The split ladder of participation: A diagnostic, strategic, and evaluation tool to assess when participation is necessary

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ABSTRACT

The mainstream literature sees participation as critical to deepening democracy and solving complex environmental issues. An explosion of literature on public participation has occurred since Arnstein's ladder of participation in (1969). However, the literature does not address the conditions under which participation is likely to work and what it can achieve in different circumstances. In order to address these questions, this paper reviews the literature on participation, learning, trust, governance and management and conceptualizes the analysis through developing the split ladder of participation. It creates four ideal typical circumstances and explains what the nature and goal of stakeholder participation is for each circumstance. This model is then tested in four case studies in Mendoza, Argentina, Coquimbo, Chile, and Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada. This split ladder is presented as both a diagnostic and evaluation tool and is supported through the use of examples.

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1. Introduction

Environmental governance is challenged in responding to the complex environmental problems of the Anthropocene (Biermann et al., 2012; Gupta, 2014a). An emerging governance frame, adaptive governance, responds to this complexity (Folke et al., 2005) by stressing social learning, reflexivity, responsiveness, and accountability, operating in a system where the science is contextual, knowledge is incomplete and multiple ways of knowing and understanding are present (Brunner et al., 2005). Further, reflexive governance (Voß et al., 2006), deliberative democracy (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), and transition management (Loorbach, 2007; Rotmans et al., 2001) build on these themes. Congruently, global environmental change requires new ways of knowledge development and a new inclusive responsive science (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993, 2008; Gibbons et al., 1994; Jasanoff, 2004; Nowotny et al., 2001; Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986).

Almost all proposals on improving global governance recommend stakeholder involvement (Norton, 2005; Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007b; Pahl-Wostl, 2009). This emerges from the literature on adaptive governance, development (Chambers, 1997; Hickey and Mohan, 2005), law (Razzaque, 2009) and

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particularly in relation to water governance (de Loe and Kreutzwiser, 2007; Plummer, 2006; Brooks, 2002; Hampton, 1999). The message is that the greater the participation, the better the chances for improving governance as first expressed in Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969).

The literature often romanticizes participation without examining when participation is challenging and/or implemented through inappropriate mechanisms, or where policy making is more appropriately technocratic and created or implemented by expert bureaucrats. Although the literature covers the contextual difficulties of participation (Allan and Wilson, 2009; Collins and Ison, 2009b), with modest impact (Akamani and Hall, 2015), it scarcely covers the conditions under which participation may work and the conditions which determine what level of participation should be used (Warren, 2009) for different policy problems. This paper hypothesizes that participation is not always necessary, not always useful, and may not always lead to consensus. It uses a methodological framework which links the nature of participation to the problem type, the nature of learning needed, and the type of adaptive governance or management required.

This paper first explores the nature of policy problems or problem structuring, the learning required in different types of problems, the concepts of trust, management, and governance. Based on these concepts and elaborating further on Arnstein's ladder, this paper creates a split ladder of participation to conceptualize the different relevance and impacts of participation to different problem types. This split ladder is presented, discussed, and analyzed in four case studies of water governance.

2. Elements relevant for assessing if and when participation is necessary

2.1. Introduction

Deciding on when and at what level participation is appropriate in which context is an inadequately developed puzzle (Hedelin and Lindh, 2008). Arnstein's hierarchical ladder system intimates that the highest rungs should be preferred over lower rungs (Arnstein, 1969; Johnson et al., 2004). This presumption is often replicated in the adaptive (water) management and governance literature. However, different levels of engagement are likely appropriate in different contexts depending on the objectives and the capacity of stakeholders (Richards et al., 2004; Michener, 1998; Tippett et al., 2007; Fung, 2006) and at differing levels of governance (local to international). This theme is explored below by analysing the nature of the problem, the role of learning and trust, or the degree to which stakeholders are willing to defer to the judgments of other stakeholders in the policy process (Tsaang et al., 2009: 103) which can reduce conflict (Mackenzie and Krogman, 2005: 517). Finally a distinction between management and governance of policy problems assists the analysis.

2.1.1. The nature of the policy problem
The structuring of the policy problem (a gap between a current situation and a more desirable future one; Hoppe, 2011, p. 23) is

an important determinant of the appropriate mechanism of public participation. Adapting to anthropogenic climate change is a policy problem; responding to the increasing frequency and magnitude of extreme climate events such as floods and droughts is the same problem, structured differently. Further, problems can be unpacked into smaller policy problems. For example, climate adaptation includes the policy problems of preparing municipal infrastructure and improving the adaptive capacity of rural producers for increasing frequency and intensity of floods and droughts. An issue typology, or how a policy problem is structured or framed and the resulting policy's form and content, determines how policy makers and the public construct meaning around the problem and how it is analyzed (Lebel et al., 2010; Collins and Ison, 2009a).

Although the framing of environmental and other social problems has been studied extensively (de Boer et al., 2010; Hisschemoller, 2005; Hoppe and Hisschemöller, 2001), in the context of integrating adaption into public policy it is only starting to be studied (Adger et al., 2009; Dupuis and Knoepfel, 2011; Dupuis, 2011; Moser and Ekstrom, 2010; Wolf, 2012). Policy design theories which analyze the form and content of a policy are highly relevant to explaining the deficit of implementing adaptation into policy processes (Dupuis, 2011; Hulme, 2005); they are independent variables determining the success of a particular policy (Ingram et al., 2007; Schneider, 2006; Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

Implicit in the definition of a policy problem is the social and political construct which articulates that a particular state of affairs is undesirable and that a more desirable future state (in accordance with science, values, norms, and goals) can be attained by governmental action (Hisschemöller and Hoppe, 1996). 'Reality' is linked to the 'perception' (Carroll, 1988: 1) of actors, and specifically those with the power to determine the policy agenda (Hisschemöller and Gupta, 1999). The relation between problem perception, definition, and policy framing between the citizenry and policy makers is important in democratic governance. Perspectives structure human observations and help people make sense of their environment and are constituted by people's underlying frames or belief systems (Vasileiadou et al., 2012). Structural disconnects between major groups and their 'perspectives' may result in a democratic deficit in which democratic systems lose viability (Hoppe, 2011: 5); for example, when the government frames a policy problem as 'responding to drought' or 'responding to flood' and the public frames the same problem as 'adapting to climate change' (Hurlbert, 2014). Examining public and government problem framing disconnects warrants expanding on the discussion of the structuring of policy problems.

Structured problems are problems where there is substantive agreement on norms, principles, ends and goals surrounding a policy problem and agreement on the knowledge inherent in solving the problem. These problems are largely determined by technical/bureaucratic specialists who are guardians of the public interest. An example of a structured environmental/drought problem is identifying the cost effectiveness of different crop practices to reduce soil erosion or determining the costs and benefits of expanding an irrigation project (Batie, 2008: 1177). A moderately structured policy problem occurs when policy makers have either