



Research article

Recruiting, integrating, and sustaining stakeholder participation in environmental management: A case study from the Great Lakes Areas of Concern

Ryan Holifield^{a,*}, Kathleen C. Williams^b

^a Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, PO Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201, USA

^b US EPA National Health and Environmental Effects Laboratory, Mid-Continent Ecology Division, 6201 Congdon Boulevard, Duluth, MN 55804, USA



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Stakeholder participation
Environmental project
Great Lakes
Area of Concern
Relationship-building
Engagement process

ABSTRACT

Stakeholder participation is now widely viewed as an essential component of environmental management projects, but limited research investigates how practitioners perceive the major challenges and strategies for implementing high-quality participation. In order to address this gap, we present findings from a survey and interviews conducted with managers and advisory committee leaders in a case study of United States and binational (US and Canada) Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Our findings suggest that recruiting and integrating participants and sustaining participation over the long term present distinctive ongoing challenges that are not fully recognized in existing conceptualizations of the process of implementing participation. For example, it can be difficult to recruit active stakeholders to fill vacant “slots,” to integrate distinctive interests and perspectives in decision-making processes, and to keep participants involved when activity is low and less visible. We present strategies that emerged in the survey and interviews for addressing these challenges, emphasizing the building and leveraging of relationships among stakeholders themselves. Such strategies include balancing tight networks with an openness to new members, supplementing formal hearings with social gatherings, making participation socially meaningful, and dividing labor between managers and advisory committees.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder participation has become widely accepted as an essential component of environmental management projects. The idea is now commonplace that decision-making can benefit from the participation of both technical experts and ordinary citizens. Fiorino (1990) categorized the benefits of citizen participation as *substantive* (bringing distinctive and valuable knowledge into the project), *normative* (honoring democratic rights), and *instrumental* (making decisions more legitimate and effective). Research suggests that effective participatory processes can generate improved decisions and other beneficial outcomes, including learning, increased trust, and reduced conflict (e.g., Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Danielson, 2016; Reed, 2008; Sterling et al., 2017). However, successful participation depends on both the design of the process and several contextual factors (e.g., Baker and Chapin, 2018; de Vente et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2018; Sterling et al., 2017). In some cases, the difficulty of realizing these benefits and the risks of generating negative outcomes have generated disillusionment about participation (e.g., Moon et al., 2017; Staddon et al., 2015).

Consequently, a key question for environmental management is how to design and implement stakeholder participation processes of high quality. A growing literature addresses dimensions of these processes, including identifying and characterizing stakeholders (e.g., Colvin et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 1997), structuring levels and degrees of participation (e.g., Davidson, 1998; Reed et al., 2018), implementing participatory techniques (e.g., Van Asselt et al., 2001), and evaluating participatory processes (e.g., Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Luyet et al., 2012). However, as Mease et al. (2018, p. 149) point out, little research focuses on “the experiences, perceptions, and stated needs of practitioners themselves”: that is, those who coordinate, manage, and implement participation in practice. We contend that the perspectives of these practitioners help build not only deeper understanding of practical obstacles to realizing the benefits of participation, but also richer conceptualizations of stakeholder participation as a process. This study addresses this gap with the following research question: how do practitioners perceive their biggest challenges for implementing high-quality stakeholder participation and the most effective strategies for overcoming these challenges?

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: holifiel@uwm.edu (R. Holifield), williams.kathleen@epa.gov (K.C. Williams).

In order to investigate this question, we analyze surveys and interviews conducted with a sample of managers and citizen advisory committee leaders in a case study of the Great Lakes Areas of Concern program. This program, which originated as an annex to a 1987 Protocol that amended the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) of 1978¹ between the US and Canada, designated 43 “severely degraded geographic areas” as Areas of Concern (AOCs) (International Joint Commission, 2018). At each AOC, the objective is to develop a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) to have the area delisted, based on eliminating adverse impacts known as beneficial use impairments, or BUIs (International Joint Commission, 2018). The most recent version of the Agreement directs the two countries to develop these plans “in cooperation and consultation with State and Provincial Governments, Tribal Governments, First Nations, Métis, Municipal Governments, watershed management agencies, other local public agencies, and the Public,” and stakeholder participation is a central tenet in their implementation (GLWQA, 2012, p. 22). In the US, the program is implemented at each AOC by a state agency in cooperation with a public advisory body. As of 2018, four US AOCs and three Canadian AOCs have been delisted, so in both countries most AOCs remain active.

Although the Areas of Concern program is in many ways unique, the diversity of sites in the program and its distinctive, longstanding emphasis on participation make it an important case for research. Each AOC encompasses a unique mix of biophysical attributes, agency priorities, and public support, but all include attempts to implement a similar process of remediation and restoration. In addition, the creation and implementation of RAPs represent a departure from traditional regulatory approaches, by making public consultation integral to environmental improvement (Jetoo et al., 2015; Muldoon, 2012). The Great Lakes community of resource managers, scholars, and activists considers the RAPs to be a long-running experiment in participatory governance (Muldoon, 2012; Williams, 2015). Numerous other studies have examined dimensions of stakeholder or public involvement in Great Lakes AOCs (e.g., Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Grover and Krantzberg, 2012; Hartig and Law, 1994; Hartig et al., 1998; Krantzberg, 2003; Krantzberg et al., 2015; Landre and Knuth, 1993a, 1993b; MacKenzie, 1993, 1996; Sproule-Jones, 2002). However, most of these studies are over fifteen years old—activity on the US side of the border has increased substantially since the passage of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)² in 2010. Finally, changes in funding and agency support over time have resulted in uneven implementation (Jetoo et al., 2015).

Through this Great Lakes case study, our primary objectives are to develop an expanded conceptual model of the process of stakeholder participation and, using this model, to contribute to the development of key principles and strategies for implementing high-quality participation. We begin by introducing the conceptual framework that we propose to expand—distinctive in that it divides the implementation of stakeholder participation into discrete components (Luyet et al., 2012)—and the most relevant recent research on principles and strategies of stakeholder participation. After describing our methodology, we present our major findings, suggesting that the key challenges and strategies perceived by practitioners pertained to three major components of implementation: recruiting active stakeholders, integrating them into decision-making processes, and sustaining their long-term participation. We conclude by proposing an expansion and modification of the Luyet et al. (2012) model, comparing and contrasting our results

with pertinent recent findings, and suggesting topics for future research. Among these topics, we call for special attention to social relationships among stakeholders, which emerged in our case study as significant to all stages of implementation. Despite the uniqueness of the Areas of Concern program, we suggest that the expanded model and best practices are applicable in a wide variety of environmental management situations.

2. Conceptualizing the implementation of stakeholder participation

In order to characterize key challenges and strategies for implementing high-quality stakeholder participation, it is useful to disaggregate the multiple components that together make up the participation process. While other frameworks emphasize types and levels of participation and their relationships with decisions and outcomes (see Reed, 2008), Luyet et al. (2012) introduce a distinctive and useful model representing the main stages in the practical implementation of participation.

Luyet et al. (2012, p. 214) conceptualize stakeholder participation—distinguished from more general “public participation” by its emphasis on distinctive stakeholder groups—as a “system with inputs (e.g. environmental policy), outputs (decisions) and processes.” In their framework, six processes constitute the major components: stakeholder identification, stakeholder characterization, stakeholder structuration, choice of participatory techniques, implementation of participatory techniques, and evaluation. Stakeholder analysis, geared toward identifying and characterizing appropriate stakeholders, has become a well-established field (e.g., Colvin et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2009). As Luyet et al. (2012, p. 215) describe it, the task of structuration is “to structure the identified stakeholders into homogeneous groups and to give each group a specific degree of involvement.” Arnstein's (1969) well-known “ladder of participation” provides the classic model for specifying degrees of involvement; however, recent scholarship suggests replacing the ladder metaphor with a “wheel,” which involves a more complex relationship between levels of involvement and the structure in which participation takes place (Davidson, 1998; Mease et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2018). Once managers have integrated stakeholders into a project, their next steps are to determine and implement appropriate participatory techniques, which includes devising methods and forums for communication and interaction (Rowe and Frewer, 2000). Finally, managers evaluate the process in order to inform and improve the implementation of stakeholder participation in subsequent projects.

Each of these processes brings different challenges and different strategies for overcoming them. Among the most common challenges associated with stakeholder identification, for example, is the need to include and accommodate under-represented groups and addressing inequities (Butler and Adamowski, 2015; Mease et al., 2018). Managers have come to recognize that the range of interests and constituencies represented within a stakeholder group makes a difference for how the process works (Butler and Adamowski, 2015; Glicken, 2000; Mitchell et al., 1997). Stakeholder characterization may also involve the difficult task of characterizing the barriers to participation that these groups face, along with the political conflicts and power differences that may condition their participation (Luyet et al., 2012). In some contexts, such power relations may render a more inclusive, “bottom-up” structure to stakeholder participation ineffective (Reed et al., 2018). As for implementing participatory techniques, an example of a common obstacle is the legal requirement to emphasize public hearings, which practitioners have long regarded as ineffective (Mease et al., 2018; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). With respect to evaluation, one of the greatest challenges is the lack of efficient and inexpensive tracking metrics (Mease et al., 2018).

Among recent studies of stakeholder participation in environmental management, Mease et al. (2018) are exceptional in their focus on the perceptions and experiences of practitioners. Their study, based on

¹ The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1978 replaced the original 1972 Agreement; it was updated in 2012 (International Joint Commission, 2018).

² The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is a federal funding program through which the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force “strategically targets” environmental threats and “accelerates progress” toward long-term ecosystem goals (USEPA, 2018, n.p.).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11023265>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11023265>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)