



Planning participatory processes in water resources management

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Planning processes in local and regional water management require an array of sometimes complex approaches and methods. Most water management authorities have considerable experience in and knowledge of water engineering as well as environmental impact assessment, and the methods associated with these fields have been applied over the last few decades. In Western countries, planning procedures typically have legally prescribed procedures to allow the general public and stakeholders to provide input and the right to object to a given plan or proposed development. However, these procedures are prevailingly implemented in a mechanistic way with little or no opportunity for co-design. Decision makers tend to rely on expert knowledge with emphasis on the technical side of the planning process.

In the past decade, a number of international agreements and directives have however prescribed a more active role for the public and stakeholders in river basin management. The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) contains a specific regulation that requires local and regional (e.g. river basin) authorities to expand and enhance public and stakeholder participation in water management.

Typically, failures in participatory water management such as the generation of additional costs and the delays in the process, have resulted in the perception that participation merely hampers planning processes. Moreover, water management authorities usually employ experts such as planners, engineers, ecologists or economists, but no participatory process experts. The need for expertise in participatory management in addition to engineering, planning, budgeting and ecological assessment is not recognised by the responsible authorities, but is necessary for an efficient and effective implementation of participatory processes.

Furthermore, plenty of guidelines, handbooks and best-practise companions have been published for the application of participatory methods in water management. However, these guidances are in many instances too case-specific, not comprehensible to practitioners, lacking in important aspects or methods of stakeholder participation or they are methodologically inconsistent.

In this presentation a generally applicable and consistent methodological framework for participatory water management is introduced. The combination of the following components make this framework unique: (1) a goal-oriented approach to participatory water resources management; (2) a consistent methodological basis comprising methods, classes, tasks and levels of participation that enable water managers to refer to both their management goals as well as their local constraints; (3) process-oriented management instructions for the design and maintenance of a participatory management plan; (4) a generally applicable monitoring and evaluation approach.

With this framework water managers can analyse context and constraints resulting in the application of methods that are appropriate for the achievement of both planning goals and the goals of the participatory process. The net result should be increasing effectiveness and efficiency of participatory water resources management.