Re-focusing research and researchers in public participation

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According to recent articles on public participation, the practice of involving citizens and organized stakeholders in decision making is continuing to expand in North America, Britain, Europe and the world at large. Despite this "rise of public participation" two pivotal questions that have been asked for a long time have not yet found conclusive answers: 1) Why should public participation be pursued at all? And 2) If participation is valid, how should it be implemented?

Two distinct professional approaches have been used to find answers: One approach can be called "research-based" because both empirical research and the systematic study and development of theory are used. The other approach is named "craft-based" as it uses applied principles and methods and the resulting practical experiences to answer the two questions.

This article argues that it is time for both researchers in public participation and researcher-practitioners to pay more attention to the craft-based approach. The article develops the argument in detail by discussing the situation of researcher-practitioners with regard to public participation, by resuming the answers which have been provided by research with regard to the two pivotal questions, and by discussing those answers that have been provided by the field of craft. The article concludes with a proposal of what the current situation in research- and craft-based disciplines of public participation" should entail for researchers.

Keywords: *public participation; pivotal questions; research-based and craft-based answers; consequences for research*

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

According to recent articles on public participation, the practice of involving citizens and organized stakeholders in decision making is continuing to expand in North America, Britain, Europe and the world at large (e.g. through international development projects). In addition to the geographic spread, citizen participation is now used in areas as diverse as city and land-use planning, managing transboundary waters, forestry, technology risk assessment, transportation, community development, and many others (Roll and Ojassoo 2006; O'Connor et al. 2000).

Despite this "rise of public participation" (Rowe and Frewer 2004, 514) two pivotal questions (Webler 1999; Webler and Tuler 2001) that have been asked for a long time (Rosener 1978) have not yet found conclusive answers:

1. Why should public participation be pursued at all?
2. If participation is valid, how should it be implemented?[1]

Two distinct professional approaches have been used to find answers: One approach can be called "research-based" because both empirical research and the systematic study and development of theory are used. The other approach here is named "craft-based" as it uses applied principles and methods and the resulting practical experiences to answer the two questions.

This article argues that it is time for both researchers in public participation and researcher-practitioners (see section 2.3. below) to pay more attention to the craft-based approach:

- Due to the above-mentioned expansion of public participation, an increasing number of researchers in different disciplines are being asked to design public participation processes.
- However, researcher–practitioners often do not (yet) have the necessary practical knowledge.
- The knowledge provided by the research literature on public participation is expanding but still does not supply all the knowledge required.

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[1] A third question – closely linked to the two previous ones and also much discussed in the research literature – is: "How should public participation be evaluated?" As the problems of evaluation are not central to this article, this discussion will not be pursued here. Reviews can be found in Rowe and Frewer (2004) and Abelson and Gauvin (2006).

- At the same time, the craft-based practice of public participation has produced pathways to answer the question of how public participation processes should be conceptualized and implemented in a given situation.
- Yet, few researchers who study participation seem to consider the craft-based knowledge as a worthwhile area of further research – if they consider it at all.

After a short discussion on the research method used for this article and the definition of the main concept, these arguments are developed in detail. The article concludes with a proposal of what the current situation in research- and craft-based disciplines of public participation" should entail for researchers.

1.2 The research method used

Ideally, to substantiate the points of the argument established here, a systematic search of the literature and – based on this – a thorough assessment of the contributions of research-based and craft-based approaches to public participation should have been conducted together with a systematic study of the situation of researchers who provide advice on public participation. However, in practice, the research approach used here was more restricted due to resource constraints.

The impression of the increasingly practical involvement of researchers in public participation is based on first-hand experience in two European interdisciplinary research projects: AquaStress (see http://www.aquastress.net) and NeWater (see http://www.newater.info/everyone), which are attempting – among other goals - to implement public participation mainly in Europe but also at some African and Asian sites.[2] The author's role in these projects is to support the implementation and the evaluation of participatory processes at about a dozen sites. The perspectives obtained here are enriched with data gained from the literature reviews on the research- and the craft-based approaches.

These literature reviews have been "semi-systematic": Research literature has been considered on the basis of previous work on evaluating public participation processes (von Korff 2006) as well as especially those articles that provide an overview of the research field (e.g. Webler 1999;

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[2] The projects have received funding from the 6th Framework Programme of the EU. This article reflects only the author's views.

Rowe and Frewer 2004; Abelson and Gauvin 2006). The selection of "craft literature" was partly based on handbooks that the author consulted for practical advice (especially Creighton 2005), partly on guides that could be downloaded directly on the Internet (see references). But it is clear that not all possibly relevant literature could be included in this article and the argument made here should therefore be considered tentative.

1.3 Public participation defined

Broadly speaking, public participation seems to be widely understood (see Rowe and Frewer 2005, 253) as a process (also called a "practice" or "procedure") by which people who are not elected or appointed decision-makers (i.e. the "public") engage (i.e. "participate") with such officials on agenda-setting and/ or decision-making on issues and policies that affect them or that interest them.

Whether this means that the public only consists of "'ordinary citizens' rather than … organized groups of individuals…." (Abelson and Gauvin 2006, 2) or also includes "companies, economic and public interest groups … and experts" (HarmoniCop 2005, 2; similar Beierle and Cayford 2002, 6) is moot. Here, the broader second view is adhered to.

Participation itself has been specified by differentiating the various levels at which power is delegated to members of the public (this is discussed by Arnstein 1969, Nelkin and Pollak 1979; Wiedemann and Femers 1993; Rowe and Frewer 2005; also by Creighton 2005, 8, and others). The two lowest levels of power-delegation are often called "information" (where officials convey messages to the public such as in newsletters or briefings), and "consultation" (where input is sought from the public such as in surveys, focus groups, or public hearings). Above this level, two-way communication between the public and officials occurs and terms such as "active involvement", or "active participation" are used. Different views exist (e.g. Portland Development Commission 2007, 4; Rowe and Frewer 2005, 254; O'Connor et al. 2000, 1) with regard to the level at which "real participation" starts. For the purposes of this article, a concept is adopted which holds that the information level can (and usually must) be part of public participation but that participation starts only from the consultation level.

2 The rise of participation and the growing involvement of researchers in its application

2.1 The expansion of public participation

"Dialogue, deliberation and citizen engagement are increasingly familiar hallmarks on the current public participation landscape", reported Abelson and Gauvin (2006, 1) for Canada. Delli Carpini et al. (2004, 316) noted a "renaissance" of public deliberation in academia and governance in the USA (in a similar vein see also Beierle and Konisky 2000, 587; Bryner 2001, 49; Webler and Tuler 2001, 29; Creighton 2005, 1). Rowe and Frewer (2004, 512) observed that "in the United Kingdom and elsewhere the issue of public participation is one of growing interest to academics, practitioners, regulators, and governments." (see also Petts and Leach 2000, 1). In Europe some authors expected (e.g. Roche 2003, France) or have already observed (Hansen and Mäenpää, no date) the expanding use of public participation in decision making.

The drivers of these developments, according to some of the above authors, are:

- Increasing concern for the environment, an associated desire for accountable and sustainable decision making, and the view that for these purposes it is necessary to engage the interested and affected public
- International agreements and legislation such as the Rio Declaration (1992), the Aarhus Convention (1998), or the EU Water Framework Directive (2000) that encourage or oblige governments to involve the public in specific decision making processes
- National legislation requesting public participation (for France see Roche 2003, for the US Creighton 2005 and Beierle and Cayford 2002) possibly in the context of dwindling citizens' trust in political institutions
- The spread of Internet and other media technologies such as GIS that offer new opportunities for two-way communication
- International and national agencies such as the World Bank or the Commission of the European Union that increasingly make public participation a requirement in projects they fund.

Abelson and Gauvin (2006, 1) qualified the increase of public participation somewhat when they stated that it "would be naïve to think that public participation has become institutionalized within Canadian culture…". Similar observations almost certainly apply to most other national, re-

gional or local governance though there may be exceptions, for example Creighton (2005, 2) noted that "in [US regulatory] agency decision making [public participation] is increasingly considered standard practice."

2.2 The challenge posed by the expansion of public participation

The expanded interest in public participation does not mean that the skills required to practice it are always available because "[i]t is one thing to make a commitment to public participation in the abstract. It is quite another to do it" (Creighton 2005, 2). The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management website (http://www.ciwem.org/policy/policies/stakeholder_engagement.asp) mentions that there "are specific skills associated with getting the best results from stakeholder engagement activities, and there is a need for training in, and wider awareness of, these." And Hansen and Mäenpää (no date, 20) state that public participation "remains troublesome in practice."

In fact, the expansion of public participation as a legal requirement or an incentive for obtaining projects seems to have created a situation where researchers in particular (but probably also public administrators) find themselves increasingly required to practice skills that they sometimes still need to acquire. The situation in the European Commission funded projects AquaStress (AQS) and NeWater (NW) reflects this need.

2.3 The situation of researcher-practitioners

The goal of AQS is to develop, test and propose interdisciplinary solutions for situations in which there is either too much or too little water, or where the water is too polluted. The goal of NW is to promote the transition to river management systems that can cope better with flooding, drought and pollution. Both projects are being implemented at a total of nearly 20 case study sites most of which are located in Europe. Effective stakeholder participation is considered to be one of the most important elements of both projects (NeWater 2003, 56; AquaStress 2005, 32 and 74).

Specifically designated project partners were selected to work at the case study sites. The majority are researchers who have the following responsibilities (among others):

1. Involving groups of key stakeholders in the strategic planning and follow-up of project activities at the case study sites. These groups may be ad hoc and may vary in size at the different sites, but they

usually require the project partners to consider the stakeholders' needs with regard to AQS and NW.

2. Coordinating the exchanges between the numerous international AQS and NW project researchers on the one hand and the local stakeholders on the other. This task is especially challenging as – ideally - the interests of researchers from the different scientific disciplines need to be bundled into local projects that also meet the needs of stakeholders.

3. Supporting or directly organizing the local participation processes that result from the exchanges described in points 1 and 2. The participation processes may involve coordinating stakeholder relevant research activities, organizing public dialogue, or providing advice directly to water managers on how to conduct specific public participation processes that include decision making.

Clearly, these tasks require skills that go beyond the traditional training of researchers especially when they are engineers or hydrologists as is true in many cases in NW and AQS. Researchers from different disciplines have thus become practitioners of complex participation processes. And AQS and NW are not the only cases: Commission-funded projects such as HarmoniCop and encora require similar tasks to be performed.

While some researcher-practitioners may already have the necessary experience to carry out such tasks, others feel less well prepared. For example, in a training workshop on public participation at the beginning of the NW project, when the 16 participants were asked for their expectations of the workshop, they generated more than a dozen questions including: "How to deal with stakeholder meetings, how many meetings to plan, how many stakeholders [to invite], etc". "How to deal with possible disagreements". "How to build trust in stakeholders especially [towards] foreign scientists". "How to deal with power relations in basins" (selected from the workshop minutes by Sullivan 2005). They also requested a practical "how-to" manual for guidance.

These and other impressions (see for example the case study of Irvin and Stansbury 2004; and a report by von Korff 2005, on AQS project participants' need for public participation training) show that at least some of the scientists responsible for implementing participatory methods require practical support. This is not surprising, considering the expansion of participation. This increased demand is faced with the available knowledge from research and from craft-based approaches.

3 The contributions and limitations of research

For more than three decades, researchers have attempted to provide responses to the question of why public participation should be pursued at all and if so, how. The following section summarizes current research on the two questions.

3.1 Research on why public participation should be pursued

Until recently, arguments why organized stakeholders and the wider public should be involved in political decision making was mainly derived from theory such as political science perspectives on democracy (for a wide review of the literature see Fiorino 1990; Delli Carpini et al. 2004) and from socio-psychological approaches such as social learning (see e.g. Webler et al. 1995; Delli Carpini et al. 2004). Following Fiorino (1990) and Webler et al. (1995), the theory-derived reasons for undertaking public participation can be classified into four categories: Normative, substantive, instrumental and social learning.

Normative

According to this line of argument, public participation and especially the level of involving people in dialogue or deliberation, is "fundamental to democracy" (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14) because otherwise many decisions will be taken that do not reflect public values. For example, the decision to recharge an aquifer with treated waste water might be taken after waste water experts have specified a certain degree of health and environmental risks. And yet, the level of risk that is acceptable to the people who will be affected is likely to vary considerably. A more democratic decision would be to include the whole spectrum of values in the decision.

Substantive

As public values and knowledge flow into the decision – so the argument goes – the final decision will also be more informed and thus of higher quality than a mere expert decision. More specifically, the public may provide information that is only available locally, discover mistakes, or generate alternative solutions (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14).

Instrumental

Integrating the public's concerns in decisions will legitimize the decisions, create trust between the public and the authorities, and – if done recurrently – legitimize the political system as a whole (Delli Carpini et al. 2004, 334; Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14 and 74).

Social learning

According to the social learning concept described by Webler et al. (1995), public participation can increase individual "cognitive enhancement" as well as "moral development". Cognitive learning does not only refer to knowing more about the problem discussed but also about own and other group members' points of view; and also about methods, tools and strategies to communicate well and solve problems constructively (1995, 446). Moral development includes aspects such as being able to see things from somebody else's point of view, developing a sense of solidarity with the group, and becoming able to solve problems in a way that considers what is good for the group as well as for oneself (see also Fiorino 1990; Delli Carpini et al 2004). There are positive repercussions on the individual's integration in the community, the existing social capital, and the political system as a whole as participants increase their civic competences and commitment (Fiorino 1990; Delli Carpini et al 2004).

Contrary opinions

Not all researchers share the optimistic arguments concerning the potential benefits of public participation. Fiorino (1990) mentioned two arguments, first that only experts can understand the complex matters associated with decisions involving risk, and second that elites are usually more rational in their decision making than are the wider public. A more specific critique is that some public participation processes such as those depending on consensus seeking might take longer and are more costly than non-consensual methods (Coglianese 1997).

The evidence

The empirical evidence regarding the benefits of public participation remains "thin" (Delli Carpini et al. 2004). Here, three thorough studies were considered. In the first, Coliagnese (1997) studied negotiated rule-making - a consensus-based process used by federal regulatory agencies of the US administration involving "representatives from regulated firms, trade associations, citizen groups, and other affected organizations, as well

as members of the agency staff." (1257). Looking at 13 years of negotiated rulemaking and comparing the time used and the frequency of ensuing litigation with more non-consensus-based forms of rulemaking, Coglianese (1997, 1335) concluded that "[n]egotiated rulemaking does not appear any more capable of limiting regulatory time or avoiding litigation than do the rulemaking procedures ordinarily used by agencies. … Once promulgated, negotiated rules still find themselves subject to legal challenge. The litigation rate for negotiated rules issued by the EPA [US Environmental Protection Agency] has actually been higher than that for other significant EPA rules."

However, this result, which appears to contradict instrumental and substantive reasons for public participation, might be explained by the (ineffective) *way* negotiated rulemaking has been implemented. Colgianese (1997, 1323) himself hinted at this possibility when he wrote that "agencies have sometimes … not been able to include all the organizations who feel they will be affected by a rule." However (and this is discussed in the following section) including all those who will be affected by a decision is one of the basic principles of effective public participation processes.

A rather positive picture about the effects of public participation is drawn in the second work considered here (Beierle and Cayford 2002). The two authors – using a case survey method - looked at 239 cases of environmental decision-making involving public participation in the North American Great Lakes region. According to these authors (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 74 and 75) "[t]he case study record shows … that public participation is more than just a theoretically appealing component of democracy…". "Involving the public not only frequently produces decisions that are responsive to public values and substantively robust, but it also helps to resolve conflict, build trust, and educate and inform the public about the environment". However, these authors also wrote, and this confirms the caveat about Coglianese's findings, that "In understanding what makes participation successful, process [i.e. how things are done - YvK] is of paramount importance" (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 74).

The potential offered by public participation is summarised by Delli Carpini et al (2004). These authors extensively reviewed mostly social psychology research about the functioning of communication (and specifically deliberation) in groups, and came to the conclusion that there is "substantial evidence that deliberation can lead to some of the individual and collective benefits postulated by democratic theorists". However, "the impact of deliberation and other forms of politics is highly context dependent. It varies with the purpose of the deliberation, the subject under discussion, who participates, the connection to authoritative decision makers, the rules governing interactions, the information provided, prior beliefs, sub-

stantive outcomes, and real world conditions". So, "although the research … demonstrates numerous positive benefits of deliberation, it also suggests that deliberation under less optimal circumstances can be ineffective at best or counterproductive at worst." (336) A very similar finding for public participation in general came out of a US National Research Council study project in 1996 (quoted in Webler 1999, 59).

In summary, even though more positive evidence is probably required and existing evidence remains to be validated, the three thorough studies mentioned here draw a rather complementary picture. If done well, public participation has great potential, possibly as great as that described by theorists. When done poorly, the consequences can be dire. Hence, the importance of understanding how to implement public participation.

3.2 Research on how public participation should be practiced

In 1993 (356), Wiedemann and Femers deplored that the "recommendations found in most public participation literature consist of reworded platitudes and rules of thumb, based on ideology rather than rigorous empirical analysis." Today however, the picture is different.

In their study of 239 public participation cases in the Great Lakes region, Beierle and Cayford (2002, 49) identified four factors that are closely associated with success (defined as incorporating public values into decisions, improving the substantive quality of decisions, resolving conflict among competing interests, building trust in institutions, and educating and informing the public), and independent of the type of participation mechanism used (e.g. citizen advisory committee or negotiation). These factors are:

1. The agency responsible for the process is responsive to the communication and resource needs of participants.
2. Participants are motivated and have faith in the chosen process.
3. The quality of deliberation - characterized by open, efficient and meaningful exchanges - is high.
4. The public has at least a limited degree of control over the process used.

In addition to these four factors, nine other criteria or principles for ensuring an "effective" public participation process deserve attention: Rowe and Frewer (2000) developed these after a comprehensive review of the literature and based their work on – among others – previous notions according to which a "good" process should be "fair" and "competent" (as specified by Webler 1995) meaning that exercises have to be perceived by

participants as unbiased (fair) but at the same time they also have to deliver qualified and useful (competent) results. Rowe and Frewer (2000) developed the fairness and competence criteria further, terming them acceptance and process criteria. Using a random sample of the general public in the UK, Rowe et al. (2001) validated the importance of the criteria for effective public participation processes in general. The (slightly revised) criteria (Rowe et al. 2004, 93) are summarized in the following tables:

Table 1. Acceptance criteria

Representativeness	The participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the affected population
Independence	The participation process should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way
Early involvement	The participants should be involved as early as possible in the process, as soon as value judgements become salient
Influence	The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy
Transparency	The process should be transparent so that the relevant population can see what is going on and how decisions are being made

Table 2. Process criteria

Resource accessibility	Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief
Task definition	The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined
Structured decision making	The participation exercise should use/ provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision-making process
Cost-effectiveness	The procedure should be cost-effective from the point of view of the sponsors

Researchers have provided additional advice, albeit based on less evidence than in the two previous cases. Relying on four case studies, Wiedemann and Femers (1993, 367), for example, advise against seeing public participation as a goal in itself but rather as a tool for achieving objectives such as reaching a better decision. And some case studies (such as Webler et al. 1995, 460) recommend detailed components of public participation processes such as "site visits, face-to-face small group work, an

egalitarian atmosphere, repeated meetings over several months, unrestricted opportunities to influence the process" etc.

Despite these at least initially confirmed broad principles of how to conduct participation exercises much research remains to be done. According to Rowe and Frewer - who recently drew up a research agenda with the ultimate aim of developing a theory of "what works best when" - one of the key questions that need to be answered is what kind of method (or "mechanism") to use in which kind of situation (2004, 551). This question comes very close to two major concerns of practitioners:

- to be able to properly design and plan a participation process in a given context,
- to know and be able to apply a wide range of participation methods.

This is where the craft-based approach to public participation has much to offer.

4 The contributions and limitations of craft

Practical guides (also called manuals when they are short or handbooks when they are long) have existed at least since the 1980s (see references in Webler 1999) to help practitioners design and implement (and evaluate) public participation processes. In contrast with research literature, these guides are not usually based on systematic research but rather on a mix of the practical experiences of the authors, plus their more or less spelled-out insight into research, and into the corresponding literature. An increasing number of these guides are available on the internet (see references). As this type of publication is not usually discussed by researchers interested in public participation, this section starts by presenting the different types of guides available, and then describes some of the advice they contain.

4.1 Types of practical guides

Guides written by public participation specialists

Some guides are written by consultants who are public participation specialists with sometimes several decades of experience (e.g. Creighton 2005; Straus 2002). These guides typically intend to provide help in all kinds of domains in which participation processes are used – from water management to urban planning (see also Steyaert and Lisoir 2005).

Guides written by institutions responsible for public participation

Some public institutions have developed their own guidelines for participation processes. These guides are usually specialized in the specific legal and other contextual requirements of the institution itself, such as road construction in Australia (Vic Roads 1997), or urban planning in Oregon (Portland Development Commission 2007). Sometimes, but not always, these manuals may closely resemble the more general handbooks written by consultants because the same consultants write them (see e.g. United States Department of Energy 1999).

Guides written by researchers

Some researchers have written their own practical guides (e.g. HarmoniCOP 2005). Some of these researchers realize that "public participation is an art as well a science" and that the formal results of science do not suffice to provide such practical guidelines but need to be supplemented by "informal insights" (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 63).

Varying content of the guides

The most comprehensive handbooks (like Creighton 2005) cover three main areas:
1. Definitions, principles and theory of public participation.
2. Guidelines on how to construct a participation process. Here the guides usually emphasize that they are not trying to provide "cooking recipes" or "one-size-fits-all" approaches but rather a series of steps that planners can use to design processes that fit their unique circumstances (see VicRoads 1997, Portland Development Commission 2007, Creighton 2005).
3. Descriptions of the different methods (or "mechanisms") that exist to get information to the public (such as newsletters, briefings, displays etc.) and to obtain information from the public (such as surveys, workshops, public hearings etc.).

Many guides focus on only one of these areas. Straus (2002), for example, focuses mainly on principles and theory, Portland Development Commission (2007) or Miskowiak (2004) on process design steps, and Steyaert and Lisoir (2005) on methods.

Target readership

The target readers are in all cases those responsible for implementing public participation processes. Some guides – even those written by government agencies – are also explicitly addressed to the general public with the aim of encouraging the public to participate more effectively (e.g. United States Environmental Protection Agency 1996).

4.2 Useful advice contained in the guides

Reasons for pursuing public participation and general principles

Like research, the practical guides give reasons why public participation should be pursued and generally list the four major reasons (normative, substantive, instrumental, social learning) proposed by research. Clearly, public authorities who have written such guides agree with these reasons (to varying extents) and in some cases - and in their own way - make them very explicit. The Portland Development Commission, for example, considers social learning to be one of several reasons for pursuing public participation. By practicing it "Portland citizens are smarter, savvier and increasingly engaged in community development" (Portland Development Commission 2007, 6). The Australian road authority in the state of Victoria (VicRoads) considers that public participation "will result in better solutions to the problems to be solved in developing the transport system." (VicRoads 1997, 3).

With regard to guiding principles on how public participation should be conducted, the practical guides echo the proposals made by empirical research discussed above (notably the four general principles given by Beierle and Cayford (2002) see Section 3.1) as well as the acceptance and process criteria of Rowe and Frewer (2000). However, the practitioners add their own criteria or formulate them in their own ways:

Creighton (2005, 20) for example, states that managers should see public participation as an opportunity that allows them to "get the mandate they need to act" rather than viewing it as a necessary evil. By introducing this principle, Creighton is talking about a fundamental change in attitude for many managers, a view that is echoed by Beierle and Cayford (2002, 75).

Another principle stipulated by Creighton (2005) is that the participation process be well-integrated into the decision-making process. This means that at any point during the decision process, it should be clear why and in what exactly the public is involved in order to avoid giving the impression that public input has no influence on the outcome?.

Other similar principles have been formulated by government agencies. VicRoads (1997, 6) for example states that it will (among others):

- communicate what decisions have already been made about the project and what decisions will be influenced by community participation;
- identify the community interests, issues and concerns about the project;
- ensure all interested parties are engaged in the decision-making process at the appropriate level and at the appropriate time.

Step-by-step guides to construct a public participation programme

Contrary to what is available via research, craft-based publications provide detailed answers to the question of how to construct a public participation process to fit each unique situation that a decision-maker might face. To do so, guides usually suggest a series of steps that the planner should go through in constructing the process. These step-by-step guides include a varying degree of detail. Creighton's guide (2005) is probably the most detailed one. He distinguishes three main stages, with a total of 16 major steps with a discussion of the rationale behind each step, plus detailed advice on how to proceed, and practical examples.

There is not enough space here to describe the various phases and steps in the different guides. However, one example is probably sufficient to show that the comprehensive advice is included in much more detail than in the empirical literature:

According to Creighton (2005), the first phase in the planning of a public participation process - called "decision analysis" - serves to clarify all decisional aspects of the process within the organization or organizations that are responsible for the process and for the ultimate decision. This involves a series of steps: Selecting a decision analysis team (the selection criteria are described); clarifying who the decision maker really is and what their stance is towards a participatory process (Creighton proposes specific questions that can be asked); finding out what the problem to be solved really is (a method to facilitate agreement on this within the decision analysis team is proposed); planning the various phases of the decision process; anticipating what potential organizational constraints could exist (for example that a decision has already been made); deciding whether in the view of all the previous information a participatory process should still be undertaken, and if so, on what level (Creighton also provides criteria to determine the level).

The idea of a decision analysis phase is important because most of the research literature does not mention it specifically, and in practice it is not

always implemented or even requested (this author's own experiences in Cyprus and France). Even some practical guides (e.g. HarmoniCOP 2005) recommend starting the process directly with a stakeholder analysis, a step that for Creighton occurs only in the second phase called "process planning".

Public participation methods

Besides providing general principles and detailed steps on how to design processes, many guides also offer more or less concise descriptions of how to use methods such as Citizen Advisory Committees, Samoan Circles, Open Space, Consensus Conferences, Citizen Juries, Public Hearings, etc. Steyaert and Lisoir (2005) for example, provide a 10-page description of a "Charette" (a consensus-seeking method which is especially useful for participatory design issues) plus 12 other methods. Creighton (2005) describes at length how to work with citizen advisory groups and more briefly characterizes over 60 other methods.

While it is true that research has also described and discussed a range of methods (see Fiorino 1990, Coliagnese 1997, Bryner 2001, Carr and Halvorsen 2001.) what is missing, - and this is acknowledged by researchers themselves - (e.g. Rowe and Frewer 2005, 286), is more systematic knowledge about *how* the different methods should be implemented.

In summary, this brief review of craft-based publications yields the following observations as relevant for the work of researcher-practitioners as well as for further research on public participation:

1. Practical guides generally offer more detailed advice than does research literature on how to design and implement public participation processes.

2. At the same time, the insights stated in these guides are not based on systematic empirical research: up to now, they are "rules of thumb" based on experience that however, often appear to work.

3. Yet some of the proposals made in craft-based publications are contradictory, for example what the first step in a participation process should be.

These observations imply that:

- Researcher-practitioners – for example those working in AQS or NW - can find useful (though not always unequivocal) practical information in such publications.

- Researchers interested in the further study of public participation will find a wealth of (sometimes contradictory) potential hypotheses on how exactly public participation is supposed to work (for

example: "Decision analysis is a required ingredient at the beginning of a participatory processes that involves policy making"). It is up to them to identify these hypotheses and to put them to the test.

5 Attention paid by researchers to practical guides so far

Ironically, despite the know-how accumulated in the practical guides, researchers interested in public participation have a tendency to almost completely ignore craft-based approaches. One of the few exceptions is Thomas Webler (also Beierle and Cayford 2002; Chess and Purcell 1999) who called for a research agenda that would end the almost separate existence of research-based and craft-based approaches (1999). And yet the research agenda for the evaluation of public participation recently compiled by Rowe and Frewer (2004) still ignored the practical guides.

6 Conclusion

This article has shown that the geographical and thematic expansion of public participation has created a situation in which many researchers find themselves confronted with new tasks – namely the design and implementation of participation processes – for which they do not always have yet the necessary skills.

In this situation, researcher-practitioners of public participation can find preliminary advice in the knowledge that research on public participation has established: This knowledge concerns the important question of why public participation should be pursued. Four general reasons – normative, substantive, instrumental and social learning - have been developed by theory. The research by Beierle and Cayford (2002) and Delli Carpini et al (2004) provides initial confirmation of these reasons but at the same time hints at the importance of understanding *how* public participation can be implemented.

Yet, research has advanced only a little on the latter point. Based on the general principles of Beierle and Cayford (2002) and the acceptance and process criteria of Rowe and Frewer (2000), up to now it has developed and provided initial validation of general orientations of how public participation should be practiced. Research, however, has not progressed much when it comes to providing more specific advice on how public par-

ticipation should be designed, planned and implemented. Some researchers have responded by providing their own practical guides.

It is on the question of design and implementation that the craft-based approach offers considerable help to researcher-practitioners. Detailed manuals with relevant steps guide the practitioner through the complex process of choosing, planning and implementing specific methods of public participation. However, this know-how is usually based on individual experience and exchanges with colleagues rather than on systematic and controlled verification. In addition the recommendations made by the practical guides are sometimes contradictory.

Despite the rich - but not yet systematically researched, and sometimes contradictory knowledge in practical publications - most researchers in the field of public participation have shown little interest in considering the advice provided by the craft-based approach as a way of advancing research-based knowledge.

This article argues that researchers should begin to seriously and systematically consider the proposals made in craft-based publications. They should be able to derive hypotheses for further research with useful practical implications. The proposal by Creighton (2005) to always go through a specific process of decision analysis as one requirement for an effective process is an example of such a hypothesis.

Hypotheses could be tested and researched in different ways. Other empirical research on public participation (Beierle and Cayford 2002; Rowe et al. 2001) has already demonstrated possible routes to undertake such research, and other methods are of course, conceivable (see e.g. Webler 1999).

But even before such research is undertaken, it is almost certain that a more profound look from the world of science into the world of craft would fertilize both worlds. Practitioners would see their approaches either confirmed or refuted and researchers would be better able to support the design and implementation of public participation processes. And researcher-practitioners such as those in the AQS and NW projects would find corroborated advice on how to acquire the new skills they need.

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