

Propelling public participation in urban river rehabilitation: *Viu la riera!*, a participatory process in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona

Stimuler la participation publique dans la réhabilitation des rivières urbaines : *Viu la riera!*, un processus participatif dans la région métropolitaine de Barcelone

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RÉSUMÉ

Il existe un fossé entre l'utilisation sociale croissante des cours d'eau urbains et la Participation Publique (PP) encore très limitée dans le cadre de la directive européenne sur l'eau. Un processus participatif visant à stimuler la PP et une implication active à la réhabilitation des rivières urbaines est présenté dans le but d'atteindre des matières d'apprentissage. Le processus participatif a été soutenu par un Système d'Information Géographique pour la Participation Publique (SIGPP) sur un site web et des ateliers présentiels. Le SIG en ligne et les ateliers présentiels ont été combinés afin de rassembler les connaissances du public et de promouvoir la prise de décision collective et l'auto-organisation des citoyens. Cinq points d'apprentissage ont émergé de l'auto-réflexion sur le processus, liés à l'échelle, la méthodologie, l'expérience, le leadership et la perspective temporelle.

ABSTRACT

There is a gap between the increasing social use of urban rivers and the still very limited Public Participation (PP) under the EU Water Framework Directive. A participatory process aimed at propelling PP and active involvement in urban river rehabilitation is presented with the objective to highlight a list of learning points. The participatory process was supported by web-based Public Participation Geographic Information System (PPGIS) and face-to-face workshops. Online tool and onsite workshops were combined with the aim of gathering lay public knowledge, and promoting collective decision making and citizen self-organization. Five learning points emerged from the self-reflection on the process related to: scale, methodology, experience, leadership and temporal perspective.

KEYWORDS

Active involvement, geographic information system, public participation, river rehabilitation, urban rivers

1 INTRODUCTION

The general perception of rivers has changed from polluted and dangerous environments to places for leisure and encounter. Authorities and general public alike in Europe are increasingly recognizing the socio-ecological value of urban rivers and demanding their rehabilitation. In this context, the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC) addresses river rehabilitation in a participatory manner, encouraging the active involvement of stakeholders and lay public in decision-making. This participatory approach is essential for resolving conflicts and enabling integrated river management. However, there is a gap between the increasing social use of urban rivers and the still very limited general Public Participation (PP) under the WFD scheme. Broad PP at all stages of the rehabilitation process has not materialized (Ker Rault and Jeffrey, 2008), and further guidelines and recommendations for this purpose are required. However, PP is a learning exercise and as such guidelines will result from self-reflection about what worked and what did not, based on specific case studies. A participatory process aimed at propelling PP and active involvement in urban river rehabilitation is presented with the objective to highlight a list of learning points.

2 CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

A two years pilot participatory process *Viu la riera!* (Experience the stream! in Catalan) (2016-2017) was propelled by two universities (Universitat Internacional de Catalunya and Universitat de Girona, Spain) in the Caldes Stream, a tributary of the Besòs River in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona. This process involved riparian communities and public administrations of four municipalities (Benages-Albert et al., 2015).

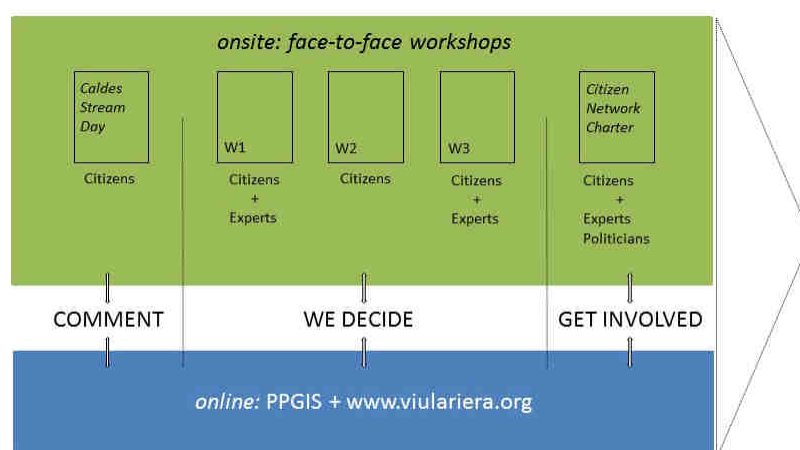


Figure 1. Participatory process structure

The participatory process was supported by web-based Public Participation Geographic Information System (PPGIS) platforms (Sieber, 2006), together with a sequence of face-to-face workshops. Both resources (online tools and onsite workshops) were combined with the aim of gathering lay public knowledge, and promoting collective decision making and citizen self-organization. The process included three stages: 1) COMMENT collected positive and negative values and improvement preferences of the river landscape; 2) WE DECIDE visualized and allowed voting the results of the previous phase, and elicited agreements on common improvement objectives from local communities and public administrations; and 3) GET INVOLVED supported self-organization of a citizen network for carrying on specific improvement actions (Figure 1).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

	COMMENT	WE DECIDE			GET INVOLVED
		W 1	W 2	W 3	
ONSITE Municipalities					
Caldes de Montbui	100	2	10	14	6
Palau-solità i Plegamans	108	2	5	21	3
Santa Perpètua de Mogoda	50	6	3	2	3
La Llagosta	80	3	21	20	5
Total participants	338	13	39	57	17
ONLINE Web-PPGIS use					
Only registration	69		22		22
Registration + Contribution	67		42		7
Total participants	136		64		29

Table 1: Number of participants in each stage

PP decreased when the participatory process became less leisure-based and more demanding. Conversely, PP increased when the process provided knowledge that fit with citizens' interests and expectations. Finally, a small number of people got involved in a supra-municipal grass-root platform committed with river improvement (Table 1). Five learning points emerge from the self-reflection on the process: (1) Scale: focusing on one watercourse, instead of whole basin or single municipalities, may promote citizen supra-municipal collaboration; (2) Methodology: face-to-face workshops and web-based PPGIS may be mutually reinforcing and facilitate customized participation. (3) Experience: enjoyable leisure experiences combined with pro-environmental actions may increase PP. (4) Leadership: initial external agents' leadership may be progressively transferred to grass-root platforms. (5) Temporal perspective: the participatory process may transcend particular and short term debates and become a permanent observatory for river improvement.

4 CONCLUSION

Self-reflection about specific participatory processes, presented with corresponding constraints and warnings, provides useful guidelines for overcoming current limitations of WFD on tackling river rehabilitation in a participatory manner.

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