

## Challenges for involving water stakeholders in educational and decision-making participatory processes supported by ABM

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We implemented a participatory process with water stakeholders for improving resilience to drought at watershed scale, and for reducing water pollution disputes in drought prone areas. The purpose is to facilitate participatory decision making in a rural watershed impacted by recurrent droughts related to ENSO in Northwestern Costa Rica. The process involved co-designing “ContaMiCuenca”, a hybrid agent-based model, as a mediation object. We followed a Companion Modeling approach and organized 6 workshops that included research techniques such as participatory diagnostics, ARDI diagrams (actor-resources-interaction), agent-based model design and interactive simulation sessions. We collectively assessed the main water issues in the watershed, prioritized their importance, defined the objectives of the process, and pilot-tested the use of *ContaMiCuenca* for environmental education with adults and children. Simulation sessions with adults resulted in debates about the need to improve the model accuracy, arguably more relevant for decision-making. This helped identify sensible knowledge gaps in the groundwater pollution and aquifer dynamics that need to be addressed in order to improve our collective learning. Based on the *ContaMiCuenca* model, we developed a role-playing game for environmental education that triggered school children’s interest and commitment in water issues. Interestingly, children emphasized the need for coordination and awareness rising, which contrasts with the adults’ perspective. Our findings provide significant guidance for improving the trans-generational engagement of water stakeholders in participatory modeling processes in a context of drought emergency, limited technical information, and weak water governance.

# iEMSs 2016 Conference

Environmental modelling and software  
for supporting a sustainable future

Draft



Proceedings | Volume 4 | Pages 803-1274  
**8th International Congress on Environmental  
Modeling and Software (iEMSs)**  
July 10-14, 2016  
Toulouse, France

**Proceedings of the 8th International Congress on Environmental  
Modelling and Software (iEMSs)  
July 10-14, 2016, Toulouse, FRANCE.**

**How to cite the full proceedings:**

Sauvage, S., Sánchez-Pérez, J.M., Rizzoli, A.E. (Eds.), 2016. Proceedings of the 8th International Congress on Environmental Modelling and Software, July 10-14, Toulouse, FRANCE. ISBN: 978-88-9035-745-9

**How to cite an individual paper:**

Author, A., Author, B., Author, C..., 2016. This is the title of your paper. In: Sauvage, S., Sánchez-Pérez, J.M., Rizzoli, A.E. (Eds.), 2016. Proceedings of the 8th International Congress on Environmental Modelling and Software, July 10-14, Toulouse, FRANCE. ISBN: 978-88-9035-745-9

**Peer Review:**

Each paper has been peer reviewed by at least two independent reviewers with possible outcomes of reject, revise, and accept.