

TRANSFORMATIVE PARTICIPATION FOR SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Around the CoOPLAGE pathways

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Chapter 10

Evaluating a participatory process

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One can argue that “*Setting up a participatory process is already cumbersome, adding an evaluation on top of that is beyond any ambitions I may have*”. And yet... What’s the point of involving different stakeholders, if in the end, you cannot tell if that participation has truly served a purpose? Following this statement, we invite you to read this chapter. We assert that evaluation is not synonymous with depression. Your evaluation can be adapted to suit your ambitions. Let’s get to it!

» The ABCs

The ABCs of evaluating a participatory process are to be able to say how many people took part in the process, whether there were more women than men, whether there were only environmentalists and no representatives from the agricultural sector, or whether an elected official monopolised the floor and invited participants only had five minutes to express themselves.

» How do you go about it?

Assess the participants’ demographics

First, ask yourself what you want to know about the participants. For example, if you want to know if the participants are representative of the region’s population, ask yourself what data you have on the territory’s population that you can compare with the data you will collect from your participants. If you are going to use national statistics, you can use the same indicators as those used by the national bureau for statistics. This will make it easier for you to compare data later on. The same applies to gender, place of residence, socio-professional category, etc. This allows you to establish a list of individual characteristics and associated options that you want to know about the participants.

Example of characteristics: age, gender, place of residence, socio-professional category, type(s) of river use(s), household composition, community or volunteer activities, telephone number or email, etc.

Example of associated options: age >18/19-24/25-64/65-79/>80 years old.

There are several means for collecting this information, each with its advantages and disadvantages (table 10.1). This table is of course non-exhaustive.

Table 10.1. Possible means for collecting individual characteristics of participants

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Online pre-registration	Automatic data collection and processing, provides information on those who will be present	May inhibit participation of some people who just want to “come and see”
Registration on arrival at the 1 st participatory event	Allows organisers to immediately see who the participants are	Requires the support of an organiser to ensure that everyone has registered, and has entered their data
Pass around an attendance list requesting information on the individual characteristics of participants	Simple to set up and customary for most participants	Some people do not wish to share personal information such as their age or residence with other participants

What about anonymity?

It is, of course, possible to organise a participatory process where everyone remains anonymous. This is the case with most public meetings, where no registration is required and everyone can participate and speak without even having to introduce themselves. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages to this option. On the one hand, this helps limit prejudices between participants (“*He’s eco-friendly*”, “*She’s a right-wing mayor*”). On the other hand, if a decision is made, you will not be able to justify that the room was not in fact filled with members from the National Federation of Farmers’ Unions or from environmental activists who came to sway the decision in their favour. There are several options in-between absolute anonymity (nobody knows who is who) and extensive demographic analysis. It is possible, for example, for the participatory process organiser to collect data on the participants, to present them with generic results (percentage of representatives from civil society, percentage of representatives from the administration, etc.) while maintaining individual identities anonymous.

The European General Data Protection Regulation (European Union, 2016) provides principles and steps to be followed when a public or private organisation collects and processes personal data. This includes informing participants about the type of data collected, for what purpose, by whom, who has access to the data and to whom it will be communicated, data retention periods, etc.

► Monitoring and evaluating the process

At the very least, information on who participated in which participatory event(s) is necessary. To do this, you can simply pass around an attendance sheet as mentioned above, or ask participants to pre-register or register upon arrival. The individual characteristics mentioned above are only collected once at the beginning of the process. At subsequent events, only the person’s first name and surname or participant number (if you have chosen to assign a number to each person) will be requested. This information can then be entered into an Excel file (one row per participant, one column per event, and in each box a “1” if the person participated in the event, if not then nothing). This allows for a quick analysis of the number of participants at each event, the retention rate (did participants who came to the first event come back again?)

and the composition of the group of participants at each event. For process facilitators, these data are essential to adapting the participatory process along the way. For example, it allows you to determine whether it is better to organise an event in the evening or during the day depending on the targeted participants, whether the events upstream of the catchment area have attracted a particular socio-professional category and those downstream another, etc.

Above and beyond data on the number and characteristics of participants and events, you can also monitor and evaluate the progress of the process itself, for example:

- whether all participants were able to express themselves;
- whether the necessary documents were made available to the participants;
- whether the facilitator distributed speaking time in a balanced manner;
- whether tensions or conflicts emerged between participants;
- ...

There are various reference systems that propose “standard elements” to be evaluated in order to determine whether or not a participatory process is going well. For example, in the insert following this chapter, there is a focus on the Participation compass developed by Cerema¹. This compass is based on the values and principles defined in the participation charter of the French Ministry for the Environment, Energy and the Sea² (see also chapter 4). Other guidelines exist that define the principles of “good” participation. The ones best known in the field of participation research are those by Gene Rowe and Lynn J. Frewer (2000), which include nine acceptance and process criteria:

Acceptance criteria:	Process criteria:
– representativeness of the participants,	– accessibility to resources,
– independence of the participants,	– definition of roles for each participant,
– early involvement,	– structure and clarity of decision-making,
– influence on final policy,	– cost effectiveness.
– transparency of the process.	

The moderators of a participatory process can use an existing reference framework to evaluate the progress of their process. They can also define the criteria themselves to include those that seem most relevant to them for evaluating the effective progress of their process. It may also be pertinent to involve a small group of five to ten people to reflect on this, each with a different point of view on what constitutes a “good” participatory process. This monitoring and evaluation steering group can further help to ensure that these pre-defined principles of good participation are respected throughout the process. They can also contribute to the collection or analysis of data and the sharing of results.

These principles of good participation often constitute the content of participation charters, which are communicated to and endorsed by all participants. Monitoring and evaluation therefore directly supports the implementation of the participatory process.

In addition, the participatory process facilitators can call on one or more participation warrants, whose role is precisely that of independently ensuring the rules of

1. Centre d'études et d'expertise sur les risques, l'environnement, la mobilité et l'aménagement (Cerema): Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning is a French public agency for developing public expertise in the fields of urban planning, regional cohesion and ecological and energy transition.

2. https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/Charte_participation_public.pdf

participation are respected, in compliance with general principles or a local charter. The warrant may be a local person, who then withdraws from the participatory process in order to remain neutral. There are also professional warrants who may have an official role in the procedures monitored by a national organisation such as the National Commission for Public Debate in France.

This is a two-fold process in which the principles of good participation are defined followed by the collection of data on whether or not these principles have been respected. This is what a warrant or participation observer is supposed to do. For instance, if one of the principles is that everyone should have the opportunity to speak, the observer will note who spoke at the various events, possibly for how long, and whether the facilitator offered the possibility to speak to those who had not yet spoken.

► Assessing the impacts of the process

In the previous two paragraphs, we discussed procedural evaluation, i.e. evaluation of the process as such, as opposed to impact evaluation, which aims at measuring the effects of the process on the participants (e.g. Did they learn something?), on the project or policy (e.g. Was the project modified following proposals made by citizens?) or on the initiator of the process itself (e.g. Is the water manager implementing participatory processes in a more systematic manner following this process?).

What is important here is the impact you want to achieve with your process on your territory. This is what needs to be assessed. Keep in mind that different stakeholders may have different visions of the impact expected from the process. This is why we advise you to carry out the following steps with a small group of people who will be in charge of monitoring and evaluation (table10.2).

Table 10.2. Steps to developing a monitoring and evaluation protocol
(source: Hassenforder *et al.*, 2016; Hassenforder *et al.*, 2018)

Steps	Questions to ask	Example
Identify the objectives of the evaluation	What are the impacts we want to assess?	We want to assess whether the participants have learned something during the process.
Define the indicators	What do we need to know to be able to assess these impacts?	We want to know if the participants learned how their watershed works from a hydrological standpoint.
Check feasibility	Will we be able to collect and analyse data on the listed indicators?	Will participants be willing to answer questions about their knowledge? Is there sufficient budget for collecting and analysing this data? Is it really useful? To whom? Etc.
Identify monitoring and evaluation methods	By what means will we collect this data (questionnaires, interviews, surveys, observation of participatory events, photos, videos, etc.)?	Questionnaire: ask participants at the end of an event if they have learned how their watershed works from a hydrological standpoint. Observation: note what participants say about the catchment area (e.g. "I didn't know that my tap water came from aquifer X"). Mapping: ask participants to draw the catchment area before the start of the process and at the end of the process.

Steps	Questions to ask	Example
Implement the evaluation	Who will collect the data using these monitoring and evaluation methods, when and with what resources (budget, time)?	An evaluator has been hired to observe the participatory events and record the content of the exchanges. Data analysis is done by a researcher.
Analyse the data	What do the data say about the impacts initially identified? Are there any unexpected effects?	23 out of 34 participants said they have learned something about the hydrological functioning of the catchment area. Of these 23 people, 19 thought that their tap water came from the river. The workshop provoked a debate on the transition to private sector management of the drinking water supply in the municipality of XX.
Share results	With whom do we want to share the results and how (written reports, press articles, videos, oral presentations, etc.)?	An infographic will be posted on the district's website and sent to all participants by email. An in-depth analysis will result in a scientific paper. A press article in the local newspaper will mention the main results.

Several types of impacts can be generated (and evaluated) by participatory processes. Table 10.3 lists some of these as a guide and figure 10.1 shows some examples of simple monitoring and evaluation methods.

Table 10.3. Types of impacts that can be generated (and evaluated) by participatory processes (Source: Ferrand and Daniell, 2006)

Type of impact	Explanation	Possible monitoring and evaluation methods
External (E)	Environmental, economic, social, cultural, political or institutional impacts	Environmental impact study, cost-benefit analysis, etc.
Normative (N)	Impacts on the norms, values, preferences, goals of participants: e.g. whether they favour the short or long term, conservation or innovation, cooperative or individual, etc.	Questionnaire, cognitive mapping, simulations, etc.
Cognitive (C)	Impacts on representations, beliefs and/or knowledge about the project, the environment, the social framework, others, solutions	Questionnaire, cognitive mapping, simulations, etc.
Operational (O)	Impacts on the practices, actions and behaviours of actors	Direct observation, direct or indirect reporting, external evaluation, etc.
Relational (R)	Impacts on relationships between participants: e.g. trust, solidarity, mutual understanding, tensions, conflicts	Mapping of actors: powers, interests, social networks, political networks, etc.

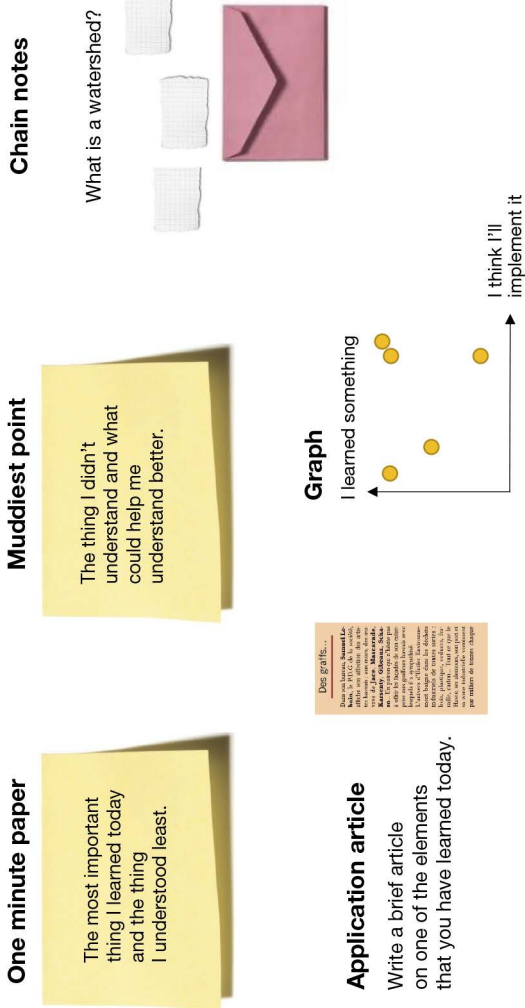
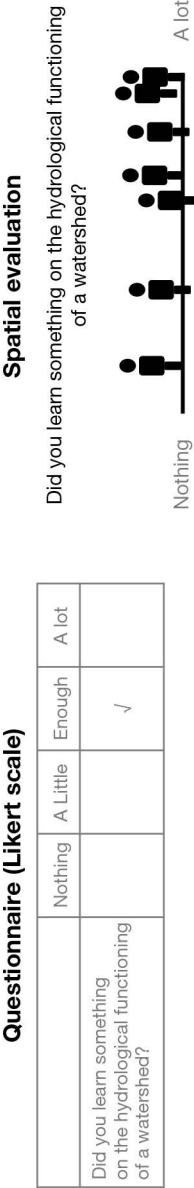


Figure 10.1. Examples of easy-to-implement monitoring and evaluation methods

Minute paper, muddiest point, chain notes and application article are from Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), which are short 5-20 minute activities to assess learning (Angelo and Cross, 1993; Bachy and Lebrun 2009; Univ. Iowa, 2020; Univ. Vanderbilt, 2020)

Type of impact	Explanation	Possible monitoring and evaluation methods
Equity (E)	Impacts on the distribution of material and immaterial resources among the actors mobilised in the project: e.g. knowledge, influence, control, risk, etc.	Simulation, questionnaires, interviews, JustAGrid ^a (allocation game on social justice principles)

^a <http://cooplage.org/tools/just-a-grid>

►► Do not wait until you have finished the participatory process to evaluate it!

Evaluation is all the more useful when it is done along the way. Why wait until the end of the process and produce a nice report that no one will read? (A little cynicism never hurts!).

Evaluating as you go, or *in itinere* evaluation for those in the know, allows for you to:

- find out whether the participating audience is indeed the target audience. For example, if the process is aimed at young people and the evaluation shows that the majority of participants are in their fifties, this assessment will allow you to adapt your process to try to reach young people more effectively, e.g. by using online social networks, by including workshops in schools for older students, etc. Now, you will tell me that the facilitator will have noticed if the participants are more wrinkled than spry. Indeed, but what about an online participatory process? And what if this data could be used to enhance the process and attract more people? For example: 250 youth from your city have already taken part, what about you? Your opinion counts as well!

- know if the process is going in the right direction and has the expected effects. For example, in the scope of a water resource management plan that is set up to improve the sharing of water resources in a territory where there is a shortage, an ongoing evaluation may allow you to realise that the local population think that the farmers consume the most water, where in fact the majority of water consumption is domestic. Knowing this will allow for it to be discussed, for figures to be put on the table, and for informed solutions to be sought. Without the assessment, the locals would probably have proposed an array of solutions aimed at reducing agricultural consumption.

Moreover, reflection on the evaluation is very useful for reflecting on the process itself. As mentioned above, thinking about what a “good” participatory process is from the standpoint of the different actors involved, is as useful for the evaluation as for the construction of the process itself.

►► Who evaluates?

Different people can contribute at different stages of monitoring and evaluation. The reflection on objectives and indicators, for example, can be done by a small group of five to ten people dedicated to monitoring-evaluation, and then one or more external people can be hired to collect and analyse the data. The initiators of the participatory process can also choose to evaluate themselves and/or ask the participants to do so. In most cases, monitoring and evaluation is carried out by a number of actors. This allows for a division of labour and the valuing of multiple viewpoints. Whatever choices you

make, each has advantages and limitations. For example, hiring an outsider can bring a “fresh” perspective to the process, but participants may be more reluctant to confide in someone they do not know.

No matter who evaluates the participatory process, we consider that monitoring and evaluation is always subjective. Even if an external person is brought in, this person, because of age, gender, employer, geographical origin and own knowledge, will have a certain view of the process. The people they survey to collect data (participants, organisers) will also have their own point of view on this person, which will at least partially condition their answers. This subjectivity is an integral part of monitoring and evaluation. The trick is to turn it into an advantage rather than an obstacle and to take it into consideration when defining who is evaluating.

►► Conclusion

We hope that we have convinced you that the evaluation of a participatory process can be integrated into the participatory process itself. Evaluation guides you into asking the right questions when developing the participatory process, putting the multiplicity of viewpoints and expectations up for discussion from the outset, and avoiding possible conflicts and disappointments at a later stage. The evaluation also allows you to adapt the process along the way, for example if the participants are not those expected or if the proposed subject of debate does not respond to the issues that concern the majority of the actors in the field. Finally, the results and impacts of the process can be highlighted and supported on the basis of concrete data, as an evidence-based study.

The evaluation of a participatory process is not insurmountable; it is not reserved for scientists or experts. It is within the reach of anyone who takes the initiative to do it and can be adapted to the ambitions and resources that are available. It is entirely possible to design and implement the monitoring-evaluation of a process from start to finish; it is just as possible to outsource part of it or to rely on existing guides and protocols (e.g. the Cerema compass—see insert at the end of this chapter, the ENCORE approach proposed in table 2.1, Rowe and Frewer’s evaluation criteria 2000; Daré *et al.*, 2020; or other approaches presented in *Concertation décision environnement*, 2009). The only thing to remember is to be able to answer the questions you ask yourself, and to remain open to the surprises and unexpected effects that any participatory process may generate.

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