



Representing the common goods – Stakeholders vs. citizens



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ABSTRACT

Whereas participatory processes have been advised as decision support to environmental management worldwide, the way different ways of organizing them influence outcomes of such processes have not been sufficiently addressed. In this study we reflect on two specific types of framings for participatory processes by examining one case dominated by stakeholders and another facilitating deliberation among citizens. Both processes concern coastal zone management in Norway. Whilst the main aim of the paper is to address how the framing of a participatory process influences its form and content, we also emphasize the distinct differences in outcomes from the two processes. Our analyses show that people are clearly acknowledging that there is a difference between acting as a citizen and as a stakeholder, and finding it unproblematic to identify themselves with such roles. Based on the findings, we reflect on their significance because fostering such logic throughout participatory processes may enhance our capacity to think both more long term and more principally about which values to protect.

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Introduction

Participatory processes are demanded worldwide as means to deal with a rapid changing world, involving changes in the physical environment. Calls for participatory processes related *inter alia* to sustainability issues have been put on the international agenda several times. For example, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) emphasizes: “We underscore that broad public participation and access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are essential to the promotion of sustainable development” (UN, 2012; principle 43, p. 14), and moreover, “we acknowledge the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development” (UN, 2012, principle 44, p. 14).

Public participation is a concept with different meanings. Frequently, two types of participants are confounded; citizens and stakeholders, and often the capacities people are acting in, as part of participatory processes, are not clearly specified (e.g., Munda, 2004). To act as a citizen implies considering values and views about what is the better thing to do for the community one belongs to, implying that a person focuses on what is considered to be important and right to do in this specific sense; including reflections on what is understood as a good society (e.g., Sagoff, 1988).

Citizens' participation is said to engender civic competence by building democratic skills, overcoming feelings of powerlessness and alienation, and contributing to the legitimacy of the political system (Fiorino, 1990).

Contrary, a stakeholder is somebody having a specific stake in a certain decision. Actually, many definitions exist in the literature about what it means to act as a stakeholder. For instance, Renn et al. (1993, p. 190) define stakeholders as “socially organized groups that are or perceive themselves as being affected by a decision”. Von Winterfeldt (1992, p. 326) states that “stakeholders are groups – not necessarily organized – that share common values and preferences regarding the alternatives under consideration”. The latter definition illustrates a kind of confusion which is often found in the literature about participation because of a lack of clarity in distinguishing between stakeholders focusing on certain interests and the wider notion of a citizen. These broad definitions of stakeholders can be more clearly distinguished from that of citizens by recognizing that they coincide with the term “interest-group”. Hence, stakeholders are best defined as organized manifestations of special interests.

Decision-making in societies concern typically different types of common goods and services. Environmental resources offer such services; air and water, biodiversity, silence, opportunities for outdoor life, aesthetic resources, etc., which are all common in the sense that their qualities and opportunities will have to be shared among people. As a result of the interdependencies implied by common goods, actions taken by some individuals influence the

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opportunities that other people face. Because of such influences, basing decision-making on stakeholder preferences/interests is not as innocuous as often assumed. Instead, it could make sense to facilitate processes to identify what might constitute a good solution for the society by involving citizens to communicate about what is the right or better thing to do.

Implicit in the above is the assumption that the distinction between involvement as citizens and as stakeholders is not just a theoretical construct. The aim of the present paper is therefore to explore whether such a distinction between 'stakeholder' and 'citizens' preferences' can be established empirically, and to determine if the role of a citizen is distinguishable and meaningful to people.

Two case studies that involve participatory processes related to coastal zone management – the Flekkerøy and Nesodden processes – are used as a basis for the analysis. We first provide some theoretical background, before giving a brief overview of the two cases and the legal foundation for coastal zone management in Norway. This is followed by more in depth investigation of each case, including the framing, the dynamics of the processes, the arguments voiced and the results in terms of advice on coastal zone management issues. After summing up differences and similarities, we discuss the main findings, and conclude at the end.

Theoretical background for participatory processes

Resource management which encompasses a set of common goods, such as the management of the coastal zone, involves challenging decision making. In this context, it may be argued that choices should not only be based on what is best regarding short term individual interests, but must also include moral reasoning regarding what wider interests and values should be protected (Vatn, 2005). In some of the economic as well as in the philosophical literature, it is argued that peoples' behaviour can be characterized by plural sets of preferences and different types of behaviour (see, e.g., Sen, 1979, 1985; Sagoff, 2005; Vatn, 2005; Hodgson, 2007). Sen (1988) makes a distinction between individual preferences and the wider value dimensions including issues like distribution and rights. Cooperation in human societies is highly influenced by norms as "standards of behaviour that are based on widely shared beliefs about how individual group members ought to behave in a given situation" (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004: p. 185). Norms are typically based on fairness and equity considerations (Fehr and Schmidt, 2000). Research has also documented the importance of trust as basis for cooperation (Bowles and Gintis, 2004). Moreover, norms invoke a desire to gain social approval (Fehr and Falk, 2002). Hence, we are challenged by complex situations, which are often characterized by conflicting interests, which moreover can reflect different, even antagonistic, value systems (Mason and Mitroff, 1981; van den Hove, 2000; van de Kerkhof, 2004).

The focus on exploring implications with participatory processes in terms of which value systems are encouraged given context specifications is of a new kind. Examples of earlier studies evaluating stakeholder participation exist but they address different issues, which can be distinguished into three main categories. A first category is related with stakeholder influence possibilities on policy making. For instance, stakeholders have low influence when just being informed, and higher influence when they can interact with policy makers and other actors (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995). A second category includes evaluations of the importance of specified principles, such as communication, fairness, timing, accessibility, information provision, among others. For instance, a study by Hartley and Wood (2005) includes stakeholders to evaluate principles of the Aarhus

Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1998). A third category of stakeholder evaluations looks into successfulness of involving stakeholders in science based research to cover information gaps (Conrad and Hilchey, 2011).

These evaluations of participatory processes are thus of a different kind than what we are focusing on in this study. In this article we explore how organizing or framing of the participatory process influences what roles are accentuated, the form of communication and the kind of interests and values that are legitimately represented. This concerns who is represented and in what capacity – i.e., what *societal roles* are accentuated for participants. The hypothesis is that emphasis on a citizens role, as opposed to a stakeholder role, influences both the form of the evaluation process and what kind of preferences and values are emphasized/seen as legitimate by the participants (Vatn, 2005). Framing is here thus related to people's identity, which is influenced by the characteristics of a participatory process (Dewulf et al., 2009). The idea is that different contexts activate different norms – and influence which norms are seen more legitimate. Such norms can be understood as shared understandings about what is required, prohibited and permitted (Ostrom, 2008). The perspective on which this paper is based assumes that people have different preferences dependent on which societal role they enact (March and Olsen, 1995; Vatn, 2005; Rommetvedt, 2006; Hodgson, 2007). While the kind of preferences we hold as stakeholders and as citizens is expected to differ systematically, there is also variation among people regarding what the specific stakeholder interest is and what a citizen perceives as a good society. The differences can be explained by who and what the different roles are representing.

While much research exists on framing effects regarding economic/individual-oriented valuation methods (see, e.g., Mitchell and Carson, 1989; Soma, 2006; Gasparatos, 2010; Sparrevik et al., 2011), framing influencing civic performances in deliberative valuation methods are less studied (Munda, 2004). Notably, some general advice on how to deal with different framings is provided by the framing theory (e.g., Benford and Snow, 2000; Dewulf et al., 2009), which also supports the idea that different participatory contexts influence which norms are seen more legitimate.

The way public participation mostly is framed in practical policy making, it tends to be dominated by private interests (Renn et al., 1995; Godschalk and Stifle, 1981; Checkoway and van Til, 1978). However, in accordance with the theoretical concept of deliberation which has been introduced by Habermas (1970, 1984), several types of deliberative processes have been developed to be used in practical management situations by, for example, Renn et al. (1993), Dienel and Renn (1995) and Renn (2006). Overall, the claim is that deliberative processes in environmental decision-making may lead to more "collective, holistic and long-term thinking" (Gundersen, 1995: p. 49). It is argued that, through a joint learning experience, citizens can reach a common understanding of the natural resource conflict through deliberative processes (Fiorino, 1990; Renn, 2006). More precisely, it is argued that a deliberative process with citizens can assist the decision-making process by: (1) enhancing understanding and produce new options for actions and solutions to the problem, (2) decreasing aggressive attitudes among participants, (3) showing and documenting the full scope of ambiguity associated with the natural resource problems, (4) helping to make a society aware of the options, interpretations and potential actions that are connected with the issue under investigation, (5) clarifying problems to make people aware of framing effects and explore new problem framings and (6) producing competent and fair solutions (adapted from Fiorino, 1990 and Renn, 2006).

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