

# SPARA – Activity 7.3

## Methodological report



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## Introduction

This document is intended to provide a Description of the approach taken within the development and subsequent analysis of our work dealing with engagement with the public and stakeholders. The various studies and activities which led to the production of (in particular) activity 7.3 dealt with a potentially complex mix of subject matter, some of which could be regarded as pragmatic in nature (e.g. public and stakeholder engagement activities, use of social media), with others perhaps best described as existing either at a higher strategic level, or indeed being central to the working ethos of a rural and regional airport (e.g. social capital, the airport as a gateway).



## Methodology applied within SPARA

The approach adopted within activity 7.3 was to explore how the various options and approaches to stakeholder engagement which had been identified in earlier project deliverables could, or already were, applied in a real context.

As stated in our strategy document, we selected Kirkwall Airport as it provided a context within which we had been aware of airport staff and stakeholders engaging in a whole range of engagement activities, and over a long period of time. It was therefore of particular interest to us to discuss and explore the experiences of the staff during what was an evolving process, and to discuss how and whether some methods which had become more apparent within the literature and within practice might or could be applied within the setting of Kirkwall. From a methodological perspective,



then, the choice of our case study was a pragmatic one, in that we wanted to concentrate on an airport location which had already been engaging with some, if not all, aspects of the SPARA project.

In terms of the practical method, we approached the case study in a logical and structured manner.

- Identify key themes (from deliverables in 7.1 and 7.2)
- Make contact with key participants (management, operational, public facing, service delivery, technical staff)
- Establish a semi-structured question guide from the themes
- Undertake a series of interviews, aimed at identifying both positive and negative resonances
- Undertake and complete a thematic analysis, to identify emerging issues and conclusions with regards to the current situation, context, and future planned developments

As we state in the strategic analysis (7.3), the context within which stakeholder and public engagement takes place is crucial (physical, managerial, geographical, social), and the recognition of this in terms of application and evaluation is crucial. This will aid the identifying who, what, how and why certain approaches might succeed, in a given context.



## Methodology for future application

We propose that the methodology which we applied within the **context** of Kirkwall airport could and should be applied in other contexts, to establish which of the methods and approaches which we have provided elsewhere in a taxonomy are likely to be most effective in a given context.

A further theme, which was discussed in some considerable depth during the course of SPARA, was that of the position of a rural and regional airport in terms of the social and cultural context of the region. In the case of Kirkwall, and discussed within various other case study scenarios during SPARA, the notion of an airport acting as a **gateway to region** appears to hold resonance, and could in fact hold the key to understanding how a smaller airport is not the 'non place' often discussed in architectural literature, but represents and embodies something far more important, vibrant and culturally important. Therefore, we suggest that this theme be explored within any discussions, debates and interviews conducted with staff and stakeholders, to help ensure that the cultural context and social importance of an airport can be fully realised.



## Guidance for evaluation of implementation and impact

As should be the case with any major intervention, we suggest that the implementation of a stakeholder and public engagement plan (once developed following the approach described here and elsewhere in 7.3) be followed by the implementation of an in-depth longitudinal evaluation of effects. In most cases, it is suggested that this could take the following form:

- Establishment of **baseline data** for each initiative proposed. For example, such data might include the number of social visitors to airport, the number of visitors to the airport website, the kinds of interaction which members of the public have with airport or of the geographical reach of any digital or social media engagement.
- In all cases, the baseline data should be **connected directly** with **practical actions** and plans which have emerged from discussion and debate. Furthermore, the data should be selected and collected to ensure that it is likely to provide a **reliable measurement of what is actually intended**. For example, if the aim behind an initiative is to increase the number of people visiting an airport for social reasons (e.g. to eat a meal), then the number of people who do so at the moment would become the baseline measurement. Similarly, if the airport decided that would be strategically or practically beneficial to increase the number of visitors to its social media accounts, then the baseline data routine to identify and record how many visitors they currently receive.
- In order to evaluate the **long term effects** of any initiatives, this collection of baseline data should then be **repeated on a regular basis**, and at intervals which are appropriate to each intervention or initiative.

By undertaking this process of monitoring, coupled with subsequent evaluation of whether the data collected is identifying success, must be regarded as crucial to the implementation of our methodology. By following this process, it is likely that the importance of stakeholder and public engagement will be made more apparent, than you is in fact be used within an future strategic planning of a rural and regional airport.