

Ecologic Briefs

Public Participation in European River Basin Management

Lessons from the HarmoniCOP project



Ecologic Briefs on International Relations and Sustainable Development

Briefs edited by:

**R. Andreas Kraemer
Sascha Müller-Kraenner**

Authors:

**Nicole Kranz
(Ecologic)**

Dagmar Ridder

**(Institute of Environmental Systems Research,
University of Osnabrück)**

Mita Patel

**(International Centre for Integrated Assessment
and Sustainable Development,
Maastricht University)**

Picture Source: aboutpixel.de

This Ecologic Brief is based on the project HarmoniCOP (Harmonising Collaborative Planning). This project was supported by the European Union's 5th Framework Programme for Research and Development, and by the European Commission as part of its programme on Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development (contract no.: EESD-ENV-2000-02-57).

Further information is available free of charge at the website <http://www.harmonicop.info/>

August 2006

Ecologic Briefs

Public Participation in European River Basin Management

Lessons from the HarmoniCOP project

Authors:

Nicole Kranz

(Ecologic)

Dagmar Ridder

(Institute of Environmental Systems Research, University of Osnabrück)

Mita Patel

(International Centre for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable
Development, Maastricht University)

Table of Contents

- 3 Preface
- 4 Objective of the HarmoniCOP policy brief
- 6 Policy background: Public participation (PP) in the WFD
- 8 Project results
- 17 Handbook: “Learning Together to Manage Together –
Improving Participation in Water Management”
- 19 Policy implications
- 22 Outlook
- 23 Further reading

Preface

Managing human society and its pressures on natural resources at times of rapid environmental change requires new, effective forms of decision-making. This is particularly true in areas where our traditional boundaries of policy making stand in the way of solving interconnected problems. We need a new form of cooperation across the administrative frontiers between states or other units of government, and across policy fields with different dynamics and decision-making circles. We also need new approaches at the complex interface between science, the economic rationale of stakeholders, the idealistic objectives of public-interest advocates, and policy-making.

The HarmoniCOP project is at the confluence of all of these challenges about democracy and technocracy in integrated water management. It describes social learning as a precondition for problem-solving and some of the methods and procedures that proved their worth in particular cases. Water management and planning has been at the forefront of new thinking about the institutions and procedures for open and participatory decision-making, and – even since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 – in the forming of new types of partnerships.

This Ecologic Brief summarises the findings of the project and thus the state of the art in collaborative planning, and gives guidance on how to implement key requirements of the Water Framework Directive. It contributes to the trans-national policy learning among practitioners in different Member States, but the messages are relevant beyond the European Union.

This Brief is an invitation to dig deeper into the HarmoniCOP documents for practical solutions for more effective and efficient collaborative planning, and to share experiences with researchers and practitioners. The insights gathered in the field of water management are relevant for other areas where environmental protection requirements must be integrated into other policy fields, where hitherto separate and sometimes conflicting objectives and interests need to be brought into harmony.

The development of a new, open form of participation for complex planning processes is a work in progress, focused on details. That is where innovations and improvements will take place, and where this Brief will mostly be read. I will be delighted when the rich experience collected by HarmoniCOP proves to be useful not only in water planning, but also in other areas, such as soil protection and land use planning, coastal zone management, the development of rural economies and cultural landscape, or the administration of trans-boundary conservation areas or forest stands.

R. Andreas Kraemer, Director of Ecologic, Berlin, August 2006

Objective of the HarmoniCOP policy brief

HarmoniCOP
HARMONIsing
Collaborative
Planning
was funded by
the European
Commission within
the thematic
programme
'Energy,
Environment
and Sustainable
Development'.

Over the past years, the limitations of a purely sectoral approach to addressing the increasingly complex problems in water management have become ever more apparent. Cross-sectoral approaches, however, which integrate aspects of water supply, sewage management, nature protection, spatial planning, agriculture, hydro-energy and other areas, demand a high level of collaboration, mainly among the so-called 'organise stakeholders' (from environmental authorities to non-governmental organisations), but also from the general public. Participation offers stakeholders and the public the means to engage in cross-sectoral planning and management of water resources.

This new management paradigm is also reflected in the provisions of the **Water Framework Directive** (WFD), currently the main guidance in European water management practices. It not only strongly advocates an inter-sectoral approach, but also mandates the participation of stakeholders in water management. As a consequence, public participation (PP) has been repeatedly raised as one of the most pressing and also challenging issues in ensuring the prompt and adequate implementation of the WFD and the achievement of the quality objectives outlined by the Directive.

The main objective of the HarmoniCOP project was to increase the understanding of participatory river basin management in Europe. River basin management can only be effective and sustainable if the actors at each level and in each phase and sector become engaged in a *social learning* process. Only through collaboration is it possible to arrive at a common understanding of the characteristics of the river basin and the respective impacts of the various water uses. The different actors need to realise their mutual interdependence and learn to deal with conflicting interests in a constructive way.

HarmoniCOP explores the concept of *social learning* from many different perspectives and in various contexts throughout the European Union, thus rendering it a new element in water management.

By reviewing existing practices of participation in nine European countries and conducting and evaluating nine case studies of participation in water management, a wealth of experiences and information was collected and analysed over a period of three years. The final aim was not only to make this analysis available to the scientific community, but also to provide a tool for practitioners in water management in the form of a handbook.

This policy brief provides an overview of the main results of the HarmoniCOP project. It will briefly outline the public participation provisions of the WFD and describe key elements of the concept of *social learning*. A brief analysis of the national background studies is followed by the main results of the case studies conducted within the context of the project.

Based on the project results, this brief addresses the implications of the HarmoniCOP project for the implementation process of the WFD, as well as its relevance for fostering participation across various inter linked environmental policy sectors.

This document is addressed at those interested in gaining a quick overview of the several outputs of the HarmoniCOP project. Furthermore, it serves as a reference for policy-makers from different policy sectors aiming to initiate or strengthen PP processes. In addition, this brief can serve as input to further discussions aiming at advancing PP in water management, but can also be of use within other environmental policy areas.

Policy background: Public participation (PP) in the WFD

This section provides an overview of the requirements for public participation brought forward by the WFD; it also outlines the steps taken so far and future activities aimed at complying with these requirements. The HarmoniCOP project represents one of the most visible research efforts in this respect.

The UNECE Convention was adopted on June 25, 1998, in the Danish city of Aarhus, at the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the "Environment for Europe" process.

The WFD is one of the first directives in EU environmental policy to include public participation as an explicit requirement, therefore also reflecting the requirements of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Public participation is referred to in Preamble 14 and 46, Article 14 and Annex VII A (points 9 and 11) of the WFD. Preambles 14 and 46 stress the need and importance of a sound information policy and the public's active involvement. Preamble 14 underlines that the success of the WFD depends directly on the comprehensive involvement of the public. Preamble 46 highlights the importance of timely information to ensure PP.

The core PP provision of the WFD is Article 14, referred to as the article on "Public Information and Consultation".

Three levels of participation are mentioned in this article – information, consultation and active involvement. As a first step, **information** provides the basis for all further forms of participation, as only well-informed stakeholders will actually have the capacity to make a useful contribution to the overall process.

With regards to **consultation**, the Directive features the following detailed provisions. In three rounds (December 2006, 2007 and 2008), the Member States are required to publish specific documents on the river basin management planning process. Within each of these rounds, the public must be given the opportunity to comment in writing within six months. Member States have to provide additional background information upon request. For this purpose, contact points and procedures have to be pointed out in the river basin management plans (Annex VII A.11). Annex VII A.9 of the WFD requires that the management plans contain information concerning the measures taken to inform and consult the public, the results of the consultations, and how these were taken into consideration in adjusting the management plans.

The highest level of participation mentioned in Article 14 is **active involvement**. This is considered a higher level of participation than consultation and “shall be encouraged” by the Member States. Active involvement implies that interested parties are invited to actively contribute to the planning process, to discuss the issues, and put forward to their solutions. First steps of active involvement occur, for example, with the public’s participation in the development and implementation of plans. Shared decision-making represents an advanced form of active involvement.

The appointed competent authorities are responsible for the way in which the WFD is implemented, and decide to what extent they are willing to share their power with other stakeholders. The rationale behind leaving the choice of the level of active involvement to the responsible authorities is presented in Preamble 13, which stresses that “there are diverse conditions and needs in the Community which require different specific solutions”.

A guidance document on public participation in relation to the WFD – titled “Active Involvement, Consultation, and Public Access to Information” – was developed in the context of the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) for the WFD. The EU Water Directors adopted this guidance document in Copenhagen in November 2002. The document has been instrumental for many water managers’ first steps in public participation.

EU CIS Working Group 2.9 - Best Practice in River Basin Management Planning (2003): Guidance Document No. 8.

As a consequence of the freedom given to the competent authorities, the implementation of the WFD and the CIS have triggered manifold approaches towards PP in the different EU member states, reflecting the different cultural and governance backgrounds in each of the countries. In addition, participative processes also depend on the economic sectors addressed by participatory approaches, and thus the structure of actors involved. There is already a vast amount of best practice cases which have emerged at different levels of water governance throughout the EU.

Project results

Defining social learning – A new paradigm for water management

Social learning is about an improved interaction of groups and individuals, which leads not only to a better exchange of information, but also to the creation of shared "new knowledge". Due to the change of perspective thus generated, this interaction brings about an increased understanding of the issues at hand.

An important precondition for interaction is an open dialogue among all stakeholders. A good information flow should be given in all directions, and should be equal between authorities and stakeholder groups. In this way, *social learning* not only leads to an improved understanding of problems, but can also provide for changes in the traditional approaches. Processes that facilitate greater *social learning* can contribute in and of themselves to the identification of more sustainable solutions.

Both analyses conducted in the context of the HarmoniCOP project – the review of national experiences with public participation as well as the case studies – demonstrated that successful participation is heavily dependent on two core aspects: the initiation of *social learning* as such, and its support by the application of Information and Communication (IC) tools.

While IC tools can facilitate different phases of public participation, *social learning* is the result of well designed participation processes. More specifically, it is the result of processes that encourage open discussion and exchange of thought, where participants get to know different aspects of a problem as well as the perceptions of other actors. But *social learning* is dependent upon a variety of factors that extend beyond the mere methodologies used in participatory processes. More details are included in the analysis of some of the key outcomes of the HarmoniCOP national and case studies below.

Lessons from the past: national background studies

The nine review studies on past national experiences with public participation reflect the wide range of approaches followed throughout Europe. The results showed that the form that public participation takes is not only specific to the relevant country, but also that regional characteristics have to be given the same consideration as the experiences obtained 'within' countries. In this respect, participation policy has to account for these regional differences and needs to be adapted or sensitised to suit the cultures and

circumstances of each individual region. Furthermore, participation should be valued more as an instrument than as a driver of change – as something that needs to be incorporated into the existing political, institutional and cultural systems within each country in order for it to have real impact and influence on decision-making.

The HarmoniCOP national studies provided valuable insights into the nature of the evolution of PP in river basin management planning (RBMP) across Europe, and focused upon specific case studies to illustrate this. For the purpose of this brief, the following analysis presents the key messages and lessons learnt from these studies, and outlines the more specific considerations associated with successful *social learning* experiences.

- The analysis of a broad collection of different experiences contributed to the insight that the different participatory – and more integrated – styles of RBMP across Europe are the result of not one but various factors unique to each individual country;
- In the UK, for instance, the uptake of PP in RBMP has been largely in response to the Environment Agency's (EA) recognition of the positive value of participatory involvement;
- Meanwhile, there has been an extraordinary development of 'voluntary agreements' in relation to PP in Italy, leading to their progressive integration in environmental policy. This has occurred outside of the official policy framework, in a gradual and somewhat *hidden way*, with stakeholders exerting their influence through *informal* channels, reflecting the strong informal culture associated with decision-making prevalent in Italy;
- The common factor among all national experiences analysed is that the process of reaching a successful participatory RBM framework has been implemented using incremental steps, so as to adapt the overall approach to the cultural qualities of each individual country.

Based on the broad collection of national and regional experiences identified within the HarmoniCOP national studies, the following provides a selection of key lessons, highlighting the opportunities for achieving improved PP, *social learning* and more informed decision-making, policy development based on good practice, and the barriers and obstacles hindering these processes.

Good practice

Good practice in PP has been associated with experiences in which highly dynamic forms of stakeholder involvement were supported. Such experiences provided useful insights for better understanding the conditions that enable more informed decision-making, the building of consensus, and, ultimately, more successful project implementation. The following factors identified among the national experience studies provided a good insight into which dynamics have contributed to good PP practice in RBMP.

- **History and experience** – A long history of PP in water management, as in the case of Spain, can provide the experience and knowledge necessary for dealing with complex issues and achieving consensual decisions;
- **Communication and openness** – Numerous cases have proven that providing opportunities and structures that support better communication, negotiation, and exchange of perspectives, can ultimately lead to *social learning* and greater cooperation between stakeholders. The formal SDAGE structure in France aims at opening the consultation process to the largest possible number of participants, and is oriented towards the exchange of information and the elaboration of a shared vision. In Spain, open processes have been integrated in the planning stages of formal water management plans. This was the case in the *2001/2003 Participative Forum on Water Management of the Balearic Islands*, where the regional government initiated an open process of consensus-building regarding the development of a sustainable water policy for the islands;
- **Active and early involvement** – Greater awareness of the benefits that well-suited methodologies of PP can achieve has brought, in turn, greater attention upon the approach style of PP adopted. Involving stakeholders from the very early stages of the planning procedure has been recognised as essential for preventing delays in latter stages of project delivery, or outright rejection of the plans, but most importantly, as a key for extending ownership to the wider stakeholder community. More active forms of involvement have also proved to encourage greater *social learning* amongst all involved and help achieve better overall understanding of complex problems.

In a more specific example, the positive sides of active involvement have been demonstrated at the Wupperverband in Germany, where the RBM activities involved field trips which were used to provide practical experience for the interested public. Furthermore, regular water symposia were held, in which representatives from stakeholder groups were able to discuss issues related to sustainable management of river basins. Although this

SDAGE Schemas d'Amenagement et de Gestion des Eaux – French state level planning tool.

more active approach is not necessarily representative of the broader approach to stakeholder involvement in RBMP in Germany, it is certainly an approach that is becoming increasingly popular, and expected to be further endorsed through greater recognition within the WFD;

- **Emerging water governance structures** – Traditional water governance structures, such as those set in place in post WW II France, often inhibited the intervention of ‘new interests’, limiting opportunities for PP. The gradual movement towards emerging water governance structures has offered new actors the possibility of entering the institutional framework, as well as the opportunity of transforming the content of policies.

Constraints

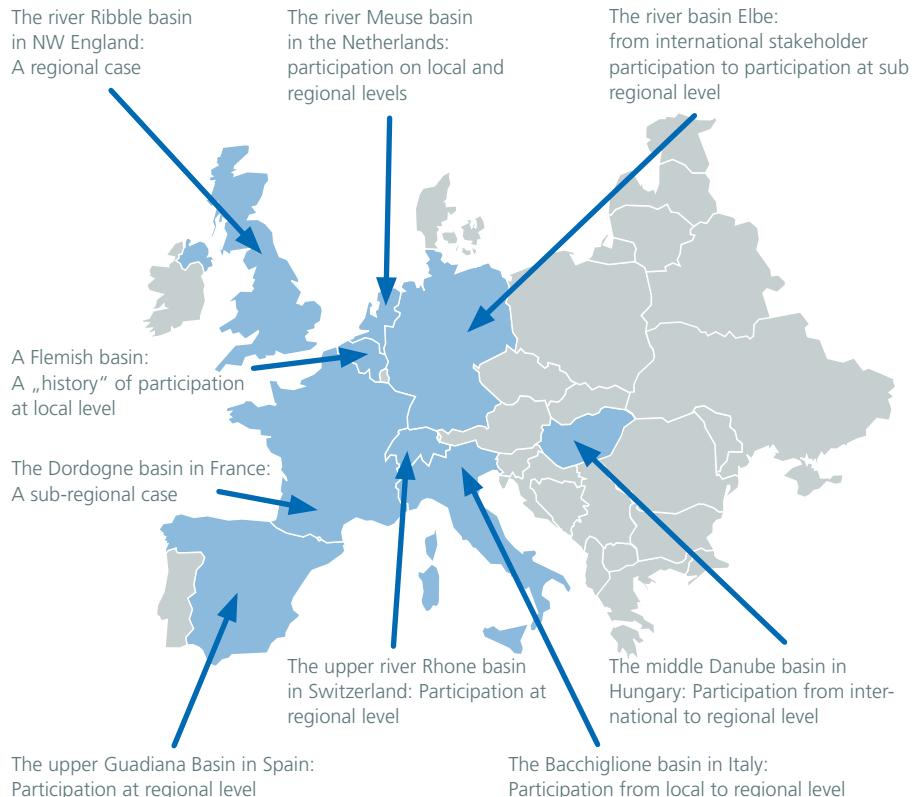
Just as good practices, constraints and barriers were also recognised in the national studies. These have inhibited PP or the degree of its impact. Some of these constraints have been associated with deep rooted factors. For instance, constraints were identified within existing national RBMP frameworks: some of these proved to be held back by tradition, which made them too restrictive or inflexible to properly support more dynamic forms of PP. Such structures have only served to stifle the degree to which PP contributes to more progressive and informed levels of decision-making. In Spain, for example, well established participatory bodies have proved to benefit from and support PP in RBMP. This notwithstanding, they are also heavily regulated, and as such have inhibited the potential for more open discussions, affecting inclusiveness and consequently limiting the potential for creating ownership.

Similarly, restrictive water governance structures burdened with bureaucracy have also been identified as barriers to evolving forms of involvement processes and new participatory policy measures. France’s restrictive water governance structure, for instance, is more resistant to external pressure for change, which was clearly demonstrated in the Loire region. The Loire Basin Committee’s main PP tool was strongly determined by the region’s past and oriented towards specific policy choices. The committee was primarily interested in funding economic development projects related to water, particularly dam construction. As a consequence, the PP institutions included within the governance structure had a bias towards participants with a technical background, ultimately resulting in measures and policies that failed to reflect the realities at the local level.

Case studies

The key objective of the case analyses was to look at examples of *social learning* processes in different river basins across Europe and to identify cases of 'Good European Practices'.

In addition, one of the aims was to collect first hand experience with PP in river basin management, so as to examine how social processes and IC tools are applied and used in practice at river basin level.



Methodology of analysis

The analysis comprised a selection of case studies with a wide range of historical, geographical and institutional backgrounds. A common analytical framework was applied to analyse the processes in all case study basins. This analytical framework was based on previous HarmoniCOP research results.

The following criteria were used to assess the case study processes:

- **Development of the participatory process:**
 - Did the effectiveness of multi-party engagement processes improve?
 - Did new institutional structures evolve to encourage better management of water resources?
- **Social outcomes:**
 - Did the process lead to an increased awareness of other stakeholders' perspectives or of significant issues within a river basin?
 - Did stakeholders share decision-making responsibilities to ensure delivery of integrated solutions?
- **Environmental outcomes:**
 - Did the process lead to the development of new solutions, which were endorsed by all key stakeholders?
 - Were there measurable improvements demonstrated in the biophysical environment?

Case study results

Public participation is regarded as fundamental for initiating *social learning* processes. The case studies highlight the following opportunities and challenges in fostering *social learning* as an integral part of public participation

- Participatory activities are most successful if designed for a specific regional context, providing for a strong reference to local conditions and facilitating awareness-raising and ownership among the stakeholders;
- Participation requires an open discussion on the tools, progress monitoring, and the technologies available which support active involvement.

In addition, the following driving forces also play an important role for encouraging and supporting *social learning*:

- *Social learning* gains more impact in situations where water governance structures are subject to and open to change;

- Targeted policies can support active involvement and catalyse *social learning*;
- Mutual trust amongst stakeholders is key for enabling *social learning*. However, such trust can only occur if stakeholders have the opportunity to interact over the long-term;
- In order to raise levels of *social learning*, an increased exploration and application of new techniques, methodologies and tools to support stakeholder involvement in planning processes is needed. This includes the employment of more ‘active’ participatory processes in relation to RBMP. These activities may include river walks, education programmes, and other active forms of involvement that can target individuals not just at the local community level but at all levels of organisation and governance.

Focus on information and communication (IC) tools

Social learning can be supported and facilitated by the application of IC tools. IC methods and tools are defined as “... material artefacts, devices or software, that can be seen and/or touched, and which are used in a participatory process to support the interaction between stakeholders (including scientists) and with the public through two-way communication processes ...” (Maurel, 2003). Examples include maps and Geographical Information Systems (GIS), but also group model-building and role-playing games. The precondition is that the method or tool supports dialogue and flow of information.

The case studies aimed to investigate diverse tools and methodologies currently applied in participatory processes in river basin management across Europe. The following lessons and key characteristics were identified:

- IC tools can be instrumental in overcoming difficulties that result from time-consuming interactions and information exchange between experts and non-expert stakeholders;
- IC tools, if used in an intelligent and creative way, can significantly improve the communication between stakeholders and simultaneously create a feeling of ownership amongst all involved;
- So far, the experience with the application of IC tools is sporadic and many decision-makers are not familiar with IC tools;
- IC tools are not adequately considered in the preparatory phase of PP processes in terms of estimating necessary resources (e.g. financial resources

for setting up interactive databases, but also personnel resources, as some techniques require training for the operation of the tools);

- Using the Internet can often facilitate communication processes; however, not every community has sufficient access to this technology. Due to this, it is also recommended that soft tools, such as direct communication in round tables, be considered.

The following table shows the assessment of tools and methods in regard to their applicability in different participation phases refer to in the HarmoniCOP handbook (see following chapter) and depicts their basic effect in regard to selected conditions and/or objectives of *social learning* (adapted from Ridder et al., 2005).

Short description	Phase: Starting	Phase: Managing	Phase: Improving	Knowing about system complexity	Fairness of the process	Learning about other perspectives	Distribution of information	Common problem definition	Name of tool or method
	● Good applicability	□ Medium applicability	△ Low applicability						
Facilitated session in which participants build a model to improve their understanding of the issue	○	□	△	□				□	Group model-building
Gaming situation in which players play roles in a real or imaginary context	○	□	△	□		□			Role-playing game
Facilitated and reported open discussion between participants	○	□	△		□			□	Round table conference
System used for storage, mapping and analysis of geographical data	□	□	●	□			□		Geographic Information System (GIS)
Geographic scale models	□	□	●	□			□		Maps
Geographical representation and structuring of perceptions about issues	□	□	●	□		□			Spatial mental models & maps
Computer-based collection of information accessible on the Internet, sometimes including a forum	□	□	□		□		□		Web site

Handbook: “Learning Together to Manage Together – Improving Participation in Water Management”

The handbook “Learning Together to Manage Together – Improving Participation in Water Management” was written primarily for water managers working at the regional level. The book provides the means to structure and organise participatory processes in water management that support *social learning*. It provides guidance for undertaking all complex tasks encountered throughout the organisation and implementation of the participatory process – from the very initial phases of identifying and inviting key stakeholders, up to the monitoring and evaluation phase of participation activities undertaken.

The handbook is structured in three chapters. **Chapter 1**, “How to get started”, provides guidance for the designing of a participatory process and the issues to be considered before starting the process. It forms the basis of the book by introducing the *social learning* concept in detail, and also discusses how to develop and initiate a participation strategy that fosters *social learning*.

Chapter 2, “How to manage”, gives ideas and suggestions for managing participatory processes. It discusses issues such as the role of the convenor, the selection of meeting venues, as well as a number of methods and tools that can be applied in a participatory process. Moreover, it discusses how to follow up a completed process phase or step as well as tricks and strategies to apply , as well as traps to avoid during the process.

Chapter 3, “How to improve”, presents information on monitoring and evaluation, with the aim of improving current and future participatory processes. It presents an evaluation checklist and discusses how the lessons learnt can be communicated to people that were not involved in the process.

The appendix, “How this handbook developed”, outlines the background and objectives of the HarmoniCOP project. Moreover, it describes and evaluates the development of the handbook as a *social learning* process in its own right.

Besides the tips and tricks of a practical nature offered in the handbook, some key messages can be extracted:

- *Social learning* is about the networking of relationships and roles: both the possibilities for adaptive change and those for learning depend on

the capacity to manage such relationships. This requires the analysis of the extent to which this capacity exists, and how it can be promoted;

- Greater *social learning* in participation processes not only can contribute to changes to common procedures but can also improve the understanding and adequate perception of problems. As such it can result in more sustainable forms of participation;
- Due to its open nature, the *social learning* process offers the possibility to better recognise uncertainties and better react to necessary changes. The management style becomes more adaptive.

A possible outcome of *social learning* can also be the recognition of new roles for governmental actors.

The printed version of the handbook is only available in English. PDF files for download on www.harmonicop.info are available in English, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian, French, Spanish and German. Additionally, the web site offers the possibility to comment on aspects of the handbook in general or specifically regarding one of the three main chapters. Besides the commentary function, there is the possibility to upload additional resources in form of tools for participation, other case studies, or any explanatory material that may be helpful for other users in applying the HarmoniCOP handbook. The underlying idea is to make the handbook a 'living document'.

Policy implications

While HarmoniCOP is primarily aimed at creating a strong research basis and has greatly benefited from the involvement of scientists from different disciplines and backgrounds, the project also intends to provide practical tools and guidance to those directly involved in water management and policy-making. Currently, water managers are faced with the challenging task of implementing public participation requirements set forth by the WFD. This chapter details, how and why the results of HarmoniCOP and in particular the handbook can be used to aid in the implementation of these requirements as well as in the further development of European water policy.

Furthermore the broad applicability of the concept of social learning across different (environmental) policy fields and thus its cross-sectoral relevance will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

HarmoniCOP and the CIS – The handbook as central element for water managers AND policy-makers

The importance of bringing together a wide range of societal actors is recognised both in the WFD and in the Common Implementation Strategy Document on Public Participation (CIS guidance document No. 8). Aspects of trust, *social learning* and the creation of networks are nowadays considered as key prerequisites for sustainable water management.

Social learning – and the HarmoniCOP handbook as its promoter – supports both the requirement of article 14 of the WFD: “Member States shall encourage the active involvement of all interested parties ...” (EC, 2000) and the request of section 3.1 of the CIS guidance document No. 8: “the encouragement of active involvement of stakeholders for the wider implementation of the Directive ...”.

The handbook provides practical advice for the successful implementation of sustainable participation processes. Water managers can benefit directly by accessing information on how to organise and structure participation processes, but possibly also by developing more commitment to participatory processes due to a better understanding of the inherent challenges and opportunities.

Policy-makers in the field of water management can benefit from the handbook, as it serves to fill an information – or knowledge – gap with regards to the interpretation of “active involvement”. The handbook not

only provides this interpretation but also demonstrates its practical implementation. From a scientific perspective, the implementation of new policies can be considered as undirected experiments: the results are defined, but no evidence exists beforehand that the means are appropriate to achieve them – often leading to unexpected results. The handbook in general and *social learning* in particular provide a direction and frame for the ‘experiment’ to actively involve stakeholders. The ‘experiment’ becomes structured and outcomes – but also problems – become more predictable during implementation.

Cross-sectoral relevance of HarmoniCOP results

The idea of *social learning* is to improve the interaction of groups and individuals through the improved exchange of information as well as the formulation and identification of new knowledge. Additionally, *social learning* leads to a better understanding of an issue at stake, due to a change in the perception of problems. This change can affect individual but also group perceptions. Supported by the careful application of IC tools, the change of perspective is partly “forced”, because people are placed into a situation where they are confronted with the perspectives, beliefs and opinions of other people, communities or groups. Ultimately, *social learning* leads to a better understanding of the dependence and connectivity of actors and to a change in common practices of individuals and groups. It is thus not only a more sustainable mode of PP than simply distributing or collecting information on a more individual basis, but it even offers the possibility to support institutional change.

It is evident that this form of participation is not only conducive to improved integrated water management but also supports planning activities that have a societal relevance. It can be used for creating bottom-up visions and planning activities on a local to regional level. The following fields of application for participation can also be mentioned as relevant for *social learning*:

- Infrastructure planning
- Waste management
- Energy policy
- Tourism
- Stakeholder interaction of companies
- Regional and urban development
- Nature conservation
- Agricultural policy

A significant role for *social learning* in the future will be to support the internal reforms of governmental authorities. Cross-sectoral collaboration is becoming increasingly important because of the complexity of present day problems, and also because “leaner” management is no longer an economic paradigm but an economic necessity.

In practice, a **cross-sectoral collaboration** could be realised through, for instance, improved cooperation of the relevant governmental authorities responsible for agriculture, nature protection and water management.

An example is the request for the integration of the agri-environmental measures – as main instrument of the **EU Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP) for achieving its environmental objectives – into the programme of measures for the implementation of the WFD. It is expected that one of the WFD’s outcome will be an increased cross-sectoral collaboration for achieving better protection of water bodies. This is also expected to make necessary a change of behaviour of the relevant governmental actors, coming from different policy areas.

Support for better sectoral cooperation is not limited to the collaboration between agriculture and the environment, but can also be found in many other fields, such as economy and education. One example is that EU policies underline the necessity of investing in education to a larger extent than up to the present, because a knowledge society is regarded as an important means for maintaining or even increasing the economic performance of EU members. This depicts the potential of common agreements and arrangements between the economic and the educational sector – from national to local level. It is unlikely that with the existing forms and means of communication this can be achieved. In this respect, *social learning* does not provide guarantees for new ways of interaction in communication, but is at the very least a promising possibility.

Outlook

The HarmoniCOP project provides a comprehensive knowledge base for public participation in water management. Centred around the concept of *social learning*, the project draws lessons from past approaches to public participation in European Member States and gains insights from case studies conducted in nine European river basins. The handbook offers an easy-to-use approach for the practical application of the experience gathered during the project.

Public participation will be one of the main challenges in the WFD implementation process for the years to come. Not only will the development of the programmes of measures require the adequate involvement of civil society actors, but public participation is also absolutely crucial to ensure the long-term success and acceptability of these programmes.

For this reason, it is of paramount importance to actively disseminate the results of HarmoniCOP among water management experts as well as academia, but even more so among stakeholders of all kinds – the public – in the river basins across Europe.

This can be achieved, for example, through dissemination seminars as well as the active use of the handbook methodology in designing and implementing public participation processes. In this function the handbook might provide inspiration for the initiation of participatory processes as well as help in adjusting and refining already existing approaches.

The past success of the CIS for the implementation of the WFD has demonstrated the value of coordinated approaches across the European Union and common discussion among policy-makers of different countries. The results of the HarmoniCOP project derived from European project experience constitute an excellent input for this process and could serve as a reference for further activities in the framework of the CIS.

Particularly when addressing the challenge of participatory water management in **transboundary river basins**, the HarmoniCOP experience provides a sound foundation of concepts, as it combines lessons and approaches from a wide variety of national contexts. Nevertheless, a further adaptation of the project's outputs to the particular situation found in transboundary basins, which would have to take into consideration the complexity of stakeholder structures there, might be one of the future tasks in the area of participation research.

Synthesis and outlook

The case studies present a wide range of positive experiences with PP, *social learning*, and the application of IC tools, in river basin management across Europe. These experiences provide a pool of practical examples that will inspire decision-makers in designing participatory processes in their respective basins. Still, it should not be underestimated that the widespread lack of experience in PP approaches creates uncertainty among decision-makers, and with it the risk of falling back to traditional and conservative approaches that have often been counterproductive in the past. The need for better guidance on how to design PP processes, which are required for implementing the WFD, became obvious throughout the case study analysis in the context of HarmoniCOP.

Social learning is dependent upon certain basic conditions – conditions that are often a goal in themselves. An example is ‘the creation of an atmosphere of trust among participants’. This shows that it is unlikely that one selected method or tool, one single workshop or meeting among stakeholders will be sufficient to initiate *social learning*. Therefore, *social learning* should be defined as a process. This means that neither is every IC tool or method applicable in each phase (starting, managing, improving) of the participation process, nor do they support conditions and objectives of *social learning* with equal intensity.

Further reading

Ridder, Dagmar; Eric Mostert, and Henk A. Wolters (2005): Learning Together to Manage Together – Improving Participation in Water Management, University of Osnabrück, Institute of Environmental Systems Research.

Rees, Yvonne; Bradley Searle; Joanne Tippett, and Åse Johannessen (2005): Good European Practices for Stakeholder Involvement – Lessons from Real Planning Processes Case-studies and Experiments, Deliverable No. 8 of the HarmoniCOP project, www.harmonicop.info.

Patel, Mita, and Jan H. Stel (2004): Public Participation in River Basin Management in Europe – A National Approach and Background Study synthesising experiences of nine European Countries. Deliverable No. 6 of the HarmoniCOP Project, www.harmonicop.info.

Maurel, Pierre (2003): Public Participation and the European Water Framework Directive – Role of Information and Communication Tools, Deliverable No. 4 of the HarmoniCOP Project, www.harmonicop.info.

Craps, Marc (2003): *Social Learning* in River Basin Management, HarmoniCOP reference document, Deliverable No. 4 of the HarmoniCOP Project, www.harmonicop.info.

Pahl-Wostl, Claudia (2002, a): Towards sustainability in the water sector: The importance of human actors and processes of *social learning*. Aquatic sciences, 64, 394-411.

Pahl-Wostl, Claudia (2002, b): Participative and stakeholder-based policy design, evaluation and modelling processes. Integrated Assessment, 3 (1), 3-14.

European Union, the European Parliament, the Council (2000): Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 2000/60/EC establishing a framework for community action in the field of water policy (WFD). (63 pp. and XI annexes).

EU CIS Working Group 2.9 (2003): Best Practice in River Basin Management Planning, Guidance Doc. No. 8.

For more information on the European HarmoniCOP project, please see the following web sites:

HarmoniCop web site:
<http://www.harmonicop.info/>

Ecologic project web site:
<http://www.ecologic.de/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=879>

Handbook „Learning together to manage together – improving participation in water management“ (2006):
<http://www.ecologic.de/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1625>

Ecologic Briefs – Selection

Public Participation in European River Basin Management –
Lessons from the HarmoniCOP project

Public Procurement and Forest Certification

European Neighbourhood Policy

Applying EU Environmental Legislation

The Architecture of the Global System of Governance

Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations
in International Environmental Governance

Joining Forces in the Mediterranean

Other issues on Ecologic Briefs:

www.ecologic.eu



Publications of Ecologic



Ecologic
Institute for International and
European Environmental Policy

Pfalzburger Strasse 43/44
D-10717 Berlin
fon+49. 30. 86880-0
fax +49. 30. 86880-100
www.ecologic.eu

Impressum

Publisher: Ecologic Institute
Series Editor: R. Andreas Kraemer,
Sascha Müller-Kraenner
Production: Globus Druck, Berlin
Circulation: 500 (first printing)
Price: 10,00 Euro
Printed in Germany
on recycled paper

The HarmoniCOP project (Harmonising Collaborative Planning) provides a comprehensive knowledge base for public participation in water management. Centred around the concept of social learning, the project draws lessons from past approaches to public participation in European Member States and gains insights from case studies conducted in nine European river basins.

A handbook produced in the context of the project (available at <http://www.harmonicop.info/>) offers an easy-to-use approach for the practical application of the experience gathered during the project. This Ecologic Policy Brief gives an overview of the main results and policy implications of the project.

www.ecologic.eu

ISBN-10: ISBN 3-937085-18-1

ISBN-13: ISBN 978-3-937085-18-0
(Public Participation in European
River Basin Management)

ISSN: 1611-4787 (Ecologic Briefs)