



**Overcoming the Challenges of 'Doing Participation' in
Environment and Development: Workshop Summary
of Lessons Learned and Ways Forward**

John Forrester and Åsa Gerger Swartling (eds)

Overcoming the Challenges of 'Doing Participation' in Environment and Development: Workshop Summary of Lessons Learned and Ways Forward

John Forrester and Åsa Gerger Swartling (eds)

Stockholm Environment Institute
Kräftriket 2B
SE 106 91 Stockholm
Sweden

Tel: +46 8 674 7070
Fax: +46 8 674 7020
Web: www.sei-international.org

Head of Communications: Robert Watt
Publications Manager: Erik Willis
Layout: Richard Clay

Cover Photo: © Vidarshi de Silva Wijeyeratne

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes, without special permission from the copyright holder(s) provided acknowledgement of the source is made. No use of this publication may be made for resale or other commercial purpose, without the written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Copyright © February 2010 by Stockholm Environment Institute



Stockholm Resilience Centre
Research for Governance of Social-Ecological Systems



Stockholm
University

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Preface	iv
Workshop theme: overcoming the challenges of ‘doing’ participation in the field of environment and development	1
Stakeholder participation and the work of SEI: an introduction – Åsa Gerger Swartling and John Forrester	2
Practical problems in deliberative and participatory policy analytic designs – Robert Hoppe	7
Stakeholder dialogue on environmental issues: stakeholder perspectives as the basis for participant selection – Eefje Cuppen	14
Voices at the table: participation, collaboration, and ownership in social-ecological issues – Ilan Chabay	17
Looking forward from the nexus of research and practice: learning from issues emerging with adaptive co-management – Ryan Plummer	21
Reconstructing the policy problem of instrumenting non-coercive approaches in Philippine integrated coastal management – Rasmus Klocker Larsen	27
Public interest in information and its significance for decision making – Sophie Kuppler	29
Workshop reports and responses – Rasmus Klocker Larsen	32
Workshop reflections – Lisen Schultz	34
Final Roundtable Response – Anders Esselin	35
Final reflections: making stakeholder engagement more participatory – John Forrester and Åsa Gerger Swartling	36
References	41
Participants	49

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to the diverse group of academics and practitioners who gave their time and energy to participate in our international workshop that these proceedings are based on, *The challenge of 'doing' participation in environment and development*. We also thank those participants who provided the papers that are presented in this report. We hope and believe their expertise and experience will be shared widely within our own organization, the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), as well as across other research and development-oriented organizations and the donor agency community working with sustainable development.

Thanks are also due to the SEI communications team, in particular Sturle Hauge Simonsen for arranging web casts of workshop presentations, allowing the international community to share the workshop results and Tom Gill for editorial advice on this report. We also thank Rob Watt for his support and advice.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) funded both the implementation of the workshop at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and SEI in May 2009, and the publication of the proceedings. We owe a debt of gratitude to Sida for its generous support. Sida was however not involved in the design of the study and does not necessarily support the views expressed in this report.

PREFACE

These workshop proceedings are not so much a *primer* in participation but rather a *reader* in participation. It is for those who have already decided to pursue a participatory approach to environment and development, but want to dip in to something which will help them better understand the issues involved. Drawing on experience from different contexts within both developed and developing countries, these proceedings highlight a number of emerging issues and examples of good practice, as well as challenges of participatory initiatives. Readers may find it helpful to view some papers as a continuum, one end of which presents the more technical and academic aspects of participation, while the other considers empirical and practical experiences. Throughout, we try to show how some of these academic problems can be solved in practice. Alternatively, some papers can be 'paired', in that they consider technical/academic issues and practical/empirical issues around the same subject matter; for example, Larsen's and Plummer's two papers, which taken together present empirical and theoretical insights into adaptive co-management. Whatever way you use this report, we hope you will find it useful for your purposes.

The papers herein were all originally presented at the International Workshop on *Overcoming the challenges of 'doing' participation in the field of environment and development* held at the Stockholm Environment Institute and the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm on 28–29 May 2009. Participants in the workshop are listed in alphabetical order at the end of these proceedings. The workshop programme is presented below.

**WORKSHOP THEME: OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF 'DOING'
PARTICIPATION IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

Programme for Thursday 28 May, 2009

Introduction

- Katarina Eckerberg

First conference address

- Susan Owens. *Publics, politics and participation: some reflections*

Session 1: Addressing the issues of 'doing' participation – why do we do it?

(Session chair/discussion facilitator: John Forrester. Session reporter: Lisen Schultz)

- Robert Hoppe. Keynote address: *Perplexities of mini-public deliberative and participatory designs in policy analysis*
- Rasmus Klocker Larsen. *Legitimacy and stakeholder alliances: instrumenting non-coercive approaches in integrated coastal management*
- Nilufar Matin. *Participation for the commons*
- Neil Powell. *Using soft systems methodologies to uncover stakeholding processes*

Session 2: Addressing the challenges of 'doing' participation: action in research – How do we do it?

(Session chair/discussion facilitator: Åsa Gerger Swartling. Session Reporter: Rasmus Klocker Larsen)

- Ilan Chabay. Keynote address: *Voices at the table – participation, collaboration and ownership in social-ecological issues*
- Claudia Carter. *The use of imaginative engagement as a participatory and learning tool*
- Sophie Kuppler. *Public interest in information and its significance for decision making*
- Jasber Singh. *Reflections from India: Towards re-imagining participation?*
- Louise Simonsson. *The use of Participatory-GIS as a planning tool in post-disaster communities – limitations and possibilities*

Programme: Friday 29 May, 2009

Second conference address

- Jim Woodhill. *The risks and consequences of participation failure*

Session 3: The future of 'doing' participation – how can we do it better?

Session chair/discussion facilitator: Beatrice Crona

- Ryan Plummer. Keynote address: *Looking forward from the Nexus of Research and Practice: learning from Issues Emerging with Adaptive Co-management*
- Eefje Cuppen. *Putting perspectives into participation: Constructive Conflict Methodology for stakeholder dialogues*

Final roundtable discussion (and session 3 continued): Reflections and ways forward

Session chair /discussion facilitator: Åsa Gerger Swartling

- Tom Wakeford. *Expertise, participation and action*
- John Forrester. *Summary and reflections*
- Kate Lonsdale, Anders Esselin, Lisen Schultz. *Reflections*
- Katarina Eckerberg. *Reflections and endnotes*

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND THE WORK OF SEI: AN INTRODUCTION

Åsa Gerger Swartling and John Forrester

SEI has a 20-year tradition of practising stakeholder engagement in environment-related research and development, at all scales and worldwide. The Institute links science and policy and engages with people outside the research community. This is vital in making our work relevant to stakeholders, promoting empowerment of these groups and supporting improved policymaking. By focusing on the management of complex environmental, developmental and social issues, SEI research and practice adheres to the principle that creating realistic and effective solutions requires taking a multi-disciplinary approach – no single discipline has all the answers to the challenges that are facing the world, but all have a piece of the answer. In aiming to be practically useful, our research should also consider perspectives other than those of the scientific community, particularly of those who would be involved in implementing outcomes or who may be affected by them. Engaging with a range of stakeholder groups is thus a common feature of SEI's work.

There is, however, no single way to practice participation. There are many questions around the whys and hows of stakeholder participation and engagement in sustainable development efforts. What is, and what should be, the role of participatory approaches in environmental management and policy-making? Who is a participant? What is the role of stakeholder knowledge in management and policy processes? What works well? Further, what could be done to support more effective research on participatory processes and to ensure sustainable outcomes? How should knowledge from different participants from different epistemic backgrounds be brought together? Is double-loop learning – where actors can reflect on and change questions (see Forrester *et al.* 2008: 14) – always desirable? What is the role of boundary or bridging organizations within knowledge systems? Is a successful boundary actor (or an 'environmental champion' working across scales or sectors) more important to the outcome than stakeholder-led processes? These are some of the questions that are addressed day-to-day in SEI's work.

The international "participation" workshop on which these proceedings are based was supported by the Sida-supported project, *Learning from Engagement: Reflection from Participatory Work and Practice within SEI*. The project sets out to capture lessons on stakeholder engagement within SEI, and to share experiences with and learn from other organizations working with participatory approaches and the sustainability agenda (see further Forrester *et al.* 2008). The workshop took place on 28–29 May 2009 and was hosted by SEI and Stockholm Resilience Centre. For SEI it was a milestone in terms of promoting inter-organizational learning and collaboration in stakeholder participation. With these proceedings we hope to share the presentations and discussions of the workshop with a wider audience.

We would first like to place SEI's work in context. SEI's mission is to bridge science and policy on environment and development. To do this, SEI needs to engage stakeholders at all levels of gov-

PUBLIC INTEREST IN INFORMATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR DECISION MAKING⁴

Sophie Kuppler

Introduction

The primary goal of this paper is to look into the role scientific information plays for the public, especially in relation to environmental activists who aim at influencing political decision-making. In this, it aims to better understand how far information enables action (cf. Plummer Figure 1 in this volume). Scientific information has long been seen as complicated for lay people to understand. However, recent significant literature and research has shown that the public is able to understand scientific debates on their own terms (Lambert and Rose 1996; Gerger Swartling 2002; Yearley *et al.* 2001 and 2003).

With the Aarhus Convention and the related European Directive on Public Access to Information the need to make environmental information accessible to the public has been formalized. In the opening paragraphs of the directive it is stated that better access to information would lead to “more effective participation by the public in environmental decision-making” (European Council, 2003).

Due to the often-observed gap between knowledge and action with regards to environmental problems it can, though, be doubted that making more information available will simply and directly lead to an embeddedness of a particular problem. Social embeddedness is needed to achieve effective participation.

The case study

The citizen initiative “Bürgerinitiative Feinstaub” in Stuttgart, the capital of the southern German Bundesland Baden-Württemberg, has served as a case study to investigate the role scientific information for environmental activists aiming at influencing decision-making. In particular areas in Stuttgart the threshold level for particulate matter in the air is exceeded far more often than allowed. The proclaimed aim of the Bürgerinitiative Feinstaub is to get the municipality to act and take measures against high levels of air pollution. This suggests that there are active and – in a certain way – informed citizens present. As will be argued below (and elsewhere in this volume), public participation in decision making is an important tool in reaching sustainability. In this particular case parts of the public started to actively demand a cleaner environment due to a lack of engagement from the municipality’s side.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with activists and non-activists living in the same area to answer the following research questions: what role does information play in the context of this group of people, and especially what role does it play in achieving embeddedness of a problem?

The need for participation and its link to information

Political decision-making in the environmental field is often complex, as many interests and sometimes contradicting factors need to be taken into account and trade-offs have to be made. This can lead to a perceived lack of legitimation for democratically elected policy-makers to take the decisions in question. Wynne (1996), for example, observed that people perceive politicians to have secret interests that are not communicated, but that influence decision-making to a considerable degree. Public participation in such decision-making can increase (perceived) legitimation of the decisions taken.

The public’s local knowledge can add value to the scientific findings by embedding it in a local reality (Van Herzele 2004). Wynne (1996) further argued that the necessity of including the public’s understanding stems from the fact that science is not value free, but based on certain assumptions about the

4 This paper is based on the author’s MSc thesis (Kuppler 2008) written at the Department of Environmental, Social and Spatial Change at Roskilde University, Denmark.

social settings. It is these assumptions that should be open for contestation by the public. This implies that the public should be involved in the creation of knowledge instead of only its management (De Marchi 2003, Mayer 2003).

Participation is though sometimes misinterpreted as simply providing the public with information. It can be assumed that a person will be especially interested in a problem and engage in it if s/he feels directly affected or feels that s/he has a stake in this particular problem. Thus, to explain the link between information and social embeddedness it is important to understand for what reason people feel affected and what information is required.

In order to know about a problem a person has to be informed first. The information process generally takes place through formal and informal information channels (Masuda and Garvin 2006). Usually, it is the entity offering the information that decides which information it communicates. In the best case, the choice of information is adapted to the recipient to feed into her/his interests. In public environmental information systems (PEIS) this is usually not the case (Haklay 2003). The public is perceived as one entity with one single interest. In reality, different groups within the public look for different kinds of information.

The European Directive on Public Access to Information, however, defines environmental information in the senses of technocratic information (such as measuring data) the political responses in case that action is perceived to be needed; information on what is to be protected, namely human health and safety (EC 2003). The information that needs to be provided thus solely consists of information on the management of a problem and does not include the creation phase.

The type of information described in the European Directive introduced above is also the type of information that is made available by the city of Stuttgart on the air pollution problem. On the internet, measured data and air pollution maps can be found (state of the elements of the environment) as well as the before mentioned air pollution prevention plan (a policy – see www.stadtklima-stuttgart.de). Further, information meetings were held in which the measures taken by the city were presented, and the impacts on health discussed.

The activists' view on information

Despite the information on offer, this particular citizen activist group, "Bürgerinitiative Neckartor", formed under the premise that they were not provided with enough information. As every citizen has – and had – access to the air pollution prevention plan, the information meetings and measuring data, it appears that this was not perceived as sufficient.

When asked how they decided whether a piece of information was trustworthy or not most of the activists said that it was the source of information – if they trusted that then also the piece of information was trustworthy. This is not new, and has been recognised before (*e.g.* see Irwin *et al.* 1996). However, they further cited the discussions within the group as a major tool for scrutinizing information. Members would bring in different pieces of information, including scientific articles and information collected at university lectures. None complained that this kind of information was difficult to understand (*cf.* Yearley *et al.* 2001 and 2003). If there were questions, these were discussed in the group. This exchange of information was one of the factors leading to a broader perception of the problem, moving from too high levels in particulate matter to the question what can be expected from life in a city and what is a good standard of living. This can also be considered to show signs of 'double loop learning' discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Another factor was the verification of the existence of the problem and the related risk with the help of personal experiences (see also Irwin *et al.* 1999, Bickerstaff and Walker 1999). As particulate matter is not visible and does not smell bad, direct personal experience could not be used in order to decide whether the problem does in fact exist. Instead, experiences that can be linked with air pollution in general were cited when asked why they got interested in the problem. These ranged from congested streets and a lack of cycling lanes to smog and car fairs in the city centre. This finding parallels research carried out on urban air pollution in York and Sheffield in the UK where knowledge of cause and effect are held

in parallel by members of the public, rather than conceived of in a linear sequence way as in technical and policy making (Cinderby and Forrester 2005).

A third factor leading to the broadening of the problem was new members joining who were interested in the topic as such, but did not live in the affected area. They already had experience in working in other activist groups and brought new perspectives into the new group.

When asked if they trusted the local government to take the right decisions the activists said no. They had the perception that the local government took all decisions “behind closed doors” and only let the public have a say once all important decisions were already taken. There was a clear demand for being involved in knowledge creation instead of only information management. The lack of trust was mainly caused by a lack of information on why and how the proposed measures were supposed to better the local situation. A person’s lack of trust in the authorities to react properly to the problem has major influence on risk perception. The authorities’ legitimation to take decisions in the environmental field is often put in question by certain groups of citizens as they perceive those authorities as having hidden interests. These interests are perceived to hinder the authorities from taking the decision that serves the public’s interest best (Bush *et al.* 2001, Bickerstaff 2004).

The activists’ overall conclusion was that the local government was serving the local industry instead of the citizens and was thus not capable of reacting to the problem in an adequate manner. They came to this conclusion as they perceived the problem not only as one of levels of particulate matter, but of transport and city planning.

The activists were striving to understand what lies behind the problem and wanted to be enabled to take an informed decision on how best to deal with it. They were calling for ‘democratizing’ expertise. This implies that pluralistic advice should be given to public authorities and citizens, increasing the capacity for informed deliberation (Liberatore and Funtowicz 2003).

The non-activists’ view on information

In contrast to the activists, the non-activists did not perceive that there was a lack of information. However, they agreed with the activists that the primary way by which to judge the trustworthiness of a piece of information was by judging its source. In their opinion, though, the local authorities did provide enough information and did take the right measures to combat the high levels of particulate matter in the air.

However, they were also aware of the relation between a high number of cars and air pollution, but they did not perceive it as a problem. Further, they less frequently mentioned personal experiences that could lead to the perception that air pollution levels were high. They trusted the politicians to take the right decisions. Due to this trust they were not interested in receiving more information than they already did. They further did not search for information or debate the problem with others.

It could be concluded that the non-activists did not perceive the local authorities to have a hidden agenda. Neither did they feel that cars are put first in the city or feel this was a problem. Thus they did not see any reason to doubt that the politicians interpreted the scientific and technocratic information at hand correctly. This indicates that the decision to become activist, or not, is more political than technical.

Conclusion

The difference in information needs between the activists and non-activists shows that perceiving the public as one entity with one single interest might lead to wrong conclusions on what kind of information is wanted in a particular case (see also Bush *et al.*, 2001).

Usually, the providing side decides which information is made available. However, this ‘information asymmetry’ has been shown not to work in other field such as economics (see Akerlof 1970; Stiglitz 2000). Existing methods and technologies are of course also a constraint, but finally it is the people in the information system that decide on which of the existing methods are used and how the system is built. In the best case, the choice of information would be adapted to the recipient to feed into her/his interests. In reality there are people that feel that they are not informed satisfyingly. This showed to be

particularly true for those who would like to understand what lies behind a problem and who are interested in being enabled to take an informed decision about how to best deal with it.

For participatory processes this means that the information made available needs to be much more far-reaching than usual. What is needed is not solely information on the technicalities of the problem and some proposed solutions, but information that allows understanding as to why these solutions are proposed and what implications they have for the individual citizen. This also demands that the problem at hand is not seen as an isolated environmental (or technical) problem, but as a problem embedded in a (local) political reality.

It is the interested public that produces the localized knowledge needed. It does this by collecting information, scrutinizing and relating it to their understanding of the local situation. It has to be expected that this exercise broadens and deepens the scope of the problem at hand. In Stuttgart it changed the focus of discussion from "What to do to keep to the limit values that were set at European level" to "How could we do transport planning differently to move from a car-centred city to a peoples-city". The new knowledge generated thus merged scientific and technocratic information with (perceived) political agendas. Thus, also the notion that the public is not interested in and not able to understand scientific knowledge has to be at least partially abandoned (cf Gerger Swartling 2002).

From this it can be concluded that it is important to understand why people feel affected or feel that they have a stake in a particular environmental problem (or not) in order to be able to meaningfully involve them in the participatory process. This further means that it needs to be understood what the different local realities look like.

This brings us back to an argument made in the beginning: One aim of any participatory process has to be to enable people to take informed decisions. If this is not the case, and people have choices put before them which they consider to have been taken behind closed doors, then no new knowledge on the problem will be created which could lead to creative solutions, and true participation cannot occur.

WORKSHOP REPORTS AND RESPONSES

Report from session 2: Addressing the challenges of 'doing' participation: action in research – how do we do it?

Rasmus Klocker Larsen

Two of the contributions from the five speakers in this session (Ilan Chabay, Claudia Carter, Sophie Kuppler, Jasber Singh, and Louise Simonsson) are reproduced in their individual papers. This session report focuses on the ensuing discussion and emerging insights from session 2. In so doing, particularly when writing in retrospect, it is impossible not to position these insights in the context of the whole workshop and instil it with some degree of personal reflection. As the second session in the workshop the exchange was characterised by a high degree of divergence in the perspectives, theories and assumptions of the participants and thus it seems appropriate in this report to try and capture the diversity of views expressed. A structuring device (mnemonic tool) is used called TWOCAGES (Transformation, Worldview, Owner, Client, Guardians, Environment, System (Checkland, 1999)) introduced in the workshop by Neil Powell in session 1 [<http://sei-international.org/index.php/news-and-media/1567-putting-participation-in-perspective-neil-powell>]. This tool is frequently applied in participatory stakeholder analyses or action research into problematic situations with high degrees of controversy and/or diversity of stakeholder perspectives. Here, it is used to organise some of the insights from the 21 researchers present and their exchange in session 2.