

# TRANSFORMATIVE PARTICIPATION FOR SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Around the CoOPLAGE pathways

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## Chapter 3

# The context of citizen participation in water management in France

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interviews conducted by Emeline Hassenforder*

Ever more land and water managers are implementing participatory approaches in the scope of their projects, plans and programmes. This chapter provides elements for understanding the context surrounding citizen participatory processes in France. It is based on the testimonies of three actors, each of whom sheds light on the subject from her own perspective, altogether encompassing the local level, the regional Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica watershed level as well as the national level.

The aim of this chapter is to provide elements for understanding the context surrounding citizen participatory processes in France. It discusses:

- current trends, in particular through the French ordinance for the democratisation of environmental dialogue;
- key events such as the conflict surrounding the Sivens dam project or the introduction of the Gemapi tax<sup>1</sup>;
- main obstacles and levers, such as the willingness of elected officials or the articulation between different territorial policies;
- and finally, a few anecdotes and recommendations to those who are in charge of future participatory approaches.

It should be noted that this chapter deals mainly with participatory approaches that support the development or revision of public policies. More “spontaneous” participatory processes (demonstrations, petitions), those carried out exclusively by civil society actors or those that put action first (living labs or citizen initiatives and forums) are not discussed.

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1. The Gemapi tax for the management of aquatic environments and flood prevention (Gemapi or Gestion des milieux aquatiques et de prévention des inondations) is an optional tax that can be imposed on private individuals or legal entities since 1 January 2018 by municipalities or public establishments for intermunicipal cooperation, which are the competent authority in terms of aquatic environments and flood prevention. The tax aims at financing actions related to this new competence: development of watersheds, maintenance and development of watercourses, canals, lakes and other water bodies, flood prevention mechanisms, protection and restoration of wetlands, as well as hydraulic installations and their maintenance (Source: <https://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2018/qSEQ180906795.html>, [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxe\\_pour\\_la\\_gestion\\_des\\_milieux\\_aquatiques\\_et\\_la\\_pr%C3%A9vention\\_des\\_inondations](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxe_pour_la_gestion_des_milieux_aquatiques_et_la_pr%C3%A9vention_des_inondations))

The floor was given to three actors, each of whom sheds some light at her own level:

– At the local level, Marie Trouillet (M.T.) is a facilitator within an association called the Centre for Environmental Initiatives CPIE<sup>2</sup> in Bugey-Genevois (east of France, at the border with Switzerland). She has been supporting participatory approaches in favour of the environment in the Haute-Savoie area for the past eight years. The testimony gathered represents Marie Trouillet's perspective and does not speak for the CPIE Bugey-Genevois in any way.

– At the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica watershed level, Anne Pressurot (A.P.) of the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica water agency, formerly in charge of evaluating the agency's public policies and research projects on participation and elected officials, is currently intervention officer at the Regional Delegation in Lyon. The comments made here are the sole responsibility of Anne Pressurot and do not commit the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica water agency.

– At the national level, Audrey Massot (A.M.) is in charge of the territorial coordination of the water policy at the Directorate for Water and Biodiversity of the Ministry of Ecological Transition (MTE<sup>3</sup>). The statements made here represent the views of Audrey Massot and do not commit the Ministry of Ecological Transition.

## ►► What are the current trends in participation in the water sector?

A.M. (Ministry): At the national level, there are currently three major factors or trends that influence participation. The first of course is the 2016 Ordinance on the Democratisation of the Environmental Dialogue. It requires water managers, in particular for water management plans (SAGE<sup>4</sup>), to either engage upstream in a consultation or to produce a declaration of intent including a right of initiative (see chapter 4). A public consultation has to therefore be included as early as possible in well-established procedures such as the SAGE procedure, which for instance has been in existence for 25 years now. Some regions appreciated the advent of this ordinance and had already consulted the public during the preparatory phase of their SAGE (e.g. the Assises du Loiret launched in 2016<sup>5</sup>, which consisted of a photographic survey that was carried out as part of the Calavon-Coulon SAGE). In other regions, however, it was seen as an additional regulatory phase and therefore something that made the procedures even more tedious. At the ministry, we are working on the methodological and procedural framework of this consultation alongside other stakeholders and the National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP<sup>6</sup>).

This democratisation of environmental dialogue echoes a second trend which consists in the mobilisation of citizens at all levels and in many forms. Some mobilisations are

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2. Centre permanent d'initiative pour l'environnement (CPIE)

3. Ministère de la transition écologique

4. SAGE – Schéma d'aménagement et de gestion de l'eau: It is a planning tool, instituted by the 1992 French Water Act, aiming at the balanced and sustainable management of water resources at the watershed or aquifer level. The SAGE sets, coordinates and prioritises general objectives for the use, development and quantitative and qualitative protection of water resources and aquatic ecosystems, as well as the preservation of wetlands. It identifies the conditions and means for achieving these objectives (Source: <https://www.gesteau.fr/presentation/sage>)

5. For more information in French: <http://www.assises-riviere-loiret.fr/index.php>

6. Commission nationale du débat public

highly visible and covered by the media (climate marches, zones to defend); others are more discreet but just as important (think tanks, local associations such as WARN!<sup>7</sup>, the “time to question” citizens’ questionnaire broadcast by Arte as well as several associative movements in 2020, etc.).

Lastly, a theme that I personally have noticed on the rise is the issue of water quality, which usually mobilises the general public more than quantity. Topics such as glyphosate or plastic pollution generate greater awareness, perhaps because the risks are better understood. These are not new issues, they were already being talked about 30 or 40 years ago, but they are back on the agenda and worrying the population. So, it’s good that the general public is paying attention. The quantitative aspect, on the other hand, is still often reserved for scientific and technical stakeholders, and for economic actors directly impacted by water deficits. There are initiatives on the water management side such as the study of collectable volumes on the Roussillon aquifer or the regional water management project on the Usse but I have the feeling that it’s more difficult to mobilise the general public on the issues of drought and low water levels. It may be because many people believe that drought mainly affects the south of France, whereas other basins, Seine Normandy or Artois Picardy, are equally affected.

**A.P. (Water agency):** One of the important trends in my opinion is that increasingly more citizens and locals are being included in participatory approaches for water management. Consultation has always been an operating principle with multi-party working committees or commissions allowing all stakeholders to express themselves (see the 1992 Water Act), but it has mainly concerned representatives of associations, administrations, companies or elected officials. The direct participation of citizens and local residents in participatory processes is more recent. This evolution has been notable throughout the implementation of the 10<sup>th</sup> action programme of the water agency (2013-2018), which is more oriented towards land management planning and therefore producing greater impact, as well as through the 2016 national Ordinance on Environmental Dialogue. Incidentally, the water agency also signed the Ministry of the Environment’s charter on public participation at the end of 2016 (see chapter 4).

This trend is reinforced by the fact that many elected officials are more open to participation than they were before. They have understood the importance of taking the environment into account in public policies and are trying to open up the reflection on water projects to citizens by organising consultations and debates. At the same time, more and more citizens want to get directly involved without going through their representatives; they are more active and vindictive. This is the case, for example, of the counter-urbanisation movement in which people settle in the countryside to be closer to nature and therefore defend the landscape, biodiversity and the fact that they can walk along the water. These new subjects, such as the emotional and sensitive relationship with rivers or the restoration of watercourses, are often complex issues and therefore require participatory approaches to obtain a consensus at the local level.

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7. The ‘WARN!’ movement (We are ready now!), which regroups activists and to a certain extent whistle-blowers, was initiated by a group of youth who had participated in the Conference of Youth (COY11) at the Conference of the Parties on Climate in 2015 (COP21). Today, this movement sets up workshops on the environment in schools and organises large-scale awareness programmes to sensitise the public-at-large on global warming and the ecological emergency. <http://wearereadynow.net/>

**M.T. (Association):** For me, there has been a change in the level of participation. In the past, we mainly built up awareness on the ground, for example by encouraging people to reduce their water consumption. Whereas now, participation has moved into other spheres; we are asking participants to give their opinion on water management, on the quantity of water or on well-functioning mechanisms. We are called upon for other things than just awareness. People are no longer just informed, they can also express their views on a wider range of issues than before.

At the same time, there is less and less support for project managers or structures carrying out participatory processes or for elected officials in implementing participation. Yet, I've seen that the people who benefited from the support of programmes like *Osons Agir*<sup>8</sup> had developed a real sense of participation; this was a true lever for the success of the participatory approach. However, today, those people who obtained support in certain territories are no longer there, following elections or a change in jobs, and the support programmes have for the most part been replaced by the occasional training days. So the trend could well be reversed.

### ►► For you, what have been the main developments in participation in the water sector in recent years?

**A.P. (Water agency):** The conflict around the Sivens dam project<sup>9</sup> was an electroshock in the water sector on the importance of involving citizens. It led to major legal changes, in particular to the integration of a prior consultation into SAGE policies on water management. It also affected all land use planning and river restoration projects.

The second influence for me is the reduction in the amount of available water due to climate change, as well as the pressures on uses which are increasingly strong. These pressures reinforce the need to exchange, participate and agree on the sharing of water resources. In some territories of the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica basin, these pressures have created tensions between stakeholders, which have even required mediation measures.

The impoverishment of society, further marked by the Covid-19 crisis, has also pushed certain issues up the agenda. This can be seen, for example, in the social pricing of water or the safeguard of low-income families from water cut-offs. We realised that there are sectors where public services have to be ensured and where the economy-water-common good link is essential.

Lastly, the flooding of the Grand and Petit Travers coastal dunes in the Hérault department (hemmed in between the Étang de l'Or and the sea and located between Carnon and La Grande-Motte in South of France) marked participation as this created conflict between citizens who were for or against certain urban developments, in a context where all involved were extremely sensitive and impulsive on the issue. In many cases, participation was a means of calming conflictual situations.

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8. 'Osons Agir' is a programme carried by the Regional Union of CPIEs in the Rhône Alps region - Union Régionale des CPIE Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. It aims at helping professionals, elected officials, and citizens to build their skills in participatory approaches. It offers group workshops as well as personal learning sessions. <http://urcpie-aura.org/nos-missions/accompagner-les-territoires/dialogue-territorial-osons-agir/>

9. In 2014, a dam project on the Tescou river in the Garonne basin led to violent clashes between activists opposed to the project and anti-riot police. These clashes led to the death of an opponent in October 2014. The dam project was abandoned in December 2015 by prefectural decree.

**A.M.** (Ministry): There are two examples of territories where citizen mobilisation has been particularly publicised. The Sivens dam of course—which by-the-way was the event that triggered reform on environmental dialogue in 2016—but also the gold mountain in French Guiana. This mining project has left its mark due to the very strong mobilisation of local communities. It was a complex project, like all mining projects, with strong environmental issues related to water, wetlands and forests, along with strong economic implications as well. The project was highly publicised and politicised. In the end, it was abandoned.

Aside from these already well-known events, many requirements have already been written into law mandating the public to get involved in a timely manner. At the Ministry level, consultations in the framework for water installations, planning and management (SDAGE<sup>10</sup>) also constitute significant events. Every six years, the public is consulted on the important issues to be addressed in the SDAGE as well as on the work programme. Some of the participatory sessions have been very useful and successful, for instance in the Martinique basin.

Lastly, at the European level, the “Fitness Check” questionnaire was sent to all European countries in view of a possible revision of the Water Framework Directive. Citizens can answer the survey directly. And even if the questionnaire is in English and relatively technical, it allows concerned citizens or organisations to give their opinion and to be heard by the European Commission.

**M.T.** (Association): The introduction of the Gemapi tax had a certain impact at the local level because people realised that their bills had increased, whereas their consumption had not. However, this only affects certain people; most people are disconnected from these changes, and do not even realise them.

On the other hand, what has significantly marked participation is the trend towards the grouping together of districts in the form of greater municipalities or public establishments for water planning and management (EPAGE – Établissements publics d'aménagement et de gestion des eaux). These groupings have created a disconnection between water managers and the population. People used to know those who were in charge of water in their districts, and the managers came to see them directly if there was a leak or other problem. There was a dialogue and people felt concerned by the water issue. But now, even the elected officials are disconnected from this because the competence has gone to the greater municipality or elsewhere. So, even if these groupings are of interest for territorial strategies or watershed solidarity, they have created a disconnect between water managers and the population.

### **» In your opinion, what are the main obstacles to implementing a participatory approach today?**

**M.T.** (Association): One of the primary obstacles is the lack of time that project officers dedicate to participation. Their time is essentially devoted to large technical investment projects and participation is ranked second, even third or fourth in terms of priorities. Participatory processes can be time-consuming, especially if they have never been set up before. Further, officers do not always think of forming a partnership with a local structure or signing an agreement with an association or other organisation.

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10. Schémas Directeur d'Aménagement et de Gestion des Eaux

Another obstacle lies in the articulation between the different territorial policies. Today, the primary tools used for land management—such as regional frameworks on cohesive land management (SCoT<sup>11</sup>) and local inter-urban planning (PLUi<sup>12</sup>)—do not leave room for citizen participation and dedicate even less space to water. These tools take participation into account through association or union representation; citizens are only consulted, and are rarely directly involved through constructive group workshops. In one of the catchment areas I work in, the local citizens had told the river committee that, in their opinion, one of the priorities for dealing with the lack of water was to reflect on land management policies. In this basin, new settlements have increased the pressure on resource sharing. Elected officials told them that this issue would be addressed in other instances (in this case the PLUi) in which citizens do not have the opportunity to express themselves collectively. As a result, citizen participation in water management often only leads to awareness campaigns or to small investments such as water collection systems, but not to profound changes in land management.

**A.P.** (Water agency): The main obstacle is primarily political, and lies in the willingness of elected officials to set up participatory approaches or not. Everyone's role must be clear: who decides, who discusses, until when, on what, without restricting anyone's expression, whether they are well or just a little informed on the subject. The second obstacle lies in the competency, know-how and interpersonal skills needed to implement participatory approaches. Participation requires expertise, particularly at the social level, to lead and mobilise a large and representative audience. Not everyone can do this. The third obstacle, by far not the least, lies in the difficulty of rendering the process and its results transparent, and of giving feedback to the participants on what their participation has produced and what influence the participants have had on the decision, project, plan or programme. If this feedback is not provided, participants may be led to believe that they have participated in an "alibi" process. Transparency is a strong lever.

**A.M.** (Ministry): The relatively heavy administrative and regulatory burden imposed by legislation on managers in terms of public participation. We are aware of this. And although involving the public is meant as a good intention, we understand that it imposes fairly lengthy procedures, which can demotivate certain structures. Especially since managers still lack support on methods and training for participation. The French Biodiversity Office report edited by Contrechamps in 2018<sup>13</sup> has clearly identified this. It is with this in mind that we are working here at the Ministry along with INRAE national researchers, the CNDP and guarantors, investigative commissioners, and other relays in order to increase the power of these methodological levers.

Another obstacle is that it is perhaps more difficult to imagine new participatory methods for plans and programmes that have existed for a very long time and which have well-established procedures that technicians and managers are accustomed to implementing. By imagining slightly more flexible practices, things could probably be rethought and invented to ensure participation throughout policy-making, to integrate

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11. Schémas de Cohérence Territoriale

12. Plans Locaux d'Urbanisme Intercommunaux

13. Chémery, J-B., Gasc, G., Arama, Y., Dubois, N., De la Rocque, J., Renoullin, M., Assessment of participatory approaches to integrated and sustainable water and aquatic environment management – Final Report, July 2018 – in French: [http://www.gesteau.fr/sites/default/files/rapport\\_-\\_etat\\_des\\_lieux\\_gestion\\_de\\_leau\\_et\\_des\\_milieus.pdf](http://www.gesteau.fr/sites/default/files/rapport_-_etat_des_lieux_gestion_de_leau_et_des_milieus.pdf)

citizens from the beginning of the process up until its implementation. Local water commissions, for example, are admirable consultative bodies, and have been in place for quite a while now. Some local water commissions are already thinking about involving citizens, perhaps without giving them a decision-making role (no voting privileges which the commission members have) but simply allowing them to be part of the discussion (e.g. SAGE Drôme, Scarpe aval or Scarpe amont, SAGE Clain, SAGE Charente, etc.). The two approaches are compatible.

### ►► How do you see the future of participation in the water sector?

**M.T.** (Association): Very optimistic! I really get the idea that water like the environment are becoming more cross-cutting issues that will be reflected in all areas: regional planning, the economy, health, etc. And that, thanks to citizen participation.

But for this transformation to be effective, the quality, rather than the quantity, of implemented participatory processes must be improved. There are still too many citizen participatory processes in the water sector that end in a “crappy water” (if I may say so); a three-year participatory process is carried out and then, in the end, nothing that was proposed by the citizens is implemented. As a result, people are less and less inclined to participate. These processes are already time-consuming for them, and the time taken by citizens is not the same as that of the managers or public authorities. We therefore need better participation, which is commensurate with the energy we put into it, which shakes things up, and which uses available means in a more intelligent way. We need to provide the necessary resources for the post-participation process, so that actions can be implemented.

The problem is that the concerns of citizens do not necessarily correspond to the concerns of managers or the water agency. The population are moving the lines and these lines are not necessarily in phase with the initial budget lines. And rather than seeing this as a hindrance, I think we should see it as an opportunity; citizens can provide a link between the various territorial policies because they do not feel limited by a particular field of competence or policy area as managers or elected representatives might. And for me, citizen participation will be a driving factor that will allow for water to be taken into account more in regional planning, development and life. Many water authorities exist, and yet water is still not fully considered in regional planning; we continue to build on marshland, and when housing is built, no one asks how we are going to supply it with water, or how collection systems will be set up. When we approach the environment in a compartmentalised way, we don't deal with the real issues. Citizen participation can help us get back on track.

**A.M.** (Ministry): In a positive way because environmental, ecological and climate change issues are beginning to make their way into people's minds and into politics. I think that the climate change approach will succeed in mobilising the general public because the climate, which is highly publicised in the media, speaks to the greatest number. With more support in methodology for participatory processes in climate change, water managers will enhance their skills. And since the climate is a highly politicised subject, elected officials will become increasingly involved and thus involve their electorate in climate issues. I think that at some point the electorate and the public in general will get involved in water issues. The political sphere and the public sphere will come together.



I'm also confident in education and the role of schools and higher education. More and more curricula include courses on the ecology, the environment and water resources. I studied at the ENTPE<sup>14</sup> institute for public works, an engineering school that was originally focused on civil engineering. For the past ten years or so, the curriculum has focused much more on environmental issues, with courses specialised in the management of waterways and the coastline. It is also through education that we will make citizens aware that they need to play a role in water management. I therefore believe that participation in consultations will increase.

Lastly, one of the future challenges, it seems to me, is carried by the water agencies, since they are the most visible to citizens due to the fact that they send out the water bill. It is important that citizens know what this money is going to be used for. This materialisation through cost is important. It's a sort of general public contribution: I am paying something to protect our water resources. It makes people realise that water is not a free or inexhaustible resource, and that they must therefore contribute to its preservation, be it by participating in consultations or by paying their bill.

**A.P. (Water agency):** On the large basin scale, the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica water agency is promoting societal debates to help imagine the upcoming challenges for future frameworks on water management (focus groups) or the agency's future policy, for example, on drug residues or nanoparticles in water, the use of treated wastewater for irrigation, etc. In addition, several research and development projects have been set up or are underway to ensure that participation and consultation are well articulated in the water sector<sup>15</sup>. The notion of common good instituted by the 1964 water law is a foundation and a plus for the development of participation in water policies.

At the local level, I imagine a very operational and pragmatic use of citizen participation to provide more substance and hindsight to local water commissions or river committees on blocked or new issues (Gemapi, sharing of water resources in territories under stress, new SAGEs to be written, reviving citizen appropriation of territories, etc.). Different commissions are often created with the same representatives when it comes to organising the water sector. Participation will breathe new life into this organisation.

Lastly, it seems to me that participation should be transformed into a more ad hoc and timely approach with easy-to-use, readily available tools. The focus is still on institutional participation and expectations are high, whereas the water sector already has consultative bodies and a very strong logic of inter-actor participation. What is lacking is participation that is more open towards citizens and set-up according to specific needs (monitoring of water resources and biodiversity, fight against heat islands in the city, restoration of waterways). The training-action plans offered by organisations or consultancy firms (such as the Centres permanents d'initiatives pour l'environnement, France Nature Environnement, etc.) help strengthen the capacities

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14. École nationale des travaux publics de l'État

15. This is the case, for example, of the project 'What participatory strategy for local water management with the citizens' (2016-2020) financed by the Rhône-Mediterranean-Corsica water agency and led by the National Institute for Research in Science and Technology for the Environment and Agriculture (Irstea), which became INRAE in January 2020 (UMR G-EAU) <https://frama.link/RMCPart>

of those who support the implementation of these types of approaches. Moreover, depending on the issue, the skills in the field, the ability to act, there may be a multitude of participatory methods that are more or less costly, creative, integrated into the decision-making process...

### ► Do you have any particular anecdote, anything that stands out, that you would like to share?

**A.P.** (Water agency): Yes, it was during a participatory workshop in the Drôme department. I was struck by an elected official who came to realise what an important contribution participation plays in processes. He said: “I was worried. I didn’t know what I was getting into and in fact it brought me closer to the people; they took their territory into their own hands and in the end, it made relations more fluid”. Especially since the approach generated a lot of citizen proposals and required a lot of investment from the managers. So, the fact that afterwards this elected official said that it had brought him a lot of new ideas, that he was no longer afraid of participation, I found that very strong.

**M.T.** (Association): During a forum theatre workshop<sup>16</sup> with locals from the Usse watershed, there was a scene where a child was wasting water because he was having fun with it. And overall the audience was very uncomfortable; they didn’t know how to react because they didn’t want to stop the child from having fun with the water, and at the same time they were aware of the waste that it generated. We were at an impasse. At this point, a person who had taken part in previous workshops came on stage, bringing a fresh perspective as always. She didn’t explain what she wanted to do, she simply took the child by the hand and suggested that he play with something else. That made an impression on me because, for me, the answer was there: it’s not a question of forbidding the different actors to do this or that, it’s a question of finding the right answer for each individual and of doing things differently. It’s not a question of telling farmers: you have to water your corn less; you have to see if you can cultivate differently, with another variety that is more resistant to drought, another irrigation technique or another crop. It’s not a question of saying don’t do it, we must collectively do it differently.

**A.M.** (Ministry): Yes, the public consultation in Martinique to revise the SDAGE framework on water installations, planning and management 2022-2027. The consultation was carried out in a fun way, with a travelling device that mobilised six pairs of young Martinicans, named the Blue Ambassadors, who travelled around Martinique to meet the general public to collect the population’s opinions. They conducted thousands of questionnaires on drinking water, rivers, mangroves, and the results of previous SDAGEs. Several questions dealt with the trust and satisfaction of the population in the drinking water, which is a major issue in Martinique. There was a high level of participation. This water basin obtained the most responses at the national level<sup>17</sup>.

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16. Forum theatre is a participatory tool in which actors perform a scene illustrating a sticking point or problem between different actors. At the end of the scene, the audience is given the opportunity to replace one of the actors in order to find a solution to the problem.

17. 1.53% of the population of Martinique participated in the consultation (Source: Synthesis of the 2018-2019 Consultation of the public and stakeholders for the revision of the SDAGE). For more on the results of the consultation - in French: <https://www.observatoire-eau-martinique.fr/politique-de-l-eau/cadre-reglementaire/consultation-du-public>

The consultation also included online surveys. The SDAGE took the collected opinions into account in orienting its provisions. This is an example of participation that was not experienced as a regulatory constraint but rather as something highly voluntary, a way of re-involving and re-mobilising citizens on water issues and turning them into actors, in particular by mobilising young people. Young people often have a more forceful discourse on these issues today, as illustrated by Greta Thunberg<sup>18</sup>.

## » What would you say to people who want to start a participatory process?

**A.M.** (Ministry): Public participation should not be seen as a regulatory phase that has to be implemented, but rather as an opportunity to enrich the plan or programme with various opinions. As a manager, we know less about the region than the residents who have seen it evolve over decades.

I would also advise anticipating the participatory process so that it goes as smoothly as possible, by assessing the forces present and any potential areas of conflict. Prior consultation is a way of defusing tensions on the territory by showing the willingness of State services and water managers to co-construct a strategy with all concerned stakeholders. Anticipating also means going to other territories to see what has been done there, identifying failed and best participatory practices. This feedback is essential, including national online consultations.

And finally, I think that the general public should be involved as much as possible, not just as a simple contributor or observer. We need to deploy methods so that citizens feel that they are actors in the process and as involved as possible. This is what we are encouraging at the ministerial level in the General Commission for Sustainable Development.

**M.T.** (Association): I would say that you have to “think carefully beforehand”, “take time for the process”, “co-construct with the participants”, “see if it is legitimate”, etc. But in fact, if I had to say only one thing, it would be test, experiment, don’t hesitate to look for participatory tools that make people want to take part and that accompany as many as possible. When I say “as many as possible”, I don’t mean in quantity but in diversity. We must not only reach out to the learned, but also to people in precarious situations. Greater education and nature activities, for example, are full of tools for reaching diverse audiences.

**A.P.** (Water agency): That you have to be open to exchange and new things, to have confidence and trust. The world of participation is very rich; there are lots of different tools, a lot of know-how and life skills that are very inspiring. And that you should not be afraid of participation, because participatory approaches often go hand-in-hand with project endorsement or approval of planned decisions, and when this is the case, they provide for a broad and incisive perspective that legitimises the project.

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18. Greta Thunberg is a Swedish activist who started protesting in 2018 at the age of 15 against inaction on climate change. She gained international recognition for her activism and speeches.