

# Evaluating the success of public participation in water resources management – five key constituents

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## Abstract

Public participation is acknowledged among the core concepts for the implementation of sustainable development. There is an increasing understanding that the knowledge brought about by the participation of lay public is valuable for environmental decisions and recently more and more emphasis is put on incorporating the public participation processes into environmental decision making. This emphasis is demonstrated at both international and European Union level through several legal developments in environmental and water policy making. These developments are supported by the idea that public participation is a promising approach to overcome the results of the previous non-participatory, top-down approaches for environmental management, in particular for water resources management.

The environmental and water policies highlight the need for the fulfilment of public participation requirements for their effective implementation. This situation can be attributed to the benefits expected from involving the public in the decision making process. The expected benefits of public participation mainly include increased public awareness and quality of decisions, social learning, more effective implementation, public acceptance, commitment and support with regard to decisions. Following from these benefits, it is a significant issue to realize successful public participation activities and to assure that public participation has a contribution both for the public and the competent authorities that plan and carry out public participation processes. Hence, evaluating the success of public participation activities becomes a demanding task that needs specific concern. Reflecting on this issue, there are various approaches in the scholarly literature to evaluating the success of public participation. It is suggested here that evaluation of the success of a public participation process can be based on the management of resources, namely time, human and financial resources, and the consideration of several constituents, which emerge from the utilisation of these resources throughout the public participation process.

In this paper, the evaluation of the success of public participation in water resources management is examined within the context of the Water Framework Directive. Accordingly, the following five key constituents are identified to evaluate the success: scope of the participants, communication with the public, capacity building, timing of participation and financing of participation. These constituents are not assumed to be independent of each other; on the contrary, it is expected that they are related due to the setting of public participation activity that brings them together. Even though our focus is on the water resources management, these constituents can also be used in order to evaluate public participation practices from any field of application, since they provide a set of aspects that exist in all public participation activities.

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