

Citizen participation in Strategic Planning for Alpine River Ecosystems

La participation des citoyens à la planification stratégique des écosystèmes des rivières alpines

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette communication détaille la mise en œuvre de processus participatifs dans cinq bassins versants pilotes à travers les Alpes dans le cadre du projet SPARE (Planification stratégique des écosystèmes alpins): Dora Baltea en Italie, Inn - Engadine en Suisse, Steyr en Autriche, Soča en Slovénie et Drôme en France. Dans chaque cas, les gestionnaires ont été en mesure de planifier, d'appliquer et d'évaluer des méthodes participatives pour l'implication des citoyens dans la gestion de leurs rivières et écosystèmes associées. Dans le cadre de SPARE, les processus participatifs étaient centrés sur des problématiques de planification stratégique spécifiques sur chaque site d'étude : prélèvements d'eau, gestion intégrée, services écosystémiques, etc. L'innovation du projet SPARE est que les acteurs eux-mêmes devaient décider qui serait impliqué dans la planification stratégique participative, quand, comment et pourquoi. A l'épreuve du terrain, ce cadre participatif a été entravé par plusieurs facteurs que cette communication mettra en évidence.

ABSTRACT

This article details the implementation of participatory processes in five pilot river basins across the Alps as part of the SPARE project (Strategic Planning for Alpine River Ecosystems): Dora Baltea in Italy, Inn – Engadine in Switzerland, Steyr in Austria, Soča in Slovenia and Drôme in France. In each case, managers planned, applied and evaluated participatory methods to involve citizens in the management of their rivers and associated ecosystems. As part of SPARE, participatory processes focused on a specific strategic planning issue in each case study site: water withdrawal, integrated management, ecosystem services, etc. The innovation of the SPARE project is that stakeholders themselves were meant to decide who would be involved in the participatory strategic planning, when, how and why. When implemented in the field, this participatory framework was hampered by several factors, which this presentation will highlight.

KEYWORDS

Alps, CoOPlaAge, Evaluation, Participation, Strategic Planning

1 INTRODUCTION

The SPARE (Strategic Planning for Alpine River Ecosystems) project aims at contributing to a further harmonization of human use requirements and protection needs of Alpine rivers (Interreg Alpine Space programme). Exploitation, protection and transformation of rivers and related ecosystems are driven by human activities. These activities themselves result from actors' decision-making, induced by perceptions, values and social interactions, and shaped by the legal, institutional, cultural and environmental context. External ("top-down") regulations, pre-assuming standardized social responses, often tend to fail (Fraser et al., 2006), to face issues of low-adoption, resistance, irrelevance or instability after intervention is decreased. Their implementation and maintenance cost can be high. It's often when the classical approaches of policy design and implementation have been disappointing, that alternative, more participatory approaches are called. Overarching policies, from the Aarhus convention to the Water Framework Directive, the Plans & Programmes Directive or the Flood Directive have increased the target level of participation step by step. However, at national and catchment scales it's still not obvious how they are transferred or which protocols must be chosen.

One of the main activities within the SPARE project is therefore to enable river managers in five pilot case study areas to plan, apply and evaluate participatory methods for citizen participation in strategic planning, taking into account their past and current constraints, expectations, knowledge and skills. The five pilot case study areas are: Dora Baltea in Italy, Inn – Engadine in Switzerland, Steyr in Austria, Soča in Slovenia and Drôme in France. This communication will detail the implementation of the participatory processes in these five areas (still ongoing) with a transversal point of view. It will explore questions such as: who is piloting the participatory process? What are the legal frameworks in each country in regards to participation? What are the issues at stake? How did these elements impact participation and its results?

2 METHODOLOGY

The participatory framework of SPARE has two main phases:

1. Participatory design of the local participation plans regarding the issue of focus in the frame of the SPARE project (6 to 9 months)
2. Implementation of the participation plans (12 to 18 months)

In cases where participation activities were already implemented before SPARE, the implementation of this participatory framework was often integrated with existing ongoing participatory activities.

The essential feature of this framework is to leave space and time, and to provide methods and means, for the preparation by all stakeholders of the future procedure of decision: who, when, how and why each category of stakeholder will participate in the various decision phases and how it will be regulated and facilitated. The hypothesis is that the future process will be better accepted and respected by its participants, and should improve alignment between the existing institutional process and the stakeholders' expectations. In summary it means that "actors decide the participation plan". After 2017 the plan is meant to be actually implemented.

This "participatory preparation of participation" by citizens is an innovation of the SPARE project as it has almost never been done elsewhere. One of the case study site had however already experienced it: the Soča River Foundation in Slovenia was established through a stakeholder involvement process that lasted several years. The important aspect of the preparation phase is that participation needs to be planned as a whole process, and not as a series of events as is too often the case: stakeholders need to think about why they are implementing participation in their river basin, who they want to involve, when and what they want to do.

This participatory framework was developed by Irstea and is part of the CoOPlaAge toolkit. The CoOPlaAge toolkit is an integrated set of tools aiming to support most of the participatory decision needs for natural resources management, in particular water management (<https://sites.google.com/site/watagame2/home>).

Results regarding the five participatory processes were collected thanks to the MEPPP and ENCORE monitoring and evaluation approaches (Hassenforder et al, 2016).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1- Key elements of the participatory processes in the five pilot case study areas

	Dora Baltea	Drôme	Inn - Engadine	Soča	Steyr
Process manager (PM)	Local government	Local water management authority	Foundation	Foundation (with support of Institute for Water of the Repu. of Slov. - IzVRS)	Office of the regional government
Process facilitator	Same as PM	External consultant hired part-time by the PM	Same as PM	Board member of the Foundation	External consultants hired temporary by the PM
Decision process and issues "coupled" with SPARE participatory process	Water withdrawal rules / renewal of Dora Baltea strategic planning (<i>Piano regionale di tutela delle acque - PTA</i>)	Preparation of the revision of the Drôme water development and management plan (<i>Schéma d'Aménagement et de Gestion de l'Eau</i>)	Integrated River Basin Management of the Inn River , combined with the IEM project (<i>Einzugsgebiettsmanagement, IEM</i>)	Operationalization of Soča River Foundation (SRF)	*Preparation of development objectives to ensure sustainable water management *Increase awareness about all types of ecosystem services
Main participation challenges	* Concession procedures usually managed by technicians with low participation * The regional government decided to cut SPARE off the official planning process (PTA)	* Time required for implementing and facilitating the process * Starting with participation plan: some participants more eager to talk about the river * Mobilizing citizens * Moderation of some participants	* Upper Engadine local government refused to implement participation * Decision to opt for an alternative participatory processes with youths	* Clarification of the roles of the various water-related authorities which have recently been restructured * Better engage people living along tributaries who have a lower sense of belonging to the Soča basin	* Integration of the ecosystem service concept in the participatory process * Keep the focus on water management * Large scale awareness rising

4 CONCLUSIONS

- The lack of political support in some pilot case study areas required the process managers and facilitators to opt for alternative participatory processes (focused on youth in the Inn, based on face-to-face meetings rather than public ones in Dora Baltea, focused temporarily on a specific topic - navigation on inland waters in Soča)
- The legal framework regarding participation plays a key role. In France there was an evolution in legal texts favourable to participation in 2016 (participation chart, warrants), other countries' legislations seem less favourable
- The “participatory preparation of participation” by citizens as planned in the SPARE framework only took place in Drôme. It leads to social and substantive learning among participants, as well as to institutional impacts (cf. Hassenforder et al. 2017) but it also leads participants to take more ownership over the participatory process and therefore to question the role of the process manager and facilitator.
- The piloting of participation (i.e. who are the process manager and facilitators) has an impact on the participatory process: in Drôme, the process manager has the political will and the decision-making power to launch participation. In Steyr the process manager being a representative of the office of the regional government also eased participation. In Dora Baltea the decision of the regional government to cut SPARE off the official planning process (PTA) put the facilitator in a difficult position. In Switzerland and Slovenia, the process is led by two foundations that have less decision-making power and influence on political decisions.
- The different issues at stake in the five participatory processes in the frame of SPARE drove diverse mobilizations and engagement from participants: a rather technical subject in Dora Baltea (water withdrawals), a broader issue oriented on integrated management in Drôme, Inn and Soča which favour a broader participation (more people potentially feeling concerned) but which also risk to lead to a less operational plan, and a broad participation process with the main local (institutional) stakeholders selecting and discussing issues relevant for Steyr River (river dialogue) for the involvement of the general public (online survey).

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