



## Towards understanding participatory processes: Framework, application and results



Emeline Hassenforder <sup>a, \*</sup>, Alex Smajgl <sup>b</sup>, John Ward <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> National Research Institute of Science and Technology for Environment and Agriculture (IRSTEA), AgroParisTech, The Australian National University (ANU), Fenner School of Environment and Society, 48 Linnaeus Way, Acton ACT 2601, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Mekong Region Futures Institute, Asoke 1655/340 Petchaburi Rd Makkasan, Radjadewi, Bangkok 10400, Thailand

<sup>c</sup> Mekong Region Futures Institute, Naga House, House 87, Unit 7, Mixay Village, Chantabouly District, Vientiane Capital City, People's Democratic Republic of Lao

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 10 December 2014

Received in revised form

7 April 2015

Accepted 8 April 2015

Available online

#### Keywords:

Participation

Monitoring and evaluation

Comparative analysis

Outputs

Outcomes

Impacts

### ABSTRACT

Many scholars point out that in complex and contested decision-making and planning situations, participatory processes have clear advantages over “traditional” or non-participatory processes. Improving our understanding of which participatory process elements or combination of elements contribute to specific outcomes demands a comparative diagnosis of multiple case studies based on a systematic framework. This paper describes the theoretical foundation and application of a diagnostic framework developed for the description and comparative analysis of participatory processes. The framework for the Comparison of Participatory Processes (COPP) is composed of three dimensions: context, process, and outputs outcomes and impacts. For each dimension, a list of variables is provided, with associated selectable options. The framework also requires clarification of three monitoring and evaluation elements. The COPP framework is then applied to five participatory processes across five different contexts: three located in the Mekong basin in Southeast Asia and two in eastern Africa. The goal is to test first if the framework facilitates the development of a comprehensive and clear description of participatory processes, and second, if a diagnostic step can be facilitated by applying the descriptions in a cross-comparative analysis. The paper concludes that despite a few challenges, the COPP framework is sufficiently generic to derive clear and consistent descriptions. A sample of only five case studies restricts the derivation of robust insights. Nevertheless, three testable hypothesis were derived, which would need to be tested with a much larger sample of case studies in order to substantiate the efficacy of process characteristics and attributes. Ultimately, such hypotheses and subsequent analytical efforts would contribute to the advancement of this increasingly prominent research domain.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

Many scholars point out that in complex and contested decision-making and planning situations participatory processes have clear advantages over “traditional” processes. Participation may be defined as the practice of consulting and involving relevant stakeholders in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities [or processes] of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development (Rowe and Frewer, 2004).

Stakeholders, according to Glicken (2000), are people or organizations either affected by the management process or who can affect it. Participation can vary depending on how many steps of the process are influenced or fully in the hands of stakeholders (Barreateau et al., 2010; Smajgl and Ward, 2013). We refer to traditional processes as those where stakeholder participation is not explicitly designed and facilitated. Traditional or non-participatory processes face great challenges generating impact in situations where complex problems meet vested interests. Participatory processes have at least three advantages to establish an effective science–policy interface (Barreateau et al., 2010; Smajgl and Ward, 2013). First, local contextual knowledge can be accompanied with system-focused scientific knowledge and methodology to overcome the cognitive processing of complexity-based challenges.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [emeline.hassenforder@anu.edu.au](mailto:emeline.hassenforder@anu.edu.au) (E. Hassenforder), [alex.smajgl@mekongfutures.com](mailto:alex.smajgl@mekongfutures.com) (A. Smajgl), [john.ward@mekongfutures.com](mailto:john.ward@mekongfutures.com) (J. Ward).

Second, during the participatory process, actual decision-makers, planners, or community members can directly experience a systems' understanding that is understood through praxis and can therefore be readily translated into improved actions and decisions. Third, participants are more likely to apply the new systems' understanding in the long term, beyond the temporal and planning targets of the initial participatory processes. Participation can facilitate system learning and thereby "implant" a foundational understanding, tailored to solve similar long term contested decision arenas.

Improving our understanding of which participatory process elements or combination of elements contribute to specific outcomes demands a comparative diagnosis of multiple case studies (Chess, 2000). A systematic framework that structures a consistent and coherent description of participatory processes across a diverse set of empirical situations is a necessary precursor to analytical comparisons.

This paper describes the theoretical foundation and application of a diagnostic framework developed for the description and comparative analysis of participatory processes. The framework is intended to be sufficiently generic to allow for the comparison of a diverse set of case studies and ultimately a diagnostic analysis. The proposed framework is not intended as a device to conduct a detailed analysis of specific cases. We assume that much can be learned from the comparison across a larger number of diverse cases. Ultimately, the purpose of this cross-comparison is to analyze the effectiveness of participatory processes and their elements. This does not undermine the need for in-depth analysis of specific cases, which is both necessary and essential when studying participatory processes. Both approaches are complementary.

The framework is intended to be informed by any stakeholder or group of stakeholders having sufficient insights on the participatory process of interest to be able to inform the variables. *Variables* are defined here as elements or criteria used to describe participatory processes. For each variable, informants can choose among a list of different "options" or values. Informants will preferably be stakeholders involved in the process, its design, implementation and/or evaluation. Identity of the informant is to be taken into account in any analysis or cross-comparison of results.

Section 2 describes the development of the framework for the Comparison of Participatory Processes (COPP). Section 3 highlights three monitoring and evaluation (M&E) elements requiring clarification when informing the framework. Section 4 details a COPP framework analysis of five case studies across Asia and Africa. Finally, we analyze the cross-comparative results and evaluate the COPP framework performance. The synthesized COPP framework, presented as a "ready-to-use" assessment template, is detailed in Annex 1.

## 2. Framework for describing, diagnosing and comparing participatory processes

The framework for the Comparison of Participatory Processes (COPP) is composed of three dimensions, synthesized from literature based insights. The proposed COPP dimensions represent four literature-derived cohorts of theorists and practitioners contributing to the corpus of scholarship. The first cohort represents scholars who identify variables related to the management of coupled social-environmental systems and institutions (e.g. Folke et al., 2005; Herrfahrdt-Pähle and Pahl-Wostl, 2012; Ostrom, 2005; Saleth, 2006; Scott, 2001). The second cohort includes documentation of scholars from the field of policy-making, governance and policy assessment (e.g. Dovers and Hussey, 2013; Dovers, 2003; Lankford, 2008; Sabatier, 1988) that focus on the decision-making process, its institutionalization and assessment. Even

readers interested in participatory processes with foci other than social, environmental and policy design will find valuable insights in the literature of these two cohorts. A third cohort draws from management science and is concerned with evaluation in general, and more specifically the evaluation of collaborative endeavors (e.g. Bellamy et al., 2001; Byrne, 2013; Conley and Moote, 2003; Couix, 1997; William, 2007). Authors in this cohort are focused on evaluation methods, principles and guidelines. Finally, the most abundant reviewed literature concerns public participation, in particular the evaluation of public participation processes and methods (e.g. Beierle and Cayford, 2002; Innes and Booher, 1999; Rowe and Frewer, 2000, 2004). The added-value of these different cohorts for the COPP framework is described in Sections 2 and 3 of this paper.

This paper considers only publications with explicit variables that can contribute to the assessment of participatory processes. Most existing approaches and variables were developed to describe or assess a specific participatory process, not necessarily to compare a diverse set of processes. The review of existing frameworks reveals that many variables are similar, flagging the potential of a generalizable assessment framework.

We describe in detail the three assessment dimensions of the COPP framework: context, process attributes, and outputs, outcomes and impacts. One perspective reliant on framework parsimony might limit assessment to process characteristics and outputs and outcomes. However, many authors suggest that contextual aspects are critical for understanding outcomes (e.g. Beierle and Cayford, 2002; Cleaver and Franks, 2005; Midgley et al., 2013; Ostrom, 2005; Sabatier, 1988). We also contend that a clear articulation of standardized monitoring and evaluation (M&E) objectives, team composition and methods are necessary to promote independent replication and validation.

A number of participatory processes evaluation frameworks exist with similar goals (e.g. Abelson et al., 2003; Rosener, 1981; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). Often, these frameworks focus on the process and/or its outcomes, without detailing the context dimension or the M&E. For example, Krywkow (2009) suggests an approach based on six "intensity criteria" to evaluate to what extent various participatory processes objectives have been reached. He assumes that the M&E objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of the participatory process in reaching its objectives. We argue for a broader diversity of M&E objectives, which may differ from process objectives. For example, the goal of the participatory process may be to develop a policy, while the M&E may aim to jointly assess whether the process also contributed to building the capacity of the stakeholders in implementing this policy. In other cases, proposed frameworks may be method-oriented (e.g. Midgley et al., 2013) or discipline-specific (e.g. Ostrom, 2005). The COPP framework aims at being used across participatory processes characterized by diverse contexts, M&E objectives, methods and disciplines.

### 2.1. The context dimension

The implementation of a specific participatory process method can lead to different outcomes due to differences in contextual circumstances (Buysse et al., 1999; Champion and Wilson, 2010; Checkland and Scholes, 1990; McAllister, 1999; McGurk et al., 2006; Morgan, 2001; Murphy-Berman et al., 2000; Rowe and Frewer, 2000, 2004; Warburton et al., 2007; White, 2006 cited in Midgley et al., 2013). This can be due to particular methods not being effective across all contexts or due to particular process steps triggering different dynamics. The same method utilized by the same practitioner or researcher can succeed or fail depending on the complexities and dynamics of the situation. Most scholars recognize the importance of the context by advocating for context-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7482118>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7482118>

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