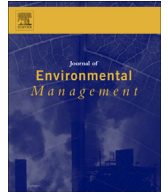




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## Research article

# Participation for effective environmental governance? Evidence from Water Framework Directive implementation in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

Effectiveness of participation in environmental governance is a proliferating assertion in literature that is also reflected in European legislation, such as the European Water Framework Directive (WFD). The Directive mandates participatory river basin management planning across the EU aiming at the delivery of better policy outputs and enhanced implementation. Yet, the impact of this planning mode in WFD implementation remains unclear, though the first planning phase was completed in 2009 and the first implementation cycle by the end of 2015. Notwithstanding the expanding body of literature on WFD implementation, a rather scattered single case study approach seems to predominate. This paper reports on implementation of the WFD in three case studies from Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, reflecting three substantially different approaches to participatory river basin management planning, on the basis of a comparative case study design. We ask if and how participation improved the environmental standard of outputs and the quality of implementation. We found an increasing quality of outputs with increasing intensity of local participation. Further, social outcomes such as learning occurred within dialogical settings, whereas empowerment and network building emerged also in the case characterized mainly by one-way information. Finally, one important finding deviant from the literature is that stakeholder acceptance seems to be more related to processes than to outputs.

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## 1. Introduction

Claims abound that collaboration and participation<sup>1</sup> in environmental governance can improve environmental outcomes (Koontz and Thomas, 2006). Yet after decades of research and practice in participatory environmental governance, there is still a lack of understanding of just how and under what conditions this should occur (Gerlak et al., 2013; Newig and Fritsch, 2009; Young et al., 2013). This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body

of evidence on the effectiveness of participatory governance. We study the implementation of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD),<sup>2</sup> which mandates that European member states produce planning documents that detail how 'good water status' will be reached. Citizen and stakeholder participation is required in the preparation and updating of these plans in six-year cycles. This 'mandated participatory planning' approach (Newig and Koontz, 2014) and common timeframe for WFD implementation across the EU provides an excellent test bed for comparative investigation of the effectiveness of participatory environmental governance (De Stefano, 2010; Jager et al., 2016). Comparing different participatory processes across Europe with respect to their effectiveness in delivering environmentally beneficial outcomes, we shed light on the relation between (participatory) policy processes and outcomes.

We report on three local participatory planning processes from Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, asking whether and, if so, how participation improved the environmental standard of outputs and the quality of implementation. In particular, we trace how processes incorporated and integrated knowledge, how they

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper, we use the terms 'participation' and 'participatory governance' due to their better compatibility with the European approach, but we acknowledge that there is considerable overlap with the concepts of 'collaboration' and 'collaborative governance', which are more common in the North American context.

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000, establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy'.

fostered deliberation and acceptance, and whether and how this improved substantive environmental outputs and/or social outcomes such as collective learning, trust and network building.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents our conceptual framework in the form of four principal causal mechanisms derived from the literature linking participatory governance and environmental outcomes. Section 3 introduces the WFD as an example of mandated participatory planning, outlines our methodology, and describes the case study sites and respective planning processes. In section 4, we systematically compare outputs and outcomes in the cases, and analyze whether any of the mechanisms described in section 2 account for these results. Section 5 reflects on the insights gained from this study for the broader field of environmental governance.

## 2. Conceptual framework: participation and effectiveness in environmental governance

Following Fung (2006), Newig and Kvarda (2012) and others, we understand participation as a multi-dimensional concept. Participation can hence be more or less 'intensive' in each of the following dimensions:

1. *Involvement of stakeholders*: The range of parties included in the process (e.g. selected experts vs. a broad range of stakeholders and the public).
2. *Communication and collaboration*: The manner, direction and intensity of information flows (e.g. one-way information provision vs. collaborative development of preferences).
3. *Power delegation to participants*: The extent to which participants may influence the decisions to be taken.

Drawing on the available literature and recent syntheses (Drazkiewicz et al., 2015; Gerlak et al., 2013; Fritsch and Newig, 2012; Newig et al., 2013; Newig et al., submitted; Reed, 2008), we present in the following key mechanisms specifying potential (positive and negative) effects of participation on the environmental quality of governance outcomes.

### 2.1. Mechanism 1: opening up of decision-making to environmental concerns

It has been argued that inclusion of environmental concerns in participatory decision-making processes (DMP) leads to more environmentally beneficial decisions (Brody, 2003; Dryzek, 2005; Smith, 2003). The key argument is that environmental groups or other actors pursuing environmental concerns will have a strong incentive to participate in a DMP on environmental matters, and thus be rather strongly represented (Binder and Neumayer, 2005; Larson and Lach, 2008). Beyond increased representation in numbers, the particular values and arguments brought forth by environmental groups can re-direct established approaches, shift actors' policy positions, and enhance the environmental quality of outputs (Brody, 2003; Smith, 2003).

On the other hand, in participatory settings environmental groups may be co-opted by more powerful interests, and/or be deprived of effective means of pursuing environmental goals outside of such settings (Berry, 1981; Whelan and Lyons, 2005). Cordial relationships developed among parties in collaborative processes may lead to the 'pacification' or 'seduction' of (environmental) groups (Amy, 1987), while the expectation that participants act 'reasonably' can be used to suppress actors' expression of objection and frustration, then seen as irrational or non-constructive. Professional third-party facilitation or mediation, along with clear rules and procedures, can help avoid co-optation of

(environmental) groups (Amy, 1987; Cooke, 2001). Further, actors may opt out of a collaborative process if they can more effectively pursue their concerns elsewhere (Susskind and McMahon, 1985).

### 2.2. Mechanism 2: incorporation of additional environmental knowledge

Participation has been credited with furnishing factual information that would otherwise not be available to decision makers – especially in relation to localized issues. The involvement of informed stakeholders may provide detailed or specialized local knowledge (Brody, 2003; Pellizzoni, 2003). This knowledge may be more *accurate* or *specific* than knowledge normally available to decision-makers, e.g. complementing or scrutinizing existing scientific models (Wynne, 1992). Therefore, participants' knowledge can contribute to improving both the environmental standard and the implementability of decisions.

In other cases, different knowledge types (e.g. local and expert knowledge) can complement each other through critical exchange, fostering improved understanding of other participants' perspectives and the problem at hand and/or a transformation of views and values via critical reflection (Armitage et al., 2008; Connick and Innes, 2003).

Apart from a process design that allows for open and fair dialogue, facilitation of group processes and sufficient time are held to be conducive to effective knowledge exchange (Raymond et al., 2010). However, a certain political will to draw on knowledge made available in a DMP – both by decision-makers and by interested stakeholders – is a crucial precondition for the incorporation of additional environmental knowledge (Flynn, 2008).

### 2.3. Mechanism 3: dialogical interaction

Decision-making processes characterized by dialogue and intensive two-way interaction among participants are hypothesized to produce more environmentally beneficial outputs and outcomes. Depending on the type of dialogical interaction (negotiation or deliberation), different types of benefits (mutual gains, and common good orientation) are anticipated.

For conflictual issues, participatory processes involving intensive interaction are expected to create spaces for negotiation and bargaining (Elster, 2000). By developing understanding of each other's capabilities, needs, demands and preferences, participants are more likely to arrive at solutions that maximize mutual gains, including benefits for the environment (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Brody, 2003; Delli Carpini et al., 2004).

Intensive dialogue can also foster deliberation among participants, and enable rational arguing (as opposed to bargaining or negotiation). In this context, deliberation approaches an ideal communicative situation wherein rational discussion and the 'weight of the better argument' prevail (Elster, 2000). A (re)orientation of participants' views towards the common good implies moving beyond personal interests in pursuit of solutions to the problem at hand (rather than personal gains) and outputs that benefit the community and the environment (Webler and Tuler, 2000).

### 2.4. Mechanism 4: acceptance, implementation and compliance

Participatory environmental decision-making is argued to foster acceptance of a decision among policy addressees and stakeholders via representation of a wide variety of interests. Acceptance may derive from stakeholders' satisfaction with the decision itself, or with the nature of the process, and is assumed to be positively related with implementation and compliance (Bulkeley and Mol,

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