustrating not to be able to put one´s own questions when you are having a productive conversation with a capable colleague from another town…..The interviews were OK and approximately up to expectation. It is naturally impossible during the short interview time (ca. 1 hour) to give a complete

picture of the situation. The review group´s impression will, to a large extent, depend on which subjects were taken up during the interview. There is the risk that the questions will be somewhat random. To make the interviews more stringent, they should follow a set **check-list** which could be sent to the respondents in advance. In principle, one can say that the investigation was limited to certain selected areas. **Two interview sessions would be needed, in which the second comments on a written report of the first.** In this way, it would be possible to correct misunderstandings and so forth. With the present formula**, inaccuracies can remain in the final report**. Even if one is permitted to **comment on the final report, is hardly sufficient**….It was pleasant, interesting and relaxed. Perhaps we had too little time. It would have gone quicker if we had received the questions in advance, but this was not a big problem. I wonder if they "swallowed" everything we said without reservation? It must be difficult for them be critical of what we said……..I thought the team was unusually well prepared and had researched well. There still remains a certain lack of knowledge of the culture and traditions, mainly perhaps that which is specific to the political tradition and management. The interview approximately met my expectations……….The interviewer was well prepared, presenting theories for confirmation or rejection. Gave an impression of democratic and serious work. Language is a limiting factor. For some of us, it is difficult to appreciate the nuances of words……..Having some questions to prepare for would have made the interview more concrete………..The weakness was that, to a large extent, it built on perspectives which more were threads one felt one caught up on this occasion (which was early in the week) rather than a complete picture. The strength was the link to international experience…….t was not worse than expected, only different. **Interview two at a time so that the linguistic misunderstandings are probably fewer……..**I am highly impressed by the professionalism and competence shown by the peer review team members I met within interviews. It was not by chance. The team was "power-loaded" deliberately to "set the bar" for the second round. I was interviewed on three different occasions by senior people so what Do you expect?……..Too few participants; would have been good to get interview questions in advance as they were in English. More schools would have given a truer answer of what it looks like here……….Competent interviewers who gave the impression of knowing a great deal. It is possible they had some difficulty in understanding the political organisation….. Since one did not know what to expect, it was difficult to be really prepared. The element of surprise was itself a strength, but it was at the same time difficult for the interviewers to pick the right questions to tie in with the interviewee´s field of responsibility……… As I was called for interview at short notice, I did not feel properly prepared, but nevertheless felt that the interview worked well. I felt that the questions were sharper and had more insight than I had expected, which must also be regarded as the interview´s greatest strength. However, it also felt that the interviewers were unaware of certain basic facts, which if corrected would perhaps contribute to even greater benefit for the interviewers. Best of all, would be to receive difficult but relevant questions within one´s own field of activities, which lead to aha-reactions………..The interviewer was very pleasant. I was extremely uncertain of what was expected of me. Could have performed better if I had been more enlightened." (22 stakeholders from city 4)

This same group of internal stakeholders were asked to comment upon the final translated review report several months later. When they were asked what they would criticise and challenge about PRESUD about half of the comments still mentioned difficulties which could be linked back to the interviews and workshops.

The criticised the understanding of the review team and weak consideration of cultural differences, the limited or selective engagement of stakeholders affecting data gathered, the anecdotal use of evidence, weak evidence, invalid generalisation from limited evidence, and limited analysis with invalid conclusions.

'"Maybe the team hasn't completely understood our country…..have to involve more persons in the process …Too little consideration of cultural differences…Lack of ability to engage stakeholders and organisations…….bad quality of the report (misconceptions, wrong conclusions, etc) and lack of feedback to improve/revise the report……..Invitations should be sent out earlier together with the questions in order to give preparation time……..The model/review relies too much on "anecdotal evidence"……… Single statements can get too much importance with regards to the few interviews. The result completely depends on whom you managed to make an appointment with………… From the report it is evident that some of the interviewees were mixed up/didn't know what they were talking about…. The report is very comprehensive. …….In some cities officers have not got much time to work with PRESUD…..he preparations and planning of the interviews need to be significantly improved…….. The material seems a bit thoughtlessly dealt with and sometimes conclusions are drawn far beyond what the thin evidence let you….One critical point is the choice of interviews" (20 stakeholders city 4)

This points to some remaining weaknesses in the review associated with interviews and workshops.

It was further observed in the evaluation that although there was a net positive view of the interviews and workshops, the view was dependent upon which stakeholders asked. When asking the review teams it was found that interviews and workshops had 'gone well' or there were few ideas for improvement. However when those interviewed or involved in workshops were asked for their views of interviews and workshops, they would sometimes give a counter view. Clearly this is an area where different stakeholders may 'see' different aspects of the process. Perhaps teams should receive this feedback as a matter of course (given that they could have more positive views of the experience than the interviewees).

Interviews and workshops are dependent upon both the teams and coordinators, in preparing and conducting them. Where there were adverse views of the interviews and workshops they were generally attributed to the approach of the team members running the workshop or the preparation and organisation of the city coordinator.

Observations on reviews suggested that teams could not collectively publicly critically assess their own performance in interviews and in workshops. Some managers were (initially) dismissive of such approaches as 'undermining the process'. For this reason it was found necessary to ask each group of stakeholders to assess the other anonymously and confidentially. Without such an approach in future peer reviews it is possible that responsibility for a 'bad' review could be attributed to others when it could be either a *shared* problem (interactions of mutual weaknesses or misunderstandings) or a *process* problem (such as the differences in language, culture, organisations, and governance or an inappropriate methodology).

8.3 Teams satisfied with their Recording Analysis and Presentation, but some stakeholders criticise the quality of Team Analysis and Understanding

Section Summary 8.3

Team recording and analysis was judged weak in the first round of reviews but satisfactory or positive by the second round of reviews (by team members themselves). The fact that analysis and recording have improved might be attributable mostly to the increasing experience of teams and team managers (as analysis was not part of the training) and partly due to training (as recording was part of the training).

The teams generally supported the mechanisms of recording information (on flip-charts with post-it notes). Teams also positively evaluated their learning, discussions, and analysis. However the approach taken does not follow good evaluation practice (See Section) Where teams themselves made criticisms were raised these referred to the lack of time and rushed nature of the data gathering in an actual review, with too many interviews, too little time for discussion, reflection, and analysis.

Stakeholders however suggested the limited time available meant the review could only develop a shallow view of the municipality, and some wanted the team (somehow) to develop a deeper view. The analysis was also limited in time and that the teams needed more time (somehow) to reflect on the data gathered before giving their analysis and recommendations.

So teams were generally satisfied with their own analysis but some stakeholders were critical of this wishing it to be deeper, better evidenced, and better validated. (See also Chapter 9 on Reports). The unsatisfactory view of analysis (judged by first review teams and some stakeholders in the second review) suggests that analysis and recording should be part of the initial training in PRESUD. This is independently supported by good practice in the evaluation literature.

Presentations and responses to these were extremely varied. Some presentations were very well attended (50-70 people), including those most involved in the reviews, some senior managers and politicians, and also media. In other cases presentations were very poorly attended, with no interest of senior people and little attendance from those involved in review. This had disappointed the presenting review teams and had embarrassed the organizers, reflecting limited municipality interest in PRESUD or hurried last minute organization within the host municipality.

Stakeholders were mostly positive about presentations, but there was often little dialogue between the teams and those at the presentation which was a missed opportunity for feedback and validation. It was suggested that the presentation could be followed up with an intensive session with the senior managers to discuss the findings in more detail and smaller break-out workshops groups to gain initial criticisms and validation, aAnd that the presentation be converted into a brief document immediately after (or on an additional day in the city).

First Review Team members & Team managers

Overall the first review team felt that these stages less positively than in the first review and in the second. This can be attributed to the greater experience of the team members and managers having gone through one or more previous reviews. However any new teams would need to develop this experience or be trained in recording *and* analysis techniques

Furthermore there are still a significant number of people (around half) who feel that there are weaknesses in the review team:

- the process of recording information
- the analysis of findings

	Negative	Mixed	Positive
Process of Recording Information	**4**	**19**	**21**
Team Discussions and Reflection	2	16	26
Analysis of Findings and Recommendations	**5**	**18**	**21**
City Presentation and Audience	6	7	31

Second Review Teams

The 2nd review teams

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Team Processes of Recording Information	5	28	8	1	0
Team Learning, Discussions and Analysis of Findings	12	19	9	1	1
Team Draft Recommendations	6	26	10	0	0
Team Presentation and Audience Involved	15	21	6	0	0

Comparison of the processes of recording information and team analysis and recommendations has shown improvement - in the views of the team members (this may be due to a combination of experience of the teams and team managers, and the additional training which introduced teams and the methods of recording to them)

The comments of the 2nd review teams emphasise their positive view of the recording, learning, recommendations, and presentations. Where negatives are noted by the team. The teams generally supported the mechanisms of recording information on flip-charts with post-it notes.

Comments on Team Processes of Recording Information

''excellent though would have helped if all the post its had been typed up and made available for all the team……..That process was excellently organised. In each interview there were at least two (very often three) team members. In some interviews only one of the supporting team-members was chosen to notice all answers and statements, but in the most all team-members noticed the answers…….Post-it system worked well……Fine………Captured on 'post-it' notes around the wall and documented individually. There needs to be agreement on how this is done and suffcent time allowed (and ownership amongst team members) to get information documentated and around the wall…..Well structured and allowed for partners (two at each interview) sharing thoughts post meetings……Still need to rely on our own notes, although we did try to share information as much as possible…good – we I led by example, doing it from the start meant others saw they had to do it too……….It got better during the week. We were many who hadn't been trained! ……..The process itself seems to work, however there is a time issue during the review; and with more time this aspect could be improved……. Every team member made their own notices during the interviews. There was the excellent idea to copy all sheets of papers with notices and to provide the other team members with the own notices. It was agreed by the whole team, but than it was not implemented………Combination of individual notes and collective flipcharts - I noticed some were reluctant to use flipcharts and preferred to use their laptops/gadgets! - which was problematic when pulling together the presentation at the end of the week. It didn't facilitate the debate as much as I would have preferred……..not enough time to discuss in the team… team were committed to recording information well

Comments on Team Learning, Discussions and Analysis of Findings

Teams also positively evaluated their learning, discussions, and analysis. Where criticisms were raised these referred to the lack of time and rushed nature of the data gathering in an actual review, with too many interviews, too little time for discussion, reflection, and analysis.

''very good although one team member leaving early did not help….There were lot space to discuss the findings, not only in the time during the work in the base room. There was an excellent exchange of ideas and adviced amongst the team members…Very interesting and intelligent team members!……..team worked well together, and free and open discussions had, hampered by the input of late meetings with internal and external stakeholders on the thursday afternoon…..Fine…Given the amount of interviewing and meetings we had to undertake, the synthesis sessions usually felt a bit rushed and we were, quite honestly, also tired!……….Good general sessions in base room where things were discussed in open way among team members and questions were asked to clarify evidence etc………..During the review week, the work is so hectic that it is not possible to have as much detailed discussion or analysis as everyone would like………. Very hard work but ably facilitated by manager…..Not enough time for discussion of results but analyses good…….The team members took time to discuss findings and to analyse them. Some members prepared the interviews properly. So, they discussed questions and strategy before the interviews with their

fellows…….Good for team development and individual learning. We constantly exchanged views and assessments throughout the week………I attempted (with some success) to ensure periods of time were set aside during the day and each evening to review progress as a team, share thoughts and shape hypothesis……..Too many interviews, no time for team discussions………Limited due to time constraints-not enough time given each evening to reflect and catch up……..not enough time to discuss in the team……….Not so much in the whole group, but between some….The CPA report played an over dominated roll. We where there for a peer review not for a new cpe audit. The CPE dependence of the team leader totally obstructed team learning and a fresh look to things. Weak team leadership caused jumping from one reporting model to the next, even when the team agreed on one model. This constant shifting also hinders team learning and wasted a great amount of time.

''One of the other things in the process, even with the experience of two reviews, on the second review, we were still rushed at the end, you know, we were up, working in the room until 1030 at night and last time it was the same. So I don't know if we have learned from that, that happens with peer reviews anyway, and it happens because you've got a new team" (Team Manager City 8)

Comments on Team Draft Recommendations

''excellent working as a team……..Very good - we were happy with the result of our efforts……….not sure they were taken seriously, but some messages they did not really want to hear……..Could have benefited from more time for integrated analysis, and prioritisation and linkages between recommendations. It is a big package !… I have only seen one team member draft……..Think they captured the work of the team and were well received by the host city……….It was in a hurry could be better, but I think we got the most important things in it. …….In my exoerience, we were suggested a specific methodology by one of the team leaders that proved to work much better than I personally expected……….These came together fairly easily because we had kept a continuous dialogue going. We only had heated debates on a couple of aspects!…… These were agreed with all team members. Lessons here are not to leave the presentation until the final evening. I made the point of starting to assemble the presentation on wednesday. We were still required to work late (11.30pm) on the thursday night……….All had an input but these were changed at short notice and because of limited time between changes and presentation (basically overnight!) rank and file team members had little or no input into final recommendations

Comments on Team Presentation and Audience Involved

Presentations and responses to these, were found to be extremely varied. Some presentations were very well attended (50-70 people), including those most involved in the reviews, some senior managers and politicians, and also media. In other cases presentations were very poorly attended, with no interest of senior people and little attendance from those involved in review. This had disappointed the presenting review teams and had embarrassed the organizers, reflecting limited municipality interest in PRESUD or hurried last minute organization within the host municipality. It was suggested that the presentation should be followed up with either an intensive session with the senior managers to discuss the findings in more detail, or smaller break-out workshops groups to gain initial criticisms and validatio. And that the

presentation be converted into a brief draft report immediately after (or on an additional day in the city).

''excellent flow and pitch……Over 70 people attended our presentation indicating strong interest. The questions that followed were very intense……..Very good chaired by Deputy Mayor responsible for environment with many senior officers present along with a strong political prensence from all parties and a large group of young people from a local secondary school. Some very interesting questions asked of the team. Clearly a lot of interest over the week in Pre-sud if this coult be translated into postive action then progress would be made. Contrast this with the Newcastle presentation which was poorly attended by senior staff and councillors alike……. very good attendance and well presented……..A bit stressful (we needed a bigger room!) but good engagement all round - they listened and they took it seriously. Externals really liked us and our work……..excellent involvement of the media and politicians….It was a panel discussion and the team members were asked to give good examples from their own cities. It was a good and working concept…….As much engagement as can be expected given the volume and diversity of information. There was too much reference to the UK and how it is done in the UK. This has nothing to do with us and will only irritate the audience! ……….There a lot of internal and external stakeholders (app. 50 I estimate) during the presentation. Two team members were informing about the results. I think it was not the best solution. I would prefer that every theme would be introduced by the responsible team member fot this part. Than, I think, it would be possible to say something more in depth about the finding for every theme as the team has done it…..The presentation should be no longer than 20/25 minutes and capture headline comments. Further work could usefully be done here to quality check and agree a common approach to how presentations are delivered/length etc...across all reviews. My view is that it is not appropriate to dleiver across 13 themes and summarise etc.. Too Long! I personally was disappointed in the relatively 'low' turnout. A lack of external stakeholders and politicians was evident. The subsequent discussion was inetr-active and stimulated interest and consensus around some the findings presented by the team……….Presentation was well attended, and chaired by the Deputy Leader………Went well-good media coverage on the day - limited political interest………The presentation came together well - all team members were involved and we had a good response from the audience. However, apart from the Deputy Leader and Lead Chief Officer, no other senior managers or members attended which is disappointing if SD is to progress. External stakeholders were present and probably were not surprised by the Council attendance……….The presentation was excellent but it was attended only by the interviewees, the head of the Environment dept and the mayors press secretary. No other media representatives………..very few senior people, but members of public turned up, good discussions……….It was only a very small audience and only interviewees were invited. Nobody was really interested in having a detailed presentation were findings could be given in depth. This includes the co-ordinators and the team members.

I recommend that the feedback to the City audience (public) is followed by an intensive session with the City Executive Team to support them to integrate the outcomes of the report into a sensible framework for action. The Panel can then ensure that the relative weighting to different aspects of the report/recommendations are appropriate, but also to talk the Executive through some of their capability gaps to take the recommendations forward. I am concerned that a City is left on its own to "sort it all out" after the "event". If you have a case

where their is quite a lot of structural silo's, then everyone will tend to action little bits relevant to themselves and this will tend to focus on short-term actions and solutions. The medium to longer term capability and integration will be completely lost in the process………. Spend extra afternoon/day together drafting the report sections before we disperse across Europe

Coordinators & Other Stakeholders

Stakeholders suggested the limited time available meant the review could only develop a shallow view of the municipality, and some wanted the team to develop a deeper view. The analysis was also limited in time and the teams needed more time to reflect on the data gathered before giving their analysis and recommendations.

''I think in the time of the review you can not see and hear everything,.. I think it would be better to take one part and go into this in more depth.. the project should go deeper – now it gives an overall view, get more to the point – on how things go – to get a clear view of the city problems, PRESUD helps this gain weight, that way we could go further in solving the problems, every city has problems – PRESUD can do more to help get the problem clear – the problem might be about how the city works together, at what points do we advise one another – PRESUD is general it could also point this out – it says 'do something on communication' but everybody knows that, you need to go down deeper – tell them this is the problem you are facing - and explain why there is a problem – and give ideas for solutions these problems - you can do this from the outside – but we cant do this inside – when PRESUD says we have done an evaluation of the problem – lets here some of the solutions as well. Look at all the cities involved and how do we solve this problem – what they do about it? The second review should take the points and go deeper into the process"
(stakeholder 15, manager, city 2)

'I found that essentially takes place on the afternoon/evening before the presentation. The presentation preparation serves as a catalyst for this process. The team manager needs to manage time and facilitate well in order to permit that there is a true analysis of findings and not just a reorganisation of information."
(Coordinator City 8)

''I think there is a tendency to come up with recommendations during the presentation preparation stage, also to soften the blow of eventual critical points the team has found. I'm not sure if it's a good idea to include them in the end of week presentation…there isn't the time to think them through all that well. Perhaps they should remain among the team and be explored in the report". (Coordinator City 8)

A Group of Stakeholders were asked individually: What did you think of the observations and the recommendations which the team presented? What were the presentation´s strengths and weaknesses? Did the presentation meet with your expectations? Have you any suggestions as to how the presentation could be improved? The answers given below illustrate the range of responses and the recurring views. The comments were mostly positive, but there was often little dialogue between the teams and those at the presentation which was a missed opportunity for feedback and validation.

There cannot be any directly penetrative analyses after so short a run-through of the whole council´s activities…..It is possibly a weakness that the presentation

sometimes delves into relatively detailed questions. Occasionally, I suspect that judgement has been based on a single person´s opinions and that PRESUD merely pass these on……….The presentation´s weakness is that there is no real dialogue between the interview group and the respondents (see above). **isn´t enough dialogue in the form of being given the opportunity to comment on the final report……….**I looked through the over-heads which they presented. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the actual presentation. I was quite impressed with how broad and, so far as I could judge, how accurate a picture they had formed during such a short time. I was also impressed by the audacity of their criticism and of their proposals. I had no particular expectations, but was, as I say, somewhat surprised by their audacity. They certainly did not mince their words……………The presentation was short but I still thought they succeeded in getting in a good deal. I look forward to reading the whole report…………….It was an excellent, clear and concise presentation, "played by ear". The weakness, as for the whole of the project, is that everyone is not completely English-speaking. I share most of the criticism, even if I believe that some of it might be considered exaggerated. The presentation was up to my expectations. The project used Power Point technique to admirable effect……………The presentation (on Friday) was as good as could be expected within the time-frame allowed, which is to say that the interview team had only a limited time to prepare. They gave a professional impression. Language is a limiting factor. For some of us, it is difficult to appreciate the nuances expressed……….I thought it was a good presentation. I couldn't clearly find any weaknesses or tangible strengths either. I hadn't really expected that it would be as relevant as it was…………….There was a lot of information at the same time but many of the things spoken about, were problems I recognise in my work. I'm looking forward to reading the report when it is ready……….The presentations were excellent. The Power Point presentation conducted by also. I need more time to think over the findings. It is necessary to "calm down" and look at our efforts and evidence from the outside for a while. To realise that you have a restricted sight on things when you have looked upon yourself as open-minded takes some time to "ruminate". There is a general problem with the presentations: it is almost impossible for the audience to grasp the findings from the presentation and at once start a discussion/dialogue. Don't expect a dialogue at the presentation!……….Observations and recommendations are, of course, always made from the standpoint of the presenter's cultural background. We have, however, a great deal to learn from others and this I regard as positive……….. We received a lot of information in a short time. It was difficult to absorb everything that was of value which was raised. A copy of the presentation material to everyone direct in the hand……………The presentation was in the main good, but rather forced. This of course depended on the large amount of material gone over. Because of the high tempo and the large amount of information in each picture, it would have been more suitable for the participants to have each received a paper copy of the presentation material for notes and reflection. It is remarkable that in an office-building with so many photo-copiers, it was not possible to produce more than ten copies in an hour. It might also possibly have been appropriate if the presentation material had been sent out before the presentation, if the timetable had allowed it. In this way, it would have been possible to prepare oneself somewhat and be able to provide more direct feedback. The lack of will for open dialogue and discussion was the greatest disappointment of the presentation. It almost felt as if the participants felt themselves cowed, which isn't so strange when one is expected to discuss the city concerns and weaknesses with external representatives. If a more open discussion were required, the leading politicians and local government officials ought

to have opened up such a discussion by themselves taking the initiative in an informal and candid way.

Perhaps there should be a final workshop rather than a presentation; there needs to be more feedback from the city. The difficulties of the review require it. The LGIP model of a presentation of findings is too much. Recommendations should be developed and the presentation should be lighter.

9 REVIEW REPORT DIFFICULTIES REQUIRE MODIFIED APPROACH

9.1 Overview

Team members mentioned difficulties in delivering reports; their variable quality contributions; the lack of time; lack of information (or access to it); the size of the task, and other things getting in the way after the review. The preparation of reports remained a major issue during the 2nd round of reviews with significant delays in the majority of cases. See Section 9.2.

Coordinators noted that delays created significant adverse knock-on problems and further weaknesses: in decreasing the consultation time, in re-engagement of stakeholders, in developing the smart action plan, and in the internal credibility of the PRESUD process. These experiences of delays were common throughout the project. Analysis of this issue and attempts to address these issues in first round had failed - despite amendments to the methodology; the experience of the problems in the first review, the creation of assistant See Section 9.2.

The reports were judged to be of variable quality by both team members and coordinators. Reports were sometimes superficial, weak in evidence, inaccurate, difficult to understand, had impractical recommendations, and had not been validated. It was recognised that there were clearly limitations to an external review, but improvements were still possible and necessary. See Summary 9.3.

In one (limited) evaluation internal stakeholders respondents agreed that; the report covered their interests; the issues identified were important; the report was of good quality, was helpful, and practical. The least agreed point was that the report contained new findings. The stakeholders criticised the depth, evidence, accuracy, expertise, participation of public and recording of criticisms of the report, and wanted simpler language, more time to create it, to be less patchy, and more objective. There were mixed views but some criticised the understanding of the review team, weak consideration of cultural differences, the limited or selective engagement of stakeholders affecting data gathered, the anecdotal use of evidence, or weak evidence, invalid generalisation on limited evidence, and limited team analysis with invalid conclusions. See section 9.3.

Most external stakeholders welcomed the initial critical findings expressed in the draft reports, but were themselves critical of the non-transparent changes made between the draft and final report (which excluded them and favoured the municipality view - thereby questioning the independence of the review). They also criticised what they often saw as a soft challenge to the municipality. In addition although stakeholders were involved in the review, they nevertheless did *not* receive a copy of the draft report for comments (which is deemed good practice most consultation guidance). This was the case in *all* the reviews and this practice should be challenged and be changed. See Summary 9.2. The credibility of the review with external stakeholders was further weakened through unsupported or incorrect statements in the review report (quoting from a first review report) and through the municipality control in negotiating changes in report redrafting. See Summary 9.3

The need for shorter clearer summarised reports with direct messages was often mentioned (but not by all as a few coordinators were unconcerned). Long, detailed, and thorough English reports were not always welcomed as these had several adverse consequences for the project objectives. Firstly, they were not widely read even by the municipality staff and managers, this weakened dissemination, ownership and buy-in. Secondly the messages and recommendations were not clear, which adversely influenced the smart action planning. Thirdly it gave (non-UK) coordinators extra work (or extra work would be needed) to convert the documents to smaller ones. Fourthly, the reports were not validated as well as they should have been, leading to flawed findings and recommendations within the report which further weakened the potential impact of the peer review, Fifthly, it added to the delays in the draft report delivery (it takes longer to write and edit). Finally it leads to a delayed final report (taking longer to comment upon when read).

Furthermore the long reports required more translation, introducing further delays and further errors as translators struggled with the wide-ranging technical language, and translation itself caused other problems: when the original style was English the translated style maintains that English feeling which makes the reports even less readable in some countries. See Summary 9.4.

So paradoxically what may be a thorough lengthy and detailed report in English will be weaker (in actually prompting change) within non-UK cities than would be a shorter and more superficial report. See Summary 9.4. This view was supported by external stakeholders who were frustrated by report delays and large reports in English were simply not wanted. They wanted simpler short and direct reports with the main headline findings and recommendations.

Note finally that teams sometimes had a better view of their analysis, reports, and recommendations, than did the municipality stakeholders and external observers. This suggests a need for validation or evaluation of the reports, findings, and recommendations in future, from all participants in the project. This is additionally needed as the stakeholder evaluation of reports in this project did not occur as planned due to project slippage, changes, and report delays. Such validation and evaluation will possible using web-based mechanisms.

9.2 Difficulties in Completing Review Reports and Delays weaken process and effectiveness

> Summary Section 9.2
>
> Team members mentioned difficulties in: delivering reports; their variable quality contributions; the lack of time; lack of information (or access to it); the size of the task; and other things getting in the way after the review. The preparation of reports remained a major issue during the 2nd round of reviews with significant delays in the majority of cases.
>
> Coordinators noted the delays created significant adverse knock-on problems and further weaknesses, in weakening the consultation time, re-engagement of stakeholders, process leading to the smart action plan, and the internal credibility of the PRESUD process. These experiences of delays were common on the project. Analysis of the issue and attempts to address these issues in first round had failed despite amendments to the methodology; the experience of the problems in the first review, the creation of assistant managers, additional training and review team planning.

Team members & Team managers

The team members and managers had mostly mixed views of the report preparation stage in the first round.

Preparing the Report After 1st review:

Review stage	Negative	Mixed	Positive
Preparing the Report After Review 6		**28**	**10**

Team members mentioned difficulties and their variable quality contributions, the lack of time, lack of information (or access to it), the size of the task, and other things getting in the way after the review.

"...Going to be tough to do this in the time….Quality of contributions by team members variable and delays in some cases……..Not finished yet……..Not clear what was expected……..Very poor indeed, wrong person doing it. Lack of info to write it……Still feel I have a lot of information which has not been used……..Liked the sharing of responsibilities…..Afterwards I found out that it wasn't so easy to write something about the themes you are responsible for and you didn't do all of the interviews of these themes by yourself. I don't have a solution for it, but we have to consider that in the near future….. I had problems cause I've moved, changing office and I was too busy with other things. I haven't spent the time and the attention I would have spent on it….. A little concerned about the volume of work required with the paucity of information….. Still in progress... I still need clarification of my themes……. problems with the team leader leaving and having insufficient time to do the report……… this is the difficult part; you notice that you do not enough material but there's not that much to do anymore... Just found the time passed me by…… too less exact information - language problems….The process is not very clear".

Preparation of the report remained a major issue during the 2nd round of reviews with significant delays in the majority of cases. Note the difficulty remained despite: the experience of the problems in the first review, the creation of assistant managers, additional training and review team planning.

In the second review round:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Preparation of the Report and Final Recommendations	1	21	19	1	0

Comments on Preparation of the Report and Final Recommendations

The main comment from team members concerned the significant delays and difficulties in meeting deadlines, and the adequacy of team members contributions (or their complete absence in some cases), and the practical difficulty of giving the attention it needed:

This type of report needs to get to the City as soon as possible to have any quick and priority impact…………..I did struggle to meet deadlines……….Some important remarks were given by the team manager for the report, but it was not really discussed in depth. But the time for writing the chapters were expanded from 1 to 3 weeks…... delayed by the lack of contributions from the politicians……..It was delayed…All important aspects of writing the report were agreed properly within the team….Report underway and we are all clear on our relevant contributions. It is taking longer than expected because everyone is having to divert on to day-job pressures and fit this commitment in as best as we can……..I was slower contributing than I should have been………….Not ready jet…………..Report has still to be written…….Work in progress The delays in the report highlight the need for team members to adhere to completion timescales and the role of the team leader in this process. The 'pressure' of meeting deadlines is not helped when people fail to deliver or do not allow subsequent time to draft the reports when they return to their organisation………..Still underway!……….still in process……….Not finished yet……….Work in progress - report being finalised………Always the slow bit as we are then all back at desks, all trying to get it done to send through to each other - this is a real sticky issue for PRESUD………not ready…..difficult to answer as final report is not done yet…………….still preparing, very hard work, good contributions from team but difficulty with changing requirements of smart plan recording

Team managers provided some insight into the difficulties of preparing reports. Technical writing takes up much of the report writing time but this was questioned and in the time between review and report loses momentum when team members return home, and then other demands are placed on team members:

'the technical aspect of the review is the largest thing, they are the opportunity to give detailed recommendations, but at the end of the report or presentation with the key actions they tend to be the more process driven, using some of the technical issues and subjects as examples……'whilst there is great potential the team is only there for a week and there is momentum lost between the review and the

appearance of the report, the report is not as immediate. We could shorten the time between the review and report – they also take more time than we allotted – the weakness is that people are doing this in addition to their other work – commercially people would block out the time and compensate people for their absence – we need to reduce the time down to a few weeks – but people get back into the office and they have their other work to do." (Team manager city 3)

''the reports have been of variable quality, and that's obviously to do with the teams, and how the teams prepared..the preparation was a bit better the 2nd round from my perspective, definitely a better review, but we still got this issue: when the team disperses, it's going to be hard to draft the elements of the report together and that's always difficult, people go back to their day jobs, including me and then you don't get the thinking time. I can't do this report all the time, I have to wait, because I need to see all the elements from the other bits of the report because some of the feedback, postscripts and the observations are contradictory, so I can't work out what's true until I actually get everything else from the people. So the report process is always quite a difficult one when people disperse. And then, you know they've got again variable report writing skills, particularly in English.....also 'people didn't mind it in the least when they got the recommendations that they already knew because that reinforces that they are on the right track" (team manager city 8)

Team member noted difficulties in writing the report on return. Coordinators noted the delays created significant adverse knock-on problems and further weaknesses, in weakening the consultation time, re-engagement of stakeholders, process leading to the smart action plan, and the internal credibility of the PRESUD process:

'Too time consuming ....On a practical note - Team members have to do the PRESUD project as well as all other day job responsibilites. It has proved difficult (outside the actual week of the visit) to set aside sufficient time for the project and to do it justice for all interests. This is because day job pressures take priority and to extend this project in the UK requires recognition that this is a valuable mainstream project which requires proper resourcing (time, people, funds)..... reduce number of themes.... Might be useful to have teams "seconded" in from each City, so they can spend two consecutive weeks on the reviews: one fact-finding, and the other writing up their report..... More realistic assessment of how long it takes to write up materials (especially if your not an expert, and having to do your day job at the same time. Though this is a hard one because I know you need to give people deadlines or they'll take for ever..... ahead and use time better. Perhaps make the interview time longer for some key interviews. (Team comments across all reviews)

''People come back from the review, they have a huge pile of work on their desk because before they go to a review they have to prepare it so work piles up, then they are a week away, work piles further up. Then you come back, have to do the other work, so it takes you one or two weeks to recover from that week of review and it's very hard to write your piece in the time frame set out in the review. It is best to write it as quickly as possible after the review but to be in practice it doesn't work that way. Or you should get people to have two weeks free. and don't come to the office because if you come to the office everybody thinks you are back and claim you. ut then you the other problem if you have two weeks review, it's very hard to find a reviewer They have to realise that doing a review is extra work" (Team Member from City 2)

'The review team left the city and promised the report in 6 weeks. There were repeated delays in first report which lost the momentum built up, it lost interest in municipality; more difficult to engage, and it lost time to develop and consult on development of SMART plan. Finally it arrived 4 weeks before the SMART deadline 2-3 months late, which reduced consultation time on developing smart plan." (Coordinator City 2)

"I think most people have seen the report quite late and with very little time to make comments on it because there is some kind of pressure from the commission. I think it is important that the city has time to make comments on the draft; we received the draft late after two and a half months, and we cant circulate it and get stakeholders comments - I'd probably want two weeks" (Coordinator City 8)

''One of the weaknesses is the long delay in a city receiving its report. This has happened here for a second time, we are still awaiting our report for the second review so that's clearly not desirable when you lose a lot of impetus and motivation in that process…one suggestion is that part of the review itself involves a bit of extra time in order to come up with the first draft of a report (Coordinator City 6)

Consequences of delays and non-delivery:

''We lost all the momentum that the review generated….there were quite a few people there at the presentation of the findings, the presentation of the findings was very good we had four politicians in the room, it was good and it generated a lot of interest and we just lost all that momentum. I mean I was getting telephone calls from external stakeholders asking what the hell had happened with the review report. They automatically think it's down to us prevaricating and holding on to something and not letting people see it. It didn't do us any good at all it wasn't a very good report, lots of people came back and said this isn't a very good report" (Coordinator City 1)

So these experiences of delays were common on the project. Significant delays and difficulties also occurred in both the first and second rounds despite some amendments to the methodology.

9.3 Variable Quality Depth and Credibility of Reports

Section Summary 9.3

The reports were of variable quality as judged by both team members and coordinators. Reports were sometimes superficial, weak in evidence, inaccurate, difficult to understand, had impractical recommendations, and had not been validated. It was recognised that there were clearly limitations to an external review, but improvements were still possible and necessary.

In one (limited) evaluation internal stakeholders respondents agreed that; the report covered their interests; the issues identified were important; the report was of good quality, was helpful, and practical. The least agreed point was that the report contained new findings. When they were asked: 'How you think the review report could be improved?' The stakeholders criticised the depth, evidence, accuracy, expertise, participation of public and recording of criticisms of the report, and wanted simpler language, more time to create it, to be less patchy, and more objective. There were mixed views but some criticised the understanding of the review team and weak consideration of cultural differences, the limited or selective engagement of stakeholders affecting data gathered, the anecdotal use of evidence, weak evidence, invalid generalisation from limited evidence, and limited analysis with invalid conclusions

Most external stakeholders welcomed the initial critical findings expressed in the draft reports, but were critical of the non-transparent changes made between draft and final report which excluded them and favoured the municipality view (thereby questioning the independence of the review). They criticised what they saw as a soft challenge to the municipality. In addition stakeholders were involved in the review, but nevertheless did *not* receive a copy of the draft report for comments which is deemed good practice most consultation guidance. This was the case in *all* the reviews and this practice should be challenged and be changed as it damages the credibility of the process and is bad consultation practice.

The credibility of the review with external stakeholders was weakened through unsupported or incorrect statements in report (quoting from a first review report) Secondly through, the control of report redrafting.

The reports were of variable quality as judged by both team members and coordinators. Reports were sometimes superficial, weak in evidence, difficult to understand, and had impractical recommendations. It was recognised that there were clearly limitations to an external review, but improvements were still possible.

'I read the reports and they are all so different. I think you need to give more guidelines to writing the report, that will help the team manager, it would be easier if you had a little more instruction on how to do it, maybe after the presentation, maybe guidelines given at the end of the review by the review manager – so instruct the team managers - how you are going to structure our findings, e.g. start with the actions for your theme and then say what improvements have happened, then your

write about other issues, then what we are personally interested in also - we could improve the quality of the reports'' (Team member City 7)

'Also it was felt that those in the team coming into the city did not have the in-depth technical evidence and information about the city that they needed, but this was attributed to them not receiving it from us in the first place, so we need to ensure that evidence and documents are more in-depth, and to involve those people who have been critical." (Coordinator City 8)

''Recommendations and strengths were very well identified, but partly the report was superficial. Integration themes were poorly dealt with. Report is the outcome of the review and larger process. To get better reports also the whole process need to be improved. I think that has partly been done for the second part of review. In our first report recommendations were difficult to find. Only the main strengths and recommendations were highlighted. All the recommendations should be clearly found in the report. 'the recommendations presented seemed precise, although they were not all practical, and some were difficult to understand." (Coordinator City 7)

I almost wrote to team manager with about evidence, saying 'why do you say this? I want to see the evidence. 'There are some things, some details in the report that are not correct in my opinion (Coordinator City 6)

"You are asking people for their recommendations what do we think about it. Is it a good recommendation or not? This discussion alone helps people to refocus once again and give it some attention and it helps. People have to give you an answer. Some people would say that it's rubbish and they can argue about it. It's part of the PRESUD because you cannot have everything right in one week interview so you know it. Some are good, but then you talk about how you want to do it and then you leave it at the persons office, they can implement it and if you think it's going well you leave it. (Coordinator City 2)

Most external stakeholders welcomed the initial critical findings expressed in the draft reports, but were critical of the non-transparent changes made between draft and final report which excluded them and favoured the municipality view (thereby questioning the independence of the review). They criticised what they saw as a soft challenge to the municipality.

'There was a lot of change between the draft report and the final report, due to the politics, I remember people being shocking or challenging by the draft report - I don't think the original outcomes were politically acceptable (that's just my interpretation – but I know how things work – if the team say 'you do not have a policy' then people don't like that they say 'of course we have a policy – they did not understand etc!'). But I liked the (original) outcomes of the draft report and I found the outcomes in the final report were less challenging, I think (originally) it was more on the strategic level and the distance between the draft and final was huge, and there is a danger that you lose the vision, policy, and strategy level of the draft which was at a higher abstraction level than the final. Also there is a similar large change between the final and draft reports – I think you lose a lot of information and evaluation, at the strategic and tactical levels, by just making actions – you need those – but not only those" (External Stakeholder 1, Manager, City 2)

''I have a doubt whether these reports are critical enough, maybe its too polite'' (Stakeholder 13: City 2)

The credibility of the review with external stakeholders was mentioned, firstly through unsupported or incorrect statements in report (quoting from a first review report) Secondly through, the control of report redrafting.

''it says 'the local people of the city welcomed the appointment of a new senior politician with responsibility' – how did the team know this!? and again – 'the team was impressed by the goals for water' – but the city don't measure it, or even reach the lowest levels, they don't comply, and the review team were impressed! - also: 'the team were very impressed with the working plan' – but we know that the city plan is just air!'' (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

''Also there was a critical report from the last peer review, the local government almost re-wrote it, and it was a completely different report to that written by peer review team, so there is also this – they don't want any criticism, they want people to accept it, they don't want rows. We did not get the draft report, we heard it was very different from the final report, and you should compare the first report with the screened report by the local government. This its important - this process is kept within a small group of people who have interests in not having bad news to publicise'' (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

In addition stakeholders were involved in the review, but nevertheless did *not* receive a copy of the draft report for comments which is deemed good practice most consultation guidance. This was the case in *all* the reviews and this practice should be challenged and be changed as it damages the credibility of the process and is bad consultation practice.

Report Evaluations by City Stakeholders

Due to delays in reports, and postponements to publicly release reports, evaluation of reports by surveys was not possible in 7 of the cities. There were only two cities where evaluations were done. The results of this are given below.

29 internal stakeholders in two cities (22 and 7) were asked questions on the report. The majority (25) had been directly involved in interviews or workshops. Of these 29 respondents mostly were members of staff of the municipality (22) with some politicians (5) there were only 2 external stakeholders, so the results may reflect the view of internal stakeholders only. Otherwise there was a balance of men and women, and an age spread (but with no young nor old people).

They were also asked to rank agreement to the following questions:

B1. The report satisfactorily **covers** your areas of knowledge, responsibility or interest.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	18
Neither/Nor	6
Disagree	2

| Strongly disagree | 2 |

B2. The issues identified in the report are important.

Strongly agree	4
Agree	21
Neither/Nor	2
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	0

B3. The report is of good quality.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	15
Neither/Nor	8
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	2

B4. The report contains new findings.

Strongly agree	0
Agree	13
Neither/Nor	12
Disagree	3
Strongly disagree	0

B5. The report will be helpful in making progress towards sustainable development.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	18
Neither/Nor	7
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	1

B6. The recommendations are practical and can be implemented.

Strongly agree	1
Agree	18
Neither/Nor	7
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	1

In a limited evaluation internal stakeholders respondents agreed that; the report covered their interests; the issues identified were important; the report was of good quality, was helpful, and practical. The least agreed point was that the report contained new findings (B4).

When they were asked: 'How you think the review report could be improved?' The replies emphasised more depth, evidence, accuracy, expertise, participation of public and recording of criticisms of the report, simpler language, more time to create it, to be less patchy, and more objective.

"Deeper interviews......The report is very dependent on that the right persons are interviewed….More participation from the public......The research/review of facts could be improved…The authors of the report should master the fields to be highlighted in a better way…. The criticisms given by the interviwees should get attention….. If the authors do not have a clear picture of the situation the should return with questions and not speculate around how things are…The language. Even in English it is possible to write simpler and more straight-forward in particular when you write for internal readers. ……You can see that the authors were in a hurry…Better balance between the different sections…. Some are very detailed, other not. You notice that the reviewers was allowed to deal with 'issues of the heart' or issues they really mastered. This is troublesome and may create disproportions and produce less important issues as the most important………There should have been enough time for a final arrangement that gives balance between the different sections…There were quite a few imperfections and facts that were wrong I should prefer better evidence' '(20 stakeholders city 4)

Note that these reports were lengthy and had an experienced team during review.

This same group of internal stakeholders were asked to comment upon the final translated review report several months later. When they were asked what they would criticise and challenge about PRESUD about half of the comments still mentioned difficulties which could be linked back to the interviews and workshops. The criticised the understanding of the review team and weak consideration of cultural differences, the limited or selective engagement of stakeholders affecting data gathered, the anecdotal use of evidence, weak evidence, invalid generalisation from limited evidence, and limited analysis with invalid conclusions.

'"Maybe the team hasn't completely understood our country…..have to involve more persons in the process …Too little consideration of cultural differences…Lack of ability to engage stakeholders and organisations…….bad quality of the report (misconceptions, wrong conclusions, etc) and lack of feedback to improve/revise the report……..Invitations should be sent out earlier together with the questions in order to give preparation time……..The model/review relies too much on "anecdotal evidence"……… Single statements can get too much importance with regards to the few interviews. The result completely depends on whom you managed to make an appointment with…………. From the report it is evident that some of the interviewees were mixed up/didn't know what they were talking about…. The report is very comprehensive. …….In some cities officers have not got much time to work with PRESUD…..he preparations and planning of the interviews need to be significantly improved…….. The material seems a bit thoughtlessly dealt with and sometimes conclusions are drawn far beyond what the thin evidence let you….One critical point is the choice of interviews" (20 stakeholders city 4)

9.4 Shorter and more Concise Reports Needed to Re-Engage Stakeholders

Summary Section 9.4

The need for shorter clearer summarised reports with direct messages were often mentioned. The long reports meant that they were not understood nor widely disseminated nor read. This reduced ownership and also the possibilities of validating flawed findings and recommendations within the report which further weakened the potential impact of the peer review.

The long, detailed, and thorough English reports were not always welcomed as these had several adverse consequences for the project objectives. Firstly, they were not widely read even by the municipality staff and managers, this weakens dissemination, ownership and buy-in. Secondly the messages and recommendations were not clear, which will have an influence on the smart action plan. Thirdly it gave (non-UK) coordinators extra work (or extra work would be needed) to convert the documents to smaller ones. Fourthly, this all added to the delays in the draft report delivery (it takes longer to write and edit) a weaker or delayed final report results (superficial comments of few people or longer to comment upon if read). Furthermore the long reports required more translation, introducing further delays and further errors as translators struggled with the wide-ranging technical language. Translation itself sometimes caused problems - it was not just problems with technical language, when the original style is in foreign (English) the translated style maintains a UK feeling which makes the reports even less readable.

So paradoxically what may be a thorough lengthy and detailed report in English is weaker (in its actual role of prompting change) within non-UK cities than would be a shorter and more superficial report.

This is supported by external stakeholders who were frustrated by report delays and process loses credibility and support; large reports in English were not wanted. They wanted simpler short and direct reports with the main headings. See Section 7.4. They also wanted to see best practice examples from the different cities and more inter-city dissemination of this, some mentioned that PRESUD could serve a useful function connecting NGOs and external stakeholders across municipalities. See Section 7.4.

The need for shorter clearer summarised reports with direct messages were often mentioned. The long reports meant that they were not understood nor widely disseminated nor read. This reduced ownership and also the possibilities of validating flawed findings and recommendations within the report which further weakened the potential impact of the peer review.

''this is like a research thesis - one person written the premise, the methodology that will be used and all this sort of stuff, for their particular section and that's all very nice and whatever but I know that no-one here is going to read it.. I like it but I need this report to be shorter, clearer you know less clever and more direct perhaps. it **needs to be very direct** messages, if we want this report to have an

impact…….saying messages that people can actually recognise. Or I want the freedom to make another version" (Coordinator City 8)

''The biggest problem was the length of the report, the report rattles on, no-one was very interested in commenting on it because they didn't want to read the whole report so I sent out an e-mail where I divided the important parts and then I named every part to one person and could you read these quickly. So I think I got four comments. For the top manager or for the politicians I didn't send it at all. Because I knew no-one was going to read it. What's the audience of this report?... a citizen?, how many pages do you think they will read? Because of the length of the report, the audience is much smaller. It's good for us who are doing this job but for the general public? it's not good - we need a different kind of document for different kind of people. I think we should translate the presentation - something like the presentation could be given to people, a very short document and then a longer document with more detail for the professionals, and of course the report could be available to everyone if they want to have more information. It was really difficult to understand for those who are not actually English speaking persons, I think we could have a report for a much more **simple** language. It was difficult to find things where we should improve our performance. I think you can say these things for example in say thirty pages, you don't need to say all this. Because the most important thing is that we give the message. This report is like a bible!" (Coordinator City 7)

The long detailed and thorough English reports these had several adverse consequences for the project objectives. Firstly, they were not widely read even by the municipality staff and managers, this weakens dissemination, ownership and buy-in. Secondly the messages and recommendations were not clear, which will have an influence on the smart action plan. Thirdly it gave (non-UK) coordinators extra work (or extra work would be needed) to convert the documents to smaller ones. Fourthly, this all added to the delays in the draft report delivery (it takes longer to write and edit) a weaker or delayed final report results (superficial comments of few people or longer to comment upon if read) and a delayed translation (its longer it takes longer to translate). So paradoxically what may be a thorough lengthy and detailed report in English is weaker (in its actual role of prompting change) within non-UK cities than would be a shorter and more superficial report.

''After the first PRESUD peer review we hired a professional translator to translate the report from English to our home language. We relied upon his competence and did not worry about that part. When he delivered the translation we did not scrutinize his work still relying on his professional competence. When the report was distributed there were immediate reactions from different persons. Some of the reactions could be explained by the fact that the awkward truth is unpleasant to hear, especially from a foreigner, but most of the reactions were due to misunderstandings and lack of special competence of the translator. We understand that it is not an easy task to have a mastery of all the different subjects reviewed. You have difficulties to master your own expertise when it comes to use the right terminology in a foreign language. We amended the translation with our own staff who should master many of the subjects and distributed a second edition which satisfied most of the complaints but not totally. After half a year we ended up in an interpreted version of the report.Waiting for the second review report we still considered the possibility of getting a professional translator, that we had used before, to do the job. However the translator himself said it would be easier for a

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person to translate to his mother tongue. Swedish is not his mother tongue. That made us decide to do the job ourselves and split the translation between us in the project team. During the translating we consulted the parties concerned and got their opinions on the choice of words. This we think will make way for a good reception of the report." (Coordinator City 4)

Furthermore the long reports required more translation, introducing further delays and further errors as translators struggled with the wide-ranging technical language.:

It was not just problems with technical language, when the original style is in foreign (English) the translated style maintains a UK feeling which makes the reports even less readable.

''It is no use to evaluate the English version. That is my opinion. Unfortunately we are not able to translate the whole report (too many pages) because it is far too expensive. We have also thought that maybe it would be better to write a summary in understandable english including the most essential recommendations. And then translate this. Anyway we need to wait that get the final report, it is no use to translate the draft version." (coordinator City 7)

''I'm not happy with the translation - it's written in an English style, which the translator then translates directly and then when you get that it looks and sounds strange" (dialogue with Coordinator City7)

''Language of the report is a HUGE problem. I sent the report for comments. I got only two responses, both of them said that they did not understand what was written." (coordinator City 7)

It was suggested that an alternative would be to negotiate the change and potential within the municipality on the basis of the draft report, and combine the report writing and action planning stages:

'Have some mechanism for somebody - not being involved in the review - go in and say ''alright how does it feel, what things can you do quickly, what things can you respond to, which things do you feel are reasonable" rather than that happening after the report is written down, because report goes in and then it comes back and people argue as to whether they are able to do that on a realistic basis over time"
(Team Manager City 8)

10 RESULTING CHANGE AND IMPACT: TRIALS SHOW CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE APPROACH NEED REVISION

10.1 Overview

There were variable and mixed views the smart plans, but these had widespread support across stakeholders groups, with some scepticism from teams and external stakeholders on the challenge in the plans and in the evidenced progress achieved through them.

There was some difficulty in attributing changes and impacts to PRESUD and the importance of other factors, meant that PRESUD cannot determine nor guarantee levels of change and impact.

There were significant non-measurable qualitative impacts resulting from PRESUD *within* the municipality administration and for those stakeholders *directly* involved in the process. These impacts were the main impacts of PRESUD, and they largely explain the positive support for the peer review process (Chapter 4) but they are understated and underdeveloped and often unrecorded by cities and teams within the PRESUD reviews and within the methodology and training.

Uncertainty and doubt on the measurable impact of PRESUD at city level with little evidence of change demonstrate that PRESUD has overstated its measurable impact and shows a need for revision of such claims. But also the weak use of evidence is partly attributable to an imposed methodology, which should be revised to be more flexible, including the participative development of mixed (qualitative-quantitative, local-national) locally-relevant indicator sets by all municipalities themselves which should then critically reviewed. It would then be a review aim to examine and challenge the mixed indicator sets would could improved through critical peer review and best-practice exchange.

Variable and Mixed Views The SMART Plans, but with Widespread Support, yet some Scepticism

The SMART action plans were welcomed by most stakeholders, as they gave clear actions to implement, with responsibilities, and this is one of the important mechanisms behind change, which can be referred to later. See Summary 10.2. Once the plan is written then managers and politicians follow the progress of change through it. Most (but not all) stakeholders felt the SMART plan should be a compulsory aspect of PRESUD, Most stakeholders asked about the SMART plan felt that it was a valuable and important component of the project, if various limitations were addressed. See Summary 10.2.

The mechanisms of development of SMART action plans varied from city to city, but to be effective they required re-engagement of responsible municipal staff. See Summary 10.2. The major problems with report (Chapter 9) had caused significant problems in the development of the SMART plan. The recommendations adopted from those made in the review report were decided by coordinators and stakeholders on criteria of practicality and through local knowledge of what could be realistically achieved. Often plans included or incorporated recommendations that would have

been carried out anyway, and were not attributable to PRESUD alone. See Summary 10.2.

Plans needed to be resourced supported and verifiable to be of use, and this was not always the case. See Summary 10.2.   The action plan could be a source of change if widely agreed, agreed owned, and with senior and political support, if this did not occur there would be limited impact; in some cases wide ownership but was not necessarily gained nor sought. Some judged the plans to be weak, where they were vague, lavked challenge, or where unresourced. See Summary 10.2.   It was necessary to consider both hard and soft indicators of change. The timescale was frequently judged too short to see measurable change. Some felt the SMART plan needed to be approached in a pragmatic way and needed political astuteness in what was put forward for recommendation to be consistent with existing municipality directions. PRESUD then acts as a parallel pressure rather than a unique single factor. See Summary 10.2.

The SMART plan was noted to be restrictive and limited in a number of ways. See Summary 10.2. Some saw the SMART plan as relatively unimportant in comparison with other effects such as the effects upon those involved or the non-measurable and qualitative changes. Some participants were sceptical of the development and scope of the SMART plan; both from external stakeholders and review teams. Firstly it did not record relevant and important non-measurable (qualitative) change that occurred (see a later section). Secondly, it was not always clear to what degree actions had arisen from the PRESUD review, nor to what extent changes were planned anyway (some argued this would always be the case, and that PRESUD should not be judged on this basis). Thirdly, some team members and external stakeholders additionally criticised the SMART plan as not challenging and setting easily achievable targets making little significant progress towards sustainable development. Fourthly, the time for significant change was thought to be beyond the timescale of the PRESUD project (i.e. little measurable change in 18 month). Fifthly, there was high uncertainty and doubt on the actual levels of measurable change, as reliable and robust indicators were not generally utilised by review teams, Sixthly, PRESUD recommendations were adopted or rejected without explanation nor public disclosure so many could be ignored without comment, which brought the credibility of the process into question; stakeholders were sceptical that the municipality would actually act upon the plans, of the ability and intention of the municipality to deliver measurable change, and in the absence of data used and independent verification of claimed changes. Finally, the SMART Plan did not necessarily lead to significant nor measurable change, in some cases it had no effect, in most cases it resulted in modest impacts. The review teams themselves expressed mixed views on the impacts due to the previous reviews and SMART Plans (indeed of all the questions asked of the review teams this generated the least positive response). Nevertheless most (but not all) were supportive of the idea of some form of Planning Stage following review. Later sections suggest a revised approach which should *include* SMART but not be restricted to it, to include non-specific (generalised) and non-measurable (qualitative) but verifiable ended aims. See Summary 10.2.

Difficulty in Attributing Changes and Impacts to PRESUD, and the Importance of other Factors

Impacts and change were rarely simply attributable to PRESUD and PRESUD could not guarantee any change. See Section 10.3.   PRESUD does not demand that its

recommendations be adopted, but that these recommendations be used to prompt practical change in the local context, only some recommendations become actions. Sometimes recommendations they were known before review, or re-suggestions. Change was sometimes planned anyway but PRESUD raised them up the agenda. See Section 10.3. It was noted that PRESUD could not generally claim sole credit for the changes occurring. Furthermore political, managerial, cross-departmental, and stakeholder support and ownwership, support and engagement is required Without this change will not occur and PRESUD can never therefore guarantee change. See Section 10.3

Significant Non-Measurable Qualitative Impact Resulting from PRESUD within Municiopality Administration as main but understated value of PRESUD.

There was a difference between measurable and verifiable change; measurable change is verifiable, but non-measurable change does not imply it is non-verifiable. There were many verifiable but non-measurable changes noted, but few verifiable measurable changes. See Section 10.4. Most review team members felt that there were many positive impacts of PRESUD, but these were mostly non-measurable and qualitative. These included raising of awareness, focusing attention on sustainability, gaining a fresh and external perspective, organisational and individual learning and potential exchange of best-practices, understanding how other cities work. But this positive view was balanced by a negative view of change expressed by team members. These related mostly to the absence of evidence, the limited ownership and engagement in the process and SMART plans, the lack of support and commitment for the approach and evidenced change. Coordinators had higher hopes for organisational and personal change than for changes in the city environment due to PRESUD. See Section 10.4.

These positive and negative viewpoints of change were supported by team managers who noted that although it was difficult to measure important changes, change could still be described. See Section 10.4. For instance by meeting stakeholders involved in programmes or initiatives and assessing their engagement, and progress through discussion or interviews, and assessing ownership and the commitment of leadership needed for change. Positive qualitative changes resulting from PRESUD included: additional stakeholder engagement, a less fragmented approach to sustainability, and directly gaining commitment of key decision makers through interviewing. One important qualitative criteria of impact was whether a recommendation had been mainstreamed in the municipality plans and strategies. However only a limited part of the organisation (usually the environmental department) owned PRESUD and this was commonly recognised as an issue which compromised the potential of the project; change and impact was therefore limited and perhaps could be doubled simply by increased ownership and engagement. One way to increase the impact is to have greater engagement in the review, but this could be supplemented by creating interactions between those that were involved in the review, sometime after review to re-engage them. External stakeholders were typically only involved in the review and saw this as the major outcome, so they would benefit from re-engagement as they were not aware nor informed of any consequences or changes, which could also be rectified. See Section 10.4.

Providing evidence of change was often not about quantitative measurement against targets with data, but often a statement of what had happened. See Section 10.4.

Such qualitative assessments of change can be done by a municipality self-assessment process by re-engaging the stakeholders through individual meetings, but perhaps better by workshops. So preparing to evidence impact in the second review involved something like: 'here is what we have decided to do, here is what has been done' and that could provide evidence for the second peer review team. But not all coordinators nor teams followed this approach. It should be noted that many qualitative and non-measurable changes and impacts were generally not recorded. These have been underestimated by the project and were generally valued by most stakeholders. This is relevant because change depends upon senior involvement and stakeholder engagement, which would be increased by recording all changes. See Section 10.4.

Uncertainty and Doubt on Impact at City Level with Little Evidence of Change and Need for Revision of Overstated PRESUD Claims and Participative development of Mixed Indicator Sets by Municipalities.

There was a net positive belief that PRESUD could lead to changes in the municipality, but no net belief that this would lead to measurable change of between 10 and 25%. See Section 10.5.

Team members were unsure that all improvements in sustainable development were generally measurable at all, or that stated targets could be achieved, and their views on this were more negative than positive. See Section 10.5. Participants doubted the 10-25% target, its meaning, its measurement, and criteria, and its attainment, and they further doubted that significant external change could be achieved in such a short (18 month) time scale. Many team members felt that the degree of change was uncertain. They also commented upon how change in the municipality depended upon the particular context, the city, administration, politicians, and coordinators, ownership and commitment, and therefore that PRESUD could never guarantee measurable change. See Section 10.5.

Coordinators and stakeholders also noted difficulties in measuring and stimulating change. See Section 10.5. Some felt the project, cities, and review teams had not created measurable criteria and indicators. Some felt measurable changes would probably not be possible. Some felt that changes would be small changes and slow, perhaps leading to notable changes in the longer term (5 years). Stakeholders wanted to see better use of evidence and targets, and questioned how PRESUD could state changes had occurred without the use of such evidence. Stakeholders also agreed that change depended upon the political context, and the level of engagement in the project. If this changed in the course of the project then it could reduce or remove possibility of change, if it was weak then impacts would be negligible. See Section 10.5.

Evidencing change would require mixed qualitative and quantitative criteria and indicators of change. See Section 10.5. It was important to better develop the data that would evidence change, yet this had been weak in the project, and it must be flexible to reflect the differences in the different municipalities, it must include clear measures relevant to the timescale, it needed a combination of local and national indicators, which were mixed qualitative and quantitative, referring to changes within the municipality and externally in the city also. Such a 'mixed indicator basket' would require participation of the municipality to develop it, and this would be relevant to the needs of the municipality utilising existing data and measures, and would be

relevant to the organisations strategic plan. This would ensure both practicality of the task and relevance to the municipality. The mixed indicators basket would be critically reviewed by the review team, who also draw on their knowledge of their own indicator baskets thereby exchanging ideas and best practice. See Section 10.5.

It was noted that PRESUD was a useful tool but the changes could be subtle and depended upon how the tool was used by participants and municipalities. Furthermore PRESUD could aid progress but if PRESUD went badly (such as with delayed or weak review reports, See Chapter 9) it could impede progress towards sustainable development, as it then damaged the credibility of those associated with it. See Section 10.5.

Overall there was doubt, uncertainty and variability across all participant groups on the resulting measurable change occurring in the municipality and on the measurable impacts of PRESUD upon sustainability within the time scale and if this was possible at all. See Section 10.5. In this sense PRESUD has overstated what it can achieve. Part of the problem is linked to difficulty and inconvenience in generating, agreeing, gathering and monitoring similar indicators across all cities. Partly it is that coordinators do not have power to engage others in this work. Partly it is that significant change takes longer than the project envisaged. Part is that the changes and impacts associated with PRESUD reviews are mostly qualitative and therefore are not recorded. See Section 10.5.

10.2 Variable Views of SMART Action Planning Stage with Widespread Support but some Scepticism

Section Summary 10.2

The SMART action plans were welcomed by most stakeholders, as they gave clear actions to implement, with responsibilities, and this is one of the important mechanisms behind change, which can be referred to later. Once the plan is written then managers and politicians follow the progress of change through it. Nevertheless only 6 of the 9 city coordinators felt the SMART plan should be a compulsory aspect of PRESUD, whereas 2 city coordinators felt it should be optional and decided by the city. Most stakeholders asked about the SMART plan felt that it was an important component of the project, if various limitations were addressed.

The mechanisms of development of SMART action plans varied from city to city, but to be effective they required re-engagement of responsible municipal staff. In many cases this required simplification of the review report and before moving into the action plan stage. Re-engagement of stakeholders was achieved through e-mail circulation, workshops, and internal interviews. The major problems with report (Chapter 9) had caused significant problems in the development of the SMART plan.

The recommendations adopted from those made in the review report were decided by coordinators and stakeholders on criteria of practicality and through local knowledge of what could be realistically achieved. Often plans included or incorporated recommendations that would have been carried out anyway, and were not attributable to PRESUD alone.

Smart plans needed to be resourced, and verifiable The effect on Action Plans and explanations of changes need to be transparent or this produces scepticism of stakeholders, particularly the external ones. The action plan could be a source of change if widely created, agreed owned, and with senior and political support, if this did not occur there would be limited impact. The smart action plan required ownership but this was not necessarily gained or sought. Some weak smart action had resulted where plans were vague or unresourced. It was necessary to consider both hard and soft indicators of change. The timescale was frequently judged too short to see measurable change.

Some felt the SMART plan improvements needed to be approached in a pragmatic way and needed political astuteness in what is put forward, and recommendations are chosen, needed to be consistent with municipality directions. PRESUD then acts as a parallel pressure rather than a unique single factor.

The SMART plan was noted to be restrictive and limited in a number of ways. Some saw the SMART plan as relatively unimportant in comparison with other effects such as the effects upon those involved or the non-measurable and qualitative changes. Some participants were sceptical of the SMART plan; both from external stakeholders and review teams. Firstly it did not record relevant and important non-measurable (qualitative) change that occurred (see a later section). Secondly, it was not always clear to what degree actions had arisen from the PRESUD review, nor to what extent changes were planned anyway (some argued this would always be the case, and that PRESUD should not be judged on this basis). Thirdly, some team members and external stakeholders additionally criticised the SMART plan as not challenging and setting easily achievable targets making little significant progress towards sustainable development. Fourthly, the time for significant change was thought to be beyond the timescale of the PRESUD project (i.e. little measurable change in 18 month). Fifthly, there was high uncertainty and doubt on the actual levels of measurable change, as reliable and robust indicators were not generally utilised by review teams, Sixthly, PRESUD recommendations were adopted or rejected without explanation nor public disclosure so many could be ignored without comment, which brought the credibility of the process into question; stakeholders were sceptical that the municipality would actually act upon the plans, of the ability and intention of the municipality to deliver measurable change, and in the absence of data used and independent verification of claimed changes. Finally, the SMART Plan did not necessarily lead to significant nor measurable change, in some cases it had no effect, in most cases it resulted in modest impacts. The review teams themselves expressed mixed views on the impacts due to the previous reviews and SMART Plans (indeed of all the questions asked of the review teams this generated the least positive response). Nevertheless most (but not all) were supportive of the idea of some form of Planning Stage following review. Later sections suggest a revised approach which should *include* SMART but not be restricted to it, to include non-specific (generalised) and non-measurable (qualitative) but verifiable ended aims.

Positive View of Smart action plans:

The SMART action plans were welcomed by most stakeholders, as they gave clear actions to implement, with responsibilities, and this is one of the important

mechanisms behind change, which can be referred to later. Once the plan is written then managers and politicians follow the progress of change through it.

''it had an impact in raising awareness of people who would not normally be interested in environmental issues, to facilitate discussion, and on the political level it is important, it has stimulated discussion, and clearly defined practical actions where people knew their tasks. The smart action plan gives clear actions to implement''
(Stakeholder 7, Manager City 2)

''I like the action plan - its an important part – its clear – who is responsible and who is involved, who are partners. It's very important to get a good action plan (which we had). The action plan did have an impact on how the city is working. ''it isn't just we take the actions and leave it – we consciously look at the plan and the PRESUD report and see if the things we are doing are still in line with the recommendations, it is anchored to the plan, but it can change if needed – the action plan does not specify them exactly – we need to find our own ways to achieve the aims'' (Stakeholder 6, City 2)

''it brought the issues to the attention of the senior politician for a start, and his management group, the pressure was building up on him to do something, it raised his awareness, and then he would start saying 'what's happening with the issue' and he would come back to us and want action - PRESUD helped get it to that stage, but after that its down to the city'' (Stakeholder 2, City Manager, City 2)

Developing smart action plans

The mechanisms of development of SMART action plans varied from city to city, but to be effective they required re-engagement of responsible municipal staff. In many cases this required simplification of the review report and before moving into the action plan stage. Re-engagement of stakeholders was achieved through e-mail circulation, workshops, and internal interviews.

''Initially I circulated the first draft of the first report to everybody who had participated to ask for their comments on its accuracy and any comments they may have. Then I took those into consideration, I think we revised the report and then searched out and invited a number of people to come together for a workshop to look at planning, what we do next. What I did was to write up on sheets of flipchart paper around the room all the key findings or recommendations that had come out of it. Because part of the problem here is you end up with such bulky documents, it is quite difficult for people to keep what the key points are in their head so my approach has been to try and simplify things, try and boil them down to really essential points and get the group to think about those, to focus on just a small number of key things. As part of that workshop we came up with suggested ways of tackling some of those recommendations or some of those findings. That formed the basis of our report and I then went back and looked to see we were addressing all the points and where there **were weren't** specific suggestions, I then went back to individual people to say what are you doing or what are you planning to do which might make a difference on this particular issue. Inevitably you find that some people are already doing things or perhaps already planning to do things which would help to address that point. So it's a matter of sort of mixing and matching. Some of the things we had to propose new actions, some things were already planned actions and some had come out of the workshops, so it was a bit of a

mixture. Then I circulated the smart action plan for people's comments and again that produced a few more useful bits and pieces of different insights. What was difficult though was beyond that point, that's where for me the process fell down because it wasn't very clear or obvious as to what I then needed to do to best implement this because effectively I'm the only person who has got really significant interest in this project and it was then about how do you then spread out and share that responsibility around. Without a degree of political and managerial commitment that was quite a hard process" (Coordinator City 6)

'We start a series of interviews with the individual senior officers across all the departments who have responsibility essentially for those recommendations. We grouped the recommendations into departmental responsibilities….we did interviews with people explaining to them about the project, what we are trying to do and giving them a table of their recommendations and asking them to comment on those recommendations, whether they think they are reasonable recommendations or not, and then in the box next to that saying what we are going to do about them. We managed to get the first box filled in, we didn't get anything for the second box. Well we did from a couple of departments but it was patchy and that's where we stand now" (coordinator city 1)

Problems with SMART could follow from problems those with the report.

'The review team left the city and promised the report in 6 weeks. There were repeated delays in first report which lost the momentum built up, it lost interest in municipality; more difficult to engage, and it lost time to develop and consult on development of SMART plan. Finally it arrived 4 weeks before the SMART deadline 2-3 months late, which reduced consultation time on developing the smart plan." (Coordinator 2)

Choosing recommendations to adopt

The recommendations adopted from those made in the review report were decided by coordinators and stakeholders on criteria of practicality and through local knowledge of what could be realistically achieved. Often plans included or incorporated recommendations that would have been carried out anyway, and were not attributable to PRESUD alone.

'The smart action plan was put together in such a way as to maximise its impact, reduce negative reception, and some actions were politically phrased to get them in and accepted. Eventually gained the ok from officers and managers, the political body, and council responsible including the opposition parties (which was not a problem) ……..(in the review report) there were multiple amendments (8 levels with several minor alterations). Needed to agree with officers and managers, a political level, and broader city council responsible for sustainability (over 3 levels of agreement). Nevertheless of the 56 recommendations made, 26 were implemented in the SMART plan (some overlapped, 10 were attributable to PRESUD, 16 were underway in some form (and these were not solely attributable to PRESUD)." (Coordinator City 2)

'In the actual smart action plan an awful lot of people put a lot of things they had already planned to do in because they have to and they know they only had eighteen months to come up with something……The review process is very useful, but the

Smart action plan to be realistic and honest, I think and not just basically a collection of things you were doing already." (Coordinator City 8)

''Actions that are in the smart action plan are things that would have been done anyway" . Coordinator City 7

''If its not already planned to do it – it doesn't happen – how do you know what are really new points?' (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

Action on SMART plans and ownership

Smart plans needed to be resourced, and verifiable The effect on Action Plans and explanations of changes need to be transparent or this produces scepticism of stakeholders, particularly the external ones:

''for PRESUD to be successful, requires that to be in place it's a bit chicken and egg – you need the cities to be committed to a process of change, but if they don't have that then PRESUD is good at stimulating that – we have to recognise were cities are to start with – e.g. who controls power, where decision making takes place, who is consulting who is not, who allocates budgets so that change can take place – we were a bit niave but you have to start somewhere with all the restrictions and barriers and shackles – may have a city without political backing or resourcing – a city can lose face, but then once taken seriously, can regain it, by putting resources in'' (team manager city 4)

The plans from the different cities should have fixed goals and time paths, data and independent checks, they check their own goals, they can change their goals, they just change them'' (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

The action plan could be a source of change if widely created, agreed owned, and with senior and political support, if this did not occur there would be limited impact.

''Another example of a strength is that if my action plan is agreed by all. They cannot drop out easily and they have to have a very good story. That also helps to drive changes through and they have seen it happen in some of our actions." (Coordinator 2)

''For those big recommendations I got answers from the executive board. I got officials quite well to comment on recommendations. I also got new information and new contacts when finding action for smart. However Because (of our contract) we kept quite low profile. For example city council was left out. And smart was not accepted at the political level. This could be considered as a weakness. The project should give more weight to smart action plan. Clarify its role for the second review. Smart is mainly tool for city, not for the project. Maybe it should be left for the city to decide if it wants to have a smart action or not." (Coordinator City 7)

''we have not got very far, we have been stuck as the political backing has not been there though now things are starting to move and the Deputy Mayor for the Environment and his office are involved in both presenting the Plan to the executive board and organising the second review." Coordinator City 8

The smart action plan required ownership but this was not necessarily gained or sought.

"the smart action that's where for me the process fell down I'm the only person who has got really significant interest how do you then spread out and share that responsibility around. Without a degree of political and managerial commitment that was quite a hard process its quite useful to have some kind of working group to try and share out the responsibility whether you've got senior involvement or not influences hugely what happens (coordinator 4)

" The SMART Action plan is no official document and is only used within our own department." Coordinator City 9

'The SMART-Action Plan for city X was only written by Y (one person) Y took other existing documents from other departments in order to have some actions. That does mean nobody (really nobody) outside Y's own department knows the SMART-Action Plan. Y and his department had no discussion with anybody about the SMART-Action Plan or single measures. So, all proposed actions were existing before PRESUD or were taken without any influence of PRESUD." (a Review Team Member City 9)

Assessing SMART plans in review

Some weak smart action had resulted where plans were vague or unresourced. It was necessary to consider both hard and soft indicators of change:

"We were weak in Smart action planning, they were almost a lowest common denominator, they are against the culture of many of the cities, in setting targets that officers and members will do everything they can to avoid – setting targets that others can then judge them on – that means when a team has gone back in to verify the achievement of the smart action plan - they have been so woolly and nebulous and difficult to assess, like fishing in the dark, we have to get a commitment from the cities that they will put in place the smart action plan and resource it, in a way that's challenging to them and verifiable, that requires a cultural change, an understanding, PRESUD has started to demonstrate it is possible but on the other hand, (team manager city 4)

"I think there is an argument for both hard and soft indicators of change the trouble is that qualitative conversations and responses don't necessarily give you the evidence" (team manager city 5)

"its easy to say at this stage but we should have emphasized more on measurable actions in our SMART plans. None of us did…..In 18 months to make a city more sustainable (in percent) especially with regard to the different responsibilities the cities have (legislation, budget, etc……. only soft words, no hard facts - no legitimation, - no connection with instruments an money and examples/new projects…….. Some sort of portfolio of evidence could be provided on arriving (with translations where necessary). … clearer framework for the smart action plan reporting….Sustainability in cities should be improved, but there is no proper guidance which can be used by interested cities to change their performance.

Chapter 9 in the methodology give a possibility to assessing changes, but the authors do not give guidance how to change certain things within a municipality. Maybe it should be considered to develop that kind of guidance, which makes it easier for some cities to change certain aspects of their performance or adopt strategies and schemes from other cities." (Team members on 2nd review)

Although welcomed the timescale was frequently judged too short to see measurable change.

'It helps you reconsider and re-evaluate the issues. I think many cities, ourselves included projects which are starting and/or in a idea phase for the Smart Action Plan as 18 months is a bit short to completely develop and implement projects with tangible impacts." (Coordinator 8)

Some felt the improvements needed to be approached in a pragmatic way:

''There were difficulties due to unauthorised release, but the peer review process gets a good press and was seen to be valuable by all involved and parties". For the implementation of the actions money and even more important time / priority is necessary. Due to the course followed to get agreement on the SMART action plan this was not included. This means extra effort was needed to put into the implementation phase. Delays followed a particularly difficult recommendation related to a complicated politically sensitive issue…….. Step-wise implementation was the approach – areas with political and practical difficulties were postponed until later. Progress on recommendations - Can show maybe 1/5 implemented, 1/5 postponed, 3/5 underway, and expect further completions before 2nd review team. However only a small number of these are attributable to only PRESUD" (Coordinator City 2)

This illustrates the need for a political astuteness in what is put forward, and the fact that PRESUD recommendations are chosen, and coupled with municipality directions. PRESUD then acts as a parallel pressure rather than a unique single factor. Some saw the SMART plan as relatively unimportant in comparison with other effects such as the effects upon those involved or the non-measurable and qualitative changes.

''the biggest changes that it can make are in the people who are actually involved. I see it very much internal to the city…….it's not about the target you've come up with in your smart action plan……..increase the number of exchanges……..I see the moment of contact between people is perhaps more powerful and more able to bring about more impact on the part of PRESUD than the actual smart action plan one way of increasing the impact of PRESUD is to increase these interactions in some way……..the Smart action plan to be realistic and honest, not just basically a collection of things you were doing already. (Coordinator city 8)

Review team members were asked their view upon the impacts since the previous review and diverse views were expressed: 18 (of 42) were positive, 10 were negative, and 14 had mixed views:

Review Stage	Very Positive	Positive	Mixed or neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Impacts Resulting from Previous Review	3	15	14	9	1

This shows that the teams had mixed views on the impacts due to the previous reviews (indeed of all the questions asked of the review teams this generated the least positive response).

10.3 Difficulty in Attributing Change to PRESUD and in Claiming Change will Happen through PRESUD

Summary Section 10.3

Impacts and change were rarely simply attributable to PRESUD and PRESUD could not guarantee any change. Sometimes recommendations they were known before review, or re-suggestions. Change was sometimes planned anyway but PRESUD raised them up the agenda.

It was noted that PRESUD could not generally claim sole credit for the changes occurring. Furthermore political, managerial, cross-departmental, and stakeholder support and ownwership, support and engagement is required Without this change will not occur and PRESUD can never therefore guarantee change.

PRESUD does not demand that its recommendations be adopted, but that these recommendations be used to prompt practical change in the local context, only some recommendations become actions.

Management or political change can alter (positively or negatively) the fortunes of PRESUD. The city politicians and senior managers could halt or prevent dissemination and implementation as well as aid it.

Impacts and change were rarely simply sucessionist (A leads to B). They may suggest issues previously abandoned by new approaches, or put them on the agenda, raise awareness, show more political support is needed, or the need to engage with other departments:

'’PRESUD led to four recommendations for my department, on one PRESUD addressed an issue that we were aware of some years ago and we tried to do something but it didn't work, we didn't have the leverage to go beyond the higher management levels were there were some blocks, PRESUD give us the possibility because it woke up some people to the larger perspectives. It give us the incentive to come up with a new approach to an existing issue and took away the management barriers. On another, communication between departments hadn't been done and we did it by internet. A third requires more political support and has gone elsewhere. Another recommendations were taken up by other departments but PRESUD put them on the agenda and it put them more systematically" (Stakeholder 6, City 2)

It give us the incentive to come up with a new approach to an existing issue and took away the management barriers. On another, communication between departments hadn't been done and we did it by internet. A third requires more political support and has gone elsewhere. Another recommendations were taken up by other departments but PRESUD put them on the agenda and it put them more systematically" (Stakeholder 6, City 2)

Change was possibly already in the air but PRESUD raises them on the agenda, flushes them out, gives them extra weight, but it is difficult to attribute change soley to PRESUD:

''I instinctively feel that some types of change are more likely than others – I think the changes that are most likely to happen are ones that are already being discussed by host council before the PRESUD team arrives; the PRESUD review flushes them out, gives them extra weight, gives them extra priority, and brings closer to the surface – but many of the issues that we say are due to PRESUD were already in the 'melting pot' and the PRESUD presence brings it forward – they say a consultant is someone who borrows your watch to tell you the time – but the very fact that something appears in a consultants report brings them to the surface gives them priority, weight, and therefore more likely to happen, so we as consultants or PRESUD should not feel bad about that. So the recommendations that are most likely to happen are those that are already being considered. The presence of PRESUD has *accelerated* the pace of change is a good way of describing it.'' (team manager city 3)

It was noted that PRESUD could not generally claim credit for the changes noted:

''PRESUD *may* lead to changes in the municipality rather than is *likely* to....PRESUD may catalyse or facilitate certain initiatives but it is difficult to say that they wouldn't take place without PRESUD. Initiatives are brought forward on the agenda by PRESUD. (coordinator city 8)

''it is difficult to know if it was PRESUD that was the cause of changes or if it was something that we were doing anyway, perhaps it is a mixture where PRESUD helps but it is not the only reason. In one area (participation) there has been a clear change - it was mentioned in the PRESUD report and the mayor set up a working group - but it was not only because of PRESUD as it was on the municipality agenda and in then strategy for the city, but PRESUD helped give it more weight'' (coordinator city 7)

''I couldn't say for definite that PRESUD alone was responsible for those changes but I think it must have played some sort of role'' (Team Manager City 8)

PRESUD does not necessarily (or mostly) demand that its recommendations be adopted, but that these recommendations be used to prompt practical change in the local context, only some recommendations become actions:

''we translate everything about PRESUD into something that's workable in our plans, the points were raised in managements meetings, some of the points were not relevant, several could not be implemented by us, but required outside organisations which we can only write too, but others could be adopted, and these were made stronger because we selected them'' (Stakeholder 5, City 2)

So in such cases how does PRESUD help? One way was that, even if an issue had been known before the review and attempts had failed, the fact it entered the action plan meant it would be revisited and rethought, and that the review teams may not be able to say how a problem should be fixed: ''I think PRESUD definitely helps because when you work on an issue such as sustainability there is always change inside going on, it helps you to be more creative or flexible, whereas we may not

have attempted it because it was attempted previously and it failed. When you visit a city for one week you cant find out all the details, all that you have to, all the history etc, you have to focus on somethings but you can say 'look this is still the point and look at again', I would like the review team to tell me how but they cant tell me how, because its about policy and organisational history, but what you can say ' (Team member City 7)

Impact is limited by Politics and Power.

Management or political change can alter (positively or negatively) the fortunes of PRESUD. The city politicians and senior managers evidently had more power than the PRESUD teams, and PRESUD claims to produce outputs and achievements on time-scales against local will:

"The report has been received within the time frame but its consultation within the authority at a political level has been stopped because of the political elections." (Coordinator City 5)

''There was a problem with one of the senior managers, who just typically doesn't understand these things. Not engaged at all. It had become their responsibility and if a person with responsibility doesn't make a decision, we can't move forward. Someone said we have to pay back the money if we don't sign this report off and so a politician took an executive decision to override the manager' (an internal stakeholder)

'Two drafts have been received and I've been told politically that they are to be embargoed until after the elections…….they said not to release it to the politicians because, well it says a lot of things which politically could be damaging to the existing adminstration………… what none of us appreciated was that the governance, because it's in the governments dimension, that means that political soundings have to be taken and if one gets a political direction like on this issue, it's not within my control to say, our requirement with your commission has to be approved within a certain time.   Unfortunately that cuts no ice because what we are producing is political dynamite. If the politicians who basically control things say it's not politically acceptable to release this document at the moment, then regardless of the contract with the European Commission or not, this has to be taken into account. So officers cannot set timetables for politicians" (City Coordinator, City 5)

''For me the biggest difficulty in this process is not so much about the project and its methodology, its more about the context within which it operates and that's very difficult for the project and/or the methodology to be able to be changed to take account of that because the context would be different in every city. That to me has been the hardest part - in that sustainable development has kind of slipped down the council's corporate agenda in quite a significant way during the course of the project. So a lot of what I've been trying to do is to fight that and get it back up so in some respects PRESUD has been helpful if giving the council a vehicle for that',…….''also particularly related to UK local government, we are overloaded with different kinds of initiatives of all different kinds, and it has been difficult getting this to the attention of the senior officers, particularly directors of departments and city councillors. But these are contextual difficulties and I am not sure what the project or beyond the project, how that methodology could be changed to do anything about that" (Coordinator City 6)

10.4 Significant Non-Measurable[7] Qualitative resulting Municipality Changes dependent upon degree of Ownership, Engagement and Commitment.

Summary section 10.4

There were many verifiable but non-measurable changes noted, but few verifiable measurable changes. Most review team members felt that there were many positive impacts of PRESUD, but these were mostly non-measurable and qualitative. These included raising of awareness, focusing attention on sustainability, gaining a fresh and external perspective, organisational and individual learning and potential exchange of best-practices, understanding how other cities work. But this positive view was balanced by a negative view of change expressed by team members. These related mostly to the absence of evidence, the limited ownership of the process and SMART plans. Coordinators had higher hopes for organisational and personal change than for changes in the city environment due to PRESUD.

These positive and negative viewpoints of change were supported by team managers who noted that although it was difficult to measure important changes, change could still be described. For instance by meeting stakeholders involved in programmes or initiatives and assessing their engagement, and progress through discussion or interviews, and assessing ownership and the commitment of leadership needed for change. Positive qualitative changes resulting from PRESUD included: additional stakeholder engagement, a less fragmented approach to sustainability, and directly gaining commitment of key decision makers through interviewing. One important qualitative criteria of impact was whether a recommendation had been mainstreamed in the municipality plans and strategies. However only a limited part of the organisation (usually the environmental department) owned PRESUD and this was commonly recognised as an issue which compromised the potential of the project; change and impact were therefore limited and perhaps could be doubled simply by increased ownership and engagement. One way to increase the impact is to have greater engagement in the review, but this could be supplemented by creating interactions between those that were involved in the review, sometime after review to re-engage them.

Providing evidence of change was often not about quantitative measurement against targets with data, but often a statement of what had happened. Such qualitative assessments of change can be done by a municipality self-assessment process by re-engaging the stakeholders through individual meetings, but perhaps better by workshops. So preparing to evidence impact in the second review involved something like: 'here is what we have decided to do, here is what has been done' and that could provide evidence for the second peer review team. But not all coordinators nor teams followed this approach. It should be noted that many qualitative and non-measurable changes and impacts were generally not recorded. These have been underestimated by the project and were generally valued by most stakeholders. This is relevant because change depends upon senior involvement and stakeholder engagement, which would be increased by recording all changes.

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[7] The Conference demonstrated some measurable *municipality* change - in the number of recommendations adopted, underway and implemented across cities. This should be noted.

There was a difference between measurable and verifiable change; measurable is verifiable, but non-measurable does not imply non-verifiable. There were many verifiable non-measurable changes, but few verifiable measurable changes.

Most review team members felt that there were many positive impacts of PRESUD, but these were mostly non-measurable and qualitative. These included raising of awareness, focusing attention on sustainability, gaining a fresh and external perspective, organisational and individual learning and potential exchange of best-practices, understanding how other cities work.

'stimulates politically driven or endorsed change……….A solid challenge to the leadership in a City!………..Enables an external overview of the authorities process, can also be used to support members and managers of the municipality in making necessary changes…….Generates informed and focused discussion on key SD issues and enables targeted action…………To develop (or reinvigorate) interest in and commitment to Sustainable Development…………….To develop the basis for a useful tool for strengthening Sustainable Development……….PRESUD provokes reflection on the part of the city being reviewed which can then lead to positive change re sustainable development. This is particularly useful to cities that do not have any formal kind of reporting or audit procedures………..Remind politicians and public/private organization the urgency of improvement of sustainable development……….Useful exchange of best-practises………good stategic framework……..There is the foundation for developing a good tool and system, which can be used by other interested cities, which want to change something in their cities without knowing how to do it. So the methodology and the learning experiences can help to change their approach and develop successful strategies for implementing sustainability………Awareness of the need to cooperate and to communicate within the city and between cities. This is a slow process and if managed carefully it will certainly have great impact. Within the time frame of the project some small success can be shown, but the real results will be visual after a few years…….. PRESUD is an excellent method to examine other cities. everybody can learn a lot……..The process and model has been reviewed on the basis of feedback from initial reviews. It can be further improved based on evaluation of second time around………..learning, learning, learning……..Difficult to fathom really from my involvement. There seemed to be clear differences in some areas, some stronger than others……….The impact strongly depends on the working people and the department who actually implement the PRESUD………..Some areas for improvements actioned………..The PRESUD process and model have made our City review its own practice on sustainable development. This has had to be done corporately, "joining up" parts of the Council which do not always communicate well. For this reason alone it has had a very positive impact…………very good external view for the activities of a city good exchange of views, best practices and ideas…………..The impact of PRESUD will be dwarfed by the requirement of the British Gov't for sustainable communities to be considered during the 2nd round of corporate assessment………..Learning and Openess………The national and cultural differences are difficulties but also necessary for a successful review and project. It would not do any good to let 10 cities from the same country do peer reviews……..The outcome has been that the "foreigners'" reports with comments and suggestions first caused a negative reaction but also consideration, at least within some fields……….Better understanding of how other cities work with these issues plus getting internal stakeholders more interested in SD……..The biggest impact is that it focuses attention on sustainability within a Municipality and can be used as a lever for change………..Sharing of methodological

approach; Awareness raising of importance of sustainable development; Chance to work with others whom one would not have otherwise met; Working things through with manager - he is conscientious and cares about sustainability (sometimes it showed too much); Interested people can use this instrument, but it doesn t convince uninterested……..Individual learning, particularly for the people who participate in the reviews. Cities have the opportunity to take a look at what they do through the review team's eyes………..A better understanding of how sustainable development is managed in the cities…………..It's very educational and interesting! It's a big opportunity for the councils to get ideas of how to improve! A week is maybe to short review time………….The process has many levels, and it´s very interesting. Maybe we can´t know all the consequences now……….In my opinion, the most important impact of the PRESUD project is putting different cities in communication with each other and facilitating the exchange of experience and good practice. Moreover, cities choose to take part in the project, and are both examiners and under examination. This creates a true atmosphere of "peer review", which has nothing to do with an ordinary top-down examination. In the course of the interviews, and in the report as well, there is sufficient room for giving relevant suggestions and indicating possible way forwards to the solutions of the sustainability challenges that cities face…….. strong awareness raising potential - makes officers and politicians look at their governance with a fresh angle - forces dialogue within the city between actors (public and other)……..Learning about structures and problems of different city administrations. Process gives impulses for sustainable development (What could be done better)………makes people aware and can share learning from each others city's and experiences……….All involved people learned a lot about the situation in other cities and personal contacts could be made. So there is the base for a new network, which could strengthen new ideas, strategies and schemes because of a broadening or deepening basis and a better common understanding of certain issues…….opportunity for systematic assessment and the chance to develop a co-ordinated action plan to address gaps and weaknesses as well as recognising strengths and celebrating them…The biggest impact is to focus attention on the issue of sustainability within a Municipality…

But this positive view was balanced by a negative view of change expressed by team members. These related mostly to the absence of evidence, the limited ownership and engagement in the process and SMART plans, the lack of support and commitment for the approach and evidenced change.

…….Not much evidence of specific actions related to first review; perhaps it was too soon, but then again we should have noticed at least some evidence of intended actions………..Found very limited evidence that it had had any real impact…………Only the co-ordinators knew the SMART-Action Plan. That Plan was based on existing schemes in the city……… Not any great evidence of a big impact. However, lots of political change in the intervening period…….lack of real committment by the city.

 ''It is not likely to lead to change in every case, because this is depending on the openness for changes in each of the cities. If there is a willingness in the cities to question their performance than PRESUD can support this and will initiate something for sure. But if there is no flexibility and a lack of a culture of searching for better solutions than PRESUD will have no or very small impact on the current situation…..Mixed feelings among those we interviewed. Some said yes some said no…………Doesnt seem to get the buy in from higher levels……….The closest involved politicians have got new experiences of there own administration that they had no

idea of. Consequently they have launched some projects to improve things……….Lack of commitment on top level………the opportunity is there, but someone with power has to catch it………….Extremely depends on interest/willingness of the city administration……..Whether there are any changes depend on the specific situation in each city. There evidences that cities are willing to change things on basis of PRESUD, but other cities do not deal with PRESUD properly. These cities fulfil their agreed obligations, but they do not use PRESUD for questioning their own strategies, schemes and structures…….Based on first reviews-depends on 'ownership' and interest both political and officer within host organisation. Changes driven by enthusiasm/commitment/work of project co-ordinators………new senior management and new political teams and not convinced of their commitment…….No pressure No power No money…..' ''the previous review did not engage with the politicians…..some improvements have been made, but still hard to assess the extent of the improvements…The actions selected were a bit soft; but some progress had been made……varied outcomes achieved   as the city undertaking large restructure……the first report should have been public and widely spread within the administration but was not……Not much had happened since the last review…..Difficult to judge since I did not take part in the first review. As a general impression, there were improvements but I could not judge the extent of those improvements…….Not much evidence of specific actions related to first review; perhaps it was too soon, but then again we should have noticed at least some evidence of intended actions……...found very limited evidence that it had had any real impact…………Only the co-ordinators knew the SMART-Action Plan and that Plan was based on existing schemes in the city; the proposals of the first review were definitely not used for the SMART-Action Plan……..Not any great evidence of a big impact…. lots of political change in the intervening period.''

These positive and negative viewpoints of change were supported by team managers who noted that although it was difficult to measure important changes, change could still be described. For instance by meeting stakeholders involved in programmes or initiatives and assessing their engagement, and progress through discussion or interviews, and assessing ownership and the commitment of leadership needed for change. Positive qualitative changes resulting from PRESUD included: additional stakeholder engagement, a less fragmented approach to sustainability, and directly gaining commitment of key decision makers through interviewing. One important qualitative criteria of impact was whether a recommendation had been mainstreamed in the municipality plans and strategies.

''with something like sustainability, it impacts on quality of life if you talk to somebody and you say what's the impact of doing something, people don't go it was great I had three slices of quality today or something like that, they describe the changes, And these are the same sort of issues around sustainability. It's almost intangible. Yes there's a lot of focus on the technical aspect but the change a lot of it is is really intangible in attitude change and inception change, and that is incredibly difficult to measure………..'we ran the workshop with stakeholders to gather evidence and actually test how involved they'd be, how many attendants they are at key meetings and so forth. We saw minutes from the meetings, we met people who were involved in managing that process on strategic planning and got a sense of the rationale behind it and where there were gaps for instance in areas like stakeholder engagement, why those gaps were there. The rationale that they could actually articulate, why they were taking that particular stance. So we could see that there was a difference, we could see that they had a plan, we could see that they were

involving people, what I didn't expect which I was very interested in was that in terms of leadership, the authority is now moving on. (Team Manager City 8)

'The relevance of any improvement plan can only be measured against and gauged by the ownership and acceptance of it, and the commitment to own it and go forward with it. It's down to leadership to determine what level of resource, and what priorities, they want - it will all hinge on how widely the recommendations are shared how engaged the politicians are about them, where ownership of actions and recommendations will sit, and there will have to be decisions about priorities and budgets" (team manager city 5)

'The team coming in has – by meeting with stakeholders have the opportunity to raise issues that of concern amongst the stakeholders that otherwise would not have been raised. We have enabled stakeholders to have a voice over what they normally would have had, so we have either heightened the importance or reinforced the views that might otherwise have been marginalized. In that sense we have changed the consultation patterns, where influence has been brought, and also in the *ways* of involving stakeholder groups – e.g the PRESUD process can be an education for the city – this has value, it can be an educational experience for the city" (team manager city 4)

''in the first review their work was very fragmented so there was a lot of fragmentation when we went back, one of the first things that I saw immediately was that they had responded to our challenge that they should have one unified strategic plan to pull together some of the disparate elements" (Team Manager, 8)

'where PRESUD does have an impact is in interviewing the key decision makers, and it's the key decison makers that provide leadership – and the interview is able to develop commitment within those key decision makers, simply by the act of interviewing them – if it's a good penetrating interview then they can have an impact in assisting to develop commitment which brings that commitment to bare on the subject. Once you have the key decision makers engaged then change can flow; that's the change management. That's probably were PRESUD can have the most impact – less on technical and more on change management by engaging directly with the key decision makers – then the process of PRESUD by then exposing those key decision makers to public description pronouncement and presentation, has the effect of immediately deepening their commitment and change flows from that (but one of the weaknesses is getting that good penetrating interview). In change management, you interview the key decision makers, get them to give a basic commitment, and present them with an action plan they sign up to, that's the process we mimic in PRESUD" (team manager city 3)

''Some improvements (in the UK) did find their way into CPA improvement plan, and on that basis the audit commission will make a judgement next time round, so if one recommendation finds its way into relevant strategies or planning, then it has migrated into the mainstream and is therefore sustained and improved thereafter without PRESUD. That would then put ownership onto the key officers in the municipality, and you have a sustained journey towards improvements. If this process is to work and if these cities are committed to sustainable development, then one measure is what the review has left – what has been embedded into the systems and into the municipality. PRESUD can make sure it has happened" (team manager city 5)

Coordinators and stakeholders also noted positive qualitative changes. These included; the simple process of being interviewed making interviewees prepare and think during discussion, the social and peer pressure that emerges out of the review, learning through engagement in the process, improved organisation, changes *within* the administration, joint working and networking with colleagues in other departments, increased and broadened awareness within the organisation, awareness of what was possible from other cities, involvement in more municipality discussions and increased contacts, change associated with those most directly involved in the process, increased engagement, awareness, visibility, joint working, the development of plans, increased stakeholder participation, and implementation of (some) recommendations.

'The truth is in going through an interview, it makes me think about what I need to do to contribute to the agenda so when officers are having a later discussion is when we think again about the need for sustainability issues, the importance of them being integrated into the quarterly performance report. By just that as a trigger makes me think well actually we need to do something about this. So just the interview process itself with PRESUD you found useful because it engages conversation with somebody it feels as if you've got to think about it. " (internal stakeholder city 6)

'The strengths of it is already in a name of the project, so they've chosen a very good name is **PEER Preview**, and the peer is also peer pressure and I find it very important to have recalled social pressure, not peer pressure but social pressure. The social pressure is rather strong or you can use it rather strong and that's I think the main power behind it, also that you are coming back and that you are reporting on it, reporting the progress it makes that people do want to perform. We are all social animals as people and social groups and social things and it's very strange that you only use money instruments or legal law giving or enforcing instruments but not your social interaction between people.   That I find very, very strong in PRESUD.' (Coordinator City 2)

'you get a bit smarter after the first one and it's a learning process as well for us, you see what works. And we start organising ourselves, you know we start using stuff that's happening in Europe to start arguing for better performance on sustainability and that means we go to meetings and we make contacts with the right kind of people. We start talking to people in policy, and we start strengthening our contacts, our relationships with people in all the departments. And so I would say as a result of this second review personally I've been invited to go to other department sustainability meetings. Now that is a clear knock-on effect of one of the internal stakeholder workshops that we held in the second review. All of a sudden people understand who you are, what you do and start asking you to go along to meetings. However, we still don't have a network, a cross-departmental network and that would be one of the key findings of the second review'' (Coordinator 1)

'I think the biggest changes that it can make are in the people who are actually involved in the review process. It has an enormous impact on those given the possibility to compare, to learn, they have an enormous impact there on quite possibly what they end up doing on that in their day to day running of the administration. I think then that the next group of people who are influenced are those that then have to implement any changes that are going to come about as a

result of PRESUD; the group of people who are interviewed here and the kind of exchanges they have during the interviews…..the impact of PRESUD gets less and less on people who are less involved in the process. I see it very much internal to the city, in our experience." (Coordinator City 8)

''I think the strengths of PRESUD in our city has been that we have pulled people together from other departments - colleagues from other departments not just from environment department but also from spatial planning and others - to involve in the project and to involve in the interview teams, in the peer review teams. I think that was good for the project and also good for the city because it is easier to integrate ideas about sustainability. Also in a political way, it puts sustainability more on the agenda. There are possibilities to put it on to the agenda. I think that's a good instrument but if you ask me is it also done in that way today maybe put sustainability on the agenda". (Internal Stakeholder City 2)

''we're not talking about even the smart action plan, it's almost like the part that is becoming more important is the exchange part, the interviews, the going off to another city, it's not about the target you've come up with in your smart action plan. An awful lot of people put a lot of things they had already planned to do in because they have to and they know they only had eighteen months to come up with something……..'So increase the number of exchanges to have a **multiplier effect** on the local level, the people that are involved in the interviews, try to get them to be catalysts, or other groups of people, I see the moment of contact between people is perhaps more powerful and more able to bring about more impact on the part of PRESUD than the actual smart action plan'   "I just think that it's a logical consequence of like who are the people that are most impacted by PRESUD and, therefore, more likely to make a change in their city as a result of PRESUD. (Coordinator City 8)

''I think PRESUD has helped to see some things that need to be done here, and I think there are more politics are involved, but overall its on a high level, I think it has helped to change things here, I can see progress – in our team we have made a year of plans to achieve more on items" (stakeholder 15, manager, city 2)

''It has made important impacts, on our ruling council and such committees we now want to know more what electors think, let the public give an opinion, to listen the public, we now follow-up on programmes more, and that approach is now on our agenda, it is brought up by our politician, I think because of PRESUD, also we are starting some investigation of one of a major critical point recommended by the review team, to find ways to improve the situation.'' (Coordinator City 2)

some impact (in improving participation for instance) but the municipality still needs to develop important areas where we have real problems (unemployment, land use, and traffic). (coordinator city 7)

''last year I saw good changes from department 2 (a non-environmental department) and they were more involved, they listened more to the senior politician, I think he has become more visible, even if specific actions don't work out….There were several actions taken, and one important was to take a cross-department project team from several departments, linked to senior politician level, the team has been formed linking four department, and they have started working" (Stakeholder 13: City 2)

However only a limited part of the organisation (usually the environmental department) owned PRESUD and this was commonly recognised as an issue which compromised the potential of the project; change and impact was therefore limited and perhaps could be doubled simply by increased ownership and engagement. One way to increase the impact is to have greater engagement in the review, but this could be supplemented by creating interactions between those that were involved in the review, sometime after review to re-engage them. External stakeholders were typically only involved in the review and saw this as the major outcome, so they would benefit from re-engagement as they were not aware nor informed of any consequences or changes, which could also be rectified.

''what you need is more integrating of social partners, economic partners in the city for sustainability is not only environment and I think its too much environment and the reason for this is because it was also organised from our department and the environmental colleagues'' (Internal Stakeholder City 2)

'The environment department itself does not have all the money, but department 2 can generate money in its development work, so there is this weakness in the process from the beginning – I think in the first round maybe only 50% of the possibilities (for change and improvement) were realised, simply because only 50% of the organisation was responsible and involved''(Stakeholder 13: City 2)

Coordinators had higher hopes for organisational and personal change than for changes in the city environment due to PRESUD:

'I think the most we can hope for and this is what PRESUD brings about changes in the administration itself and I think this is what the local team is hoping for. In terms of the impact of PRESUD it is very much focussed on people within the city administration as opposed to external stakeholders. Ideally it would be brilliant if there were more external stakeholders involved but it wasn't practical to do it in the second review because the project hasn't reached them." (Coordinator City 8)

''perhaps one way of increasing the impact of PRESUD is to increase these interactions in some way. Perhaps half of the people that were interviewed here don't know who the other half are, perhaps the next thing to do is try and bring all of those people together and get some kind of interaction going between them, use the second review, the presentation of that, an opportunity to bring everybody together and try and structure it as a participants workshop not just a presentation." (Coordinator City 8)

'its politically good to have a certain position in the peer review and to be viewed as such, but I don't think it makes a lot of difference – I'm a bit sceptical – because its very solitary action within this very large local government – it's a needle point only – I think it's a good thing for environmental sustainability but within the whole operations of government its very small, I think the politics will react like they did last time – it all depends on how its edited and translated. I remember last year it the press were well involved but if they start digging that's what nobody wants – people want good news to be in the press not bad news – and they rightfully so try to make it as politically correct as it can be, I have not seen any changes because of it, I have not heard of any changes because of it, I have not heard anything of what has happened beyond the action plan, Its been over a year and I did not think about PRESUD, I received a PRESUD newsletter but not on the situation in my city. For the

second review I had to go back to my cupboard to find out what it was about. But I still think my city does not yet have a full policy – as an outsider it looks just the same" (External Stakeholder 1, Manager, City 2)

Providing evidence of change was often not about quantitative measurement against targets with data, but often a statement of what had happened. Such qualitative assessments of change can be done by a municipality self-assessment process by re-engaging the stakeholders through individual meetings, but perhaps better by workshops.

"you pull it together like a progress report. I contacted all the relevant people who were listed as being responsible for particular actions and we were able to produce a kind a self-assessment of how much progress had been made in time for the second review………the process was simply contacting all the responsible people and asking them what progress had been made on each specific point and I asked them to provide me with statements or comments or evidence of what things had changed since the action plan was agreed." (Coordinator City 6)

So preparing to evidence impact in the second review involved something like: 'here is what we have decided to do, here is what has been done' and that could provide evidence for the second peer review team. But not all coordinators nor teams followed this approach. It should be noted that many qualitative and non-measurable changes and impacts were generally not recorded. These have been underestimated by the project and were generally valued by most stakeholders. This is relevant because change depends upon senior involvement and this would be increased by recording the evidence of change.

"if we were able to provide concrete evidence of what the project has achieved in the past already, I think that would be the strongest appeal to senior people……..'I know it's unlikely that we are able to say that we increased in quantitative terms but at least if we can point to a number of qualitative and learning benefits then I think those of very worth while" coordinator (6)

The suggestion was that if evidence gathering is improved then in future more senior managers might take notice; the more that happens the more evidence will be forthcoming.

10.5 Uncertainty, Doubt and little Evidence of Significant Measurable External Change, Requiring Development of Improved Mixed Indicator Sets by Municipalities

Summary Section 10.5

There was a net positive belief that PRESUD could lead to changes in the municipality, but there was no net belief that this would lead to measurable change of between 10 and 25%.

Team members were also unsure that all improvements in sustainable development were generally measurable at all, or that stated targets could be achieved, and their views on this were more negative than positive. Participants doubted the 10-25% target, its meaning, its measurement, and criteria, and its attainment, and they further doubted that significant external change could be achieved in such a short (18 month) time scale. Many team members felt that the degree of change was uncertain. They also commented upon how change in the municipality depended upon the particular context, the city, administration, politicians, and coordinators, ownership and commitment, and therefore that PRESUD could never guarantee measurable change.

Coordinators and stakeholders also noted difficulties in measuring and stimulating change. Some felt the project, cities, and review teams had not created measurable criteria and indicators. Some felt measurable changes would probably not be possible. Some felt that changes would be small changes and slow, perhaps leading to notable changes in the longer term (5 years). Stakeholders wanted to see better use of evidence and targets, and questioned how PRESUD could state changes had occurred without the use of such evidence. Stakeholders also agreed that change depended upon the political context, and the level of engagement in the project. If this changed in the course of the project then it could reduce or remove possibility of change, if it was weak then impacts would be negligible.

Evidencing change would require mixed qualitative and quantitative criteria and indicators of change. It was important to better develop the data that would evidence change, yet this had been weak in the project, and it must be flexible to reflect the differences in the different municipalities, it must include clear measures relevant to the timescale, it needed a combination of local and national indicators, which were mixed qualitative and quantitative, referring to changes within the municipality and externally in the city also. Such a 'mixed indicator basket' would require participation of the municipality to develop it, and this would be relevant to the needs of the municipality utilising existing data and measures, and would be relevant to the organisations strategic plan. This would ensure both practicality of the task and relevance to the municipality. The mixed indicators basket would be critically reviewed by the review team, who also draw on their knowledge of their own indicator baskets thereby exchanging ideas and best practice.

It was noted that PRESUD was a useful tool but the changes could be subtle and depended upon how the tool was used by participants and municipalities. Furthermore PRESUD could aid progress but if PRESUD went badly (such as with delayed or weak review reports, See Chapter 9) it could impede progress towards

sustainable development, as it then damaged the credibility of those associated with it.

Overall there was doubt, uncertainty and variability across all participant groups on the resulting measurable change occurring in the municipality and on the measurable impacts of PRESUD upon sustainability within the time scale and if this was possible at all. In this sense PRESUD has overstated what it can achieve. Part of the problem is linked to difficulty and inconvenience in generating, agreeing, gathering and monitoring similar indicators across all cities. Partly it is that coordinators do not have power to engage others in this work. Partly it is that significant change takes longer than the project envisaged. Partly is that the changes and impacts associated with PRESUD reviews are mostly qualitative and therefore are not recorded.

Team members & Team managers

When review teams were asked about the likelihood of change resulting from their own review only 20 (of 42) agreed that PRESUD was likely to lead to changes in the municipality (with others mostly uncertain). When asked to comment on the claim and objective that PRESUD would improve sustainable development (by 10-25%) only 12 members agreed, 10 disagreed, and 20 were uncertain.

Evaluating PRESUD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The PRESUD process is likely to lead to changes within the municipality.	4	16	19	2	1
The PRESUD process is likely to improve sustainable development (by around 10-25%).	3	9	20	6	4

So there was a net positive belief that PRESUD could lead to changes in the municipality, but no net belief that this would lead to *measurable* change of between 10 and 25%.

Many team members commented upon how change in the municipality depended upon the particular context, the city, administration, politicians, and coordinators, ownership and commitment.

The following short comments illustrate this view and were given by different individual team members after 2nd review visits:

'It depends on how serious they in the municipality take it BUT it also depends on how much further we help them…..it's dependant upon the political will within the municipality……..the host council is largely committed as a participant but the PRESUD model cannot demonstrate that it was responsible for the change……it is not likely to lead to change in every case, because this depends on the openness for changes in each of the cities. If there is a willingness in the cities to question their performance than PRESUD can support this and will initiate something for sure. But if there is no flexibility and no culture of searching for better solutions than PRESUD will have little or no impact on the current situation…………there were mixed feelings

among those we interviewed; some said yes some said no………it doesn't seem to get the buy in from higher levels….there's a lack of commitment on the top level…………the opportunity is there but someone with power has to take it….its extremely dependent upon the interest and willingness of the city administration……..it depends on 'ownership' and the interest of the politician and officer within the host organisation…… changes are driven by the enthusiasm/commitment/work of project co-ordinators…..there are new senior management and new political teams and I am not convinced of their commitment…….whether there are any changes depend on the specific situation in each city. There is evidence that some cities are willing to change things on basis of PRESUD, but other cities do not deal with PRESUD properly. These cities only fulfil their agreed obligations, but they do not use PRESUD for questioning their own strategies, schemes and structures" (comments of different review team members after 2nd Round of reviews)

So many team members felt that change was uncertain and it was certainly beyond the powers of PRESUD to guarantee change.

Team members were also unsure that improvements in sustainable development were generally measurable, or that the stated targets could be achieved, and their views on this were more negative than positive. Negative comment doubted 10-25% targets, its meaning, its measurement, and criteria, and its attainment, and doubted significant external change could be achieved in such a short (18 month) time scale.

''the city recognised that their smart action plan was not well done and did not provide a base point for the second assessment to judge their progress, nevertheless the city consider that they have taken the essence of the first assessment and delivered this progress…….The reviews have given us a better idea of how to make improvements which are sustainable, based on past and current good practice…yes, because of the decision to take part in such in project the politicians and senior staff members of the municipalities have signaled awareness and willingness to adopt ideas from other cities and to implement changes for more sustainability…It will help to improve sust. but not up tot 10 or even more 10%. Unrealistic target……What does it mean 10-25 %? Who is calculating the improvement as percentage? ………I don't think I can judge the exact percentage, but I'm sure it will improve sustainable development"………'Not sure. This is ambitious for a short term target!…….There are many players around the issue of sustainable development. It's not such easy to improve, I think……some fairly massive behavioural changes needed first e.g. in relation to consumption…… Unsure -dependent on what measures are being used?……Bit dubious about this as the bottom line is still cost rather than sustainability for Municipalities……….It completely depends on how susceptible the community is!……Don't think there was this level of commitment to it in City Y particularly in view of money saving and budget cuts! ……..its time limited and can only plant seed of awareness and needs to be longitudinal beyond 18 months……. they are focused on economic and social development…….please make me 10 % more lucky - how will you do this?……..No pressure, No power, No money - only paper…….Even in cities where are involved civil servants are keen to use PRESUD the initiated changes seem not to be in a scale in order to improve sustainability in that wide range."

There was a widely expressed view that progress was possible but it was not (all nor mainly) measurable, and there was uncertainty and doubt that it would or could be. This led to the call for mixed qualitative and quantitative criteria and indicators of change.

'all the actions are in progress, you can always say there is some progress, but we cant say its 1% or something; we are working more strongly together on our plans, the review has increased contacts between the different departments - you cant measure it. '' (Team member City 7)

'I am not certain PRESUD has technical impact – I think its strength lies in its examination of processes; the way things are managed, rather than technical questions, my gut feeling is that its greatest impact is to flush out, to accelerate process-driven changes, the way things are managed rather than a technical change e.g. as would be prompted by the benchmark" (team manager city 3)

''One of the big difficulties we had was actually measuring change, we all thought that it would be easy to measure change. But because of all the variables we have ended up with almost gut-reactions, feelings, opinions – measurable in quantifiable terms has been difficult to do – but measurable in terms of having evidence of somebody's change in opinion, or a marginal change, e.g. this didn't take place and now it does take place, this report wasn't there or wasn't used but now it is, so we can evidence change but it's a lot more complex to evidence that change than we thought it would be, and part of the inexperience of the team is that we didn't train them for this or they don't have understanding of what counts as evidence of change – we have used ordinary officers and they are not trained as researchers and they are not trained to do this, and they have struggled in gathering evidence of change" (Team manager city 4)

''I think there is an argument for both hard and soft indicators of change the trouble is that qualitative conversations and responses don't necessarily give you the evidence – if the first set of smart action plans are left with those cities in a way that can be verified – if something is only partly achieved then that is work in progress, going back on the second review you can say a number N of the targets are not or partially achieved, subsequently we agree what are you going to do about it and those N plans are still in progress, but you might also make some new recommendations x y and z and so it becomes an evolving process, or the methodology continues and becomes a periodic review, or is there some iteration of the recommendations" (team manager city 5)

Some things could nevertheless be counted, as proxy measures, but criteria need to be created:

''Because the prominence, and the intention of the first review generated and the second review, when we came to the presentation, had to be moved to a bigger room because so many people turned up to hear the findings of the second review. Which was not the case on the first review." (Team Manager City 8)

Coordinators & Other Stakeholders

There was positive support for PRESUD by coordinators and stakeholders, but there were difficulties in measuring and stimulating change. Some felt the project, cities, and review teams had not created measurable criteria and indicators. Some felt measurable changes would probably not be possible. Some felt that changes would be small changes and slow, perhaps leading to notable changes in the longer term (5 years):

''Overall I evaluate the value of PRESUD positively without doubt. The changes are small but gradual. It should be seen as small footsteps placed one at the time and not as a great leap forward. The trick is to do it gradually, to make it last and have a real impact. You can do it quick and dirty, but than it would not last and therefore would not be sustainable….together (these small changes) will help us make a great step, where we will have made some visible improvements…its only helpful to make small steps – the city can choose to have quick gains or lasting effects – it's a deliberate choice, we chose the lasting option….you cant judge change due to PRESUD in a short time – it needs longer - one or two years is too short – six years is too long, but in four or five years you could see some notable changes' (Coordinator City 2)

''Impacts take place on three levels: Firstly, the personal level: PRESUD has had a great impact on the people who have been involved in reviews and training in terms of learning about best practice/issues in other cities and also learning about their own city. Secondly, the group of people involved in the first review: the review report had a certain impact in that comments or suggestions led to reflection on small but important issues. Thirdly, the City level: Little impact" (Coordinator City 8)

''It is very difficult to say what are the actual impacts. We joined this project to get help for my work and to find gaps in our sustainable development work, but also to show our good practises to other cities. And this project has helped a lot in my work and I know what should be done differently. This project has mainly been among the administration, politicians were not so much involved. Recommendations of the first report were reported to politicians in city government. For sure recommendations about citizen's participation, unemployment and integration of land use planning and traffic have been listened to very carefully." (Coordinator City 7)

''I don't like this 10-25% target and I don't believe it. I don't know how you can measure it, or know the starting point or how you would estimate it – even if you could it might only be 2% - but I cant really say because its not possible to measure it. I think it should be measured or judged in other ways – for instance how satisfied citizens are with the activity of the city'' (Coordinator City 7)

''We did not choose parameters we could measure, and maybe its too short time between the review and now, these are long processes and it takes time, you may have to wait 15 years for the benefits in some cases, so maybe 10-25% is possible but not in a year, some things we can manage but not all." (Coordinator City 4)

''''It wont be easy and it wont be overnight but it's a first step and then I think PRESUD is process of small steps but it helps you to make those steps and I didn't see any other instrument I know which helps you in this way and it's a very positive way to make a step, it's not from a negative attitude or he has to do it because it's

law he has to do it from this now it's because you want to do it and it's beneficial to the city……..'Weaknesses - I have found that second review is too quick after the first review, you want to have real progress and real progress you don't make overnight. One and a half year this was even less than that, it was too short because you have the normal cycle of getting things approved within the city council, then you have to have the budget, you have to get time for the people who have to do human resources you have to get free and that is very difficult to get it in one and half years" (coordinator 2)

Stakeholders (particularly external) wanted to see better use of evidence and targets, and questioned how PRESUD could state changes had occurred without the use of such evidence.

'Every city should say what they want to achieve in a plan, the data should checked independently and be verifiable to see if they have reached their goals, if you don't have that they can say anything (to the review team), and you don't know if its true or not. You (the team) need to compare it with all the other cities. I never saw this happening. Its no good to say the air quality is good and has improved, without the data, your data was not always correct (same on waste also), the peer review report was wrong. You can not say once you have the numbers that it is OK, because we can show that the city produces numbers and we know its not true, if you don't have an independent check, you cant say the numbers are right"
(External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

'That's what I think is not so good in the peer review – its lost the strategic vision on sustainability, you need to combine operations and strategy, target them, and measure their impact" (External Stakeholder 1, Manager, City 2)

On change it was noted that PRESUD was a useful tool but the changes could be subtle and depended upon how the tool was used. Furthermore PRESUD could aid progress but if when PRESUD went badly (such as with delayed or weak review reports) it could paradoxically impede progress towards sustainable development, as it damaged the credibility of those associated with it.

''PRESUD is a valuable *tool* if used wisely, it can be a used as a crowbar to get change – one significant action was strongly enforced by PRESUD which otherwise would not have survived budget cuts. ''PRESUD gave my team more influence and power, and we can build on this, it can be a (political/administrative) pressure tool, you need to see it as such, and use it as such – but you need also to compromise and give in where necessary – to know what is important, when to step back, and when to stand your ground" (Coordinator City 2)

'' because of one significant success (due to PRESUD) others are possible – your informal status can rise with success and then you can do more, you can build on the success, but equally problems can damage you – its important that PRESUD delivers (a little delay is acceptable, but months and repeating delay can cause huge credibility and time management problems. The same is with the finances. Not receiving the funds when it was promised more than 6 months ago, gives problems with the financial auditors which can and will hold back their approval on other (European) projects. Changing (EU) management demands e.g. time systems / financial reporting requirements can also undermine people views as you have to

waste their time – in asking the same thing in different formats etc.) failures increase the risk of further failures" "you get success – you get more success, you get failure you get more failure" (coordinator city 2)

Stakeholders also agreed that changes depended upon the political context, and the level of engagement in the project If this changed in the course of the project then it could reduce or remove possibility of change, if it was weak then impacts would be weak.

''..there is a new administration, new politicians. At the present stage the PRESUD report is a snapshot assessment of our approach to sustainable development as of spring of this year. How the politicians want to use that, how they want to move forward with it, I really don't know…It's only of use if those people who are making the structural changes to the organisation of the authorities financing, actually want to listen to it.   It doesn't have any great status…………cities agree to terms and conditions, to be partners and to share the risk but the reality was that there was an individual, relatively junior, in each of the cities who went through their own review process in the cities to get buy in either politically or officer level. Each of the cities got a different level of buy in, politically, technically and financially. If those cities then turn round and say well I'm sorry this is our understanding, this is all we can do, you cannot do much more. It's not a contractual issue, you cannot reinforce and at no stage can you actually push those cities too far, you've got to build a partnership and that means compromise. Part of the problem with the European Commission is there see it as a contract, they don't see it as a partnership (Coordinator city 5)

It was important to better develop the data that would evidence change, yet this had been weak in the project, and it must be flexible to reflect the differences in the different municipalities, it must include clear measures relevant to the timescale, it needed a combination of local and national indicators, which were mixed qualitative and quantitative, referring to changes within the municipality and externally in the city also. Such a 'mixed indicator basket' would require participation of the municipality to develop it, and this would be relevant to the needs of the municipality utilising existing data and measures, and would be relevant to the organisations strategic plan. This would ensure both practicality of the task and relevance to the municipality. The mixed indicators basket would be critically reviewed by the review team, who also draw on their knowledge of their own indicator baskets thereby exchanging ideas and best practice.

"Its about having some form of internal monitoring system within each participating city that tries to record all the hard and the soft evidence about what changes are taking place as and when they happen. It's very easy to say but much more difficult to do." (City Coordinator 6)

'I think it was a good idea to try to measure sustainability by interviews. I think the principle is good but you cannot miss out data. You need it. It is not always clear for every city and also when I do interview accept data, how the progress was in quantitative sense. How open are you about your progress? Because when you are very open in the output what you are doing, you can become much critical … you make it clear with data you want to measure the progress. I don't know how exactly we were able to really to measure the progress because every city is doing something different."   " (Internal stakeholder 14 City 6)

"there has to be clarity about is the things that are measurable over a reasonable period of time, both hard and soft, that we can meaningfully say, basically treating it almost like a basket of indicators………a combination of indicators that could be used almost as a proxy, a basket of indicators that we could say that over time we aim to get from where we are now to, you know, 'X' position we don't want to almost like have a situation where we are being pulled in different directions by different performance management requirements and regimes…………it needs to work across Cities because you've got to have something comparable and it's got to fit in with the local context because you don't want to be pulling in different directions, difficult balance. PRESUD could in each City say ''you come up with a set of indicators that tells us what you are trying to do with sustainable development''. You fit that into your context so you are not duplicating work, we'll come in and review that, you can tell us what it is in advance, we will give it come thought, where there is commonality across Cities…………….a review team could then come in and say OK what are your basket of indicators for sustainable development? have you got one?) what are they?" " (Internal stakeholder 38 City 6)

"if somebody said I want a basket of indicators in 6 months then we could generate certainly a basket of indicators based on what we already collect and with some ideas of things that we should collect, so I don't think it would be too difficult a job. To at least get a reasonable robust starting point. I don't think it would be too difficult… it can be not only relevant, but nationally relevant, it can be bottom up instead of being imposed from above, you can create it have a mixture of the local and national. ….the design shouldn't be designed in advance by PRESUD, make it bottom up. Then the review team come in and look at it, criticise it, talk about it, discuss it and tell them about other cities, it will be part of the review; the design and its contents and who's holding it, who's responsible for it is to the city. The critical point is that the basket has got to directly link to the organisations strategic plan, basically. Because unless it's mainstreamed in some way the people would lose focus." (Internal stakeholder 38 City 6)

11 PRESUD TRIALS SHOW WEB ENGAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS CAN IMPROVE PROCESS, INVOLVEMENT & DATA

A recognised issue of the PRESUD process is the limited number of stakeholders involved in giving views to the review team. There are instances of internal and external stakeholders wishing to be involved not being involved because of limited time of review team or through exclusion of critical voices not respected by those organising or conducting the reviews. A number of trials were conducted using the web to gain standardised information across many stakeholders, before or after review. These trials clearly showed the potential for the use of web-based approaches to support the peer review process. Although the web can not access all, and it is not representative, it can additionally engage and this has been achieved when supported. Additional benefits include the relatively low cost of data gathering and engagement, the standardisation possible across the project, and avoidance of large time commitments and avoidance of widespread travel and accommodation costs.

Web based surveys[8] were particularly successful on giving post-review information from team members, this was aimed at evaluating the process, but could include exchange of information from the review team to a wider group of stakeholders or for a parallel internet review. The surveys were standardised, and mixed qualitative and quantitative, and were therefore useful in looking across reviews. Wider web engagement of (non-team) stakeholders was trialed in four cities although most were concerned with evaluation of PRESUD rather than evaluation of the municipality. It was found that the technical applications developed work, and with the support of the municipality they can engage significant numbers of additional stakeholders and gain additional information.

In one City a media launch was trailed to announce the web site, but this did not lead to significant uptake as it was an open request rather than targeted to interested stakeholders on a database. This is not recommended as a main mechanisms but could be used additionally. In an attempt to gain pre-review information and engagement all municipality staff were to be contacted through a e-mail to all via the deputy leader. However the city backed out of the large scale trial because of problems in use of different e-mail systems and web browsers, and the representatives of the city saw this process as exclusionary (it could not practically be sent to all – so it is not clear why). Nevertheless the site address was placed passively on the municipality web site (without announcement) and it generated 45 additional replies (largely from municipality staff) showing the potential as an additional instrument to gather views. These mechanisms therefore demonstrate potential. In another attempt at pre-review engagement in another city a database of over 1000 people were accessed, and this generated 125 replies (4-5 times the number actually involved in the review). This generated significant information and engagement. In another city the final report was circulated via the web with an

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[8] These were developed by the researcher in collaboration with a young internet consultant; the direct costs of three web surveys were modest in salary time: around 6000Euro in consultant costs representing activity 1 day/week for several months (also with university servers to store the data). In short the web surveys are feasible and good value.

associated survey to which over 20 stakeholders replied showing the potential for post-engagement of stakeholders and feedback on the report. Similar trials had to be abandoned because of delays in final reports, but this instance clearly shows the potential for the approach. Note the aim of these trials was enablement of additional involvement of stakeholders and this potential has been demonstrated. The fact that some municipalities have been reluctant to be associated with such an open system for engagement suggests that the function should become part of the methodology initially utilising municipality contacts but independent of municipality control.

11.1 Pre-Review Engagement of Stakeholders

In PRESUD some stakeholders can be engaged in the review process before the review begins. This could be done using informal e-mail dialogues from the teams or coordinators. Alternatively it is possible to standardise findings using a short web survey. In PRESUD trials we developed a two-page survey to gather information in advance of reviews (a few weeks before). In trials to engage stakeholders before review, we offered a prize draw of a 100 euro Free Trade hamper as an incentive[9]. The first web page asked 8 simple questions which were either a single 'byte' or a choice of a drop down menu. Basic details included city, name, sex, age, e-mail & telephone, category (politician, employee of municipality, representative of another governance organisation, community organisation, citizen, academic, or other). The first web page is shown below.

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[9] if this seems 'expensive' note that in one trial we received 120 responses which worked out at cost of less than 1 euro per stakeholder. Furthermore the contact details were then stored on a database and were then available to PRESUD generally (and could have been used to disseminate reports, gaining comments, or in re-engaging stakeholders in learning across cities. This was not done but it could be). The potential for broader and more numerous stakeholder engagement – particularly in the internet age - is huge and currently untapped.

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PEER REVIEW FOR EUROPEAN
SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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28th July 2004

Contact Details: City Stakeholders   Search   Sitemap

THANKYOU FOR YOUR HELP.
AT THE END OF YOUR REGISTRATION YOU WILL BE PLACED IN A PRIZE DRAW!

Please register your interest in the Presud project. An independent team will review sustainable development in your city. Following this process contact those registered for their views.

Please note: The information supplied will be held solely for the purposes of the Presud project and will not be shared with external persons/organisations.

City: Den Hague, Holland ▼ ●   ● Required Fields

First Name: trevor ●   Family Name: wren ●

E-Mail: trevor.wren@ncl.ac.uk ●   Telephone:

Job Category: An academic ▼
Select one of the options below
A politician
Employee of municipality/local government
A representative of another government organisation
A representative of a community organisation
A representative of business
A citizen/resident of the city
An academic
Other

Age: Sex: Male ▼

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The second and final web page, asked a mix of open and closed questions. Examples of open questions included: **What would you advise the review team to focus upon and why?** Another was: **What specific recommendations would you give to the City Council to improve?** To which they could give a written response which reflected their viewpoints and interests. Closed questions can give measurable indicators for establishing change[10] can also be also be asked for instance: how would you rate the performance of the municipality in sustainable development? Option for tick-box answers could include: Very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative.

The second and final page of the trial web survey is shown below:

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[10] It is well known in the sustainable development community that closed standardised questions are useful for analysis and monitoring (and can easily be combined across *all* participating cities). Less well known is that *qualitative data* is useful in analysis and monitoring. With the 120 additional stakeholder engaged in one trial (4 time those in the actual review) short comments resulted (typically between a sentence and a paragraph). This appears useless taken one at a time but is useful taken collectively. The result is an informed summary. Qualitative analysis of *nine* cities (around 1000 responses) could also have easily been qualitatively analysed by the method of clustering (do the city summaries first, then summarise the summaries). The report findings were not as large as people expected (a few pages). This method is generally unknown and unused in the SD community.
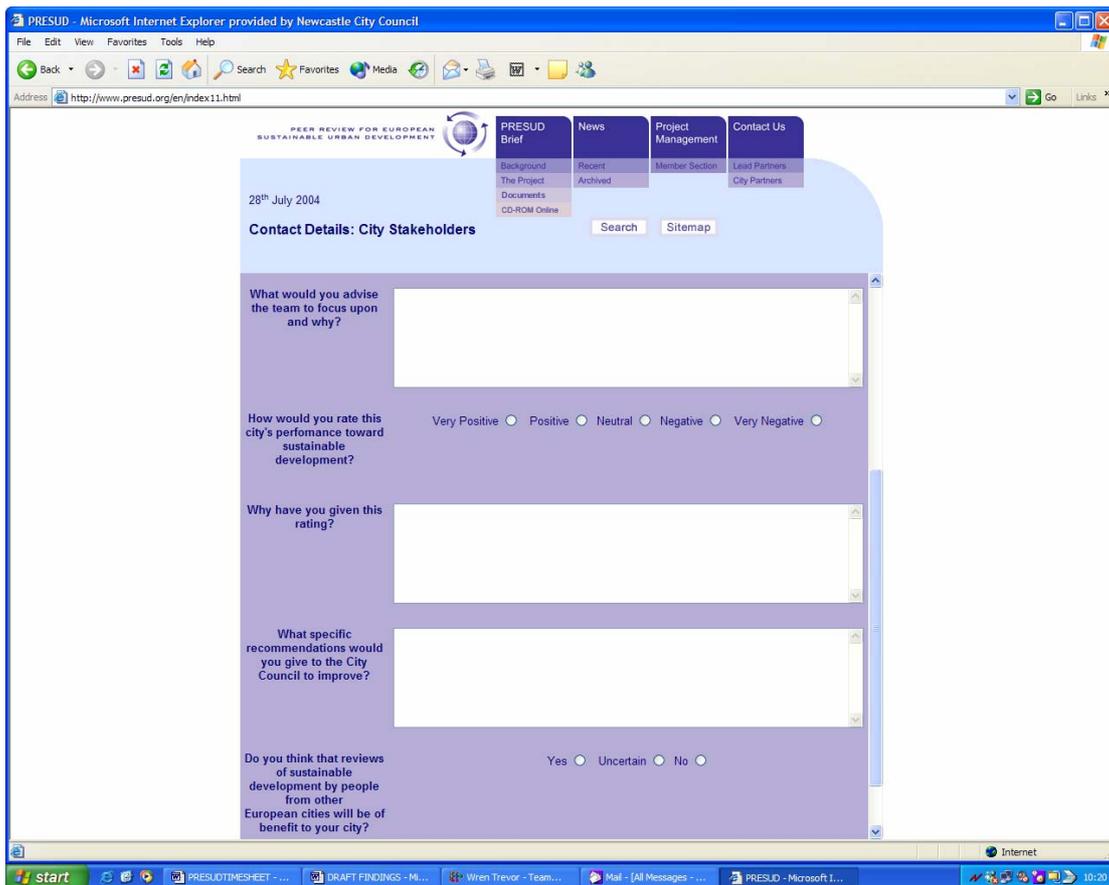
The data resulting from these two pages was quite informative and could be used to prepare the review teams before the review or to aid in their draft report after review.

11.2 Example Results from a web-engagement trial of stakeholders

A result of one trial is showed the potential use of such methods for (a) increasing stakeholder numbers, diversity, and engagement, and (b) for

How the respondents rated the progress towards sustainable development:
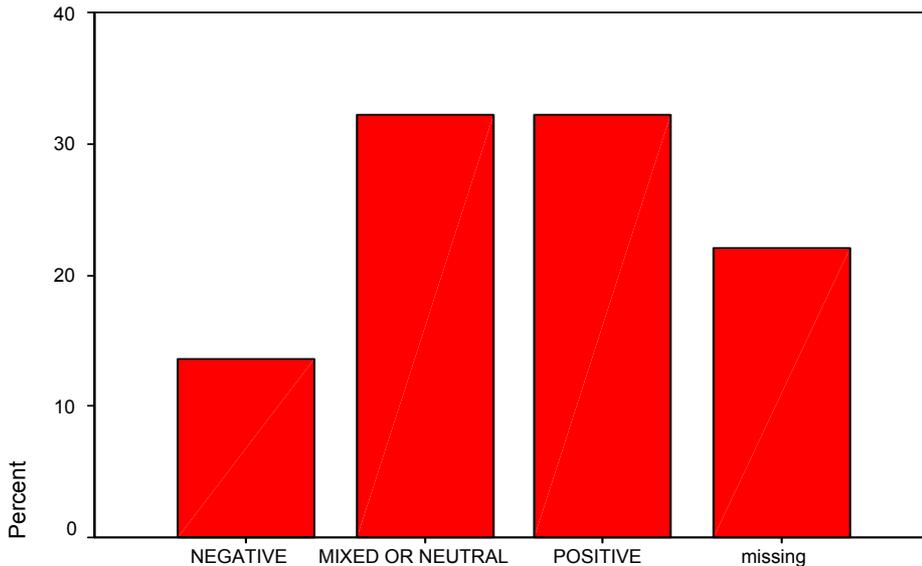
HOW WOULD YOU RATE MUNICIPALITY PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DE

From this sort of graph it can be seen that there were more positive than negative responses, many have mixed and neutral views and therefore there may be room to improve as viewed by this sample. This information can be used as an indicator for the review team. It is evidence.

Total number of Responses: **120**   Total rated responses: **94**

Total **Very Positive** responses: 5
Total **Positive** responses: 33
Total **Neutral** responses: 40
Total **Negative** responses: 13
Total **Very Negative** responses: 3

It also shows that there are few extreme judgements, such as very negative and very positive. This is additional evidence.

11.3 Clarifying and Improving Stakeholder Representation

In addition through internet surveys we can examine the sample and see where it is and is not representative of the population and whether it includes a broad spread of desired stakeholders. In the trial we could show

(a) Respondents typically had multiple interests.

> The interests of the sample can be arranged in descending order (by democratic priority). The interests were: democratic and community engagement (42 people), environment-social integration (40), and natural resources (36), transport (36), and environment-economic integration (36), energy (33 people), waste management (32), economic-social (28), regional integration (21), water (20), performance management (14), air management (11), leadership (10 people).

This shows the group had a broad spread of thematic interests, it was more likely that sustainable development was covered by this group. This meta-information[11] is important and should be used in qualifying findings in reports. For instance, if no-one mentioned performance management as an issue, we can infer that it is perhaps not (since there are people interested in it). However if no-one mentions performance management as an issue, and we do not know their interest, we can not infer it is not a problem

(b) The breakdown of respondents sampled was known and informative:

- Community and Representatives (49); including residents (24) representatives/activists (18) and politicians (5)
- Members of External Organisations (34); including 24 academics, and business representatives (4)
- Employees of the City Council (30)

So from such meta-information we can see that employees, community representatives, activists, and academics were well represented. But politicians and business representatives were not. This is important. For instance the comments gained may well express the views of academics and activists and the municipality (and therefore both critical and supportive stakeholders) but does clearly not express the views of two important stakeholder groups in sustainable development – business representatives and political representatives. This should be noted in the report. The report does not speak for political and business peers; furthermore this identifies a gap that can be filled.

(c) The demographics of the stakeholders can be determined

The sample was simply analysed in terms of age and gender, and I found that:

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[11] Meta-information is information *about* information. In this case the views of stakeholders is information. Understanding *who* is giving their views is meta-information. In the peer reviews meta-information was rarely reported or considered. This may contribute to exaggerated importance of certain findings and criticisms of reports.

- There were no under 20s and few over 60s.
- Those in 20-29 range were under-represented
- There were more women than men under 30 (2:3), but this was approximately reversed above 30 with more men than women.

Again this is useful meta-information. The views do not well-represent young and older people.

It is then possible to say some definitive things about this sample by combining results. For instance:

- If Young and old are under-represented, and
- If Business and political are under-represented

Then:

the (young or old) (politicians or business people) are very badly represented (and probably not at all)

Which is the case. The fact that young/old politicians/business representatives were not represented (*at all*) is meta-information; it is important and relevant in itself. It also suggests that how to improve - the team needs to get balancing views (not of more middle-aged municipality, academics, and community reps) but perhaps young and old business people and politicians. The information helps *design* a better review. Information detached from meta-information can be misinterpreted or over-generalised. The review report should state its known weaknesses – no young or old business nor politicians – this is not a failing it is useful information for the city and for future review teams.

Note that the qualitative calculations above apply equally to other forms of exclusions (from participation in governance). So it is highly likely that

Finally, I note that if such methods were use across cities then significantly more stakeholders would be involved in the overall project thereby increasing dissemination and ownership (e.g. 1000 additional stakeholders would be a reasonable outcome across nine cities, 10,000 in 100 cities) this information could be *statistically* considered and analysed. This then enables deeper questions and deeper qualifications of findings. For instance: do men feel differently to women across Europe about sustainable development in local government? This may be relevant if there is not a gender balance within PRESUD stakeholder – perhaps more women need to be involved (and so on).

In conclusion more engagement is possible, it is easier than sometimes claimed, it creates an accumulating resources, it gives better views, it gives meta-information with which to qualify reports and findings, and it can be used. Such approaches are quite easy but are neglected and can be dismissed as 'ineffective' or 'unnecessary'[12].

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[12] It is noted that these methods could have been used more in PRESUD and were not. It would have required little effort and no cost. It would have involved people who wanted to be involved and generates information. I call this form of stakeholder exclusion:

11.4 Survey of Review Teams following the Peer Review

The review teams were asked to complete an evaluation after each review. This asked overall questions about PRESUD, how they rated it, asked them to comment on various issues that were being evaluated, asked them comment upon the impacts and change due to PRESUD, and also upon the various stages of peer review. Some questions were simply tick-box type questions and therefore could be compiled quantitatively. For instance: how would you rate the PRESUD process? (with positive, neutral, negative options) others were purely qualitative with an open question: what are the overall impacts of PRESUD? (with a box for written responses). Many were mixed quantitative-qualitative questions. For instance, a statement would be given (the PRESUD process should be continued) and they choose a response (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) but also add to this by in response to the prompt Why? How? Additional comments? Which they then write into a box. In another type of mixed quantitative-qualitative question participants are directly involved in *action evaluation*[13]. For instance: Give your view of external stakeholder engagement in the review (with tick options of positive to negative), followed immediately by an associated question: How could this be improved? With a commentary box for participants to write their views. The team survey screen is shown below:

'methodological exclusion'. By restricting the engagement methods, municipalities can exclude interested stakeholders (unintentionally).

[13] This comes from the Action Research approach of Kurt Lewin (1946), or for a readable account see Stringer (1996). This is research with the aim of acting upon the social world or process of interest (rather than contributing to knowledge). Action evaluation is therefore evaluation that is explicitly designed to result in changes to the process or programme. Participant Action evaluation is such evaluation done by participants within the programme.

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Address   http://www.presud.org/cgi-bin/presud/q3/evaluation.pl

A. FEEDBACK ON OVERALL PRESUD PROCESS AND MODEL

Please consider the overall approach, impacts, and value of the whole PRESUD from all your experience and understanding.

1. How would you rate the PRESUD process and model from your overall experience of it? (Compulsory)
Very positive ○   Positive ○   Mixed or neutral ○   Negative ○   Very negative ○

Consider the specific areas below. First tick your view of each aspect, and type your comments for improvements. Check boxes are compulsory, comments are optional.

Key:
☺ Strongly agree
☺ Agree
☺ Neither/Nor
☹ Disagree
☹ Strongly disagree

Evaluating PRESUD	Your View	Why? How? Additional Comments?
The PRESUD process is likely to lead to changes within the municipality.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
The PRESUD process is likely to improve sustainable development (by around 10-25%).	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
The PRESUD process balances the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
The PRESUD process should be repeated and continued in the future.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
I would recommend the current PRESUD process to other cities in my country.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
The PRESUD process adequately reflects national and cultural practices.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
The PRESUD process would be improved if it were fully bilingual.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

2. What are the overall impacts of the PRESUD process and model?

Done   Internet

start   5 Microsoft Word ...   Wren Trevor - Tea...   Mail - [All Messages...   Received Mail - Re: ...   Presud Evaluation -...   WinZip - files.zip   15:05

11.5 Involving Stakeholders in Report Development and Evaluation

In evaluating the report another web survey was developed. The format is shown below. On the right hand side of the screen was the report (either translated or in English). This could be scrolled down for reference and for reading when addressing the questions. The questions were found on the left hand side of the report. The questions were a mixed. Some were statements and boxes to tick. For instance: 'the report is of good quality, choose from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Some were fully qualitative. For instance: how could the report be improved? Followed by a box in which comments could be written. Still other questions mixed the two approaches together. For instance: 'the report is likely to prompt change in the municipality', with options of reply from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', followed by a comments box, with the questions: why? how?

Frågeformulär för Malmö

Del B: Rapporten

B1. Rapporten **täcker** på ett tillfredsställande sätt dina kunskaps-, ansvars- eller intresseområden.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet
- ○ Håller med
- ○ Varken eller
- ○ Håller inte med
- ○ Håller inte alls med

B2. Problemen som identifierats I rapporten är **viktiga**.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet
- ○ Håller med
- ○ Varken eller
- ○ Håller inte med
- ○ Håller inte alls med

B3. Rapporten har hög **kvalitet**.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet
- ○ Håller med
- ○ Varken eller
- ○ Håller inte med
- ○ Håller inte alls med

B4. Rapporten innehåller **nya slutsatser**.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet
- ○ Håller med
- ○ Varken eller
- ○ Håller inte med
- ○ Håller inte alls med

B5. Rapporten kommer att vara till **god hjälp** i det fortsatta arbetet mot hållbar utveckling.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet
- ○ Håller med
- ○ Varken eller
- ○ Håller inte med
- ○ Håller inte alls med

B6. Rekommendationerna är **användbara** och kan implementeras.
- ○ Håller med helt och hållet

PRE_SUD

Granskningsrapport för Malmö
2003

PEER REVIEW FOR EUROPEAN
SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

12 WIDESPREAD WISH FOR LEARNING AS AN EXPLICIT AIM OF THE PRESUD NETWORK AND PROCESS

12.1 Overview

The learning possible on the project was often mentioned positively when discussing the PRESUD. However it is worthwhile distinguishing between actual learning and potential learning, individual learning and organisational learning in the following findings.

Learning occurred mostly by those experiencing the project directly:

- Personal learning through involvement within the process
- Team learning about the city through peer reviews and by experiencing them
- Cities learning from the review findings, and through trying to implement actions
- Project learning during the trials (e.g. evaluation)

There was additional potential for learning which was recognised but not systematically developed or part of the process and methodology:

- Review teams and stakeholders learning from performance monitoring progress, or lack of it
- Home cities systematically learning from returning team members
- Team learning occurring across the reviews and adapting through this learning
- EU systematically from the many reviews learning from the project experiences

There was additional generally unfulfilled learning that had considerable potential and was requested or suggested by participants as part of a revised PRESUD:

- Stakeholders learning from the incoming team members, and through their networks to their home cities
- 2nd Review teams learning from 1st review teams
- Municipalities learning from each other including sharing of best practice
- Cross-project learning: PRESUD learning from other projects (EU, national. Local) and other projects learning from PRESUD
- External stakeholders of one city learning from other external stakeholders in other cities

Learning is one of the main positive drivers for involvement of stakeholders in the project - both team members conducting the review and city stakeholders receiving a review.

There is little doubt that positive personal learning results from involvement in coordination and teams. See section 12.2. However, many stakeholders wanted more two-way learning to occur. See section 12.3. Some suggested this occur during reviews, in interviews, workshops and during presentations, although there was some scope for this (particularly after presentations, which also might give an opportunity for more feedback) team members and coordinators generally rejected this idea due to the limited time in a review. Therefore satisfying learning

requirements would require development of additional up activity and communications across the PRESUD networks outside the review.

Although learning was recognised as important within the project itself, the project had not been set up this way, and the contractual promises and objectives made at the project onset, were not fully supportive of the principle of flexibility and learning, so this potential was never fully explored. The learning of team members returning to home cities was mentioned positively by those directly involved in the project. This clearly had potential but was possibly aspirational (as there few explicit evidenced cases offered to show such learning had occurred and this was not a requirement of the methodology or process. See Section 12.3.

Many wanted learning within and across cities to be explicitly built into the methodology and the project (outside the actual review week). See section 12.4. Learning from each other was regarded by stakeholders as weak in the existing process and current methodology, but this was equally seen as huge opportunity for development. Furthermore the widespread interest in learning through peer review would be an additional incentive to become involved and therefore may increase engagement in the peer review process. See section 12.4.

Stakeholders wanted a return of information. See section 12.4. Learning from the reviews of other cities, access to information on projects elsewhere, more active learning in the review or outside it, review team members responsible for bringing back learning from other cities, success stories from other cities recorded, e-mail communications more widely between cities, exchanges of review reports, a web site, recording of who is involved in each review and their roles and contact details, either in the report or on a web site, with an invitation to contact, evidence reports to include best practice examples from the cities in advance of review (to be reviewed). Other suggestions included deeper analysis in follow-up reviews, or after reviews. Learning how to solve problems, not just hearing about known problems but how to do things better, creating exchange visits. See section 12.4.

External stakeholders also shared this view, furthermore they would be more inclined to be involved if they were also able to contact other external organisations in other cities, to learn (which the first trial of PRESUD did not attempt). This would also help to increase engagement. See section 12.4.

There were few mechanisms mentioned for team members to share that learning more widely on return home, although some mentioned debriefing and sharing meetings of all team members (possibly informal). The need for PRESUD facilitating networks and contacts, was important if learning was to result. This would require additional systems to share knowledge and best practice. Reports could include best practice from cities and review team members would have a responsibility to contribute their own. It was felt such exchanges would help maximise the impact.

Several stakeholders suggested that learning should occur by linking to other projects which had strengths which were complimentary to PRESUD, for instance Urban Audit, DISCUS, INTERACT. See section 12.4.

It was suggested that the desired learning beyond the review could be achieved via systematic development of networks with outputs as part of PRESUD. See section 12.4. One idea for trying to sustain learning across cities (without trips abroad) was

made that PRESUD could be a leader, but output of PRESUD would include, for instance, a list of everyone involved in a review, who they are, what their interests are, and their contact numbers and e-mail. PRESUD could form a website which would include everyone from the each review, with all the reports and lists of people that have been involved. Someone interested in transport or social inclusion can search for these things and see everyone involved, read their reports, critique reports of the city and contact one another. This output was not systematically gathered and disseminated (another potential opportunity or instance of missed potential).

Furthermore, the second review teams in fact had to *re-learn* about the organisations and systems, it was not generally recorded by PRESUD teams and again refers to short-term or potential learning of PRESUD, by recording some information this would aid any future team returning to the city. Other examples included background learning about cities and systems; learning about the organisational structure, culture, national contexts etc was often implicit in reports and not available to others or the second review team.

Finally there was additional potential for the EU to learn from such an exercise provided it was conducted and reviewed systematically. The overview lessons could be of major importance for the governance structures in the European Union.

In summary the learning possible far exceeds that actually transferred, achieved or evidenced. There was a clear expression by all stakeholders that the unrealised potential of peer review be recognised, developed, and realised.

12.2 Learning of coordinators and teams is a clear benefit and incentive

Learning is one of the main positive drivers for involvement of stakeholders in the project, for all stakeholders; both team members conducting the review and city stakeholders receiving a review. There is little doubt that positive personal learning results from involvement in coordination and teams.

''it is a learning project on all levels and it involves us to do it, that i like very much on the architecture of the PRESUD'' (team member)

''I think again one of the strengths has been actually being able to work with people in other host authorities one of the great things that's come out of it is the opportunity to learn in an unstructured way'' (Team Manager City 8)

''it gave the opportunity to visit cities I have not visited – particularly the smaller cities – in terms of personal development, and an opportunity to raise of our own organisation overseas, and being able to see other services abroad better than we can do them at home – e.g. I learnt a great deal in places where they are better than we are in waste management – we are learning from their good points '' (team manager city 3)

''what I found out as a review team member can help me to do things in my city - I learned a lot''

"The big attraction to it is the fact that it is a learning process which looks at practice over a very wide range of issues and it draws from a much wider European perspective so I think that's a key benefit …….. how well cities throughout western Europe have managed to do things and to try and learn effectively from experience in other places." (Coordinator City 6)

"Coming out of this I'm now recognised as a European expert on sustainable development and on peer reviews. Our municipality has a profile of sustainable development and pay reviews that they would never have had before just be running this project. So the city council has its brand value has been enhanced using commercial pilots. My own brand value has been enhanced dramatically. Personally I've gained enormously, the city council has gained enormously and I think part of the issue is had we invested more in it, then we would have got more out. What we have invested I think is paying dividends" (City coordinator 5)

''I think it's a very good strength that you go abroad and you are forced to think in other structures because in other city council, administration is definitely organised. They have different laws, different settings, different ways of working so if you are reviewing you have to think in their way'' (coordinator 2)

''its exciting learning how other cities do it, you can learn a lot from best practice elsewhere, it also develops the people engaged in it, and of course we believe it can improve sustainability, we are enthusiastic about it, so we will talk to our colleagues and try to convince them, and we will recommend it'' (Coordinator City 4)

12.3 Stakeholders want More Learning During and From Review: Time is Limited but Post-Presentation Exchanges Possible

Many stakeholders wanted more two-way learning, some suggested during reviews, in interviews, workshops and during presentations, although there was some scope for this (particularly after presentations, which also might give an opportunity for more feedback) team members and coordinators generally recognised this would be limited given the time constraints of a review, and therefore would require development of follow-up activity and communication across the PRESUD networks. Although learning was recognised as important within the project itself, the project had not been set up this way, and the contractual promises and objectives made at the project onset, were not fully supportive of the principle of flexibility and learning, so this potential was never fully explored.

A contract is about enforcing terms and conditions and their flexibility to change is pretty limited. So you're always cast in stone and that casting in stone is according to something that you wrote a year or so before the project starts. Once you're into the project then politics have changed, officers have changed, frameworks, everything has changed. Your ability to actually make changes to the terms of reference to the project is very limited by the contract you have with the commission which, all of those things severely limits your flexibility." (City Coordinator 5)

'the way stakeholders are engaged in this process is primarily as them giving information and experiences based against the questions and criteria, and on that basis you paint a picture, and they tell you what's going on, the reviewers are not in the position to argue back - the stakeholders share their thoughts but they are not getting too much back in return, but its part of a process, they are given a presentation but many don't come, they then have opportunity to be given a report, but how many and how excluded they are I don't know. (team manager city 5)

'In our presentation we were asked questions about what each team member did in their own city, how do you solve these problems, how do you compare our situation, do you have suggestions, I think this could be a part of the learning process too, that could make it stronger" (Team member City 7)

'We want to know well in advance so we can find out what we want to know from the interviewers, its too much one-way, I want to know what's happening in other countries. They just ask us questions and we give our answers. It would be more valuable to find out how they deal with issues, their political priorities, that would give me some background, how they handle things. A little more two-way conversation – but we are being reviewed so its not strange that it is one way. I don't just mean the interviews I mean the whole process - I want to know how other cities handle things in my specific area. Maybe outside interviews. It could be exchange of contacts, e-mails, maybe more informal conversation walking around the city." (internal stakeholders 8, city 2)

'when you take some theme as a review team member you will talk about it from your own perspective and compare it with your own country, maybe we cant keep up with a certain country, but you can get good ideas on how to start, this is missing, this should be different, but you don't have time to discuss, that's what I missed..When interviewing people they would tell me - we know we have not done this or that - but they would ask me as a team member - what is your experience?

Tell me about my city from your point of view? It could be more specific especially in the second review when there is more time to reflect, its quite easy to have more time for this reflection and exchange – that is something I missed – it could be in the method"   (Team member City 7)

''I think it's a very good idea to have something in the middle and something very technical in the middle. How do we deal with the problems, how do you solve problems, how do you do some very technical stuff'...'I do think most of the people have a professional education and they should keep up themselves, their professional knowledge but I don't think that's the job of PRESUD The PRESUD report itself has another function. It doesn't have the function of telling you how to clean your soil or how to deal with soil pollution. It has an agenda setting function people should keep their professional knowledge current and accurate themselves… it is very good to have network and have a number of officers on every subject of the ten teams and have an exchange of information, telephone numbers and things that might relate to another city or to a cluster of cities then you could ask questions as an officer across cities (Dialogue with Coordinator City 2)

The learning of team members returning to home cities was mentioned positively by those directly involved in the project. This clearly had potential but was possibly aspirational (as there few explicit evidenced cases offered to show such learning had occurred and this was not a requirement of the methodology or process.

''I think that the reviewers who come back will enrich with their new skills and organisation because they know how they do it in other cities otherwise when they are faced with a problem they have at least the ability or the possibility to say wait a minute we have always tackled this problem in this way, now we should try to see it from another way if you can find another solution you are being more creative, more innovative and more aware that there is not only one solution." (Coordinator 2)

''what we've done here is not only run a project, but enabled people to disseminate the best practice in their cities as well and to share in this practice. So having a project which not only helps cities to understand where they are at but also as part of that process gives them consultancy adds doubly to it, particularly when it's from the public sector. So that I think is the key value to the public sector in this project." (City coordinator 5)
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'of course, the project can learn from all the cities; what has been done well for example, at the Hague and what is good in Vienna. We should all learn, that would be very important. We could better share what is learnt and known about other cities, what is good, the way people share learning must be simple and readable and short. It would not be a good idea that everyone reads everybody's report. That is not reality." (dialogue with Coordinator 6)

12.4 Opportunity and Desire for Cross-City Learning Outside the Review Week: Majority want PRESUD to be an Active Networking and Dissemination Mechanism

Many wanted learning within and across cities to be explicitly built into the method and project outside the actual review week, and learning from each other was regarded by stakeholders as weak in the existing process and current methodology. However this was equally seen as huge opportunity for development. This would

allay the (often expressed) comment that PRESUD told stakeholders what they already knew. Furthermore the widespread interest in this aspect of peer review would be an incentive to become involved and therefore may increase engagement in the peer review process.

For their part in the peer review process stakeholders wanted a return of information, learning from the reviews of other cities, access to information on projects elsewhere, more active learning in the review or outside it, review team members responsible for bringing back learning from other cities, success stories from other cities recorded, e-mail communications more widely between cities, exchanges of review reports, a web site, recording of who is involved in each review and their roles and contact details, either in the report or on a web site, with an invitation to contact, evidence reports to include best practice examples from the cities in advance of review (to be reviewed). Other suggestions included deeper analysis in follow-up reviews, or after reviews. Learning how to solve problems, not just hearing about known problems but how to do things better, creating exchange visits.

'Its not in the method but I would like to have the exchange of experience to be stronger' (Team member City 7)

'the weak point of the project is: to learn from each other, we could learn from other cities, I have not learnt from the review people about their cities, I don't learn from the reviews in other cities, I don't see the good and bad examples, for instance I heard in my interview that there is a good project elsewhere but I don't get a way to find out about.. I'd like to see more of that and maybe there is a more active role for the review there, maybe they could select some interesting points, and the people on the teams from our city they could bring that back to our city and give us information, its another opportunity" (Stakeholder 2, City Manager, City 2)

'if there are problems or recommendations - we can learn from each other or we have this problem and we are trying to solve it but we are not able to do so – PRESUD could tell success stories about other cities or come and look at the process - how we do things – maybe it sees the things we are missing – in general we would all learn from it – we are learning now but its too general – in the review I heard a lot of things I already know – I don't need PRESUD to tell me those things need to be done – what I need to hear is how we can get this city so far that we are going do something - it involves money, political support, people – PRESUD could help to see things clearly from another point of view. For instance, one idea - maybe a team with similar expertise from other countries – view the whole process from the politics down to the workers, work out what is happening, and try to give me advice on what I could do better, tell me what I don't know or where we do know but don't see a solution. Or alternatively I go with my team, or send some of them, to some other country to work with others and see how to do things better, and they come back with ideas here – but its better to connect with the politicians – and it should involve the senior politicians." (stakeholder 15, manager, city 2)

'There could be more room for exchange between participating cities, a lot of things we are inventing may be reinventing things from elsewhere, and exchange of experience, approaches, methods, that could be very helpful but that's not much time for that during the review week – there is some exchange but not as much as could be. I know that one of the cities has problems we were dealing with ten years

ago and another could help us. The learning aspect could be strengthened there are a lot of different ways to do this - exchange reports about projects, exchange methods by e-mail, or IDeA might know what is happening in the UK and lots of projects - we could learn from that, maybe a web site" (Stakeholder 6, City 2)

''we must find a way to broaden our experiences and broaden the knowledge and that must certainly be a part of a follow up of this review. …… it's a learning process not a judgement process but learning process. We want to learn from each other and we want to learn internally." (Coordinator City 2)

The principle behind the UK beacon schemes - a series of learning exchanges might be relevant, on sustainability or community governance, what was said about the city and how to take it forward, there could be some sort of facilitation of dissemination events, web-based information sources, stuff through the media, or newspapers, a feature, there are routes back to the stakeholders. (Team manager city 5)

External stakeholders also shared this view, furthermore they would be more inclined to be involved if they were also able to contact other external organisations in other cities, to learn (which the first trial of PRESUD did not attempt). This would also help to increase engagement.

"Suppose the evidence is produced, and numbers are right, and goals achieved, it would be nice to know how they did it, how it was possible in city a but not city b, you can show examples across cities. So our recommendation is that you have a diagram with the cities, with criteria, and you make a score for each city, and then they can learn from each other…but that doesn't happen…if you cant do this….maybe PRESUD is just nice travel to each others cities – and not more than that – maybe its better not to do it….one of the main instruments in Europe is to compare best practices, so why not do it in the peer review, its so logical…I know city x has much lower waste per head of population than our city – but why is that and what could we learn from that city? – we might find a way to do it better. Everybody learns by comparing" (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

'what would be very good, if you seriously benchmark, is that we learn from other cities, what I found good in my interview and would have liked to discuss further was that the interviewer mentioned things about his own city that were relevant to my city, that is very helpful for me, because you have to learn from other things how we do it here and how they do it there, that's interesting, what can we learn from other cities, on the points where we are weak" (External Stakeholder 1, Manager, City 2)

''We would like to know how critical groups are organised in other cities, how do the cities organise or fund these counter-powers, so that they can improve their policies by giving local people the opportunity to criticise, what independent controls and groups do they have? - we would like to learn this and tell others what we do here" (External organisational stakeholder 12: City 2)

There were few instances offered of this learning becoming explicit nor extending away from the visiting team members, although some mentioned debriefing and sharing meetings of all team members (possibly informal). The need for PRESUD facilitating networks and contacts, was important if learning was to result. This would require additional systems to share knowledge and best practice. Reports could

include best practice from cities and review team members would have a responsibility to contribute their own. It was felt such exchanges would help maximise the impact.

 ''I keep in contact but also from other people you would like to hear, how is it going with that project and so how do you keep the network intact that I still learn, but even if this project closes from each other because we have to, we can learn a lot. There are so many good ideas. I wonder how we could help each other...if there is something that they need from us and we can give them to make a step further.'' (Coordinator 2)

''The process we must build on now is dissemination of learning and knowledge. some authorities, host authorities Might want to be left the space to decide how they would do it, whereas other authorities have clearly given the signal that they want some illustrative examples in their report. So that's about responding to the audience, and the report and I think, actually the case study stuff always works well. There's examples of how it's happening in different cities you may want to contact the PRESUD teams there - making sure that that network continues beyond the life of PRESUD, I think a virtual learning network that can expand …..the issue is how you might pull that together or how you might share the information, but most authorities have websites now, so that they can set pages and some of the authorities who have already participated in PRESUD have European networks and so a challenge has to be for those host authorities to actually make the links, share projects that they already have so they can maximise some of the impact ………….
(Team Manager City 8)

Many stakeholders, not directly involved in teams, *wished* for more cross-city learning about technical aspects and not the fact that they had *achieved or witnessed* any such learning from the teams. It was a suggestion or request, not a statement of fact.

Several stakeholders suggested that learning should occur by linking to other projects which had strengths which were complimentary to PRESUD, for instance Urban Audit, DISCUS, INTERACT.

''We should try to develop the project with the INTERACT project'' (city 4)

'Peer review should link up with Urban Audit' to extend and improve on its quantitative approach '(city 5)

Many other examples were suggested in the course of the project and evaluation (such as LASALA[14] DISCUS[15]) but essentially modified peer review can learn from other European projects (and these other projects can learn from PRESUD) and should utilise their findings and potential within the mixed methodology that would include PRESUD. In practice this may be done as a project and literature search to inform the development of the methodology, or it could be a union of projects (URBAN AUDIT for quantitative data, DISCUS for background lessons etc).

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development)
[15] DISCUS was a three-year European project (ICLEI) on Governing Sustainable Cities which examined 40 European municipalities to better understand effective policies and participatory decision-making.

It was suggested that the desired learning beyond the review could be achieved via systematic development of networks with outputs as part of PRESUD. One idea for trying to sustain learning across cities (without trips abroad) was made that PRESUD could be a leader, but output of PRESUD would include, for instance, a list of everyone involved in a review, who they are, what their interests are, and their contact numbers and e-mail. PRESUD could form a website which would include everyone from the each review, with all the reports and lists of people that have been involved. Someone interested in transport or social inclusion can search for these things and see everyone involved, read their reports, critique reports of the city and contact one another. This output was not systematically gathered and disseminated (another potential opportunity or instance of missed potential).

I think that's quite a sensible proposal, the only downside to that would be that the more senior people involved in different cities would not welcome getting contact "out of the blue" from all kinds of different people in other cities and countries because they may see this as an unwelcome intrusion. Their inclusion would have to be agreed by them, you couldn't just automatically list everybody's names, posts and contact details. I think they would need to be able to exercise a certain amount of control over how public their details become'' (Coordinator City 6). Note however when the coordinator's senior manager was asked to comment on the same suggestion, the suggestion was fully supported and there was not (in this instance) any significant concern about other practitioners ringing or e-mailing managers from other cities, yet this may be an issue which could be considered and trailed.

Finally there was additional potential for the EU to learn from such an exercise provided it was conducted and reviewed systematically. The overview lessons could be of major importance for the governance structures in the European Union:

''So we have to learn some lessons I think from this, in how we use it across the European political community to raise awareness to these issues e.g I actually feel having worked with some of the elected members they are actually work most effective so they do need more skill. it is a challenge for the European Union in terms of their administration actually, because they have invested in this project and it will be quite interesting to see what lessons they have learnt for instance around something as basic as procurement are making sure that if they are going to do a development or whatever on the back of the growth of the European Union whether they start to take on board that there are other ways of doing things like procurement like partnership working and create jobs for local communities and so on. I guess the biggest part would be if the Union voted in such a way that they led by example given their strategic position, within each directorate there are key people with different cultures but nevertheless if you could have an impact and raise the awareness in the directorate that would be quite interesting...they may want to see what they can do themselves as an example as a change, but the imperative of policy making is really to keep unemployment out because they think unemployment will create tension and lack of stability. The emphasis is on the economy and we need to have that balanced." (Team Manager City 8)

Additional Observations.

Learning may require that PRESUD develops and records networks, identifies these people, telephone numbers and disseminates these to others. Stakeholders want to have a little bit more and I sense an overall support for the project, but I also senses frustration; stakeholders say ``Why am I always answering questions, I want to ask questions, I want to find out things''

On reviews interviewees wanted to talk and discuss the past experiences and projects and knowledge of the interviewers. The time constraints meant this was not normally the case, but in some cases people encouraged return questions. It was generally appreciated by interviewees - they would like to ask questions back. There is not enough time for a detailed two-way interview, but perhaps there should be some opportunity for interviewees to ask questions back, to gain initial information, possibly with e-mail or telephone exchange to follow up interests in a later exchange. Note that if this occurred in the time when a report was been written then this would provide additional opportunities (in selected cases) to follow up on mutual interest and chaeck out further questions *and* to enable exchange of experiences.

Once again this is time limited a typical review involves 45 stakeholders and 5-8 people in a team, so if every one had <u>follow-up conversations</u> shared out over the team then that would be less than 9 conversations. Given that this is an upper limit, and not everyone interviewed would wish to have such conversations, this might reduce to 5 follow on conversations per team member. This is perhaps 5 hours additional work spread over two weeks but it would enable a bit of continuing dialogue to further inform the report in focused ways, while enabling the host participants to get something back. Moreover this might not be one person but might be shared out among the mutual PRESUD networks. It does not seem unreasonable for a returning team member to introduce 5-10 people to colleagues by way of introduction, and to speak to 3-5 personally to give back the time that was given by the host city. If these network contacts were developed then by telephone and e-mail additional potential might be realised. For the PRESUD teams and coordinators this amounts to little more than creating a list of PRESUD participants in each city, and ensuring that they all develop contacts with other cities. Finally, The second review teams in fact had to *re-learn* about the organisations and systems, it was not generally recorded by PRESUD teams and again refers to short-term or potential learning of PRESUD, by recording some information this would aid any future team returning to the city.

13 SOME GOOD EVALUATION PRACTICE BUT MORE POSSIBLE

13.1 Overview of Theory-Based Assessment of Peer Review Process

Peer Review is a form of evaluation, a form of organisational, social, and sustainability action research. It can therefore compared and judged against good practice reported in the literature; this is theory-based assessment. This chapter considers the evaluation of local government, both the PRESUD method and also the peer review methodology, as utilised by the UK Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), from a literature perspective and assess the inherent strengths and limitations. It will use documentary evidence: the peer review methodology (ref IDeA 1); a summary of 44 peer reviews (ref IDeA 2); and two particular peer review reports (ref IDeA 3 & 4). Additional information is from the IDeA web site (ref IDeA 5). All documents are publicly available on the IDeA website.

The final section will consider the similarities and differences between the IDeA Peer Review in the UK and the PRESUD Peer Review in Europe and therefore which strengths and limitations carry over from one to the other.

13.2 Key Assumptions Underlying Peer Review

Key assumptions within the peer review process (and arguments for its use) are (1) that peers are (a) similar enough that they can understand one another; they share common understanding, experience, and context[16] to be intelligible to each other, yet (b) that they are dissimilar enough so that their experiences, contexts, and creative ideas are unique giving potential for novel exchange leading to changes and improvements that would not otherwise occur, (2) That by interviewing many stakeholders the peer review team gain a more valid overview than any individual view or collective view within the organisation and that by gaining and disseminating these wider views the team can stimulate change, contribute to improvement, and transfer best practice. Each assumption can be convincingly argued for in the case of peers from one English local municipality travelling to, and reviewing another, and support the legitimacy of the peer review method within a country[17]. Stones (1996: pp 64-87) however notes the importance of context and shared meanings in developing understanding of others and in displaced circumstances, and the need to explicitly consider context (and its variability) in conducting sociological and organisational research.

It might be expected that peer review will be successful when this shared understanding outweighs the differences and mutual misunderstandings.

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[16] Context is a sociological term that includes the organisational structure, practices, policies, strategies, location, circumstances, the national legislation, government, and culture, and wider circumstances such as European politics and legislation.

[17] It is not initially clear that these assumptions remain as valid across different countries and cultures.

13.3 A Strong Methodology of Qualitative Practitioner Action Research

Weiss (1972: p105) claims advantages in involving practitioners in evaluation; disseminating the purposes; gaining ideas and information; identifying the norms and realities; preventing misunderstandings and unacceptable recommendations; gaining support for new practices; and encouraging change as the people who will implement ideas are also involved in developing them. This supports the peer review which exclusively involves practitioners (as both review team members and as interviewees in local authorities). Stringer (1996: p97 & p123) recommends action research as an approach in that it develops recommendations for change with those responsible for implementing or undertaking change. Peer review is essentially action research conducted by practitioners and develops recommendations for leading to action plans, and again has literature support.

The advantages of a primarily qualitative methodology are outlined by Patton (1987: p9-13); qualitative data provide detail through direct quotations and experience; responses are neither systematic nor standardised so the researcher does not impose a framework upon participants but enables them to give their own perspectives; it is better suited to developing elaboration, explanation, meanings and new ideas; the use of interviews and observations are complimentary and reinforcing, and can give an inside perspective. Patton (1987: p23-43) further argues that it is appropriate in understanding internal processes; in gaining the perceptions of those involved; unravelling what is happening within an organisation; in exploratory evaluation to identify key issues or variables; and to help understand the meaning of quantitative data. Furthermore it has the advantage of flexibility, insight, and ability to build upon tacit knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p13), which is an aim of peer review. Finally it is useful in goal-free evaluation (Scriven, 1972) where data is gathered without being restricted to the stated goals of an organisation or programme, to find out what actually happens rather than what is stated to happen by the organisation and again this is supportive of the qualitative methodology.

In Stringer (1996: 16) the action research approach is recommended for practitioners. He sets out a basic action research routine as a continuous recycling set of activity and reflection:

Look	Gather relevant information (gather data)
	Build a picture: Describe the situation (define and describe)
Think	Explore and Analyse: What is happening here? (Hypothesise)
	Interpret and explain: How/why are things as they are? (Theorise)
Act	Plan
	Implement
	Evaluate

Such action research models give a simple structure to the process of review. Peer review shares the advantages noted above as it is primarily a qualitative evaluation (with some additional documentary evidence and secondary data as input); there are the qualitative interviews as a fundamental aspect of peer review; (IDeA ref 1: pp33-72) there are the ordinal grading of services (level 1,3 or 5); qualitative indicators and the mostly qualitative questions. Also peer review teams also draw on their own qualitative experiences in municipalitys and the review reports are largely qualitative (e.g. see IDeA ref 3 & ref 4) with qualitative recommendations.

In summary, a qualitative action research methodology that engages practitioners is recommended within the literature and is a strength of the peer review approach. See Section 13.4

13.4 Strong Social and Cross-Organisational Learning Potential

Easterby-Smith *et al* (1999) discuss social and organisational learning developed through social interactions, recognition of tacit knowledge, embodied forms of learning, learning from each other, experience, and emulation, and in situated practice. It is recognised that understanding may not be recorded, nor held by individuals, but nevertheless exists across the community as a whole and this influences knowledge and practice. This literature therefore supports the peer review approach as a form of social learning. Learning across organisational boundaries is considered by Dixon (1994: p114) who recommends principles of collective learning (each drawn from the wider organisational literature):

1. The Collective. The practices of organisations are not simply the sum of members' individual competence; there is also competence and knowledge that is a product of the collective. An organisation must learn as a collective. The peer review approach encourages this.

2. Limiting assumptions. An organisations ability to be effective is limited by its assumptions. Yet groups are often unaware of the assumptions they hold or the ways in which those assumptions serve to limit their practice. Peer review may help question local assumptions.

3. Co-inquiry. Learning across organisations is most effective when all parties are engaged in co-inquiry rather than when one party is regarded as the expert and the other(s) as students. Peer review in the UK is *not* full co-inquiry but is closer to external audit, thereby going somewhat *against* good practice.

4. Ordinary intelligence. The world is knowable by ordinary people and this knowledge can be meaningfully organised to address the serious organisational issues they face. This is consistent with the idea of peer review but has been attacked by other theorists who focus upon structural and macro factors outside individual and collective awareness.

5. Learning occurs over time. System change takes time thus learning also should. Learning includes: planning to act, implementing, reflecting on the implementation and re-planning. Learning is an aim but it may be developed (by engaging people more before and after the review for instance).

6. Collaboration and alliances. There is a new spirit of collaboration among organisations that is a recognition that there is much one organisation can learn from another. Again peer review utilises this.

The social and cross-organisational nature of peer review is an underlying strength and is supported by the academic literature on organisational learning. See section 13.4

13.5 Issues of Data Generation, Reflection & Stakeholder Sampling

Qualitative data is generated from two sources (i) explicitly data is gathered from interviews and workshops (often the implicit reflection of practitioners on their knowledge of the municipality) and this is filtered and judged against (ii) the implicit reflections of the interviewers - the review team (based upon their observations and experiences in their home authorities). Note the reliance upon implicit practitioner reflection in both cases. Practitioner reflection is recognised and advocated by Schon (1983) as a legitimate and he discusses how this could be better utilised and developed (see section on theory-based evaluation).

The interviewers take written notes and record these on post-it notes, which are then placed on flip chart paper under the three themes. Interviews are not tape-recorded. Key issues, strengths, opportunities, and findings, emerge throughout the week. Peer review methods therefore do *not* generally follow good practice approaches in the literature - such as tape recording and transcription[18] (e.g. Guba and Lincoln (1988) or Clarke (1999)).

Much of the review information depends upon the sample of stakeholders involved in interviews or workshops. The methodology prescribes the involvement of *types* of stakeholder (IDeA 1: p16-17):

- A workshop of up to 30 middle managers
- A workshop of up to 30 front-line staff working with the public
- A meeting individual or group meetings with
  - Elected members
  - Representatives of municipalitys main partners
  - Senior managers
  - Trade unions
  - Cross-section of the public
  - Observations on municipality meetings, panels, and groups

The PRESUD review has a similar approach.

Sampling is therefore a mix of convenience and quota sampling (Robson, 2002) and purposeful sampling (Patton 1987: p52) to get 'information-rich' cases; those from which the evaluator can learn a great deal about the important central issues and effectiveness. The aim is a wide-range of informative stakeholders (including critical stakeholders such as newspaper editors and opposition leaders). However in the final reports the stakeholder profile is not recorded (IDeA, ref 3 & 4). It is therefore not clear how comprehensive and transparent the review may be. For instance, note that the stakeholder sample above includes (a) greater fraction of managers than front line staff (and the workshop setting of say 2 hours limits what can be said by all participants), and (b) unspecified 'cross-section' of the public, which is not practically achievable a workshop setting run by local government. Also it might be argued that

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[18] However, it must be noted that the peer review process is necessarily constrained in time and cost (*immediate* recording, analysis and transcription of all interviews is not a practical option as this would increase the time for a report ten-fold and possibly treble the costs in transcription and analysis time).

an information-rich sample of the public might include excluded groups such as those unemployed in a deprived area. Finally, it is noted that most front-line staff have access to the Internet[19] and they could be additionally engaged giving additional data and dissemination, and also another method from which to triangulate.

> In summary, there may be an opportunity for peer review to improve and adopt some good practice from the literature including: systematic development of reflexive practice; tape-recording of interviews as a memory aid (recordings need not be transcribed) for the benefit of follow-up reviews or in support of cross-site comparative meta-analysis; more rigorous and inclusive sampling of stakeholders; the use of additional and mixed methods for data gathering and triangulation; and transparent and reflexive qualification of the review findings. See section 13.5

13.6 Limited Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation

Patton (1987: p144-164) outlines analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Analysis is the process of creating organisation of the data, finding patterns, categories and basic descriptive units. Interpretation involves the attachment of significance and meaning to this, and explaining relationships and patterns. The two stages are not separate but interact.

The peer review data is not concerned with particular programmes nor projects but broad aspects of local government itself (ref IDeA 5). They consider each local municipality against a benchmark of a 'fully effective municipality' (IDeA 1: p24). In particular peer review considers three main governance themes[20] (IDeA 1: p26):

- Leadership
- Managing Performance
- Democratic Accountability and Community Engagement

(The PRESUD methodology adds several environmental themes and four intergration and co-operation themes).

Each sub-heading was divided into 5 further sub-themes, and each had a three-level rating (1,3, or 5) from one (fulfils basic statutory requirements) to five (exemplary above and beyond requirements).

The interview data could be analysed by content analysis (identification of coherent important examples, themes, and patterns). Many of the analysis themes are imposed before and during analysis (as given themes). Analysis includes a simple form of triangulation (where findings agree from 2 or 3 different sources these are given weight in team discussions). Triangulation of methods (interviews, documents, secondary data, observations and reflections) is also (but far less) used, and is one way in which the process could be improved. Qualitative evaluations are particularly

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[19] Internet surveys can be a quick cheap and powerful additional method for gathering mixed quantitative and qualitative data, from a large number of stakeholders

[20] Showing a close connection with the Peer Review and both the English CPA and English Best Value. Note also that in future there may be an additional theme of Community Well-being or Sustainability and this may have implications for the peer review approach (see the section on theory based evaluation and external change).

suited to inductive analysis (the patterns, themes, categories come from the data rather than been decided prior to collection) and the evaluator looks for variations and similarities in the data. The idea is not to impose pre-existing expectations on the data[21]. Inductive approaches begin with the specific data and build toward general patterns. Patton (1987) further notes that different people give different analyses and that important insights can emerge from these. In principle the peer review process could explore this formally but does not systematically. Finally, Pawson and Tilley (1997, p 116-152) note that evaluations can accumulate and therefore the peer review has significant potential given the many cases (authorities and interviews) which could be of benefit if designed analysed and interpreted.

Team members receive some training (in the peer review approach, interview techniques, methods of recording of information, and presenting findings) but they do not receive training in social research analysis nor interpretation.

Qualitative analysis and interpretation is not a strength of practitioners nor of the peer review process; yet this is an important implicit aspect of the methodology. This may require additional training and compensation through additional methods, engagement, and personnel. See Section 13.6

13.7 Weak in Theory-Based Approach, Evaluation and Foundation

It is noted that evaluation is largely non-theoretical and often ignores theoretical issues such as specifying how a programme or organisation is supposed to operate or theorising from empirical results (Clarke, 1999, p30-34, Patton, 1987: p39-40, Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p 55-82, Patton, 1986 p150-176).

A qualitative methodology is useful in developing grounded theory (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, or Patton, 1980, p80-83), which is inductive, pragmatic, and concrete (and therefore likely to be appealing to practitioners). This approach can help practitioners understand how programs or organisations work, why they function as they do, and how impacts might follow. Grounded evaluation is an important product of demonstration programmes and multi-site evaluations as in the peer review programme. Argyris & Schon (1974) consider integration of thought and action in organisations by practitioners and therefore offer an alternative to academic detached approaches (which they argue do not work well with real-time issues, and therefore can not contribute to the study of effective action). In practice people need to become competent at simultaneously taking action *and* reflecting upon this to learn from it. They therefore provide a perspective on how understanding might be developed by the practitioners and stakeholders within a municipality. They claim that such situations can be best considered through a conceptual framework which analyses the 'theories of action'. Their view is that the foundation for competence is the capacity to learn how to learn. Their practical approach is to make the theories-in-use explicit, to improve them, enable criticism of them and thereby to increase their effectiveness, predictability, explanatory value, and ability to control. They suggest explicit practical informed theory building and testing; developing micro-theories of real-time situations. Practitioners can 'reality-test' their own theories, the relationship between actions and effects, encouraging engagement with the empirical to test these theories.

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[21] it could be argued that this is inevitable and indeed expected in peer review, pointing to one possible limitation, and possible solutions of compensating for the limitations of peer review.

Peer review requires and includes implicit theoretical evaluation at two stages. Firstly, changing the municipality *internally,* secondly, in managing *external* changes that aim to influence the population (e.g. community well being or sustainability for instance). Internal changes need to lever (or cause) external change outside the municipality. The recommendations, indicators, and implicit theories of change must become more complicated, and require additional testing against realities (i.e. evaluation). A new order of monitoring, engagement, and evaluation is required in such cases: how does the municipality know what is happening and what is changing? More data and methods will be required to establish this, wider stakeholder groups and external practitioners need to be involved to contribute, and practitioner and organisational learning needs to be extended to external practitioners, organisations, and citizens also. Theories on how the local municipality intends to influence the external world need to be considered, clarified, and tested. For conceptualisation of change and causality in the social world see for instance realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), complexity and critical realism (e.g. Byrne, 2002) and the agency and structure debate (e.g. Archer, 1995). For instance, Pawson and Tilley (1997) offer a theoretical evaluation framework for such programmes, practitioners, participants, and policy makers that can apply within peer review. They argue that programmes or organisations are not things which work or not; but things that contain *ideas and mechanisms* which *may* work in certain conditions and contexts. It is therefore important develop a picture of the contexts in which particular mechanisms work best to generate desired outcomes (p215). They advise evaluation (and therefore peer review) should:

- Attend to how and why programmes have the potential to cause change, and identify the anticipated or actual causal mechanisms. This would also apply to recommendations of the peer review team.
- Penetrate below the surface of observable inputs and outputs. Social reality has underlying generative forces not immediately observable. Choices and social constraints are important. Quick-fix obvious solutions sometimes are not the answer.
- Focus on how the causal mechanisms (which generate problems) are actually removed or countered through the alternative causal mechanisms in the programme or recommended.
- Understand the contexts within which problem mechanisms are activated and in which program mechanisms can be successfully fired. Context refers to institutional locations and social settings, with norms, values, and inter-relationships.
- Understand the outcomes and how they were they produced (including multiple outcomes and conjectured mechanisms/context theories confirmed or refuted).
- Identify successful and unsuccessful Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configurations as an aim of evaluation. This is particularly relevant in comparisons across cities and reviews, and suggests a need to have a meta-focus also.
- The evaluation should construct context-mechanism-outcome pattern explanations (which include the need to learn stakeholders theories, formalise them, and feed them back, so stakeholders can comment upon them and modify them). This would require that the review process engage stakeholders in formalising why and how their suggestions for change are imagined to work.

Finally, on a foundational point Mason (1996) adds that qualitative enquiry requires an explicit epistemology (where what is accepted as representing knowledge is stated) and an ontology (where our beliefs of nature of the system and phenomena under investigation are explicitly stated)[22].

> The peer review and evaluation by practitioners is weak in terms of theory-based evaluation and foundation as recommended in the evaluation literature. It is important to understand how programmes are thought to operate and to test these expectations, and its important to develop grounded theory during the review from the empirical data gathered. This requires training or compensating personnel and approaches. See section 13.7

13.8 Strength in Uptake and Dissemination in Policy and Practice

One of the major criticisms of evaluation research is that: it has limited impact on policy and decision makers. Rothman (1980) investigates this and concludes that when researchers and appliers are closely linked then research is more likely to have impact. Percy-Smith *et al* (2002) also surveyed the impact of research on policy and practice in over 100 UK local government organisations. The study found that the highest regular dissemination of reports to key officers, were those from the Local Government Association (81%), those from DETR (80%), followed by those from the Improvement and Development Agency (58%). It is worth noting that universities, consultancies, and think tanks accounted for only 1% of utilised research. Percy-Smith further found that research utilization is greatest when the work is undertaken in response to a specific need and that longer academic time-scales are not acceptable as action is required in the short-term. Therefore again peer review offers a promising approach as it aids the municipality to prepare for (or act upon) the CPA and Best Value Assessments and findings are reported shortly after review. Furthermore, both Booth (1988) and Weiss (1972) argue that effective evaluation needs to be (a) utilized and significant, (b) takes an action research perspective, it engages stakeholders and those involved in policy and decision-making directly, and (c) research methods should engages them in distinct ways. Patton (1986) further argues that evaluation must be utilisation-focued throughout, with specific people, identified and multiple stakeholders, who are then personally and actively involved.

> Peer review is strongly supported by the literature, for findings would be better received, disseminated, and utilised than would academic approaches, thereby increasing the likelihood of impact[23]. These components are a major strength of peer review and should be retained and developed. See Section 13.8

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[22] this may be felt excessively academic for practitioners but Mason points out these assumptions exist anyway and influence research findings and researcher interpretations so they need to be explicitly considered and developed.

[23] Impact necessarily requires uptake but this not sufficient; the findings and recommendations must reflect the organisational and social reality, and then activate effective causal mechanisms, see the section on theory-based evaluation and realistic evaluation.

13.9 Similarities and Differences between the IDeA and PRESUD Review

LGIP linked into a supportive national context including national and local government support, with additional CPA and Best Value audits as drivers for adoption of independent external peer review to support impending audits. This is not so for the PRESUD peer review. Diverse and varied national contexts with no overall European nor national support or drivers, and PRESUD is not linked into the support of existing national or European programmes.

Note this suggests one way to develop by linking revised PRESUD peer review into existing national (e.g. in England the CPA and Best Value systems) and also existing European systems (Urban Audit, Eurocities etc).

In the LGIP peer review, the peers share understanding and similar contexts (a single language and national culture, common working practices, political systems, legal frameworks, and European directives) with (possibly) different organisational and departmental contexts requiring some consideration. In the PRESUD peer review the peers do not share any context (other than European) and have much less shared understanding (compounded by language differences).

The IDeA approach is regularly reviewed to keep it relevant, The PRESUD methodology and its themes should be *regularly reviewed.* Firstly, as the local, political, cultural and national contexts change, secondly as the socio-economic-environmental circumstances and the population changes, and thirdly as the review members, teams, and local government participants change. There should be no standard advocated or applied.

This also suggests the need for participative peer review to compensate for these differences.

Table: Similarities and Differences

	LGIP Peer Review	**PRESUD Peer Review**
Development Background and Context	Linked to the English CPA and best value Regimes of external audit	Linked to LGIP with methodology slimmed down to headlines and words and phrases removed to give governance. OECD methodology added with some Urban Audit to give environmental and sustainability.
Purposes	To improve governance by focus on key themes important in UK To stimulate widespread discussion and improvement from within (p79, ref IDeA1)	To improve sustainability governance by focus on key themes important in UK To improve sustainable development. To improve conditions in the city (environment through some social and economic links) To lead to measurable improvements. To assess progress towards sustainable development (newsletter)
Applied in	England All English Local Government Authorities (unitary, county and district councils)	Nine European Municipalities in 6 countries; City municipalitys only.
Structure of Review model	Preparation; 5 days Sunday to Friday; visits, 2 or 3 streams of interviews during, workshops, evening working, presentation on final day; contact between teams after review to write report, delivered	Identical to LGIP; but 5-7 days; sometimes earlier arrival organisation on Sunday;

	LGIP Peer Review	PRESUD Peer Review
Methodology and benchmark	83 page LGIP document	LGIP document scaled-down, with 'offending' phrases removed, but with environmental and integration themes from OECD peer reviews added.
Measures and methods	Qualitative interviews, CPA, Best value reports containing other judgements and data	Qualitative and quantitative wanted. Interviews, documentation available, city evidence requested.
Costs & Expenses	Travel, accommodation, fees for councillors covered by the host city, time of participants covered by home municipality.	All travel, accommodation, and municipalitylor fees currently paid for by project. Time of participants partly by home municipality partly from the project.
Languages used	All English	English as project language, host country language, different team members languages.
Approach	Centralised standard format Top-down/and same level	same
The interviews	Same language; people from similar contexts Expect higher transfer and understanding	Mostly second language; people from different contexts Expect lower transfer and understanding; but more learning about own context relative to another, i.e the constraints.
Review Teams	6-7 people. Senior local government managers and councillors. Expertise in senior management. Serving chief executive, A senior officer, Two elected members Other – private, public, voluntary or academic Review manager Mono-cultural	5-8 people. Mainly sustainability lower/ middle managers, some senior politicians and externals involved. Few senior managers. Multi-national Expertise environmental sustainability and lower management. Some middle management. Multi-national
Themes and benchmarks	3 governance (leadership, performance management, democratic and community engagement).	3 governance (as LGIP but focused on sustainability) Several specifically environmental themes 4 sustainability integration/co-operation

	LGIP Peer Review	PRESUD Peer Review
Degree of standardisation and flexibility	Significant standardisation acceptable given common aims, meanings, local contexts, managers, in UK context. Therefore consistent content competence and expertise. Support for CPA assessments. Local municipality requests and pays for review	Diversity of ideas, meanings, contexts, people etc. Approach with flexibility around a core idea. Compromised and negotiated competence content and expertise? Municipality volunteers and provides money in kind, and in exchange.
Report	Short and headline, within weeks	Long and detailed. Typically 10 weeks to draft, then comments, to final draft then translation, over 3 months, typically 30–70 pages.
Experience to build upon Generalisation of findings transfer of Best Practice Transfer Potential	Over 160 reviews over 5 years and sites with varied but similar clustering of local contexts, and identical national context. Through extensive senior single culture network. High potential for generalisation. High potential for reliable transfer.	9 reviews and sites across very dissimilar local and national contexts. Through sparse lower-middle manager multi-national network Currently low potential for generalisation. Low potential for reliable transfer.
Action Plan	Not necessarily SMART	SMART
Management	IDeA have significant permanent infrastructure to support reviews (e.g. media support, team organisation, team managers, training).	Temporary & limited future capability of any individual city.
Additional Support in National Contexts	CPA audits, Best Value Audits	Diverse variable & uncertain

14 REFLECTIONS ON THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE EVALUATION

Evaluation applies primarily to the second round of reviews. Therefore a great deal of learning and solving of problems has occurred in this period. Therefore the evaluation here is likely to be better than might be found for a municipalities entering the network.

Some evaluation data was not used from interviews given time constraints, project delays, and limited researcher time at the end of the project. In future significant time must be set aside for data gathering *after* the all reviews and reports have been completed and delivered, and significant time must be set aside for evaluation analysis and write-up, on a three year project with 10 cities a six month half-time period after the final review of 6 months would seem appropriate for final data gathering and analysis.

The strength of participant evaluation is that it considers the original conception of how a multi-national peer review might work (the implicit theory) and tests this theory against the view of participants experiencing and implementing peer review. The results (contained in this report) suggests a modified view of how multi-national peer review actually works and what it's *practice* capable of. This then suggests a modified peer review programme which could be more realistic, more effective, is evidenced in the trials.

Limitations of Participant Evaluation

It was noted that different groups gave different evaluations of PRESUD. Teams and coordinators often had better views of (their contributions to) the process than did the internal and external stakeholders. For instance, teams tended to judge their interviews and workshops, their analysis, recommendations, and their final reports, more highly than did the coordinators and stakeholders. Coordinators tended to judge their engagement of stakeholders and SMART Plans and progress more highly than teams and external stakeholders. The management group tended to judge their methodology more highly than did the coordinators and team members. This is to be expected perhaps, but it also points to a possible bias in the existing evaluation; stakeholders (particularly external) views of the process, and in particular team analysis and reports, or coordinator stakeholder engagement and SMART plans, are likely to have a more positive view than if external stakeholders were more fully involved in the process.

A further bias may be that most people involved in the project are from environmental backgrounds, and therefore their judgement of the adequacy of their social and economic integration might be better than the judgement of people with expertise in this area, again possibly favourably distorting the evaluation of PRESUD.

The interviews are crucial to the process and outcome (they have not been systematically evaluated) any improvement there is likely to have significant effects throughout the PRESUD network. Team views were generally better than the stakeholders (particularly in workshops). The team recording, analysis, and recommendation process, have not been systematically evaluated by any groups besides the teams themselves, and any improvements are likely to have significant

effects. The analysis and recommendations should be evaluated by internal and external stakeholders.

Evaluation has not achieved systematic comparative independent analysis of reports, other than indirect comments of participants who contribute, comment, or criticise, upon individual reports. This is another area where evaluation could contribute in future. The reports have not been systematically independently evaluated by all review participants and this is an unknown, which needs addressing.

The evaluation is strongest on team and coordinator experiences of review overall review process. It is weakest on external stakeholder viewpoints.

Some methods generated very little data; the post-review e-mail questions were (in some cities) answered extremely briefly, or by few people. Stakeholder responses could not be analysed in the same depth as coordinators and team manager interviews. So this evaluation (like the peer review itself) is relatively weak on external stakeholder engagement (but perhaps it does reflect something of the peer reviews which had many more internal stakeholder – those employed by local government – than external stakeholders – those outside local government).

Strongest areas for evaluation are from review planning, up to the production of the SMART action plan, and views of direct participants (team members and coordinators). Weakest areas during review are the evaluation of team processes of interview, workshop, analysis, and recommendation. Weakest areas beyond the review are in evidenced change and impacts in the municipality and city beyond the development of the SMART action plan (and views of non-direct participants).

A reflection on my personal position also seems relevant. I began with a mixed view which, through the evaluation has become more positive and supportive of PRESUD, without giving unconditional approval. My initial sceptcism concerning reasons for involvement, and the sincerity and dedication of participants has gone, but I remain suspicious of organisational and project claims on significant 'progress', and the projects claim to independence without having full access and engagement of all stakeholders. The need to demonstrate this, beyond support of those in the project, if others are to take it seriously. Great potential if continually improved adapted and evaluated by all stakeholders.

Future Evaluations

Team questioning of interviewers by the review team. In three cities evaluation questions were given to the team managers to be used during the review by all team members. In general this method failed to generate useful evaluation evidence. Firstly, participants in the second review were not involved in the first review, nor in subsequent development of PRESUD. Secondly, some team members were reluctant to devote interview time to evaluation and did not ask the evaluation questions. Thirdly, when participants did comment they often made comments of only a generalised and unconfirmed nature, and the resulting team notes were of little use. Given the failure of this approach to generate evaluation evidence the methodology was modified again in the three cities. In each of these two cities a dedicated researcher visited specifically to address evaluation questions. In two cities this was done at the end of the review interviews, in the third city a room was set aside for review participants to visit where a researcher would interview them on evaluation.

Post-review e-mail questions to all stakeholders. Those involved in the interviews were asked questions via e-mail immediately after the review (Tampere, Newcastle, Birmingham). Although responses were very low the following responses give an indication of issues and viewpoints raised. In the biggest trial around 1/3 the participants replied from city 5 (but half of these answers of these were too brief or were specific to the city). In other cities the replies were significantly less. This mechanism raised some issues but these can only be taken as indicative given the low numbers of replies.

Note that there are too many cases (cities and personnel) to develop a comparative or collective case study approach, yet too few cases to develop a statistical approach. This will have implications for possible evaluation methods. In addition if the program develops new evaluation procedures will be needed (Qualitative Comparative Analysis, Realistic Evaluation). As the numbers of people involved increase (both through greater engagement and increased numbers of municipalities and countries) then the possibility for statistical analysis (on peoples viewpoints) becomes possible. If this became widespread then possibly upon cities also. Equally the project has avoided any comparative assessment (but also comparative learning and detailed research) to avoid judgement. But through comparative research it should be possible to show how different contexts and configurations can be combined or utilised to improve the impacts of the project. These insights could then form part of the evaluation *and* review recommendations. Combined with the fact that stakeholder evaluation and engagement is currently weak and uncertain, then this will be one direction in which the project could be improved.

Finally, in such a project it is impossible not to become attached to the people and participants you work with so closely, sharing their aims and aspirations for the project. This can sometimes lead to an over-identification with those participants, and therefore a less than balanced evaluation. In this evaluation I have always had two fears: (1) that we would recommend a flawed and ineffective process which simply shifts power around, and is then inflicted upon municipalities and hard-pressed practitioners all over Europe with little or negative effect, or (2) that we would not recommend a process with great potential and then be (partly) responsible for the future problems in not developing a more sustainable approach.

This evaluation is therefore critical, I have not worried whether participants would all approve of the criticism. I have (I hope) stated it as it was told to me, and have added further criticism for good measure. I have stated that people are positive - but require changes more rigour more participation. The evaluation focuses upon the problems but also opportunities, because it aims to improve the process, to make it more effective, and to help satisfy participants who become involved in it, so that a potentially valuable and effective process might be created and might spread and be improved – and only then will it have significant impact. I wish them well. Good Luck!

15 REFERENCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following references have informed the evaluation or are recommended reading for the development of the PRESUD evaluation of municipalities, and in exploiting learning potential of the project. The references highlighted with an asterix are recommended as background reading, for use in stakeholders training and development, to develop and analyse internet surveys in future PRESUD formats, or for municipality stakeholders to better generate evidence of change.

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APPENDIX

A HALF-WAY EVALUATION OF THE PRESUD PROJECT

PEER REVIEWS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN CITIES: SELF-EVALUATION OF THE INITIAL REVIEW PROCESS BY REVIEW TEAMS

Jan 2003.

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Qualification of this report. *The learning and evaluation reported represents the views of participants and participant observers on the project and on individual city reviews. This report focuses upon the early stages (the first round/year) of the review process up to the reception of the city review report from the city review team. The evaluation does not consider the detailed output of the review process – the report content – as these should be assessed by informed stakeholders within the city and/or independent evaluation. The report focuses upon past or present weaknesses of the full review process (rather than upon the many strengths). This is done to limit the size of this report and to focus upon improvements possible through this learning; therefore the report will give a more negative impression of the project than is deserved if the positive learning were considered more fully. The report does not comment upon management, partnerships, dissemination, city planning stages, implementation, nor second round review processes. For this reason the report does not attempt to comment on the overall utility or effectiveness of the proposed two-stage peer review process nor its likely impact upon city sustainability – unless these could be compromised by weaknesses in the early review processes leading up to and including the review report back to the city. Where these are noted draft recommendations are given for discussion and as suggested improvements. In such cases it is recognised that the peer review process must strike a balance between input constraints such as cost and time restrictions against improvements in outputs such as increased quality and depth of recommendations. Finally, the author and contributors should not be considered as independent reviewers (being members of the management team and participants in the PRESUD project).*

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. Background

This document summarises the first year of a three year project, with the objective to develop a transferable peer review process which can (a) critically and systematically review progress towards sustainable development in European cities, and can (b) deliver appropriate recommendations for improvements. For each participating city *a Performance Assessment Report* is produced by a cross-national team (nominated from a wider network of experienced and trained personnel from all participating cities). The performance assessment reports are outputs of the *Peer Review Process* which has been under development. The primary purpose of this document is to record the lessons that have been learnt through development and testing of the peer reviews (as experienced by the project partners and the personnel involved in conducting and supporting these reviews). The report includes key findings and recommendations for further discussion and agreement with project partners. The primary focus of the report is to identify and recommend improvements to the overall review process and record these.

1.2. Diversity of projects and learning experiences

With ten reviews conducted there are diverse experiences of the individual review processes. In addition, each of these reviews involved different team members and many participants (typically 20-40) within each city. There are therefore many different views of the review process. In identifying key points only those which are common to many reviews have been noted.

1.3. Methodology for Self-Evaluation

The evaluation represented by this document is draws upon three methodologies. Firstly, the experiences of the PRESUD management and PRESUD observers on city peer reviews. Secondly, the views of the team review members, including co-ordinators, immediately following each review through the development of a web based survey. Thirdly, the views of the review managers after the first round of peer reviews. This is therefore a self-evaluation - or partial evaluation - based upon the approach of 'reflective' practitioner and participant observer. The self-evaluation process included initial observation of the process and informal feedback from participants and team members. From these, a self-evaluation questionnaire was piloted, and then an improved web-based version was used to record evaluations by team members. These evaluations were combined and considered to identify and clarify key issues. These issues were then written up, in conjunction with the reflections of the PRESUD observers and review managers, and then circulated back to all contributors to read and agree during a steering group meeting to follow.

2 OUTPUTS AND POSITIVE LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT

Although the main focus of this document is to identify weaknesses and improve the review process, it will be worthwhile to first list the important positive outputs from the project and positive lessons learned within the first year of the project.

2.1 Outputs from the PRESUD Project

Outputs from the overall project:

- Engagement, management and joint working of nine European cities, the technical partner organisations, and the European steering group.

- A network to European cities which can be developed and built upon to link into other cities

- co-ordinators experienced in organising city reviews and supplying supporting documentation through

- Team members and review managers experienced in peer review methodology.

- Sustainability networks and contacts across all participating cities.

- A peer review process, and review structure with supporting guidance documents, which has been tested and partially evaluated; with clearer understanding of strengths and weaknesses for future development.

- A web-based self-evaluation tool for assessing strengths and weaknesses of reviews, and providing feedback from the review teams.

- Additional self-funded membership from the city of Tampere, Finland, demonstrating interest of cities in the process. With additional interest from two other European cities.

2.2 Outputs from the Peer Reviews

There are several outputs from the peer reviews:
- Around 30 team members with experience of review process

- A city network with experience of peer review processes; participants to draw upon (and expand upon) in subsequent review and planning activities

- Nine European reviews each involving between 20-40 stakeholders; over 200 participants able to review and comment upon the utility of the process

- Presentation to each city summarising the initial findings of the review team, including one in host city language

- Performance assessment reports written on most participating cities (with remaining under preparation).

2.3 Additional Positive Learning

Steering Group Meeting and Participation

The first steering group meeting, the management team learned from the project partners that the project must become more participative than had been originally envisaged and planned (requiring greater involvement and discussion with the partners before making decisions). However this learning was balanced by that of the project partners who came to realise that their cities had committed to a significant workload and tight schedule with deadlines and milestones that had to be achieved. A compromise position was agreed in that where possible (and subject to auditors agreements) partner concerns would be accommodated.

Adoption of Continuous Learning

The project and personnel have adopted a viewpoint of continuous learning (subject to project constraints). This emerged in the early course of the project. It was agreed that difficulties, weaknesses and errors could be freely admitted and discussed so that the project would benefit from this learning. Besides delivering a qualified process and product which can be improved, the continuous learning approach enabled better engagement and motivation of personnel, both of which can be compromised when projects are rigidly bound to original ideas and plans without flexibility to learn and adjust as the project develops.

Overall Team Experience of Reviews

The team evaluations of the overall process demonstrated that review team members positively evaluated many aspects of the review process including: the other team members, team building and team working, the overall PRESUD management and organisation, review management and city co-ordination (including travel, accommodation, team and interview venues, and interviews with internal stakeholders).

Outputs of Improvement Recommendations

As a result of the learning approach, trials, and ongoing evaluations we are able to recognise areas in need of improvement, which will impact positively on future reviews and performance assessments. These are summarised in the following sections, and they will be incorporated into revised guidance documents.

The Development of Web-Based Evaluation Procedures.

One difficulty with projects involving many people across many cities and countries is in organising, collecting, and analysing evaluations by participants. A trial of a web-based evaluation method has taken place (and results are reported here). This process has been judged useful by the review team members and can be developed.

3 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Process Recommendations. In the course of the project weaknesses have been identified which are common to many reviews. These would need to addressed in the guidance, training, and in any transfer of the review process. Areas in need of improvement include:

3.1 Recommended structure for future first round reviews

The recommended duration a first round peer review is now one week. In the early stages of the process many on the project thought that one week would be excessive in both time and resources, and initial reviews were planned to be 2.5 (and later 3.5) days. However, through experience of both review co-ordination and membership of the peer review teams it was found that this time was inadequate. The recommended structure for a review now includes:

- A five day review process.
- Arrival on Sunday night, team building, briefing and sharing of information. Review manager checks venue and schedule with co-ordinator.
- Monday primarily as a day of introduction. To include, welcome, overview of city and sustainability, a coach tour, political and national context, briefing on weeks interviews, allocation of review teams to interviews.
- Interviews and workshops until Thursday afternoon. Recommend three parallel streams of interviews (but no less than two). At least two team members per interview or workshop.
- No more than 5 interviews/workshop sessions per day per person. So with a team of 6 and manager (3 interview streams) and 3 days for interviews, this enables around 45 one-hour sessions. For example 25 hours internal 20 hours external).
- City participants to include a better balance of internal and external, with similar time distributed between these. Also to include full representation from social-economic-environmental fields.
- Time between interviews to prepare, reflect and record. Time to share findings and focus in upon issues to explore, in the evening (in quiet roundtable environment).
- Conclude information gathering on Thursday afternoon. Begin team discussions of findings and key issues.
- Presentation Friday.
- Review draft sections written by team members in one week, final draft within two weeks sent to review manager, review manager further four weeks to send draft report to city.

3.2 Extend participants to include more senior and political

The pool of review team members is just adequate for the review allocations in terms of numbers. Allocation to teams has been on criteria of availability rather than a balanced team mix. The proposed city reviewers do not yet have the full seniority originally envisaged in the project nor the degree of political representation required. It is recommended that city co-ordinators

redress this. Furthermore there have been difficulties in assigning review managers in some cases (the turnover of review managers in the first year period included all those managers originally nominated to participate). The review team manager plays a crucial role in the review and more should be involved and trained to offset possible turnover in the second round of reviews. It is also recommended to extend team membership to the municipality (to include experts, academics, external stakeholder representation etc). This should be done by nomination of team members, steering group managers, and review managers to PRESUD management team. These people should be more senior and experienced than existing team members. The training of these additional people could be done during reviews (provided that the rest of review team have had such experience).

3.3. Improve pre-interview briefings

Better briefing and preparation of both team and interview participants is needed before interviews, in particular everyone involved in the review should be briefed on those they will meet before interviews. This was one of the findings from informal evaluations with interview participants.

3.4. Use Evidence Summaries

The management group proposed that each city assemble a list of city responsibilities based upon the sustainability themes used in the PRESUD project. These themes and indicators were derived from OECD (national), Common Indicators (city) and Urban Audit (city) indicators. It was found to be difficult and time consuming to use these theme tables, some co-ordinators completed these to find them not used within the review (an oversight of the PRESUD management team). The use of the theme indicators were criticised in some places as inappropriate or not relevant. Some of the yes/no questions were found to be inapplicable. The utility of these theme tables was challenged by some of the city co-ordinators, city participants, and PRESUD team. In response to this, an alternative approach was introduced based upon 'evidence summaries'. These were written by the city (with the city co-ordinator) and were used to summarise the state of sustainability under each of the themes, while also listing the main people responsible within each theme. Recommendation that the theme tables only be used to guide the production of evidence summary and the evidence summary form the basis for understanding the municipality. Note that evidence summaries need to be expanded to include 'contextual information' noted above.

3.5. Recognise and learn local and national cultural context and differences

The cities have different political and managerial systems and different responsibilities, which are influenced by national governance differences. This was one of the significant differences requiring development of the original review structure (where within IDeA the review teams come from the UK and review UK authorities). These differences became apparent in a number of ways. Firstly the incoming review team would be insufficiently aware of the diversity of the managerial and political structures, responsibilities, and processes in the host country (at national, regional and local levels). Without this knowledge significant review time was spent

clarifying this during interviews. This could be avoided by having prior information and a discussion period before the interviews. Another aspect is that the incoming team might be unaware of the national perspective on each of the issues it explored (which influenced how the issue was perceived). This could be minimised if team members took time to do more pre-reading and pre-research (with the co-ordinators) - and by sharing the understanding with the rest of the team, the guidance should advocate these sorts of comparisons in advance.

3.6. Improve Briefing Documentation and Associated Team Sessions

Additional briefing is required for the incoming teams. This should include organisational aspects of the municipality: managerial, political, decision-making, and agency, and context of themes and indicators relative to regional, national, and international comparisons in order for the local findings to have meaning. The documentation should be followed up with a team briefing session on the very first day to allow clarification.

3.7 Better manage review time: Interview preparation, reflection, team sharing, analysis and recommendations

The evaluations established a widespread need to redistribute (and allocate) time within the overall review. Although it is accepted that reviews necessarily involve time constraints and pressures, there was concern that some of the pressure was unnecessary, and reduced the quality of review outputs. Problems included not having enough time to prepare for interviews and not having time to reflect upon these interviews afterwards (recommend 30 minutes minimum between interviews). In addition there was a need to allocate time to share findings and developing views (this could be achieved through working lunches and dinners). Finally there should be adequate time set aside for shared analysis of findings, and also discussion leading to presentation of initial findings and recommendations. In the course of the review, time allocated to group discussion, will enable review members to share findings and focus in upon the emerging issues and areas.

3.8. Balance Social and Economic Scope with Environmental Bias

The project is explicitly concerned with environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability, however the project is heavily weighted towards environmental sustainability in a number of respects. Firstly, through personnel the management steering group, team pool, and city participants are all predominantly experienced in environmental fields, and representation on social and economic sustainability tends to be an afterthought. Secondly the themes, and time allotted to each theme, is again weighted towards environmental themes. It is recommended that reviews and review process establish a more even balance between the environmental and socio-economic aspects of sustainability in future reviews. The integration issues: social-environmental, social-economic, and economic-environmental need to be clarified to aid city co-ordination.

3.9. Enhance involvement of external stakeholders

Involvement of community, business and external agencies is often weaker than it could be. This will require more research, networking and time on behalf of city co-ordinators, and will require more review team resources

devoted to this aspect. Note that this is not just about increased numbers involved (which is possible given the current weaknesses in reviews), but also concerns the time given to external bodies. In the first round of reviews the municipality personnel were given more time in individual interviews, whereas external stakeholders were more often involved in workshops where their time was shared with others. Possibly could benefit from three teams working in parallel, alternatively those excluded or declining involvement could be involved in future evaluation and second review processes.

3.10. Language

Language difficulties were frequently mentioned as an issue within the evaluation comments. In such projects language difficulties need to be managed. The project language is English. Although this was indeed the common language across cities and review members there are still difficulties including; the participants on the peer review have inherent difficulties in communicating complex circumstances. This is also a difficulty where individuals (whose English is regarded as very good) can still become frustrated in having to work within a foreign language without support for their own language. There is no full solution to this difficulty. <u>Recommend that the steering group discuss this issue and possible improvements</u>.

3.11. Interpreters and Translations

Interpreters for interview and workshop participants. This can help the participants within the city under review, but this does not aid the review team members. The interpreters need abilities in expressing social, economic, and environmental sustainability ideas and concepts, as well as management and political concepts (leadership, performance management, democratic and community engagement. Recommend that interpreters should be recognised and included as members given their importance in the process, and that they should meet with co-ordinators before review.

3.12. Increase Presentation audiences

Presentation audiences have often been smaller than the group participants involved in the project, suggesting limited involvement (or availability) of the participants. This could be an area for improvement. On some occasions the presentations have involved media coverage and have therefore reached a larger audience – this should be encouraged in all future reviews

3.13. Limited Presentation Feedback and City Participant Interaction

In many city presentations the feedback from, and interaction with, the audience was often limited, and this opportunity for two-way exchange and feedback was missed. One recommendation for discussion is that the presentation be immediately followed with a break-up into topic and theme groups (lead by review team members) to encourage the feedback currently lacking**.**

3.14. Section and Report Writing and Delivery

During the review, sections of the report are assigned to each of the review team members, and this is completed in the weeks following the review. This has caused problems in some cases. Difficulties relate to the time taken

to write up and submit to the review manager. It is recommended that a first draft of the report be produced in the first week (if not the first day) to give a rough version containing all relevant points. However it is recognised that time is needed (for review team members returning to work) to deal with work that has accumulated during the review. Also the team member needs some time to reflect upon the experience and early drafts, before writing the final section. There needs to be time to accommodate iterative development and reflection by team members before sending sections to the review manager (some contributions have required considerable work by the manager), who then needs additional time to edit and integrate the sections into a draft report. The time needed to complete this process has been underestimated and needs to be revised in review documentation.

3.15. Recognition of links between outputs, inputs and process; Monitoring and qualifying the review

One facet of reviews that has been shown in this evaluation process is that the quality (and comprehensiveness) of the review outputs are dependent upon the quality (and comprehensiveness) of the many review inputs. Weak or incomplete inputs lead to weak and incomplete outputs. The review inputs include: preparation, documentation, team management, team building, team make-up, time, team learning and sharing, team skills, knowledge and experiences, efforts and expertise, language abilities and translations, city co-ordination, review planning and structure, timing and organisation, the involvement of many and appropriate stakeholders, including community, businesses, and external agencies, team recording analysis and summary, report planning, responsibilities and writing. In other words, the quality of the outputs is dependent upon many factors, people and process. Problems in such reviews are therefore inevitable and should be expected; but as the quality of the review output might be compromised by weaknesses (at all or any of these links) any such weaknesses should be made explicit and review recommendations should be (implicitly or explicitly) qualified with this knowledge. There should therefore be qualification of any review findings if the review inputs are limited. In some cases where quality of inputs has been disputed this has led to responsibilities and blame being shifted around. This in itself is a lesson which draws attention to the complex nature of the reviews. It is important to minimise any peer and management tendencies to give overly positive views of the review inputs, as then the host city would be implementing imperfect or flawed recommendations. It is important that the review be considered and communicated as what it is; an impression formed in one week, with the inherent limitations of the process, and outputs being dependent upon inputs.

3.16. Participant Evaluation of Performance Assessment Report

The reviews have been assessed only from the perspective of *team members within the review*. Although this is necessary (and informative) for development of an effective review it can not be regarded as sufficient. Evaluation of the process and outputs by other participants (stakeholders, independent bodies) has yet to be explored and conducted. It is not yet clear how this could be done effectively given project constraints (it was not foreseen and there is limited budget provision in the original proposal) and will require further consideration. This suggests that the overall evaluation

process is currently incomplete and that this evaluation must be addressed before the development of action plans. The evaluation of review outputs (the presentation and report) is clearly an area where we need to create, trial, and improve effective evaluation procedures quickly. Evaluation of review outputs should include a process whereby participants can disagree and present counter evidence, or where they point out the impracticality of the recommendations. An effective evaluation process for the outputs of the review should involve all participants and perhaps additional independent reviewers. Furthermore this might be an opportunity to gain wider participant evaluation and also to improve engagement of external stakeholders (those involved in the review and those not involved). Recommend firstly that reports and recommendations are evaluated by city (internal and external) stakeholders and that there be a discussion on how best to do this, and secondly that issues identified inform future reviews and revised guidance documents.

3.17. Plan for turnover of review managers

Review planning and continuity has (on occasions) been affected by turnover of review managers. Managers involved in the pilot, training and project co-ordination have left in the course of the first year, reducing the available pool of review managers. This fact needs to be built into future planning and training, possibly with reserve managers nominated and contingency planning.

4 FINDINGS FROM 1st ROUND OF PEER REVIEWS.

4.1 Possible sources of self-evaluation

In the early stages of the project it was agreed that the project should incorporate the idea of learning, and that this learning should come from the experiences of all those involved in the project. Key groups involved in the project include the project management team, the review managers, the review teams, and the city co-ordinators. The project and review process can be evaluated (in principle) by all those involved in it.

4.2 City Review Team Evaluations

For the purposes of the initial evaluation the review team is taken to comprise all those involved in *conducting* the review. This includes the city co-ordinators, the review team members, the review managers, and the observers involved in reviews.

The ten trials have been evaluated by the teams that conducted, organised and managed the reviews. The evaluations were relevant to the reviews held between June and November 2002.

The areas and questions were formed from the early experiences of the PRESUD observers, and were tested in the early reviews. This format was modified and a web-based form of the evaluation was then tested and used to gather views of the review teams on all city reviews.

The following sections record the results of the self-evaluations received from the review teams. These indicate relatively strong and weak areas of the review as judged by those conducting the review.

4.3 General Results

Numbers Evaluating. A total of 44 evaluations were completed for the nine reviews:

- Tampere, Finland - June 2002 : 5 evaluation(s) received
- Malmo, Sweden - June 2002 : 5 evaluation(s) received
- Leipzig, Germany - June 2002 : 3 evaluation(s) received
- Vienna, Austria - September 2002 : 3 evaluation(s) received
- Newcastle, England - September 2002: 5 evaluation(s) received
- Venice, Italy - October 2002 : 5 evaluation(s) received
- The Hague, Holland - October 2002 : 7 evaluation(s) received
- Nottingham, England - October 2002 : 6 evaluation(s) received
- Birmingham, England - November 2002 : 4 evaluation(s) received

Full Results of Evaluation. Full results of the evaluation including extensive comments can be found at: http://www.PRESUD.org/cgi-bin/PRESUD/analysis.pl

Breakdown of findings by topic. The evaluation asked team members for views and comments on 21 areas. These areas and the views of the team members are tabulated below.

Table 1: Review Team Evaluations on Process and People

Aspect of Peer Review	Mostly Negative	Mixed	Mostly Positive
The Team Members	0	5	38
Overall Team Working	1	5	37
Overall PRESUD Organisation and Management	2	6	35
City Co-ordination	0	9	34
Review Management	1	8	34
Travel and Hotel Accommodation	0	11	32
PRESUD Observer	4	8	31
Team Venue and Interview Locations	5	8	30
City Presentation and Audience	6	7	30
Team Building and Briefing	3	11	29
Interviews with Internal Stakeholders	0	14	29
Team Discussions and Reflection	2	15	26
Preparation for the Review	4	16	23
Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders	3	17	23
Process of Recording Information	4	18	21
Analysis of Findings and Recommendations	5	18	20
Involvement of Community and Business	6	18	19
Documentation received	2	23	18
Involvement of External Agencies	6	19	18
Interpreter(s)	5	19	17
Preparing the Report After Review	6	27	10
TOTALS	65	282	554

Overall Experience of Peer Review

Overall 36 respondents regarded their experience of the review process to be mostly positive, 7 regarded it as mixed, only 1 felt it was mostly negative. In all individual reviews the number of respondents who regarded the reviews as mostly positive out-numbered those that regarded the review as mixed or mostly negative. Of the 901 responses summarised in the above table, 7% were mostly negative, 31% were mixed, and 61% were mostly positive. The entries in the table have been *approximately* ordered from best to worst. Although note that all aspects of the reviews can be improved upon including those at the top of the list (issues and suggestions on all aspects of the review in the comments have been made in the evaluations). Those areas lower down in the table are ones that can be regarded as most in need of improvement from the viewpoint of review team members.

1.4. Aspects of reviews judged to be good

The self-evaluation showed that the teams (including review managers, co-ordinators, and observers) regarded the team functions as most positive:

- Team members
- Team working

- PRESUD organisation
- City co-ordination
- Review management
- PRESUD observer
- travel and accommodation

However it should be noted that in each area many comments were still given for improvements. It may be that the team bonding processes and the nature of self-evaluation may give a distorted view of the actuality in some cases. What is clear however is that in general the extended team members have a mostly positive view of one another.

4.5. General and specific areas capable of improvement

From the responses we can identify areas judged to be relatively weak in the review process across all cities. In the following sections these will be investigated in more detail through comments of the teams, PRESUD observers and review managers. Those areas judged weakest can be seen from the table below.

Aspect of Review	Mostly Negative	Mixed	Mostly Positive
Preparing the Report After Review	6	27	10
Documentation received	2	23	18
Interpreter(s)	5	19	17
Involvement of External Agencies	6	19	18
Involvement of Community and Business	6	18	19
Analysis of Findings and Recommendations	5	18	20
Process of Recording Information	4	18	21
Access to Additional Information and Stakeholders	3	17	23
Preparation for the Review	4	16	23
Team Discussions and Reflection	2	15	26

These areas are areas that the teams themselves felt were relatively weak in the process. These cases offer most opportunity to improve according to the team.

4.6. Negative Comments received from review team members

The comments made by the review teams help to better understand some of the issues raised in the ranking of issues above.

Improved use of time. Aspects of the review which went particularly badly were associated with time limitations and difficulties; review preparation and interview preparation, reflection, elaboration, too many interviews, and preparing the presentation.

Preparation before the review. Better communication between managers, team, and co-ordinators, background information on city structure, admin,

political, national context, and decision–making processes. Background information on interviewees and interviewers.

Better Involvement of Stakeholders More people need to be involved; better balance between elements of sustainability (social and economic) and involvement of external (agencies, community, business and NGOs), better engagement of politicians.

Team Briefing could be improved. Need time set aside, with environment to encourage. This was made difficult by late arrivals and adverse environments, needs the review manager to take control and for team to have prepared.

Better involvement of external stakeholders. Could have been improved in many cases. Note however that this conflicts with time issues and a better balance needs to be created.

Analysis of findings and preparing the final report. Variable, common criticism of not enough reflection and shared discussion. Most reports had some difficulties associated with them, some delays in receiving contributions from team members. Need adequate time to develop from initial write up to adequate draft.

Team discussions and reflection, analysis of Findings and Recommendations. Many of the comments refer to limitations in this; particularly associated with time management or constraints.

Views of participant observers and review managers. Many of the issues raised by the review team members have been repeated or emphasised in the comments by PRESUD observers and review managers. These views will be sought through circulation of this paper and any additional points will be incorporated here.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS ON EVALUATION

2.1. The Need for Further Evaluation

The evaluation reported above represents the views of members of the PRESUD project team (members, co-ordinators, management group, and review managers). Furthermore they have evaluated the review process only. It is recognised that this is only one component of the overall evaluation (conducted by a particular sub-group involved in review). There are other groups that could be involved in evaluation, and other aspects of the project to evaluate. In particular the evaluation of the review *products* should be evaluated. These should be evaluated in both positive and negative terms.

2.2. Evaluation of reports and recommendations

The evaluation of the performance assessment report and the recommendations to the city has not yet been conducted. The utility (and quality) of the report and its recommendations will be an important factor in the future of peer reviews of sustainability and so is recommended as a next stage in the evaluation. Without this evaluation the project is unable to judge the utility of the first review process.

2.3. Personnel involved in Evaluating Reports

In addition to the PRESUD project team there are others who have expertise to judge the process and outputs. It is recommended that the views of all the city stakeholders involved in the city review (and perhaps those who were not involved but should have been) should be sought on the report outputs. In each review there were between 20 and 40 participants, which gives an evaluation pool of over 200 people (many experts in some field). This process would give additional opportunity to engage stakeholders who were not included in the first round (particularly senior politicians, social and economic experts, and external stakeholders)

2.4. Further Evaluation Mechanisms to be explored

Generally the web based evaluation approach was welcomed by the project members and this can be explored as a means to reach many stakeholders in different cities. One proposal is to send out interactive versions of the reports with associated evaluation survey. Evaluators can then comment on the report while giving their views on the evaluation questions. Another approach is to have workshops where all stakeholders are reassembled for a discussion and an evaluation is conducted face-to-face. Trials should be designed and conducted to arrive at an adequate evaluation process.

3. SUMMARY OF AMENDMENTS TO THE REVIEW PROCESS BY RESPONSIBILITY

TASK	ISSUES	RESPONSIBILITY	DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS
Team Development	Diversity in review team	PRESUD/IDeA	Co-ordinate
		City co-ordinators	Enlarge pool of possible review members by one, to compliment existing nominees.
	Lack of politicians	City co-ordinators	One politician from each city as a requirement to be corrected.
	Language (effective loss of expertise)	PRESUD/co-ordinators/Team	FOR DISCUSSION
	Seniority of team members vs sustainability expertise (credibility/breadth)	Co-ordinators PRESUD	Need to establish a balance of expertise and seniority. More seniority needed in teams while keeping themes covered.
	First review Numbers on team	PRESUD/co-ordinators	
Review Planning	Avoidance of national holiday periods – particularly summer	PRESUD	Awareness and planning
		City Co-ordinators	Communication
Training	Turnover of managers	IDeA	Need to have replacement of managers
	More personnel needed	Co-ordinators	
Preparing Cities for Review	Guidance Documentation	PRESUD	Include new learning
	Lack of Context for Team	Co-ordinators	Inclusion of political, administrative and decision making structures Inclusion of national/regional context on themes and indicators as available Dedicated discussion session with team before interviews
		Team (via Co-ordinators)	Do background research before review, question/forewarn co-ordinators, and present

			during first team meeting
	Team Briefing and Building (learning/sharing)	Review Managers/Team/Co-ordinators	Ensure quiet venue, round table, manager leads. Team present understanding.
Structure of Review	Number of days, introduction, workload, time management, balance of participants	Co-ordinators re	4 day reviews minimum Sunday night to Friday afternoon,
	Day of introduction	PRESUD	Modify Guidance to include
	Number of streams		Minimum of two; possibly three to accommodate required stakeholders and team mix in future.
	Additional day for a draft report	Teams and teams managers	Need extra day
	Team Building		
Performance assessment	Context	Co-ordinator Review Manager	Ensure context is clear in documentation and a first period. To include understanding of political, administrative, decision-making structures. National context on themes and indicators.
		PRESUD UWE	Give good examples to follow on CD/web
	Environmental Bias	PRESUD	Set up co-ordination groups in city to represent all aspects. Explicit responsibilities. Include social and economic expertise in all teams.
		Co-ordinator	Include social and economic in interviews and workshops
		Review manager	Ensure above
	Time Management	Co-ordinator Review Manager	5 day review; begin Sunday evening end Friday. Build in preparation and reflection (1/2 hour gaps) with 1 hour lunch

			and evening periods free.
			No more than 4/5 one hour interviews per day
		Team	Ensure full week attendance
	Lack of External Stakeholders	Co-ordinator	
Presentation and Audience	Poor turnout	Co-ordinator	Ensure
	Limited Feedback	Review manager Co-ordinator	Workshop breakdown on themes?
	Limited Dissemination	Co-ordinator	Involvement of media
Report Writing	Delays	Team Members	2 weeks for final draft of sections
		Review Manager	Further 4 weeks for first draft to city.
Report Themes	Management		
	Environment		
	Social and economic		
	Other themes wanted		
Evaluation of Review Process	Need for evaluation	PRESUD Managers, Team Members, Co-ordinators	Use of Web Based evaluation system
	Improvement in format	PRESUD/UWE	Improved categories learnt from first round
	Extension for second round	PRESUD/UWE	
	Evaluation and challenge of adequacy of themes		
Evaluation of Report	No evaluation process yet agreed	PRESUD/uwe	Trials of a web-based evaluation system
		Cty-co-ordinators/PRESUD	Develop evaluation trials suitable for city