



Public participation in landscape planning: Effective methods for implementing the European Landscape Convention in Norway



Sebastian Eiter^{a,*}, Marte Lange Vik^{b,1}

^a Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute, PO Box 115, 1431 Ås, Norway

^b Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Geography, 7491 Trondheim, Norway

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ABSTRACT

Public participation in landscape planning and management has received increased attention across Europe since the European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in 2004. The ELC has now been ratified by many countries, which have been working on its implementation for up to several years. In this article, we study experiences from public participation in five different planning processes in Norway, and we assess the methods used according to a set of evaluation criteria developed in a European context: Scope, Representativeness, Timing, Comfort and Convenience, and Influence. Subsequently we identify ten singular methods as being particularly effective in terms of contributing significantly to increasing scores of Scope, Representativeness, and Comfort and convenience, i.e. the criteria most influenced by the methods chosen. All ten methods identified contribute to increase scores on one or two evaluation criteria, which underlines the importance of combining different methods to achieve effective participation within the restricted framework of a concrete spatial planning process. In an international perspective it seems most fruitful to apply a set of both dominantly verbal methods as practiced in Norway and somewhat more visual approaches used in other countries. This would also acknowledge basic differences among theoretical understandings of landscape and follow a recent scientific development of the concept of landscape.

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Introduction

The European Landscape Convention (ELC; Council of Europe, 2000), which came into force in 2004, calls for broad participation in management of all landscapes, and obliges signatory parties to establish procedures for the participation of the general public as well as local and regional authorities and other interested parties. After the ELC came into force, a number of studies have been made on challenges to and prerequisites for public participation (Arler, 2011; Jones, 2007; Stenseke, 2009), as well as on practical examples and methods (Caspersen, 2009; Jones, 2007; Selman, 2004; Stenseke and Jones, 2011). Conrad et al. (2011) have contributed to this body of literature, by evaluating the level of public participation in landscape policy processes with specific reference to the ELC in Norway and three other European countries. Their framework for evaluation and comparison was developed specifically for

the study of the implementation of the ELC, and has two principal advantages. Firstly, five target areas for effective² participation practice are identified based on a broad body of literature. Secondly, the scoring criteria are directly linked to landscape planning processes.

Norway was among the first countries to sign and ratify the ELC in 2001. It has been implemented in two principal directions. The first is the 2008 revision of the Planning and Building Act (*Plan- og bygningsloven*) which, among other things, included perspectives and objectives from the convention. The second direction consists of direct measures, including information folders, videos, and workshops, the development of 18 scenic national tourist roads (*Nasjonale turistveger*) with a special focus on landscape, as well as the designation of 22 especially valuable and characteristic 'selected' agricultural landscapes (*Utvalgte kulturlandskap i jordbruken*) (Mortensen, 2011). The agricultural landscapes were designated after nomination processes in Norway's 19 counties, in

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +47 64949725.

E-mail addresses: see@skogoglandskap.no (S. Eiter), marte.lange.vik@svt.ntnu.no (M.L. Vik).

¹ Tel.: +47 47636552.

² Readers familiar with Germanic/Scandinavian languages should note that we use the word 'effective' in the English sense, which implies usefulness rather than (cost) efficiency, the latter being a common meaning of *effektiv*.

close cooperation with landowners and farmers as a way to fulfil the objective of public participation (Statens landbruksforvaltning, Direktoratet for naturforvaltning and Riksantikvaren, 2008).

The present study has two main objectives. Firstly, we wish to make evaluation of public participation methods more transparent for scholars and practitioners by explicitly linking theory and practice in public participation. Secondly, we aim at contributing to broader knowledge on participation in urban and regional planning by generalizing the experiences from the case studies and relating them to other methods for public participation in Norwegian and international context.

In contrast to several other countries which in their implementation of the ELC include public participation already in landscape characterization (Conrad et al., 2011; Jones and Stenseke, 2011), landscape characterizations and assessments in Norway are usually expert-based inputs to spatial planning processes, and public participation is then practiced as part of the planning processes. While the evaluation by Conrad et al. (2011) was generic and based on written documents only, we analyze interviews with planning officers at local and regional levels who have been involved in processes that made specific reference to the ELC. Practical methods for participation considered as particularly effective by the interviewees was a prevalent issue in the interviews. We reassess these methods by applying the evaluation framework from Conrad et al. (2011), to identify the particular strengths in terms of effective participation.

ELC and public participation

Public participation has been a focus of scholarly work for several decades. Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of citizen participation' was one of the most significant early contributions to the field. This ladder has later been applied and adapted in other settings (Arnesen, 2000; Falleth and Hanssen, 2012; Sager, 1991; Zachrisson, 2004), and similar typologies have been developed for use in the Global South (Pimbert and Pretty, 1997; Pretty, 1995). According to Cornwall (2008), such categorisations classify different forms of participation on an axis from "bad" to "good". Common to most of these typologies is that the top level, and hence the "best" form of participation, implies transfer of power to the public either through mobilization or delegation.

In this paper, we use the term 'effective participation' which we understand as public participation that fulfils the aim of ensuring active involvement and influence of the public in official planning processes. Hence, in contrast to the typologies just mentioned we consider "partnership" ('Level 6', Arnstein, 1969) as being the most desirable form of public participation in spatial planning processes as we study them, rather than "delegated power" (from 'experts' to the general public; 'Level 7') or "citizen control" ('Level 8'). A reason for this is that in the Norwegian decision-making system, the power of decision is delegated to elected representatives (councils) at each administrative level who enact any spatial plan as the final step of the respective process. Thus, further delegation is not in question, and public participation and partnership is seen as a means to increase legitimacy and improve the basis for decision-making.

However, the term partnership is in itself confusing. In many planning and management studies, partnership is connected to governance and network-based management (Falleth and Saglie, 2012a,b). Governance implies a mutual commitment between parties, often representatives of defined groups as experts, the market and the public. In contrast to this, the focus of our paper is on participation methods where public involvement is limited to specific efforts and measures which do not imply further commitment. The objective behind the participation methods we study is

to facilitate public involvement in planning processes beyond the mandatory minimum of public announcements and hearings. In the following, we first provide a short presentation of studies related to the ELC with a particular focus on participation and practical participation methods. Secondly, we review literature on public participation in Norwegian planning practice before and after the enactment of the 2008 revision of the Planning and Building Act (Miljøverndepartementet, 2008).

Many studies related to the implementation of the ELC have focused on democracy and participation in landscape assessments. Jones and Stenseke's (2011) book is a constructive contribution to a series of publications that so far to a large degree have focused on challenges in implementing the ELC (Arler, 2008; Jones, 2007; Olwig, 2007), and on lack of coherence between the ELC and its explanatory report (Olwig, 2007). Jones (2011) presents the rationale behind participation, as well as some lessons learned from participation practices in development projects in the Global South (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Moreover, the book provides a series of examples of processes that have been carried out in various European countries as part of the implementation of the ELC. The cases show considerable variety in practical methods used. The methods can roughly be divided into two groups according to whether they are based on visual or verbal aids. Spencer (2011) describes a method relying on group discussions, plenary discussions and workshops for identification of local values, issues and knowledge to set the agenda and develop an action plan. Clemetsen et al. (2011) name their method 'landscape resource analysis' and emphasize meaningful dialogue and active landscaping through a phenomenological perspective and sense of place approach. Verbal methods can also be used in problem solving through meetings and interviews as described by Larsson et al. (2011). Visual aids include sketches, 3D illustrations, photos and maps, and often include scenario presentations. Such methods are described by Michelin et al. (2011) and Planchat-Héry (2011). Visual aids are intended to stimulate discussion. Thus, the questions and dialogue following the visual representation is often more important than the visual representation itself (Planchat-Héry, 2011). Hence, visual methods also carry an important verbal factor, often oral. Ramos (2011) combines visual and written verbal aids in a description of future aspirations and scenarios. The methods differ in scale and formalization, and as to whether they relate to landscape representations in indoor discussions or make use of outdoor field trips as well. Nevertheless, common to all these methods is that they are used in landscape characterizations and assessments and that they aim to "improve the ability of people to express their opinions and perspectives" (Stenseke and Jones, 2011, p. 302). This process may imply both awareness-raising and construction of understanding as conditions for people to express themselves.

Conrad et al. (2011) supplement the existing material on public participation with a method to evaluate the level of public participation, making specific reference to the ELC. They present five evaluation criteria for effective participation:

1. What is the *scope* of public involvement?
2. How *representative* is the public involved?
3. At what *stage* of the process is the public involved?
4. Are efforts made to render public participation *easy* for participants?
5. How much *influence* does public participation have on the results derived?"

(Conrad et al., 2011, p. 29, our emphasis)

In order to operationalize the evaluation criteria, they developed a five-point score from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each criterion based on verbal judgements (Conrad et al., 2011, p. 34). Scope varied from informing the public (1) to active public participation in

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