



Analysis

Linking process to outcomes – Internal and external criteria for a stakeholder involvement in River Basin Management Planning

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ABSTRACT

Within the natural resource management and environmental governance literature, a number of authors have argued that there is a need to pay better attention to how the social processes of planning and management influence the outcomes of such processes. These outcomes are often measured through the quality of their outputs (plans or strategies) as well as whether the objectives of the plans or strategies are achieved. This paper contributes to this debate by reporting on a longitudinal evaluation of stakeholder engagement in developing and implementing River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) in Scotland. We illustrate how many of the process and outcome criteria promoted in the literature (the external perspective) appear to be less important to stakeholders than would be expected (the internal perspective). The paper argues that a combination of internal and external criteria is best placed to understand how to judge a 'good' process. This paper draws on literature from water management, other natural resource management sectors, spatial planning and environmental management, so the findings are of interest to scholars interested in evaluation, participation, environmental or natural resource management, as well as those specifically interested in RBMP under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

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1. Introduction

This paper was motivated by the tension experienced when taking a critical and constructivist perspective when assessing to what degree stakeholder involvement influenced the development and implementation of the Scottish River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) process. Such an aim needed to consider from whose perspective a judgement about success would be made. This paper is a response to several trends in the literature. Firstly, [Parkins and Mitchell \(2005\)](#) contrast a focus on outcomes (optimal decision making) with a focus on process (communication and understanding). However, combining outcome and process evaluation practises is recommended ([Blackstock and Richards, 2007](#); [Blackstock et al., 2007](#); [Sabatier et al., 2005](#)). Secondly, many of the papers above focus on what should, not what does, happen in NRM governance processes. There has been little empirical evaluation of WFD planning processes in Europe ([Irvine and O'Brien, 2009](#)). Thirdly, where evaluations have taken place, most authors rely on external criteria from the literature. However, the definition of what is 'good' depends on whose judgements are taken into account. Success may be understood and evaluated quite differently by participants within the process ([Santos and Chess, 2003](#)). [Webler et al. \(2001\)](#) illustrates how

views of 'good' can vary depending on the relative weighting that internal participants put on different criteria. However, there has been little exploration of the difference between criteria derived from the literature and from participants. Therefore the paper reflects on whether there are differences between internal (participant derived) and external (literature derived) criteria for judging success of the Scottish RBMP process. The research questions are:

- What are the internal criteria for a good process and a good plan?
- What are the results of applying these internal criteria?
- Does an application of external criteria bring out new perspectives?

This paper does not evaluate substantive outcomes (environmental or economic impacts) of RBMP. Implementation processes are still being developed and the objectives are not due until 2015 (or later if derogations were applied) thus any substantive evaluation could be premature. The paper briefly explains the case study application before explaining the methodological approach. The results are split into five parts; a summary of external criteria from the literature, introduction to the case study and methods, analysis of the process using the internal perspective, analysis of the process using the external perspective and finally a comparison of the two approaches. These findings are then discussed in light of the overall research aim before the main contributions are summarised in a conclusion.

The increased interest in stakeholder engagement in Natural Resource Management (NRM) stems from two distinct literatures; improving the implementation of NRM, and deliberative democracy

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(Parkins and Mitchell, 2005). Despite significant resources being mobilised, water quality and quantity issues are pervasive and the transaction costs of institutions still higher than most administrations would like (Ostrom et al., 1999). Equally, the move towards deliberative democracy is due to the perceived failure of traditional democracy to respond to problems prioritised by society (Fischer, 2000). There are also non-academic drivers for evaluating participation, prompted by the Aarhus Convention (1998). These principles were translated into Article 14 of Water Framework Directive (WFD) (Ozerol and Newig, 2008), whereby participation ensures effective implementation (Newig et al., 2005) and counteracts the democratic deficit of the EU (Newig and Fritsch, 2009). Thus, the WFD is an example where policy has prompted changes in governance of NRM (Rauschmayer et al., 2009).

2. Defining the External Perspective

A number of potential external criteria (see Table 1) are highlighted by various papers on participatory NRM processes, collaborative water planning and management, and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in Europe. However, it is difficult to make direct comparisons of the criteria in the literature given that papers vary in their focus: from implementation of NRM practise; to the development of statutory, or non-statutory, plans; or process-outcome linkages (e.g. social learning). This may explain why there is no accepted framework to evaluate these processes (Rowe and Frewer, 2004 in Slavíková and Jílková, 2011). Furthermore, confusion can arise where different authors use the same terms but with different meanings (or different terms but with the same reasons): for this reason, where necessary for clarity, authors' original terms have been altered in Table 1. Table 1 therefore cannot be a definitive list, but summarises the main external criteria for our analysis.

The papers assessed do agree on the importance of process: ensuring the 'right' participants are involved; the need for dynamism in the representation process; access to technical information; leadership and facilitation; examining the quality of the debate including how conflict is handled; integration of associated issues; learning, openness and transparency; as well as assessing whether processes produced outcomes that are seen to be legitimate, transparent and effective, and that those making the choices can be held to account. Ozerol and Newig (2008) believe that communication and capacity building are the most frequently occurring problems with the implementation of the WFD. Some authors draw attention to pre-requisites for the process; and also to influence of others external to the process. Others also use intermediary criteria, issues that may mediate the outcome of a process but are not directly part of the process (Marshall et al., 2010). The water evaluation literature particularly draws attention to the outcomes of the processes. Finally, a few authors draw attention to the legacy affects (i.e. whether this process will influence policy in the future). Overall, many authors stress the need to understand both task and role definition within the planning cycle; and to focus on this cycle rather than the plan itself. As such, we characterise the external perspective as focused on 'normative values' relating to process.

3. Case Study Description and Methodology

3.1. Scottish River Basin Management Planning (RBMP)

The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)(WFD) is a wide-ranging piece of European environmental legislation which became law in Scotland at the end of 2003 through the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (WEWS Act). The WFD and the WEWS act require statutory objectives to be delivered through River Basin Management Planning (RBMP); one for each of Scotland's two River Basin Districts (Scotland and Solway-Tweed). The RBMPs had to be finalised and submitted to the European Commission by

December 2009. The objectives are to reach good ecological status (GES) or good ecological potential (GEP) by 2015, 2021, or 2027, unless achieving GES/GEP is deemed to be technically, economically or socially infeasible. The plans themselves are statutory documents that require all responsible authorities to "have regard to" them. Under the WEWS act, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is responsible for preparing the plans and all technical aspects of the process.

The WFD's article 14 requires information provision, formal consultation processes and the 'active involvement of interested parties' in the development of the RBMP (Hedelin, 2008). SEPA convened a National Advisory Group (NAG) for both districts; and 10 Area Advisory groups (AAGs) to cover the sub-basins within the two River Basin Districts affecting Scotland (8 in the Scottish District and 2 in the Solway-Tweed District). These groups were convened, by SEPA, in 2006 and have met more or less quarterly since then. However, the simple national-area description belies the actual complexity of the RBMP process as it unfolded. The advisory groups also convened sub-groups or working groups; and were supplemented by bi-lateral meetings between SEPA and individual organisations or sectors. Wider engagement was achieved through convening virtual e-forums for each sub-basin and forum meetings were also held. Our overall study was designed to evaluate the success of these stakeholder involvement processes.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology focussed on the practises of active involvement, especially the behaviour of actors (Borowski, 2010; Weible, 2007). There were four main sources of data. Firstly, we have attended 45 advisory group meetings from 2006 to 2010 as participant-observers. We selected four areas (Argyll, Clyde, North-East and Tweed) as well as the National advisory group. These groups cover highland and lowland, urban and rural Scotland, inland and coastal waters and all sectors that use the water environment. In two cases we were allowed to tape record the meetings, so the data are verbatim transcripts. For the other three groups, comprehensive field notes were taken during the meeting and typed up immediately. As we were unable to attend three meetings, and four meetings were cancelled, our sample of 45 is not a complete sample of all the advisory group deliberations. Secondly, we have drawn on the formal documents to supplement our understanding. Thirdly, we have attended three meetings with the SEPA river basin co-ordinators (2007, 2008, and 2009) as well as having many informal discussions by phone, email and in person. These interactions were also field noted or transcribed; and allowed us to keep up with the other processes that we did not observe ourselves. A team of researchers used a standard fieldwork protocol for the above data. Finally, we distributed a simple questionnaire to advisory group members in 2006–07; 2008–09 and 2010–11, with some questions repeated to track changes over time. The first questionnaire was distributed to the five groups we attended, resulting in an average response rate of 28%. The next two questionnaires were distributed to all 11 groups, at the request of the co-ordinators. The average response rate for the mid-term questionnaire was 21% and the final questionnaire was 26%.¹ The responses came from a cross section of the meeting participants, so are broadly representative. The term member, chair or co-ordinator refers to those at meetings and respondent to refer to questionnaire respondents. The sample is the entire population of the advisory groups for the questionnaires; and all the members of the five groups we attended for the field notes.

¹ Diminishing return rates for the mid-project questionnaire, combined with perceived consultation fatigue and difficulties experienced with keeping up with paperwork meant that the final questionnaire was designed to be much shorter and focussed, and several follow up questions were deleted. Even so, there were no returns from 3 AAGs and one AAG was not given the questionnaire as they had no co-ordinator in post at the time.

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