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Public participation: contributing to better water management

Experiences from eight case studies across Europe

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Executive summary

In the context of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), public participation (PP) is viewed as a means of improving water management through better planning and more informed decision-making. The active involvement of all interested parties and influencers in the deliberation and decision-making process is generally expected to foster an environment of accessibility, receptiveness and mutual respect that ultimately promotes transparency and trust among participants and can then increase the success rate of policies due to better acceptance by stakeholders. Naturally, this kind of setting is highly desirable, especially when the topic under discussion is a cross-cutting issue involving multiple stakeholders and reflecting numerous interests.

While the concept of PP is now well established, and commonly plays a part in the environment and sustainability agendas of international organisations and national authorities, its effectiveness in achieving European water-policy goals is still being assessed.

This report evaluates whether the provisions for PP included in the WFD actually contribute to achieving the objectives of the directive or at least support the ongoing implementation process by, for example, improving the integration of water management between different actors, incorporating local knowledge and promoting informed decision-making. Common criteria are identified based on key principles of PP, and are tested by analysing eight case studies from across the EU. The report addresses the fundamental question of how PP can improve water-related policies, plans and implementation, especially in the context of river-basin planning and the WFD.

A review of the existing literature establishes the theoretical background and outlines the principal objectives of PP mentioned above, as well as the core principles that constitute a good participatory process: openness, protection of core values, speed and substance. These core principles are broken down into a series of evaluation criteria, later used in the case study assessments.

The report considers three main themes of PP. The first is the governance of participatory processes, covering issues of scale, planning and scheduling, and the stakeholder role in organising consultations. The second theme concerns the actors involved in implementation of the participatory process, and the dynamics of their stakes: issues of inclusiveness and influence, and of mutual benefits and trade-offs come into play here. The third theme covers the methods used to engage stakeholders and members of the public, and their effectiveness in promoting social learning.

The review of the eight case studies showed that the **institutional set-up**, shared or ambiguous remits of authorities, and the links between natural and administrative boundaries can all reduce the effectiveness of participatory processes. These elements should therefore be carefully considered and factored in, in order to plan River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) effectively.

Furthermore, **clarity** appeared to be key for achieving effectiveness, first in terms of describing how the **participatory process** is planned and conducted, including feedback on how the information gathered will be used. Secondly, clarity and tailored approaches are needed concerning the technical level (and language) of the **information provided** to participants. This also relates closely to the best practice of fostering transparency and a sense of ownership through clarity and early involvement, respectively. And finally, **trust** appeared to be vital for good PP. Good practice here meant having technical experts engage in face-to-face discussions, appointing independent facilitators, and selecting tools targeting a specific audience.

As digital and information systems and communication structures like interactive tools and social media are rapidly evolving, it is likely that the current, second cycle of River Basin Management (RBM) planning and the associated PP will make more use of such means. This study reflects past developments, which exclude much of the current technical innovation in this field. Future studies could certainly take a different approach here

Upper Thames, the United Kingdom © Thames21

and analyse the use of water information systems, more distributed data approaches and possibly the structured implementation and information framework (SIIF) approach proposed by the Commission.

The goal for PP is both involving members of the public, as well as involving organised stakeholders. The initiatives identified in the case studies showed that involving organised stakeholders is as important for a good planning process as the involvement of the wider public. However in some cases the involvement of the wider public, is even more challenging and needs appropriate tools and encouragement. It would be useful to look further afield for good practices and innovative approaches to inform members of the public and involve them in participatory processes. As an example the first successful European Citizen's Initiative (ECI) would be very relevant, through which EU citizens recently stressed their earnest interest and the policy relevance of universal access to water and sanitation in the EU. The Commission has in answer to this initiative reaffirmed the importance of an open and transparent approach to water management, involving all actors including the public. The future impact of this specific initiative on the WFD's implementation and that of the overall ECI approach could shed new light on the PP discussion.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context, aims and structure

Over the past decades, public participation (PP) has been increasingly integrated into the international agenda on environment and sustainability. The concept has been introduced as a tool to improve resource management and promote more democratic decision-making. In the EU, policymakers and social scientists are familiar with PP, especially within the realm of water, where specific provisions have been included in Article 14 of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), Directive 2000/60/EC. Under the WFD, Member States must encourage active involvement of all interested parties, and ensure consultation and access to background information used for the development of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). Article 14 defines the following three stages for stakeholder and public consultation, with each stage requiring at least 6 months for feedback:

- timetable and work programme for the production of the RBMPs (at least 3 years before the plan begins);
- overview of the significant water management issues identified in the river basin (at least 2 years before the plan begins);
- draft of the RBMP (at least 1 year before the plan begins).

Indeed, most of the planned WFD measures to improve water quality and resource management need to be supported, implemented or even initiated by actors other than environmental and water authorities, in areas like agriculture, energy, and transport. The most appropriate measures for achieving RBMP objectives will involve balancing the interests of various groups of stakeholders.

At the same time, the protection and rehabilitation of European waters also calls for the involvement of citizens, interested parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — not only to ensure the legal implementation and integration of regional expertise in the process, but also to guarantee the buy-in by key influential actors. Transparency in setting objectives, developing and adopting measures and reporting standards is vital to ensure that Member States comply with the requirements willingly and unequivocally. Supplementing this transparency with appropriate dialogue mechanisms (e.g. timely and adequate information dissemination, participation and complaints procedures) endows citizens with a greater power to influence decisions and performance in areas of environmental protection.

In this sense, the term 'public participation' as used here is not limited to the involvement of the general public, but rather encompasses a wider stakeholder engagement of actors who are experts in particular fields of interest, be it private, public or both.

Objectives

This report seeks to draw useful lessons and examples from eight case studies, and as such is not a formal evaluation. Nonetheless, the academic literature on evaluation of participatory processes provides a useful starting point for the analysis. According to Carr et al. (2012), the evaluation of participatory programmes and projects is necessary to assess whether their objectives (enhancement of resource management and democratic involvement of stakeholders and public) are being achieved, and to identify how these programmes and projects can be improved. The most obvious achievement criterion is a 'successful' implementation of the WFD with the respective cost-efficient programme of measures, and finally, the achievement of the objectives of the WFD for the respective river basin district (RBD).

However, as the objective of good ecological status of European water bodies is expected to be reached after 2015 in most cases, other intermediate criteria must be used in such a preliminary assessment. In the context of this report, a set of evaluation criteria is used to identify 'good' and 'successful' active involvement and PP in the interest of:

a) good water management, including policy integration with relevant sectors;

b) improving the transparency of the decision process.

The underlying question to be addressed for each case study therefore concerns the potential of PP to improve water-related policies, plans and implementation, especially in the context of river basin planning and the WFD.

This report does not seek to provide guidance on how to conduct and manage PP initiatives. The geographical, institutional, political, social and cultural contexts in which PP takes place vary greatly. This means that processes and methods cannot usually be implemented in the same way across different locations. This was recognised in guidance documents produced before the first round of development of RBMPs under the WFD, in particular the *CIS Guidance on Public Participation in relation to the Water Framework Directive* (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003) (subsequently referred to as the *Guidance* document no. 8 in this report) and the HarmoniCOP handbook (from the project 'Harmonising Collaborative Planning') titled *Learning together to manage together — Improving participation in water management* (Ridder et al., 2005).

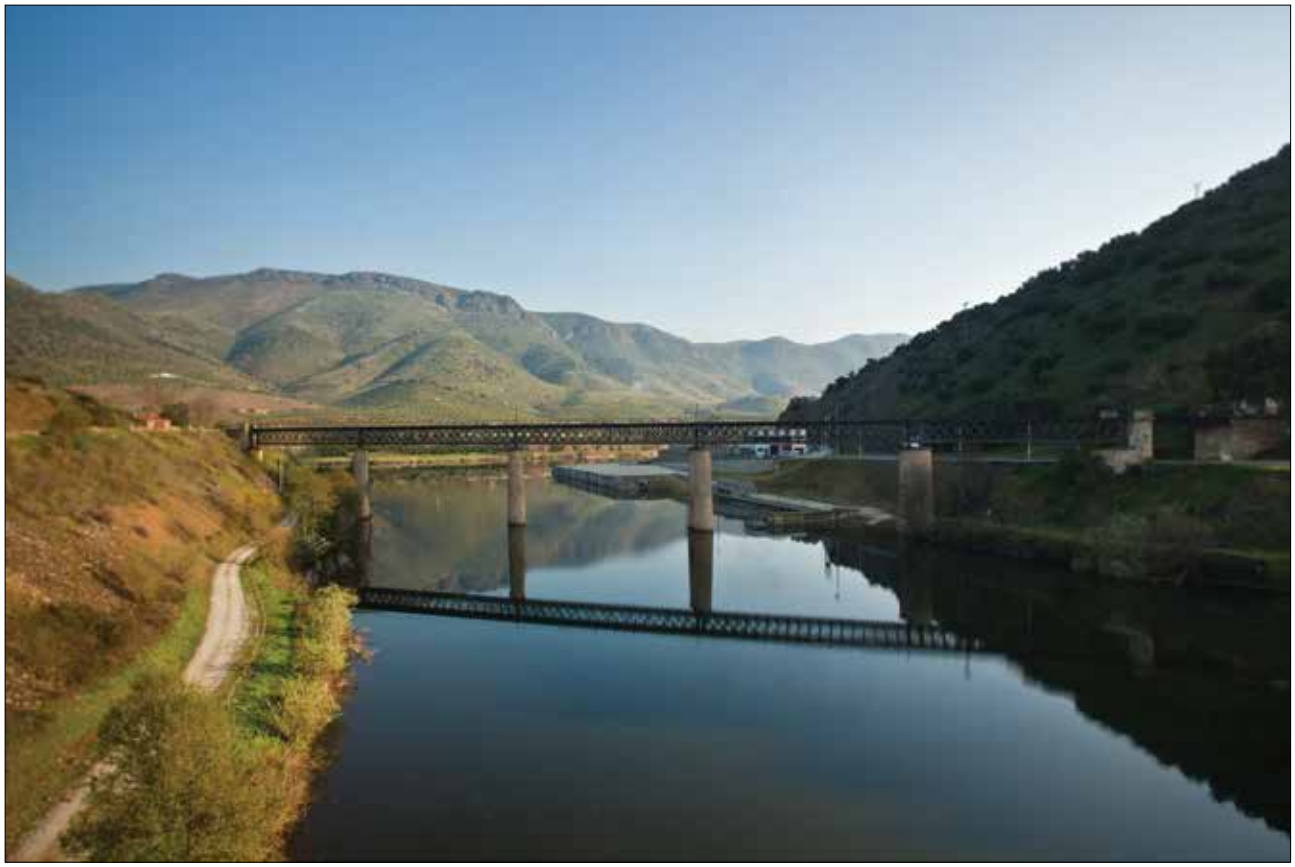
However, the assessment of the eight case studies provides an opportunity to reflect on the practical application of some of the principles and framing issues that have been proposed in the past.

Structure and method of the report

In order to assess possible approaches to PP (in the sense described above), three steps were followed throughout the assessment, as explained below.

1. The conceptual background on PP and the aspects that contribute to making it effective are described in Chapter 2, clarifying the relevance of active involvement as a co-decision process.

2. On this basis, selected assessment criteria to evaluate the quality of the participation process are also described in Chapter 2, inter alia examining methods used by authorities to inform, consult and induce active involvement, as well as to manage and harness the information gathered during the process. The selected criteria are grouped into the following three main themes:



River Duoro Barca d'Alva, Portugal © APA/ARH do Norte

- actors involved in the process;
- governance of participatory processes;
- access to information, knowledge exchange and tools employed.

3. Against this conceptual and methodological background, a series of case studies have been developed as a source of evidence and good practice cases, where PP was indeed established as a form of active involvement of a wide group of stakeholders and had positive effects on the planning, implementation and/or outcomes of the RBMPs (against the conceptual background and the quality criteria identified in this report).

Good practice cases should not be limited to recent cases connected to WFD implementation and RBMPs alone; they should also encompass broader (and earlier) examples of participation in the water management sector. Consequently, examples of water management prior to the WFD RBM planning are also included.

Chapter 2 presents the **key concepts and terminology** surrounding PP, to clarify the use of terms within this work. The chapter also explains the objectives and possible applications of PP. It provides a brief overview of the methodology used for assessing the cases in the study, explaining the criteria applied.

Chapter 3 summarises each of the **case studies**.

Chapter 4 explores Theme 1, **actors involved in the participation processes**. The involvement of a range of stakeholders, reflecting different interests and perspectives, especially when these include perspectives not previously considered, is likely to result in a more open and accessible participation process. This section also discusses the degree to which the expression of divergent values and interests is facilitated and agreements are achieved. Actors here include the wider public as well as private- or public-arena experts with particular interests.

Chapter 5 studies Theme 2, the **governance of participatory processes**. This is closely linked to the broader question of governance for water management overall, which is also addressed. The issue of how planning and decision-making is organised across a number of administrative scales (from the national right down to the local administration scale) and the sequencing of planning processes to integrate a variety of issues is a particular challenge for participation in water management. In this way, the governance sets the framework for involvement of different actors.

Chapter 6 focuses on Theme 3, **access to information, knowledge exchange and tools employed** for participation processes in the field of water. It considers how stakeholders and the general public access information in the case studies, as well as how their knowledge was brought in. It also reflects on how tools and methods were used.

Chapter 7 considers the **outcomes** of the participation processes for good water management, including policy integration with relevant sectors, and for improved transparency of the decision process. As explained earlier, it is difficult to assess the quality of participation in relation to changes in environmental conditions, as in most case studies, the plans and their measures have only recently been put in place. As a result, this chapter focuses mainly on the quality of the 'process' and on the 'intermediate outcomes'.

Chapter 8 summarises lessons learned from the case studies, in terms of potential **key characteristics of good practice PP**. Since participation is an evolving practice, this section also highlights some **significant challenges** for the future, and identifies opportunities for achieving more effective participation.

2 Conceptual background and criteria

This report seeks to draw useful lessons and examples from the eight case studies, and does not constitute a formal evaluation. Nonetheless, the academic literature on evaluation of participatory processes provides a useful starting point for the analysis. To set the stage for subsequent chapters, this section presents the key concepts surrounding PP and follows the 'common understanding' of terminology proposed in the *Guidance* document (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003). It also presents the key objectives and principles of PP. These were used as the basis for selecting the criteria — employed later in the report — to analyse different participation processes in the case studies.

2.1 Public participation and stakeholder involvement in European water policies: policy context

The WFD includes clear requirements for PP; these are outlined in Box 2.1. While the specific requirements of the directive are significant, this report calls attention to the principles that they reflect. These principles are set out in the 1998 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The EU and almost all European countries are parties to the Convention, and as such, should ensure that their approaches to PP in environmental matters are aligned with it.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) also includes requirements for PP. As a result, the SEA is connected to the PP process prescribed by the WFD and by the Floods Directive (FD) 2007/60/EC); it provides another dimension to participation on specific aspects of the RBMPs, particularly regarding environmental impacts. While recognising the importance of the SEA and the opportunity it creates for further input by stakeholders and members of the public, resources did not allow for analysis of this directive in the scope of the case studies and this report ([1]).

In the context of the WFD, **PP** can be defined as the involvement of individuals, associations, organisations or groups (i.e. the public) in the process of preparation and implementation of RBMPs in order to raise awareness and increase acceptance and commitment by promoting a sense of ownership. The public can be further categorised as **stakeholders** (any person, group or organisation with an interest or 'stake' in an issue, either because they will be directly affected or because they may have some influence on its outcome) and the **broad public** (members of the public with only a limited interest in the issue concerned and limited influence on its outcome — however, collectively, their interest and influence may be significant) (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003). At the same time, the difference between stakeholders and the general public may be perceived to be subtle, depending on elements like the stakes, the level of power and the information each actor has, all of which can change swiftly. In cases where information is made available in a simplified form, the general public may quickly understand the essentials of water management problems and solutions, and become relevant actors providing fruitful contributions as experts with a viable 'stake' in their direct environment like health, noise, or recreation.

Finally, the scale at which PP should take place is not predetermined. At a local scale, the effects of management will be felt more directly, and more responses from public and (local) stakeholders can be expected. This input can be aggregated to a higher level to take advantage of local knowledge at river basin or RBD level. Sometimes the focus should be on a wider area than the one where PP is undertaken, for example when dealing with measures (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003).

In the report on the implementation of the WFD River Basin Management Plans (European

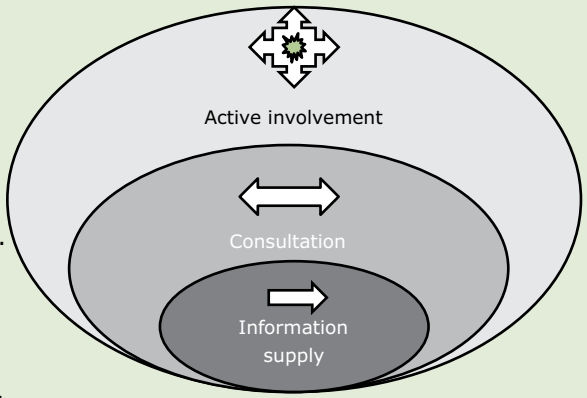
([1]) On the links between the WFD and the SEA Directives, see Sheate and Bennett (2007), for example.

Box 2.1 WFD requirements for public participation

The WFD requirements for PP are explained here as a three-level process. The groundwork required or precondition for PP is **information supply.** This first level should provide the public with the knowledge and background documents necessary to take part in the process. According to the EU *Guidance* document on PP in relation to the WFD, 'as a minimum the background documents should include all the documents that are summarised in the River Basin Management Plan'.

Consultation is the second level of PP: this consists in making a document available to the public for their comments and ideas, based on their perceptions and experiences. This can be executed in written or oral form, and can be conducted passively (an open invitation to participate is extended) or actively (opinions are requested directly through surveys, for instance). In a consultation, the party requesting opinions is not bound to integrate them into the outcome, and the public does not play a decision-making role.

Figure 2.1 Three levels of public participation, after WFD *Guidance* document no 8 (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003)



Lastly, the third level of PP is **active involvement**, which is a higher level of participation than consultation. Active involvement implies that stakeholders and the public are invited to contribute actively to the planning process by discussing issues and contributing to their solution (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003). The CIS *Guidance* document on PP, the whole process of the WFD common implementation, and numerous examples in the literature suggest that active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders facilitates achievement of WFD objectives and improvement of our water environment. When preparing the first draft RBMPs, initial steps for active involvement of all interested parties often consisted in the set-up of working groups with a predominantly advisory role, involved directly in the drafting of plans, or consulted afterwards (Kampa, 2009).

Commission, 2012) it was noted that the information reported in the first round of RBMPs did not allow an analysis of the effectiveness of consultations for these plans. However, the report recognises that there were good examples of PP in the first round of RBMPs, showing proactive approaches to public and user participation in water management and transparency. This kind of approach needs to be adopted more widely across Member States. The report stresses the importance of early involvement and the provision of transparent information on how public and stakeholder input have contributed to decision-making.

2.2 Objectives and principles of public participation

2.2.1 Objectives of public participation

In European water policy as well as more generally, two main objectives are cited for PP. The first is to improve water management itself. The *Guidance* document on PP emphasises that 'public participation is a means to improve decision-making' (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003). In particular, PP can strengthen the knowledge base for planning and decision-making.

It can ensure that 'decisions are soundly based on shared knowledge, experiences and scientific evidence, that decisions are influenced by the views and experience of those affected by them, that innovative and creative options are considered and that new arrangements are workable, and acceptable to the public'.

The *Guidance* document refers to a second objective in terms of public acceptance: the role of participation in increasing awareness of environmental issues and water management and strengthening 'commitment and support' via decision-making processes. Moreover, through participation in the planning process, stakeholders engage more fully in the implementation of RBMPs, taking on board their goals and playing a role in undertaking measures specified under the plans.

Such engagement, in fact, is a key element of policy integration. In their reviews of the first round of RBMPs and the initial decade of implementation of the directive, both the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Commission emphasised the importance of policy integration — across areas including agriculture, industry and inland navigation — in terms of reaching the WFD's overall goal of ensuring good status for Europe's waters (EEA, 2012; European Commission, 2012). At the same time, the Aarhus Convention takes this even further: PP in environmental matters (along with public access to information and to justice) is viewed as a human right, linked to the right to live in a healthy environment, and also as a democratic right (UNECE, 1998). This transcends the 'functional' view of participation with a view to improved planning.

2.2.2 Core principles of public participation

A few core principles of PP were identified in the HarmoniCOP project. Respecting these principles during the PP process will help achieve wide stakeholder integration, a balanced representation of interests of the different stakeholders involved and buy-in by actors. These core principles in the approach of the HarmoniCOP project are openness, protection of core values, speed and substance. They will be used to develop the further methodology in the assessment of the 8 case studies.

Openness means that the initiator adopts a receptive attitude and does not take unilateral decisions. The initiator thus opens the discussion, allowing participation from other stakeholders, who need to be identified through a stakeholder analysis

Box 2.2 European Citizen's Initiative

Since its launch in April 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) has endorsed EU citizens — in the role of stakeholders or the broad public — with a mechanism to officially invite the European Commission to take action on issues that they consider to be of high priority and relevance. The issues may be associated with any area where the Commission has powers to propose legislation ([2]) Moreover, the rules and procedures for launching and participating in such initiatives aim to foster transparency and accessibility.

The first successful ECI, titled Right2Water (accepted in March 2014), invited the Commission to propose legislation that ensures access to water and sanitation across the EU, excludes water services and water resources management from liberalisation and single market rules respectively, and increases EU engagement in the pursuit of universal access to water and sanitation ([3]). This initiative could evolve into a good example of public engagement leading to improved water management and increased transparency in the water sector with significant implications for users, utilities and authorities alike. In March 2014, the Commission responded to the initiative with a communication (EC, 2014). Alongside reinforcing existing activities, the communication identifies a number of remaining gaps and areas where more efforts — at EU or national level — are needed.

In the context of PP, some of the most relevant points are the following:

- step up efforts towards full implementation of EU water legislation by Member States;
- launch an EU-wide public consultation on the Drinking Water Directive (DWD) 98/83/EC), to assess the need for improvement and how this could be achieved;
- improve information intended for citizens, by further developing streamlined and more transparent data management and dissemination for urban wastewater and drinking water;
- promote structured dialogue between stakeholders on transparency in the water sector;
- cooperate with existing initiatives to provide a wider set of benchmarks for water services, improving the transparency and accountability of water services providers by giving citizens access to comparable data on key economic and quality indicators.

([2]) More information about the European Citizens' Initiative is available at http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/basic-facts.
([3]) More information about the Right2Water ECI is available at http://www.right2water.eu.

(Ridder et al., 2005). Steady collaboration from the very beginning of a project is crucial for real PP (rather than just consultation or information provision). This will allow the policies that apply PP to generate better-informed and more creative decision-making by ensuring that all relevant interests are heard (Mostert, 2003). Pre-consultation phases with relevant stakeholders are likely to enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of consultation. In particular, they help to detect conflicts at the early stages of the process, providing time for discussion and compromise (Kampa, 2009). Failure to get everybody on board will result in conflicts, and more time will be needed for building up trust (Ridder et al., 2005).

At the same time, if adequate information on the intended process and outcome is provided, and stakeholders find that they lack the time or resources to fully engage in the process coordinating with them to approach another stakeholder to represent them might be an acceptable option as long as stakeholders remain adequately informed. It is vital that representatives of groups of stakeholders have a clear mandate and a solid relationship with their constituency, to avoid misunderstandings or disagreements.

Transparency is indispensable for building and maintaining trust, and regular feedback should be given from both sides: from the authorities, in order to show how stakeholder input is managed and integrated (it is necessary that consultation outcomes are made public); and from the stakeholders, to yield the information and consent necessary for successful implementation. PP can enhance the democracy (Ridder et al., 2005) and legitimacy of the policymaking process and of policies themselves (van der Heijden and ten Heuvelhof, 2012). Lack of openness, inadequate access to information and compromised transparency of the policy process can lead to the imposition of unilateral decisions and absence of public support. Political pressure from a certain stakeholder or group can jeopardise the democratic process (Mostert, 2003).

In this context of transparency, corruption is a failure in governance that can be defined as 'the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain' (Plummer, 2008). It can occur amongst public officials, between public officials and private actors, and between public officials and users/citizens (Plummer, 2008). This definition suggests a close relation to a lack of transparency that can assume many forms and occur at practically any administrative level. While it is clear that the absence of transparency behind corruption is the antithesis of the principle behind PP, it must be noted that participating actors (administrative bodies, stakeholders and the broad public) are all

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prone to taking part in corrupt practices. In that sense, ensuring transparency with good knowledge dissemination and visibility of the interactions between these relevant actors is necessary, in order to control this risk of failure.

In the context of implementing the WFD, an evaluation of the first RBMPs has indicated an increase in transparency (compared to pre-WFD times) in setting objectives and managing water, alongside other positive effects such as improvement of the knowledge base and inclusion of more ecological perspectives (Kampa et al., 2013).

Protection of core values such as mutual respect and balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders will create a safe environment for discussion, and will allow all stakeholders to feel confident that their core values will not be compromised. In turn, balancing the interests of various groups of stakeholders will generate social learning, i.e. learning by groups (authorities, stakeholders and experts) to handle issues in which all group members have a stake (Mostert, 2003).

Speed relates to the need to include stakeholders in the process at an early stage. This will create a sense of ownership that will consequently promote stronger involvement of citizens and civil society.

Substance refers, inter alia, to the importance of being clear and concise about the role and purpose of stakeholder involvement when engaging with stakeholders and inviting them to participate in decision-making. Before communicating messages, institutions must clarify which parties they represent, as they may well represent several different interests. There also needs to be clarity about the roadmap and outcomes of the process, as well as about the significance for stakeholders, as they need to be involved in issues that clearly and directly benefit them. Stakeholder mapping is a common practice, carried out to analyse and identify relevant stakeholder needs and issues, and also those that might be expected to emerge during the participatory process (Rees et al., 2005).

Fulfilling the core principles described above during the PP process will help achieve outcomes as described below.

- **Buy-in of actors.** PP needs to be organised well; otherwise, it can result in a limited and unrepresentative response from the public and stakeholders that could easily be misused or misinterpreted. The public and stakeholders may become disillusioned, and the image and trustworthiness of government may be compromised (Rees et al., 2005). If PP is well organised, it will ensure ownership and public acceptance of the decision, resulting in fewer conflicts, fewer delays and better implementation.

Public consultation meeting for the Poznań area, Poland
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- **Coordination of directives and conventions.** Different directives and conventions often have different procedures and requirements, even though they might pursue similar objectives. This could complicate their implementation and result in slow progress, lack of credibility and reduced ambition of future goals. Providing an open channel to draw on the views and objectives of multiple sectors can facilitate the identification of cross-cutting issues and common means of progress. Appropriately planned and conducted PP is one of the tools that can be used to overcome the multiple barriers to policy integration (Schwedler, 2007), and it can serve as a precursor to joint work among sectors. It can help to align measures and efforts, promote consistency, reduce duplication and avoid conflict.

2.3 Assessment methodology for public participation

The objective of PP cited in the CIS *Guidance* — that participation be used to improve decision-making and implementation — suggests that the quality of participation should be considered relative to the quality of plans, and in particular, to their outcomes in terms of (better) environmental conditions that result from the plans and measures put in place. The most obvious success criterion is 'successful' implementation of the WFD with the respective cost-efficient programme of measures, and achievement of the objectives of the directive for the respective RBD. However, there is a problem of timing: these results may only become apparent after implementation is well under way (achievement of the objective of good water status is expected after 2015 in most cases), and indeed, improvements in ecosystems may take many years. This time constraint is a particular issue for most of the case studies considered in this report, as implementation of the RBMPs has only been under way for a few years. Thus, other types of criteria must be used in such a preliminary evaluation.

In their review of participation evaluation in water resource management, Carr et al. (2012) suggest that the mere evaluation of the process of participation (i.e. the quality of the participation process, e.g. whether it is legitimate and promotes equal power between participants) rarely indicates whether a participation programme improves water resource management. At the same time, the evaluation of the resource management outcome itself (e.g. water quality improvements) is challenging, because resource changes often emerge beyond the typical period covered by the evaluation, and changes cannot always be clearly related to participation activities.

Thus, Carr et al. (2012) suggested that the evaluation of intermediary outcomes (i.e. assessing the achievement of mainly non-tangible outcomes, such as trust and communication, as well as short- to medium-term tangible outcomes, such as agreements and institutional change) should play a more important role in evaluating participation. The assessment of these intermediary outcomes can help identify some real achievements and side benefits that could at least partially be a result of participation, and could drive future improvements in decision-making and environmental conditions (Carr et al., 2012).

However, when taking the Aarhus Convention perspective of participation as a public right, the review of the process remains important. Measuring success in terms of achieving these broader goals of participation requires some element of qualitative assessment of the experience of participation by those involved, in order to understand how well they have been able to exercise their right to participation.

Taking into consideration the notions on evaluating results discussed above and combining them with the concepts described in Section 2.2.2 as core principles, a list of evaluation criteria categorised according to the principles of PP (openness, protection of core values, speed and substance) was constructed. These criteria were further broken down according to three aspects that can be evaluated (see Annex 2):

- process of participation;
- intermediary outcomes;
- actual impacts (results of the WFD implementation process).

This list of evaluation criteria was used as a basis from which to develop a common questionnaire for gathering information from the case study areas. The variable and site-specific character of the criteria was considered, and flexibility to integrate new evaluation items from stakeholders' input was assured ([4]). Preliminary data were obtained through a desk review of relevant documents and websites, and this was complemented by conducting interviews with people involved, in a variety of roles and with different perspectives. A common template was used to compile this information (see Annex 3). In addition to raising information on the evaluation criteria, the template included sections on general information (e.g. scope, location and dates), objectives of the initiative, key contextual factors (e.g. the intensity of conflicts present, the degree of complexity of cross-sectoral integration issues) and resources. This allowed for the development of significantly comprehensive profiles of the participation initiatives in the eight case studies.

During the phase of analysis and synthesis of the case studies, common issues were identified

([4]) The list of criteria was based on Carr et al. (2012) and Ridder et al. (2005), and can be seen in Annex 2 and 3; the criteria were then refined and categorised during the course of the project into the three main themes which make up this report.

and used to refine and categorise the gathered information into thematic clusters (governance of participatory processes, actors involved in the process, access to information, knowledge exchange and tools and methods employed) which later formed the main structure of this report.

The eight case studies were selected to highlight varied and interesting examples of participation approaches and contexts. The set of studies also seeks to represent a geographical balance across the EU, examples at a range of administrative levels (from local RBD level), cases involving engagement with the general public as well as engagement with stakeholders, and a wide variety of issues and pressures, including water availability, flooding, diffuse pollution and biodiversity. Some case studies involve the preparation of RBMPs; others look at quite different water management issues.

Landscape in the Venice Lagoon, Italy © Venice City Council. Photography competition: The seasons of the Lagoon — landscape, flora and fauna (*Le stagioni della Laguna — paesaggio, flora e fauna),* 2007

3 Case studies

As explained in the introduction, the eight case studies were chosen to represent a variety of different contexts. Table 3.1 highlights differences in terms of their geographical and administrative levels, as well as the EU legislation involved. This section provides a brief overview of each case study.

Thuringia, Germany
For the development and implementation of RBMPs under the WFD — as well as planning under the FD — the German Federal State of Thuringia engages with the public and stakeholders on at least three administrative levels. At state level, an advisory panel, the Gewässerbeirat, set up in 2003, has brought together selected stakeholders as well as representatives of lower administrative levels. At the next level, the state has launched three stakeholder forums for three broad catchment areas: the Saale-Weisse Elster Forum, covering part of the Elbe RBD, the Werra-Main forum, and the Unstrut-Leine forum. At local level, workshops (Gewässerwerkstätten) are organised to explain and discuss individual measures with inhabitants and local stakeholders. The advisory panel and the stakeholder forums contributed to Thuringia's 2009 work for the RBMP as well as to other aspects of water management. Many of the local workshops have looked at measures to address river hydromorphology, a prominent issue in the RBMP.

Matarraña River, Spain
This case study covers two parallel and linked participation processes, which have taken place in recent years in the Ebro RBD, specifically around the Matarraña River. The first is a bottom-up process, in which mechanisms have been developed for dialogue around water management issues between stakeholders and communities with conflicting interests: this has led to the agreement of a River Contract ([5]). The second was the involvement of

Table 3.1 Overview of the eight case studies

Country	Location	Geographical/ administrative scale	Relevant EU legislation
France	Rhône Méditerranée	RBD	WFD (first RBMP cycle and start of second cycle)
Germany	Thuringia	Single German state, part of the Elbe RBD as well as other RBDs	WFD (including first RBMP cycle) and water management in general
Hungary	Tisza Basin	Hungarian catchment of this major Danube tributary	Addressed floods (prior to FD)
Italy	Lagoon of Venice	Local; part of the Eastern Alps RBD	Indirectly: Natura 2000, WFD
Poland	Poznań: Warta River	Local; part of the Oder RBD	Indirectly: FD
Portugal	Northern Portugal	Three Portuguese RBDs	WFD (first RBMP cycle)
Spain	Matarraña River	Sub-catchment of the Ebro RBD	WFD (first RBMP cycle)
United Kingdom	Tidal Thames	Local; part of the Thames RBD	WFD (early stage for second RBMP cycle)

Note: FD: Floods Directive; WFD: Water Framework Directive; Natura 2000 (based on Habitats and Birds Directives); RBD: river basin district (under the Water Framework Directive).

([5]) A River Contract is a management and participation mechanism that originated in France around 1990, and is a means to restore, improve or conserve a river through a series of actions agreed upon in a broad participatory process with all basin users, and private and public entities involved in water management. Parties to the contract define their own management objectives and guidelines, and develop a plan of action which benefits from the input of local expertise.

stakeholders in the Matarraña sub-basin, contributing to the first Ebro RBMP. This process was influenced by the dialogue and consensus-building work that was ongoing in the Matarraña area.

Rhône Méditerranée RBD, France
In France, each RBD has a Comité de bassin (river basin committee) that brings together a range of stakeholders and government offices. The Comités de bassin adopt key documents for river basin management, including the RBMPs: thus, they have decision-making powers. In the Rhône Méditerranée basin, as in other French RBDs, extensive efforts were made to raise public awareness and gather public opinion for the 2009 RBMP. This work included a communication campaign involving a travelling exhibition, public forums, conferences and workshops, as well as posters and brochures. Two rounds of questionnaires were prepared for the public (the second round was mailed to inhabitants, and numbered over 6 million questionnaires).

Tisza Basin, Hungary
Floods from 1998 to 2002 prompted the development of a plan for flood risk management actions in the Hungarian part of the Tisza River basin, which covers a large area of the country ([6]). Implementation of the plan potentially affects up to 3 million people in Hungary. The 'Renewal of the Vásarhelyi Plan' (the name is a reference to a 19th century water engineer who prepared a flood control plan) was discussed at over 180 public events that ranged from scientific conferences to village forums. A range of bodies organised these events, including academic groups and the Environment Committee of the National Parliament, as well as NGOs and local governments. The discussions influenced the choice of location for water retention basins, as well as the approach for compensating farmers whose land was used for dykes or remained within the basin areas. The plan was approved in 2003, and the first phase of work is largely complete. Several additional PP events were organised during the construction phase.

Lagoon of Venice, Italy
The city of Venice has proposed to create a park in the northern Lagoon of Venice, across a territory that includes salt marshes and other natural areas as well as inhabited islands. A Natura 2000 site covers much of the park area, although it is not directly connected to the city's proposal. Since 2011, the city has organised several public and stakeholder engagement events, focusing on inhabitants and organisations in the northern Lagoon; in addition, one stakeholder as well as a local politician have organised other events. In mid-May 2014, the city council voted to create the park; subsequent approval of management plan guidelines, for which another round of public consultation is foreseen, is expected to follow in the near future.

Poznań and the Warta River, Poland
In Poznań, the city government worked with external consultancies and a private developer in the Na rzecz Warty (For the Warta River) Partnership, which prepared the long-term Development Strategy for the Warta River 2012–2030. The Warta, part of the Odra (Oder) RBD, is Poland's third-longest river. Improving flood protection in the city is a key element of the strategy, which includes flood protection measures such as allowing more space for the river in flood events. The private developer undertook one of several pilot projects linked to the strategy: its project will include property development as well as river measures. In 2012, a series of public meetings discussed the plan and the pilot project: participants suggested several additions that have been incorporated.

Northern Portugal RBMPs
In northern Portugal, a range of participation activities were organised from 2009 to 2012 for the preparation of this region's three RBMPs (Portugal's first round of RBMPs were prepared late with respect to the EU schedule, which called for completion by December 2009). Throughout the process, a regional water council — comprising

Rio Duoro, Portugal © APA/ARH do Norte

([6]) The Tisza River basin is the largest sub-basin of the Danube; it extends to Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine. For more information, see the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River at http://www.icpdr.org/main/danube-basin/tisza-basin.

government offices as well as stakeholders and scientific organisations — met in several towns and cities. The PP 'journeys' discussed significant water management issues in several localities, including two on the Spanish side of the RBDs. Meetings on water themes (body, soul, ingenuity and art) sought to engage a broad public. Sectoral workshops were also held, and a regional water forum fostered debate on the draft RBMPs. PP influenced the issues addressed in the RBMPs as well as their measures. The participation process did not, however, address the development of new large hydropower plants, as this was the topic of a national policy document prior to Portugal's RBMPs. Compared to other regions in Portugal, the northern region organised the most ambitious approach to PP.

Thames, the United Kingdom © Thames Estuary Partnership

Tidal Thames, United Kingdom

Your Tidal Thames (YTT) is an initiative set up to test a catchment-based approach for the second cycle of WFD river basin planning. The initiative focused on part of the Thames RBD between London and the East Coast. The initiative ran from January to December 2012, as one of 25 pilots sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to explore ways to engage stakeholders in river basin planning, encourage common ownership of problems and solutions, and achieve integrated, multiple environmental outcomes. All the pilots were asked to form a stakeholder group, identify the most important issues in the catchment and develop a catchment plan. YTT used innovative activities to gather the views of stakeholders and members of the public about what to include in the catchment plan. Defra has now published a policy framework for the catchment-based approach. YTT is taking forward its work within this new framework.

Diverse contexts

These summaries highlight how case studies differ across several dimensions. In terms of scale, three case studies are at local scale — those in Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom — while other case studies consider larger territories, such as a RBD. In terms of EU legislation involved, while most case studies are parts of processes to implement the WFD, two are related to floods (one, in Hungary, took place before the EU FD), and the case study in Venice only indirectly involves EU legislation, in this case mainly the Habitats and Birds Directives.

As well as differences in the relationship to the WFD, there are differences in terms of historical levels of conflict and the wider context of political action that influence participation. For example, at the start of the Hungary case study, there was no experience of participation on the scale required, so mechanisms and processes had to be developed. In France, on the other hand, there is a long history of water management at the river basin scale, with organisations already in place.

As noted earlier, this broad diversity of case studies is suitable for examining how PP for water management is organised in different contexts. As a result, the institutional and political contexts for participation vary considerably: this topic is addressed in the Chapter 4.

4 Actors in the process: who participates, which interests are communicated?

This chapter reviews the case studies, firstly in terms of who participates and whether or not members of the public have been included alongside water management stakeholders. The chapter subsequently considers whether participants were able to influence the scope of issues covered in the participation process and the factors that contribute to make participatory processes more or less open. The other major theme in this chapter concerns the interplay of interests: how the different ways that stakeholders value and use the water environment are recognised and considered within the planning process; and how the participatory process seeks mutual benefits or trade-offs between the preferences of different stakeholder groups or between the interests of particular stakeholders and the broader issues of environmental protection or restoration. The process and governance of the participation and the organisational structure is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Inclusiveness

4.1.1 Including diverse participants

In considering who participates, two aspects feature prominently. The first is whether the set of stakeholders involved in key discussions is restricted, and any issues are declared non-debateable, or if the setting is open to attract a wide range of interests from different communities and sectors. The second is the extent to which participation involves both stakeholders — that is, organised interests — and members of the public.

In Thuringia and the Rhône Méditerranée, the formal committees or councils for the whole RBD are open for a range of stakeholders, although the council in Thuringia, with 22 members, is much smaller than the Rhône Méditerranée 'water parliament' (with 165 members) and therefore may represent a more limited range of views. Portugal also has a formal council, and in this case, one body covers three RBDs, which suggests that there is less opportunity for diverse stakeholder viewpoints to be expressed. In all three cases, these broad councils include local government representatives, and some other organisations, such as members of the scientific community in the case of Portugal.

In many of the case studies, other mechanisms were used to involve stakeholders, often alongside the formal committees or councils. In northern Portugal, for example, a number of open meetings were held apart from the meetings of the council: these brought in other stakeholders, including organisations working at more local levels, as well as members of the public. The Ebro RBD — of which the Matarraña River is a part — has a basin-level water council which includes stakeholder representatives; for the first round of RBMPs, the lead authority (the Ebro Water Confederation) carried out extensive stakeholder engagement in all the main catchments. For the Matarraña River, the RBMP process involved the formation of several working groups, which met a number of times to address significant local issues.

Your Tidal Thames (YTT), United Kingdom, also brought together key interests in stakeholder workshops, as well as holding open meetings, running events and providing opportunities to contribute online, in order to involve a wider public. Here, the process was informal, compared with the formal committees or advisory panels in France, Germany and Portugal. Likewise in the United Kingdom, there was a formal mechanism for RBD-level stakeholder involvement in England — small RBD liaison panels, bringing together representatives of a restricted range of stakeholder interests — organised by the Environment Agency.

In Hungary, an approach that initially sought to restrict participation was subsequently opened up to a much broader set of stakeholders and members of the public. In the process, many people participated who had not previously been engaged, particularly in local meetings.

For most of the case studies, however, engagement has focused on stakeholders in the sense of organised interests. Members of the public or not organised experts, by contrast, have played a

smaller role. Approaches towards engaging them are discussed further in Section 4.1.2.

4.1.2 Engaging members of the public

The WFD uses the terms 'public', 'general public' and 'public, including users' when referring to the consultation and provision of information elements of PP; it uses 'interested parties' (which can be understood to be stakeholders in the sense use in this report) when referring to active involvement. However, the level of involvement of members of the public in RBMPs has been low. In a Eurobarometer Survey of citizens across the EU, carried out during the preparation of the first round of RBMPs, only 14 % of respondents said that they were aware of the consultation process, although about half of all respondents said that they would be interested in participating (Gallup Organisation Hungary (for the European Commission), 2009).

The case studies varied in the extent to which they focused on involving members of the public. For the preparation of the first RBMP for the Rhône Méditerranée, a range of actions were taken to raise awareness and gather input from members of the public, including questionnaires, local meetings and exhibitions, and also theatrical performances. The questionnaire approach, however, had mixed results. The two questionnaires were relatively simple, organised by topic, and reflected common concerns such as water and health, flooding, and equity in water management. Their format, which used closed questions, was criticised for being too simplistic and not providing useful input, given the high cost of distribution to all residents. Nonetheless, these efforts brought in far more participants than seen in most other RBMPs, and most other Member States: there were over 65 000 responses to each of the questionnaires and thousands more who attended discussions and visited exhibitions.

In reaction, however, to concerns over the high costs and limited value, a different survey approach was followed in the Rhône Méditerranée for the second RBMP: an online questionnaire with open questions was used in 2012, to provide qualitative as well as quantitative information. Responses thus provided more information, and costs were reduced. However, the response rate was much lower due

Involving the public in the Rhône Méditerranée Basin, France © Agence de l'eau Rhône Méditerranée Corse

to the online format, and possibly also because the questionnaire took longer and required more knowledge to complete. This example illustrates the challenges of effectively involving members of the public.

One obstacle to increasing PP may be that those leading participation activities are still in the process of finding out what motivates members of the public to get involved. In northern Portugal, for example, authorities organised four events to look at water from different and novel perspectives, focusing on the topics of body, soul, ingenuity and art. It is not clear how these were intended to contribute to the RBMP, and in retrospect, they were not perceived to be successful, as relatively few members of the public participated in the events.

The public played a larger role in the Tisza River case (see Box 4.1), despite initial plans not accounting for extensive participation. However, a broad range of stakeholders, local governments and other actors were keen to discuss the flood control proposals. A large number of meetings was organised, and those running the process were responsive to the suggestions put forward, which no doubt contributed to the high levels of interest from members of the public.

In the Venice case, on a much smaller scale, a topic potentially of concern to local inhabitants was discussed at a range of events, including events not originally planned by authorities. Open meetings were attended by local inhabitants, although efforts to set up a local forum did not take off.

In Poland, local inhabitants were also invited to engage in the strategy and pilot project proposed in Poznań, but attendance at open meetings was low. In Thuringia, local communities were addressed

Box 4.1 Overview of public events held in the Tisza River basin

The flood protection plan for the Hungarian section of the Tisza River basin was prepared under the then-Ministry of Environment Protection and Water Management and the then-Central Directorate for Water and Environment. An intergovernmental committee provided oversight for the planning, which was carried out from May 2001 through the end of 2003. During this period, a broad range of PP events were held:

- 104 forums for members of the public (including in local settlements and villages)
- 10 regional water management council meetings
- 7 county assembly seats
- 8 county assembly expert committee meetings
- 17 professional and scientific conferences, large events
- 6 parliamentary committee meetings
- 14 NGOs, events and forums
- 17 other negotiating forums and events.

The ministry and Central Directorate and their consultants organised some of these meetings; others were organised by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, by regional and local bodies, by the Environment Committee of the National Parliament, and by an NGO and other groups. In addition, interviews and direct discussions with stakeholders were held in many local areas affected by the plan.

Some events brought together ministries, academic research groups and technical bodies; others, at local level, brought together residents and local stakeholders. The latter meetings sought in particular to gain local consensus for the construction of water retention basins. An important cross-cutting issue was that of compensation for farmers whose land would become part of the retention basins. Over the course of the process, the points raised by participants were translated into options by the directorate and the consultants, and were then taken to later forums for further discussion and agreement. As a result, a consensus was reached on these key issues: for example, some of the proposed water retention basins were dropped, others were added, and a shortlist of six basins were identified for the first phase of construction.

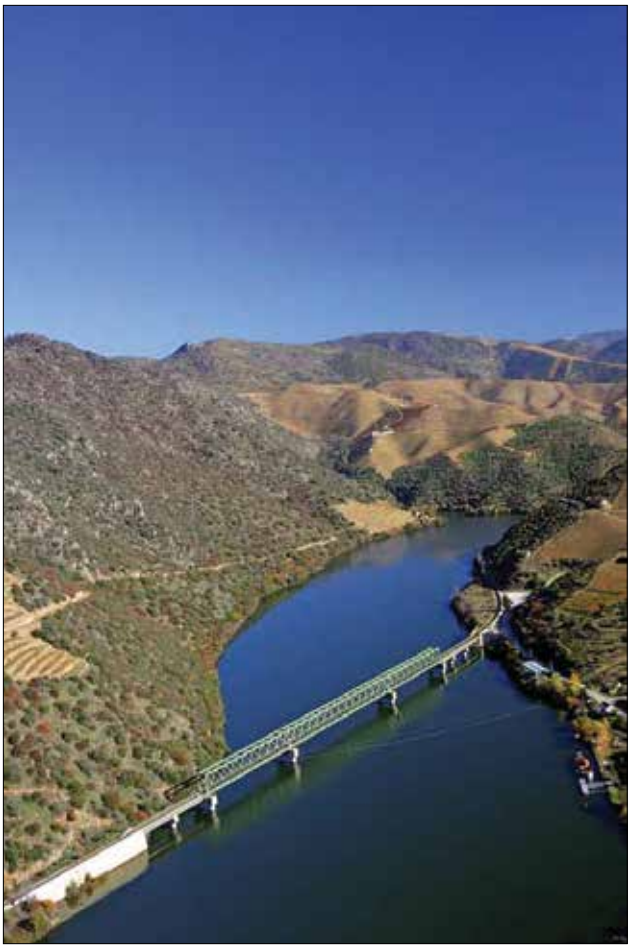
in water workshops on specific measures that had already been included in the RBMP. In the tidal Thames, a more focused approach was taken at public events such as environmental clean-ups: 'pop-up' activities were organised to ask people about their priorities for a catchment plan. This allowed opinions to be gathered from people who might not otherwise have participated; nonetheless, participants at these events are still likely to have been more environmentally aware than most members of the public.

One of the main barriers to increasing the involvement of members of the public is the use of highly technical language, which makes it difficult for non-experts to engage with the issues. At higher levels, the detailed approach and technical nature of RBMP discussions may be difficult for many members of the public to follow. For example, participants in the northern Portugal RBMP said that meetings were often quite technical, even though there were attendants from non-technical backgrounds.

The ability of members of the public to understand how the issues being discussed are relevant to their own lives and concerns can be fundamental in maintaining their interest. In the Tisza, the recent flooding made the consultation relevant to local people; controversy over the proposed location of the retention basins meant that people felt their involvement could make a difference. It appears that controversy also brought in members of the public in Venice.

Cultural events can raise awareness among a wide audience. Yearly 'festivals of the Lagoon' have been held in Venice since 2011 to inform and engage inhabitants and others. However, while many local inhabitants and visitors have taken part, activities did not directly support the PP process on the park proposal. This example contrasts with the mixed results seen for the innovative water events organised in Portugal.

In the case studies, the actions that appear to have been most successful in engaging members of the public have been at local scale, as in Venice and the local forums organised in Hungary's Tisza River basin. These results suggest that while members of the public can provide information about broad values and concerns relating to water management (of the kind collected by the Rhône Méditerranée survey), their knowledge about and interest in water management issues tend to be focused locally. Stakeholder groups with strong community-level connection, such as environmental NGOs and neighbourhood organisations, may therefore play a particularly important role in bringing the views of diverse communities to the decision-making process.



Rio Duoro Ponte Ferradosa, Portugal © APA/ARH do Norte

4.1.3 How do stakeholder concerns and priorities influence the scope of discussion and the design of the planning process?

The way organisers allow and enable participants to raise issues that are important to them reflects a change in the emphasis of water management: from a one-way process of knowledge-gathering and deployment, to a 'social learning' approach. Pahl-Wostl et al. (2008) refer to this as 'multi-scale, polycentric governance approaches that recognise the contribution of a large number of stakeholders, functioning in different institutional settings'. In order to have these multiple stakeholders contribute effectively to knowledge development and decision-making, they must not only contribute to established debates, but must also be able to influence the scope of those debates, and be confident that their input will contribute to shaping outcomes.

The creation of stakeholder committees, working groups or advisory groups can be a way of institutionalising stakeholder input and giving stakeholders a clear and transparent role. In most of the case studies, structures were intended to give external voices some influence in defining the scope of issues to be considered and the way these would be explored in the planning process. However, the Tisza River's 'Renewal of Vásárhelyi Plan' (VTT) was less successful in doing so.

In Poznań, the advisory committee involved single, selected experts rather than organised stakeholders, so while it introduced external views, it did not provide an opportunity for stakeholder influence on the design of the planning process. In northern Portugal, despite regular meetings of the consultative body (the regional water council) and discussions in a range of other forums, concern was expressed by some stakeholders that one major group, stakeholders of hydropower, was excluded from the scope of the consultations: this was due to the national process for a hydropower policy that had been organised and completed before the RBMPs, and thus a decision taken at a higher administrative level.

If the structures for stakeholder input do not have clear roles and remits in the planning process, stakeholders often find that their views are not listened to, or they may themselves question the purpose of their involvement. In Venice, a forum for stakeholders was set up in 2007 but does not seem to have worked effectively, perhaps because there was not yet a clear process for stakeholders to contribute to (as was the case for the events held after 2010). A similar problem may have limited the participation of stakeholders in steering the way public inputs would be used in the tidal Thames catchment plan: stakeholders were unwilling to use their already over-stretched resources on a pilot process that might not be taken forward.

In the Matarraña, the River Contract is formalising a bottom-up approach where river management authorities participate on equal terms with other stakeholders in developing and agreeing approaches and priorities for RBM. In the 1990s there was

Box 4.2 River Contracts: the model, and the Matarraña River experience

River Contracts are voluntary agreements between public and private actors about the management of a local river. The main characteristics of these agreements are:

- their focus combines ecological restoration with socio-economic regeneration;
- they are based on wide participation.

The River Contract model was officially recognised by the French government in 1981 and was included in the 1992 Water Act. Contracts may be formally endorsed by river basin committees, as noted in the Rhône Méditerranée case study. The model has also been recognised in Belgium (Wallonia).

The River Contract model has increasingly been used as a means to restore, improve or conserve a river through a series of actions that are agreed in a broad participatory process involving all basin users, and private and public entities involved in water management. Under the scheme, both public and private sector interests commit themselves to implement a consensus action programme to restore the river and its water resources. The Contract involves defining management objectives and guidelines and developing a plan of action that benefits from the input of local expertise.

All participants (including local authorities, public departments and agencies, water users and NGOs) come together in a river committee, which is a meeting place and a forum in which views can be expressed and discussed. The River Contract exists in parallel to established management procedures rather than being proposed as an alternative to these.

In the Matarraña sub-basin, the NGO Ecologia y Desarrollo (ECODES) had been using a consensus-based approach for a number of years to involve all interests in scoping water management issues and in identifying and agreeing options for action. In 2009, a project supported by the Ebro Basin Confederation (the competent authority for the Ebro RBMP) allowed ECODES and local stakeholders to review the relevance of the experience of River Contracts in France and Belgium as forums for ongoing involvement in water management. In 2010 the process of creating a River Contract for the Matarraña began.

considerable conflict around the management of water resources in the Matarraña. A local NGO, Fundacion Ecologia y Desarrollo (ECODES) developed a process known as a Social Mediation Initiative (SMI), which involved listening to the views of all actors, including those who had not traditionally been involved in decisions about water management and recognising the legitimacy of all views. This is a way of ensuring that all actors are brought into the decision-making/participatory process.

Interestingly, while the renewal of the Vásárhelyi Plan for the Tisza basin started as a technically-led approach, with information and materials on the background to the plan and initial proposals being drafted by staff from several ministries, working with academic research groups and design collectives, once this material was taken out to local communities, space was created for participants to interrogate the information, raise issues about the proposal and, over the course of the planning process, play an essential role in determining where measures would be taken. The degree to which stakeholder or public involvement changes the focus or priorities of the plan can be a good measure of its effectiveness. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

These examples suggest that while it is important to have formal opportunities for stakeholders and members of the public to comment on and determine the scope and mechanisms for PP in the development of plans for the water environment, if stakeholders cannot exercise some power in support of their positions and priorities, their formal contributions may not have a significant impact on the planning process and there may be reluctance to participate in such processes.

Matarraña River at the Parrizal (upstream stretch), Spain
© Confederación Hidrográfica del Ebro

4.1.4 Enabling participation in the planning process

The way that stakeholders and members of the public can express their concerns or preferences during the planning process may facilitate or hamper their participation.

Formal approaches do organise, but also can limit participation. In Thuringia, for example, the Water Advisory Panel meets two or three times a year. Summaries are circulated after discussions at the meeting and stakeholders have four weeks to submit written comments: these, together with the discussions, are then taken into consideration by the water authorities. Other WFD-related processes also have a formal structure. This is seen in particular in the river basin committee in the Rhône Méditerranée, a system now in place for 50 years. Here, stakeholder groups such as agriculture and industry meet before formal sessions to develop common positions, in particular as public authorities hold the majority of seats in the committee. This 'water parliament' system, certainly provides an organisational structure to the participation, but it also may limit the exploration of stakeholder concerns and opportunities to identify win/win approaches with outside views.

The case study evidence on the role of advisory bodies echoes the findings of other investigations, on the WFD planning process and other processes. Advisory boards are often closely managed by the lead organisation or authority; while the authorities are required to consult and engage, this may be within strict boundaries. The operation of the British Environment Agency's RBD Liaison Panels has been described in these terms in a number of studies (Muro and Jeffrey, 2012) and the concern about these limitations was the motivation for testing a more bottom-up method with the catchment-based approach.

The extent to which this kind of water advisory body is able to influence river basin planning may also be constrained by the limited time that members are able to dedicate to these activities. Where members participate in a voluntary capacity,

they may struggle to have an influence. In a couple of case studies, representatives of environmental NGOs mentioned that limited resources restricted their capacity to attend and contribute effectively to all meetings. In the case of the Matarraña, the role played by ECODES — the independent foundation — was seen by some stakeholders as fundamental in providing the technical support and coordination to enable members of the River Contract to participate effectively.

Finally, for openness to be achieved, the lead organisation(s) needs both to be willing to open up the planning process and to be in a position to do this in practice. In the Tisza basin case in Hungary, the lead authorities were willing to let local people make changes to the proposals they had put forward and supported this by producing new maps and information so that people could see the implications of their suggestions. In the tidal Thames, the lead organisations did not have the authority to agree a binding plan at the catchment level, so although they invited local people to put forward proposals, they were unable to progress action in relation to any of these proposals.

4.1.5 Towards open and transparent planning processes

Another aspect of openness is the degree to which participants are clear about the purpose, extent and outcomes of their involvement. One of the key factors contributing to making participation processes more open is for the organisers themselves to be clear about why stakeholders and members of the public are being involved, what they will be able to influence and what they can expect to get out of being involved. There are a number of different objectives for involving people, such as to gather information for the plan, to bring new knowledge to the planning process, to raise awareness about the river and the planning process or to gain buy-in to the plan.

In the case studies, some lead organisations seem to have been clear from the start about the purpose of different types of participation and engagement, for example in the Rhône Méditerranée. In other cases, such as the VTT plan in Hungary, the authorities appear to have started the process with a more limited vision of its role, but when concerns were raised at public meetings and also externally, they directly reacted to expand the process and demonstrate how they were taking input on board.

Of course, being open and transparent has its own challenges: if organisers and participants believe that participation will only have a limited impact on decisions, this is unlikely to stimulate interest. Decisions about how to involve members of the public and stakeholders should take account of the stages of the process and the type of input that is needed. Plan development involves stages when the discussion should be opened up (e.g. identifying issues or options) and stages involving more technical work. Participation in planning processes needs to be carefully designed to ensure that engagement takes place at points when there are real opportunities to influence the plan. For example, it is best to spend time understanding wider social values and concerns at an early stage in the planning process (for example, using techniques like the social survey in the Rhône Méditerranée or the blank Catchment Plan Template in the tidal Thames). As the process begins to consider technical options and their implications, more detailed and focused input is likely to be needed, and may be obtained by, for example, setting up working groups on specific topics as the Ebro Water Confederation did as part of its engagement process in the Matarraña or through developing detailed maps, as used for the VTT plan in Hungary.

Rio Duoro, Portugal © APA/ARH do Norte

4.2 Seeking mutual benefits and trade-offs among stakeholders

4.2.1 Different interests at play

Stakeholders bring different perspectives and interests to the table. In its Nature Outlook 2010–2040, the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (n.d.) identified four 'perspectives' regarding nature:

- 'vital' nature, focusing on biodiversity;
- 'experiential' nature — an environment for human life and recreation;

- 'functional' nature, supplying products and services for the economy;
- 'tailored' nature, a setting for economic activity.

This study considers perspectives on nature and biodiversity. These four perspectives are nonetheless also valid for water management, in particular for implementation of the WFD, whose objectives include protecting aquatic ecosystems, promoting sustainable water use and reducing pollution to waterbodies. The four perspectives, while not necessarily exhaustive, thus provide a lens for considering the interests that stakeholders bring to discussions of water management, each of them referring to a different functionality provided by water.

In the case of the Venice Lagoon, stakeholders representing recreational fishing, hunting and motor boating groups were concerned that environmental protection would restrict their possibilities to engage in these sports. Commercial fishing interests wanted to preserve their livelihoods, which are based on products taken from the environment. Both groups, of course, wished to maintain a lagoon environment that provided these services. Moreover, the park proposal itself — as many types of water and environmental management — could be seen as trying to present a holistic approach that preserves underlying biodiversity and supports recreational uses as well as economic services derived from the environment: indeed, one goal of the park is to attract visitors who support a sustainable form of local economic development. In the Venice case, however, many of these issues are actually addressed not in the park proposal but in other jurisdictions: here, the participatory process for the park appears to have been a lightning rod for conflict, in part due to a lack of participation as yet in other processes, such as Natura 2000 (work on the site management plan, including PP, has been delayed) or water governance under the WFD.

Fauna in the Venice Lagoon, Italy © Venice City Council. Photography competition: The seasons of the Lagoon — landscape, flora and fauna (*Le stagioni della Laguna — paesaggio, flora e fauna)*, 2007

The development of RBMPs also involves interaction between these different perspectives: the case studies in France, Germany and Portugal all involved contrasts between, for example, environmental NGOs focused on biodiversity and nature values and economic interests such as those in agriculture and industry concerned about the functional services provided by waterbodies. Agriculture in particular is a major stakeholder in these and other case studies: in the Matarraña River, irrigation needs were a central focus of debate.

The WFD sets clear environmental objectives, including the good status of aquatic ecosystems; at the same time, it supports 'sustainable, balanced and equitable water use' (Article 1). While these goals are set in EU legislation, achieving them requires both the awareness and the buy-in of major water users.

4.2.2 Recognising differences in the participatory process

The HarmoniCOP handbook argues that it is not enough for participation processes to be open or to allow all stakeholders and members of the public to get involved, potential participants must also be actively reassured that getting involved does not put them at risk. This means demonstrating tolerance to individuals' and groups' different positions: in the Matarraña the social mediation approach developed by the ECODES foundation involved devoting time to finding areas of common ground between groups that started in strong opposition to each other. If

people don't feel that they can talk about the things that are important to them and that they will be listened to, they will not come into the conversation and will be more likely to protest outside. This weakens the participation process as a whole. The assessment of the extent to which these differences were recognised and tolerated was based on a number of closely linked factors:

- whether the preferences and interests of participants were made explicit;
- the methods used for decision-making; and
- whether the process leads to greater trust and understanding among participants.

In terms of participants being able to express their preferences and interests openly, the people interviewed for the case studies generally reported that participants were able to discuss a range of topics. In northern Portugal, for example, participants in thematic workshops were able to give their views on themes not specifically covered by the workshop. On the other hand, stakeholders here were not able talk about hydroelectric power within the RBMP process, as this was the subject of a separate decision-making process.

Decision-making
In most of the case studies, final decisions were not taken in participative meetings and forums. In Germany and northern Portugal, advisory boards, workshops and other meetings — along with written comments and other methods — provide inputs that were considered in preparing the river basin plans. In these two cases and most others, it appears participants understood and accepted this decision-making process.

In the tidal Thames case study, however, there was a lack of clarity in terms of the links between participation and decision-making. It is clear that those organising the pilot project were keen to ensure that all stakeholders were able to express their interests, concerns and proposals: the use of a blank Catchment Plan Template, instead of a form with predefined headings or questions for participants to fill in, was intended to demonstrate that there was no set agenda. As a result, participants put forward a wide range of ideas and suggestions. This made it difficult for the project leads to structure the input as an operational plan. The lack of clear direction from the national environmental authorities on how the plan would be used exacerbated the problem. The project's stakeholder strategy was asked to agree the priorities for the catchment plan; however the stakeholders said they were not able to agree on such priorities as they did not have the resources or time and they were not clear who would be responsible for any set of prioritised measures they identified.

Finally, in the Rhône Méditerranée case study, stakeholders are members of the river basin committee, which votes on the RBMP. In 2009, many stakeholder representatives including those for agriculture voted **against** the plan, as they felt that their interests and concerns had not been adequately addressed. This raises questions about their subsequent support for the implementation of measures.

Building trust
Pre-existing relationships can create trust between stakeholders and confidence that their interests and concerns will be listened to. Trust is generally built up over a period of time. Where participants have worked successfully with each other and with the water authorities in the past, they are more likely to be willing to engage in a new process. In the Matarraña, stakeholders had been working together since 2003 and the water authorities had demonstrated that they were willing to listen to and act on proposals coming from them. This context meant that stakeholders were willing to participate in the water authorities' river basin planning process. Where these relationships are not already established, authorities will need to make greater efforts to demonstrate transparency and responsiveness in taking account of stakeholder values and interests. In Poland, some of the suggestions made in public meetings were adopted by planners and illustrated in subsequent meetings. This approach appears to have played a role in strengthening trust in the process.

Similarly, in Hungary, participants were shown how proposals put forward by communities had been used to make decisions on the location of reservoirs. This evidence provided further motivation for people to come up with collective solutions that were acceptable to all.

The information gathered for the case studies suggests that in most cases the participatory process led to greater trust and understanding. In Thuringia, for example, one interviewee said that members of the Water Advisory Panel now work better together after having understood each other's positions. On the other hand, some stakeholders in Thuringia felt that the local workshops did not provide sufficient space for discussion. In Portugal, interviewees suggested that the process led to a greater understanding among stakeholders, after initial heated discussions.

With the Thames Estuary Partnership, the United Kingdom
© Thames Estuary Partnership

However, if it is not clear how the interests, concerns and proposals put forward by those involved in PP processes have been used, trust tends to be eroded and stakeholders and members of the public become less willing to participate in the future, and perhaps have less motivation to support implementation of the plan, a potential concern for the Rhône Méditerranée RBMP.

4.2.3 Seeking mutual benefits and trade-offs

Participation can provide a mechanism through which to maximise mutual benefits (win-win outcomes) or else to find and agree trade-offs between stakeholder interests; a further goal is to assist the different participants to understand each other's perspectives as well as broader public goals for water management and environmental protection. Pursuing these goals contributes to the broader objectives of better decision-making and stakeholder buy-in. In the Tisza River basin case, for example, an important issue arose over the compensation for farmers whose land would become part of the retention basins: this was resolved via an structured approach, involving both an initial compensation payment when the basins are constructed and agreements to compensate losses in production if the basins are used in flood events.

5 Governance of participatory processes

A key factor in participatory processes is their governance: which organisations lead and administer participation mechanisms, how the decision process is organised, and whether the decision is a shared responsibility between actors. This, in turn, is linked to the governance structures for the issue at hand, and to the overall water governance systems (see Box 5.1).

The case studies bring together a range of different institutional contexts. Table 5.1 provides an overview, indicating the lead government authority for the participatory process (as well as other key organisations) as well as the existence of permanent bodies that bring together stakeholders. The following section considers the importance of multilevel governance for water management in general and for PP specifically. The section that follows considers the role of stakeholders within the institutional context.

5.1 Organising public participation across different administrative scales

Water management is typically a complex, multilevel process, and this creates challenges in terms of organising participatory processes.

One level of complexity arises from the interplay between administrative boundaries, such as those for regional and local governments, and natural catchment boundaries. The WFD calls on European governments to set up RBDs based on the natural boundaries: however, water management often needs to bring in existing public bodies. On a second level, public bodies at different administrative levels — such as national, regional and local — often have key roles for water management. On a third level, water management involves a range of economic and social sectors: and thus, different stakeholders need to be involved, as well as government bodies that set policies across the sectors.

In the Thuringia case study, for example, the territory of this German state is part of three river basins: the Elbe, the Rhine and Wesel. Two of these, the Elbe and the Rhine, cross national boundaries: for both, international committees coordinate water management, including the preparation of RBMPs. Within Germany, Thuringia developed its own, state-level management plan under the WFD: this work fed into the development of RBMPs for the three basins (a similar process occurred across Germany's states).

Thuringia's state government appointed a state-level advisory panel as well as three catchment forums (see Box 5.2). While this approach addressed both

Box 5.1 Defining water governance

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) defines water governance as 'the range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources, and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society'. Water governance, according to a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study, encompasses administrative systems, formal institutions (including laws and policies) as well as informal institutions such as power relationships and practices. This can include the political level, and the OECD study also cites the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), which has stated that water governance 'determines who gets what water, when and how' (OECD, 2011).

Consequently, water governance is about the relationships for water management within the RBM system rather than simply about government-led processes. Moreover, stakeholders are not simply 'water users' or 'interests': some are major elements of local economies and societies, as in the case of agricultural interests in farming areas, and as such are part of water governance. Moreover, the 'active involvement' of these stakeholders — as per the WFD — is a key element in terms of integrating water management across economic sectors and consequently for the success of water management goals.

Table 5.1 Institutions involved in the PP process in the eight case studies

Case study	Process	Lead authority/ authorities	Other key organisations	Permanent participatory bodies
Thuringia (Germany)	RBMP and water management overall	Thuringia state government		Water advisory panel at state level and three catchment forums
Matarraña River (Spain)	RBMP; and Matarraña River Contract	Ebro Water Confederation	ECODES	Matarraña River Contract (for this catchment)
Rhône Méditerranée (France)	RBMP (first cycle)	Basin Committee and Basin Agency	National, regional, department and local governments	Basin Committee
Tisza Basin (Hungary)	Catchment flood plan	Ministry of Environment Protection and Water Management	A range of national and local bodies	
Lagoon of Venice (Italy)	Local	City Council and Administration	Stakeholder organisation	City-wide environmental forum
Poznań: Warta River (Poland)	Local	City Council and Administration	Private developer and consultants	
Northern Portugal	RBMP (first cycle)	Regional Water Administration		Regional Water Council
Tidal Thames (United Kingdom)	RBMP (second cycle)	Environment Agency	Thames Estuary Partnership and Thames 21	

Box 5.2 Consultation mechanisms at different levels in Thuringia, Germany

In Thuringia, the Water Advisory Panel (*Gewässerbeirat*) at state level has met two or three times a year since 2003. It brings together 22 members from:

- state agencies — four from different departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Nature Protection, one from the Court of Auditors, and one from the State Environmental Agency and five from other state offices;
- local government — two from the communes, and one from the counties;
- business, agriculture and professionals — one each from the water supply and treatment sector, the hydropower sector, the energy sector, agriculture, the chamber of commerce and the chamber of engineers;
- civil society — one each from environmental organisations and sport fishing.

The panel's meetings are organised by the state ministry and can also bring together additional groups or experts to discuss specific topics. According to members interviewed, discussions in the early years were sometimes confrontational, but they have become less so as members grew accustomed to working together on concrete issues for the WFD and the FD. The panel issued one joint statement: in 2012, in the face of public budget cuts, it warned that additional financing would be needed to implement the measures in the RBMP.

Stakeholders from many of the same sectors also meet in three catchment-level forums, also created in 2003: the Saale-Forum, the Werra-Main-Forum and the Unstrut-Leine-Forum. These are intended to serve as information platforms and to interlink catchment activities, as well as to identify concrete problems and develop solutions in the regions, for WFD implementation. They bring together a similar set of stakeholders, about once a year. These forums do not have extensive influence. One reason reported is that stakeholders prefer to bring issues to the state-level panel; another is that stakeholders are better organised at state level.

At local level, a range of water workshops (*Gewässerwerkstätten*) have been held to discuss individual measures for water protection. These open meetings bring together both local stakeholders and members of the public.

the administrative and natural boundaries, the state-level advisory panel appears to have been much more important in terms of bringing together major stakeholders and influencing water management: this appears to be due to the important role of state-level decision-making as well as the fact that most stakeholders had existing state-level rather than catchment-level organisations. Thuringia also organised local workshops on individual measures, thus addressing this administrative level.

In the other, 'large-scale' case studies, efforts were also seen to encourage participation at local level. In France, the water agency engaged local governments to organise participatory events: this approach allowed an extensive set of events, while maintaining a common thematic structure. In Portugal, the northern region organised a series of local events in its three RBDs (as well as a couple of events in the Spanish side of the RBDs). In Hungary as well, work on the Tisza River involved numerous events held in local areas. Here, a range of actors including local governments played organising roles.

The tidal Thames case study in fact focuses on a participation initiative at local scale: in this case, however, at the scale of a catchment area within the RBD, rather than a local administration.

Problems of multilevel governance can also arise in local case studies. In Italy, the city proposal for a park for the northern Lagoon encountered problems: the territory to be covered was under the jurisdiction of several government levels and offices that also overlapped (see Box 5.3), a factor that has led to considerable delays in the approval of the proposal. Observers contend that there is a lack of a coordinated governance approach for the Lagoon as a whole, as responsibilities for different aspects of water and nature management, as well as economic governance, are split across at least four levels (local, provincial, regional and national) — without a dedicated coordinating mechanism.

One way to address multilevel governance issues is to bring in local governments in the participatory process. The Water Advisory Panel in

Box 5.3 Complexity of multilevel administrative governance in the Lagoon of Venice

The Lagoon of Venice, extending over 550 km^2, represents the largest wetland area of the Mediterranean. Italy's national government, the Veneto region, the Venice province and several cities and towns have jurisdiction over different aspects of the Lagoon, including Venice itself. Approximately one-third of the Lagoon lies north of the historic centre of Venice and contains extensive areas of salt marshes and mud flats along with minor islands and other features. Nearly all the northern Lagoon has been designated a Natura 2000 site as well as an Important Bird Area.

In 2004, Venice City Council adopted a proposal to create a park in the northern Lagoon within the city's spatial plan. (The territory of the city of Venice covers almost all the northern Lagoon; proposals to create a park for the entire Lagoon made previously in the national and regional parliaments were unsuccessful.) An important goal of the park proposal is to promote economic development that is compatible with the natural wealth of the northern Lagoon. The next step, regional government approval of the addition of the park to the city's spatial plan, occurred only in November 2010, and involved consultation with a national body, the Venice Water Authority under the Ministry of Infrastructure.

In mid-May 2014, the city council voted to create the park, and the management plan guidelines should be approved in the near future. In preparation for this approval by the city council, a series of public meetings were held to discuss the proposal, with residents and stakeholders on islands in the northern Lagoon such as Burano. The next step in the process is the preparation of its environmental management plan, which must be approved by the Regional Council and will involve another round of public consultation.

The territory of the park proposal corresponds closely with a Natura 2000 site, whose management plan is being prepared by regional and national institutions. Moreover, the entire Lagoon has been designated a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive. A further complication is that the park proposal also covers much of the same territory as some waterbodies designated under the WFD. This area is part of the Eastern Alps RBD. In Italy, however, regions continue to play a strong role in WFD implementation — and in the Lagoon of Venice, the Venice Water Authority also has a leading role. One other layer of government, the Province of Venice, has a leading role for the management of hunting and fishing in the northern Lagoon. These many government agencies have created at least two problems. One is that discussions over the park proposal generated issues and conflicts more relevant for other administrative levels — possibly because it provided a more open participatory process. The other problem is that communication across these government layers has been a source of delay throughout: in mid-June 2014, Venice City Council was still waiting for clarification from regional government on several aspects of the mandate for the park.

Thuringia, for example, includes local government representatives; so does the Basin Committee in the Rhône Méditerranée (see Box 5.4). Local governments were important participants in northern Portugal, and likewise in the flood planning for the Tisza River. There is a risk, however, that participation is focused much more on intergovernmental processes than on the participation of non-governmental stakeholders. Across the EU, many responsibilities related to water management are distributed across different levels of government, requiring good coordination mechanisms. Such mechanisms appeared to be in place in most Member States for the preparation of the first round of RBMPs, although their effectiveness has not been assessed yet (WRc plc, 2012). In a small number of RBMPs, in fact, the 'participation process' appeared to mainly involve administrative offices at different levels of governance. A broader concern, however, is that involving both stakeholders and government offices in the same participatory mechanisms could diminish the input and thus the buy-in of stakeholders.

Another issue is how to bring in stakeholders at the different levels involved. The Thuringia case, where the catchment forums appear to have been less important than the state-level advisory panel, suggests that the role of participation at each level needs to be carefully identified. The existence of too many participation events risks creating 'stakeholder fatigue', since many organisations have limited resources. Moreover, stakeholder groups are likely to be most interested in participating at levels where more important decisions are made.

5.2 The stakeholder role in organising the participatory process

Five of the case studies involve implementation of the WFD, and in particular, the preparation of RBMPs. The overall objectives are set by the EU directive, including the minimum requirements for PP (in Article 14). In all these cases, government authorities responsible for water management lead RBMP preparation — and in most of the cases, these authorities also organised and led the participatory process.

In the tidal Thames case, however, the lead authority, the Environment Agency, asked two NGOs to organise the first stage of the participatory process, to test a new catchment-based approach, which might feed into the development of the second RBMP for the Thames. This more participatory pilot approach, taken in 25 catchments across England at an early stage in the RBMP process, sought to address concerns that participation has been too limited in the first round of RBMPs that was completed in 2009.

While permanent stakeholder bodies play a key role in participation in several RBMP case studies, the river basin committee for the Rhône Méditerranée

Landscape in the Venice Lagoon © Venice City Council. Photography competition: The seasons of the Lagoon — landscape, flora and fauna (*Le stagioni della Laguna — paesaggio, flora e fauna*), 2007

Box 5.4 River basin committees in France

In France, each RBD has a *Comité de bassin* made up of representatives from:

- regional and local authorities (about 40 % of the members);
- civil society — including NGOs, economic sectors and consumers (also about 40 %);
- state administration (the remaining 20 %)

These committees are often referred to as water parliaments. They were established by a 1964 water law, which also created a national water committee, to be consulted on national water legislation and policy, as well as basin agencies that carry out a range of technical work (CIS). Each river basin committee is responsible for the implementation of the WFD, under the authority of a *préfet coordonnateur de bassin* (a prefect who represents national authority at river-basin level). The committee adopts key documents for the RBMP, including its schedule, work programme and significant water management issues, as well as the public consultation process and the official consultation on the draft RBMP. The committee adopts the final plan.

In the Rhône Méditerranée district, the river basin committee has 165 representatives who meet two-to-three times a year. The committee is supported by a smaller *bureau* of representatives who meet four-to-five times a year to prepare the work of the plenary and other bodies, and by five geographic commissions for sub-basins of the district: these meet once a year to discuss local aspects of water policies. Ad-hoc working groups may be created to discuss specific issues (such as the classification of waterbodies under the WFD, or hydroelectricity problems).

Administrative and technical work to prepare and then implement the RBMP is carried out by public agencies under the *préfet coordonnateur,* including the basin agency for the Rhône Méditerranée Corse.

is notable in that it holds formal decision-making powers for the basin; stakeholders make up about 40 % of the members of this committee (see Box 5.4). In France, moreover, a range of approaches for the participatory process — including surveys of the general public — were set out at national level.

By contrast, the Matarraña case study encompasses both the RBMP process, led by the public water body, and as a very different experience, the River Contract process: here, all the stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, signed a voluntary agreement, building on joint work over previous years and with support from an independent foundation. In this case study, the stakeholders became in part 'owners' of the process, and the foundation acts as the secretariat for the River Contract.

Two of the case studies are at local scale: in both Poznań and Venice, the city administrations are the lead authorities. In both, however, private organisations were involved in the participatory process alongside government bodies.

In Poznań, aspects of the urban strategy were developed in cooperation with a private stakeholder (SwedeCenter, a real estate development company) and with two Dutch consulting firms: this facet of the case study is a public–private partnership. The public meetings were organised by the city administration; the private bodies made presentations and considered input received in aspects of the overall strategy for which they were responsible.

In Venice, the city administration was the leading authority; they organised several public meetings on the proposal to create a park in the northern Lagoon. However, other groups also organised meetings and played a key role in discussions: a stakeholder group set up one meeting and an opposition politician organised another.

In Hungary, a case study of a large river catchment, local governments and scientific bodies were among the many organisers of individual meetings and forums.

The case studies have thus represented a range of approaches: authority-led and planned processes, those developed in part with the input of stakeholders, and processes with strong stakeholder ownership.

5.3 Planning and scheduling the participatory process

The HarmoniCOP guidelines on PP for water management (Ridder et al. 2005) include 'speed' as one of the main criteria for good participation: a schedule should be followed and an objective, such as completing a management plan, should be set in order to keep participants focused. At the same time, the guidelines note that participatory processes may be slower and less direct than unilateral decision-making within a government structure.

The case studies involving preparation of RBMPs had to follow the timetable for participation set out in Article 14 of the WFD. Overall, this was the case in Thuringia, Rhône Méditerranée, the Ebro (Matarraña case study) and northern Portugal, but in northern Portugal and the Matarraña (as in Portugal and Spain generally) the overall schedule for the RBMPs had slipped.

Article 14 of the WFD also sets out different phases. In the case studies, 'active involvement' followed these phases. Thus, in the Rhône Méditerranée and northern Portugal, initial activities considered significant issues for the RBMP, while later phases addressed the plans themselves and the measures proposed.

The tidal Thames case study presents a preparatory experience for the second cycle of RBMPs, one not specified in the directive. Here too, the timetable (set by the Environment Agency) was followed by the private organisations managing the participatory process. However, as described in the case study, the plan agreed did not include prioritised and operational measures, because the stakeholder strategy group felt unable to prioritise the proposed measures in the absence of clear information about the follow-up: what the measures would be used for and who would be responsible for their implementation.

In the other case studies, it does not appear that fixed time-frames were set in legislation. In Hungary, the participation process appears to have delayed the approval of the plan. Here, the original plans for PP were inadequate and the process expanded. At the same time, the organisers were able to accommodate the broadened process and use it to make decisions relatively quickly —

Tisza River at Vezseny, Hungary © VITUKI CONSULT Ltd

within about two years of the release of the original proposal. Moreover, the extensive participation appears to have strengthened the plan, and also played a key role in identifying specific projects to be pursued.

In Venice, as described above, long delays in the approval of the park were attributable to several reasons, including, inter alia, the complex and partly overlapping multilevel administrative roles. The participatory process does not appear to have significantly influenced the timing of approval. Here, the process has extended over 10 years.

Deadlines set in legislation — like those under the WFD — provide a clear time-frame for PP. The Hungary case, however, shows that accommodating greater participation even on expense of delaying a legislative deadline can play an important role in strengthening a plan where many public and stakeholder concerns are expressed, even though this may involve additional activities.

6 Access to information, knowledge exchange and tools

One of the broad objectives of a participatory process, as highlighted in the introduction, is to incorporate knowledge from a broad range of stakeholders and the general public. Participants may have detailed knowledge of their economic sector or may be aware of local situations, and thus can offer fresh insight. This means that participatory processes need to create a space where participants can share their knowledge.

At the same time, in order to participate fully, participants need access to information held by the government bodies involved in planning. This information can provide greater understanding of water management needs and objectives, particularly in relation to specific issues under discussion and the impact on the 'stake' of the participants (organised stakeholders and public).

Finally, several tools and methodologies may be employed as part of the participation process, in order to simplify communication processes, ensure the efficient exchange of knowledge and promote active involvement.

6.1 Provision of and access to information

Much of the information used for water-planning and management is held by public authorities or agencies. For participants, gaining access to this information may be vital for comprehending issues fully and for making informed decisions. Authorities, however, may be concerned about how the information could be (mis)understood and used by non-specialists or organisations. In addition, members of the public as well as some stakeholders may not have the time or technical knowhow needed to review and analyse all official reports and results.

This section provides an overview of the provision of and access to information. Further description of the methods used by authorities to provide information can be found in Section 6.3.

In the case studies that focused on the preparation of the first round of RBMPs, the documents specified by the WFD were published online and in hard copy: the timetable and work programme, the significant water management issues, and finally the draft RBMP.

The HarmoniCOP study emphasises the importance of 'translating' technical information so that general principles and issues can be understood more easily; it suggests providing 'information in different levels of complexity and depth, adapted to the different stakeholders and public who will participate in the process' (Ridder et al., 2005). The CIS Guidance mentions the use of non-technical summaries. Summaries can be useful in providing all parties involved with the same basic information for discussion. However, simply summarising long and complex technical documents may not satisfy participants' need for relevant information in a language and format they can understand. Considerable skill is needed to express complex subjects in everyday language, without oversimplifying or skimming over contested issues; although technical experts are being trained to improve their communications skills, issues remain. A second challenge is to produce summaries that are balanced in terms of the topics and perspectives they cover, so that they include aspects of interest to stakeholders and members of the public, rather than focusing excessively on questions perceived as important by the authorities.

Only a few examples were found in the case studies, however, where summaries and background information were prepared as stand-alone documents to meet identified information needs of stakeholders and members of the public. In Thuringia, meetings of the advisory panel addressed specific water management issues: typically, working documents and slide presentations were prepared for these discussions and sent to the members. Members also received further information, such as maps, upon request. In the Rhône Méditerranée, considerable resources were spent on producing material in different

formats (leaflets, posters, performances, etc.) for different audiences. Despite this targeted communications campaign, some stakeholders felt that the official information for the RBMP was too long and technical.

In Venice, it appears that officials mainly provided information via presentations, often using slides. Background information and explanations were also available on the city's website.

The extent of information available from authorities can also be a subject of contention. In Thuringia, some members of the Water Advisory Panel spent considerable resources making requests for detailed monitoring information, which could not be easily provided.

Water information systems can provide further channels for online communication beyond the simple provisioning of digital material via websites, and could provide open access to detailed information held by authorities. Thuringia might have benefited from better access to the information system, while the Rhone-Méditerranée RBMP's experience with online questionnaires was not encouraging. Digital interactive tools or social media campaigns need further development if they are to prove useful.

This issue is of particular interest at the moment, as EU institutions are increasingly promoting the principle of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), in which the access to and use of environmental information is open and transparent: from the information source through to the different levels where it is used. With the Structured Information and Implementation Framework (SIIF), the Commission (EC, 2012b) introduced a way forward for better implementation of EU law by Member States, by improving our knowledge of how environmental law works in practice, better sharing this knowledge and more effectively responding to existing or potential environmental problems.

This should result in more environmental information being available online and a more consistent structure for citizens to air environmental grievances and concerns.

Rio Douro, Portugal © APA/ARH do Norte

6.2 Knowledge generated by participants

One key objective of participatory processes is to bring in additional knowledge and perspectives that can strengthen decision-making by broadening the information base and approaches used by authorities. The case studies considered the extent to which participants contributed knowledge through the participatory process, and also analysed some of the types of knowledge they provided.

In all of the case studies, participants put forward evidence of their own for consideration. A good example is the tidal Thames, where one-to-one meetings were held with a number of stakeholders in order to grasp their issues concerning the estuary. In such a large area, where the river has a wide variety of uses, speaking with stakeholders directly involved in water management for 'ground-truthing' the technical information being prepared by the Environment Agency was considered a very important task.

Four of the case studies directly involved the preparation of the first round of RBMPs: Thuringia, Rhône Méditerranée, Matarraña and northern Portugal. In all four, stakeholders provided inputs both through formal, written comments (as required under the WFD) and also via formal, participatory bodies, as well as in further events and meetings. In northern Portugal as well as in the Rhône Méditerranée, these meetings provided an opportunity to discuss specific issues related to the RBMPs. In the Matarraña sub-basin, stakeholders developed inputs in a series of sector workshops.

Several case studies used innovative methods to solicit input from the general public. In the French case study, authorities gathered input from the public as a whole via a survey. In the tidal Thames case study, stakeholders were invited to complete a 'blank' Catchment Plan Template, described in Box 6.1. Here, they were free to propose any

Box 6.1 A 'blank' Catchment Plan Template to gather stakeholder and public suggestions for the tidal Thames

The Catchment Plan Template was the main tool used to collect the views of stakeholders and members of the public about what issues, solutions and actions for the area should be included in a catchment plan. The template was a blank page containing four key questions.

The idea was first put forward as a solution to an information gap. The Environment Agency — the Competent Authority for RBMPs in the United Kingdom — completed the review of issues for transitional and coastal waterbodies after the pilot project began, so the organisers were not able to invite people to comment on this information. However, the approach was felt to be valuable and continued to be used after the Environment Agency information was published.

By inviting individuals and organisations to put their own views into an empty form or template, the organisers opened up the scope of the plan, allowing it to be shaped by the interests of people on the ground. The instructions on completing the template were non-restrictive: 'You can be as technical, site-specific or general as you like.'

People using the online template could look at the responses received from others before writing their own ideas, if they so chose. YTT staff grouped comments received under broad headings like 'Access to and along the river', and 'Water quality, sediment and freshwater flow', which were generated by the responses themselves, rather than being predefined. This approach allowed people to make comments that were relevant to them. Some respondents started by explaining their perspective ('as a cyclist', 'as a kayaker', etc.). Over 170 contributions were received during the first six months that the template was available. The responses include very specific observations about rubbish in the river at named locations, as well as information about general issues, from access to riverside development.

While the approach made it possible to engage effectively with stakeholders and members of the public, the lack of research data meant that there was no basis for prioritising the input received. This difficulty was compounded by the size and complexity of the area covered. Stakeholders participating in the project's strategy group discussed how to prioritise the proposals put forward, and came up with an initial list of decision criteria. However, the group decided that time constraints did not allow them to finalise these criteria and establish a clear and transparent procedure for applying them.

This type of approach is useful in getting stakeholders to participate in scoping issues, but is not necessarily appropriate for developing a plan with clear technical requirements, like an RBMP.

action for river management. As described earlier, however, this approach was not totally successful, as it proved difficult to place such a broad set of proposals in an RBMP context.

The Poznań and Tisza cases both considered flood issues, although the Poznań case study involved urban investments that transcend water management. In the Poznań case study, local citizens brought forward ideas for consideration. Participants, including local officials, appear to have played a strong role in the Tisza case study, where in one location their suggestions — linked also to their experiences with flood events — led to the consideration and then the adoption of a water retention basin, something which had not been considered in the original plan.

In the Venice case study, participants also made use of the opportunity to bring in their own ideas and knowledge. In this local case study, the immediate outcome was a decision on whether to approve the park proposal — unlike the other case studies, where the issue at play was how to shape the plan. Nonetheless, stakeholders were able to share their positions and concerns through the process; for at least one group (commercial fisheries), participation led to discussions and assurances from city officials in terms of how the park would affect them.

The Matarraña case study differs in that an initial process of dialogue among stakeholders resulted in them developing their own initiative (the River Contract). This horizontal engagement later informed stakeholder input to the RBMPs. As such, the case study indicates how stakeholders can themselves generate the key knowledge needed for decision-making.

Pop-up Workshop Thames 21, the United Kingdom © Thames21

6.3 Tools and methods employed for public participation

For the purposes of this review, a 'tool for PP' is defined as a device or technique used to promote, structure, record or facilitate the participation of stakeholders or members of the public — in this case, in water management. Devices that are part of normal water management processes, such as plans or models, are not included in this assessment, since their primary function is not to support or facilitate PP even if they might have that effect.

Table 6.1 describes the main tools used in the case studies, following the three levels of public information and participation set out in the WFD.

6.3.1 Methods and tools for communication and consultation

Very different approaches to communication were used in the case studies examined.

The most extensive, sophisticated and high-quality communications and consultation tools were used in the Rhône Méditerranée, including a survey distributed to homes along with customers' water bills, and television and radio broadcasts. The high cost and the perceived lack of results, however, meant that an online survey was used instead in the second cycle of river basin planning (see Box 6.2 on public surveys for the Rhône Méditerranée).

Another interesting and effective approach to providing information for the general public rather than for expert stakeholders or technical specialists exclusively was the use of maps in the development of the VTT plan in Hungary. The aim was to encourage discussion about dam locations and compulsory farmland purchases. Here, it is important to note that modified maps were produced to reflect the comments and suggestions put forward in public meetings; as a result, the maps

Pilot project Chwaliszewo, Poland © KuiperCompagnons

Table 6.1 Main information tools used in the case studies

Tool	Case studies using this tool	Comments
Information provision		
Website	All	In Poznań, the website was used to broadcast two public meetings as well as to post documents; in France, the website was used for education as well as information-giving; many countries such as Spain and Portugal used geographic information systems (GIS) to present maps and visual information
Maps	Hungary and tidal Thames	For the VTT, maps were used to help participants visualise the location of proposed dams and to suggest alternative locations; tidal Thames used a simple map to guide participant input at 'pop-up' events
Multimedia communications campaign	France	Posters, short films, brochures and a press pack
Information gathering/consultation		
Surveys	France	Seeking public views on areas of concern and on key themes for the RBMP
Written comments on consultation documents	Thuringia, Portugal, France and Spain	Standard WFD three-stage consultation documents
Written inputs via a website	Tidal Thames	170 contributions to the catchment plan received through the website in less than a year
Stakeholder interviews	Matarraña	Carried out by lead organisation to map views before working group meetings
Active involvement		
Formal advisory panels, committees and forums	France, Thuringia, Hungary, Poznań, Portugal and tidal Thames	The Poznań advisory group was made up of expert stakeholders who maintained regular contact and information exchange; the forum in Venice only met three times
Short-term or informal working groups	Matarraña	The water authorities set up temporary working groups to look at specific issues in the Matarraña and other catchment areas, as part of the RBMP process
Conferences, workshops and meetings	France, Hungary, Portugal, Poznań and tidal Thames	These face-to-face meetings may be of very different sizes, structures and scopes
One-on-one meetings with stakeholder groups	Venice and tidal Thames	Informal meetings with individual stakeholders, either to understand their positions (Venice), or to ensure that each provides knowledge for the process (Thames)

Survey for the Rhône Méditerranée basin, France
© Agence de l'eau Rhône Méditerranée Corse

were a tool both for the technical experts and for the participants, who could all see their proposals clearly set out.

Online communication appears to have become a standard method of communicating with stakeholders and the public. Some lead organisations in the Rhône Méditerranée and tidal Thames case studies, for example, have created engaging and effective websites.

6.3.2 Methods and tools for active involvement

Previous sections have highlighted several tools for the 'active involvement' of stakeholders, in particular

Box 6.2 Public surveys for the Rhône Méditerranée RBMP

Two large surveys were carried out for the 2009 RBMP. The Rhône Méditerranée district followed a national approach for these surveys and more generally for its public consultation on the RBMP.

The first survey, in 2005, focused on significant water issues and the work programme for preparing the district's RBMP. Before this first consultation, none of France's river basins had had experience in public consultation, and they decided to try different methods so as to compare results. For example, the Rhine-Meuse RBD, one of the smallest river basins, mass-mailed the questionnaire to inhabitants. The Rhône Méditerranée sent its questionnaire enclosed in information magazines distributed by regional and local authorities. An online version of the questionnaire was also available. This method aimed at focusing the consultation process at local level, but difficulties in involving local authorities prevented this from succeeding.

In the Rhône Méditerranée, 82 420 multiple-choice questionnaires were returned (most in paper versions); in addition, 204 comments were received via email and letter. As Rhine-Meuse RBD collected the highest share of completed questionnaires, it was decided at national level that in all river basins, the second round of questionnaires would be distributed directly to citizens via mail.

The second survey focused on the draft RBMP. In the Rhône Méditerranée district, 6.3 million questionnaires were distributed. The paper questionnaire only had multiple-choice questions; an online version contained these questions as well as an additional section for open comments. A telephone survey complemented the questionnaire, to ensure that questionnaire responses were representative. In total, 67 123 responses were received (61 160 answers to the paper questionnaire, plus 5 963 answers online), including 2 244 open comments.

For both surveys, a website was a tool to provide information on the river basin and the RBMPs, and thus to support public input. In 2005, the most consulted page focused on 'understanding the pressures in the Rhône Méditerranée river basin'.

In the end, the cost of the surveys was sharply criticised; moreover, many questionnaires for the second survey in Rhône Méditerranée were not delivered. A further issue is that the questionnaires used in 2005 and 2008 were conceived as simple tools, organised by topics reflecting common concerns (e.g. water and health, functioning of aquatic environments, water and economic activities, floods and fair water management). This approach, along with the use of closed questions, was criticised as being overly simplistic and not providing quality input for the RBMP: indeed, the survey results did not significantly affect the plan.

For the second RBMP cycle, two surveys are also planned in the French RBDs. In 2012, the questionnaire for the Rhône Méditerranée was only available online: based on the first RBMP cycle's experience, the Rhône Méditerranée decided to focus rather on web tools. The online questionnaire used open questions for each significant issue. The number of respondents was however much lower than for previous questionnaires — about 500 people — perhaps also due to the more complex questionnaire. An online forum complemented the survey; about 170 people participated in this event.

their participation via advisory panels, committees and forums. Several initiatives were developed with the aim of encouraging active involvement from members of the general public. These were not always successful.

In northern Portugal, the authorities sponsored four workshops with themes such as water and art, with the goal of bringing people with wider or different interests into the discussion, and to encourage them to participate in workshops focused on the RBMP itself. However these activities attracted fewer participants than expected; in the second RBMP cycle, the administration intends to attempt similar activities, modifying the approach where needed (e.g. organising meetings at a time of day more conducive to PP).

In Italy, an annual 'Lagoon festival' provides a forum to discuss the natural and historical heritage of the northern Lagoon, as well as to highlight examples of the kinds of activities planned for the park. While the festivals did raise awareness about the northern Lagoon, it is not clear if they did likewise for the park proposal.

In Germany, water workshops at local level provide information on measures for the implementation

of the RBMP; it appears, however, that these events focus more on disseminating information than on encouraging participation in decisions.

In a couple of case studies, organisers held one-on-one meetings with stakeholders: this was the case in Venice, where the main stakeholders were consulted, and also for the tidal Thames, where individual meetings were used to bring in knowledge from all stakeholders. In both cases, these bilateral meetings were announced publicly. However, one-on-one meetings risk compromising the transparency of discussions and might favour some stakeholders over others.

The case studies found very few examples of the use of social media, defined here as interaction among people where they can create, share, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. In Poland, public meetings were held via web streaming, but apparently few people followed these. In northern Portugal and in Poznań, the authorities used Facebook, but this does not seem to have significantly affected the participation process.

6.3.3 Facilitation

A facilitator has been defined as an 'individual who enables groups and organisations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. He or she is a 'content neutral' party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting, can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work' (Doyle, M. in Kaner et al., 2007). Thus far, research has found that professional facilitation was used in at least three case studies: northern Portugal, for some meetings; the Matarraña; and the tidal Thames.

In northern Portugal, interviewees noted that the professional facilitator used in some meetings helped to encourage participants to put forward their views for discussion. The facilitator also had to manage heated debates. In the tidal Thames case study, the facilitator moderated large meetings, trained organisers in facilitation techniques and helped them to design and take forward the participation process.

A good example of facilitation is the work of the ECODES foundation in the Matarraña case study. Foundation staff have been providing support and facilitation for a consensus-building approach for over 10 years. ECODES promoted the approach and designed the process. It also fulfils the important function of coordination between the organisations involved.

6.3.4 Creating effective tools

There are many PP tools available. Their effectiveness depends to a great extent on when and how they are used — it is difficult to claim that certain methods and tools are inherently better than others.

Box 6.3 Using 'pop-up workshops' to gather public ideas for the tidal Thames

The aim of 'pop-up workshops' is to take engagement to the community, rather than trying to bring everyone together in one place at one time, in a traditional group or workshop.

The concept of the pop-up workshop originated in retail, where available locations (empty shops or spaces) are used for temporary sales activities, restaurants or launches. This characteristic of 'here today, gone tomorrow' lends a particular appeal, making it possible to create a unique environment that engages people and generates a feeling of relevance and interaction.

Members of the YTT team set up their pop-up workshops at events being held in the area, such as volunteering days and local community fairs. They put up posters and handed out leaflets about the YTT area and the purpose of the catchment plan, and invited people at the event to ask questions, make suggestions or fill in a short form (a 'blank' template — see Box 6.1), with their ideas about what issues should be included in the catchment plan and any proposed solutions to these issues.

The forms completed at these events were added to the online list of topics and solutions, and the information was used to map issues in the catchment and to inform decision-making.

The events were considered to have been extremely successful in creating a space to engage with people on their own terms, and in a novel and entertaining way.

Some of the most important factors influencing effectiveness are as follows.

- **Relevance to context.** The method needs to be appropriate to the issues and audience. The use of maps in the development of the VTT plan in Hungary provided a visual prompt for people to discuss matters of significance to them: the location of the retention basins and flooding of farmland.

- **Resources and capacity of the lead institutions or their contractors.** The Rhône Méditerranée authorities involved the communications team of the river basin agency to manage an extensive communications campaign. However, often significant resources are not essential: the YTT 'pop-up workshops' were effective because they took the discussion to places where participants felt at home and able to talk about the issues. The workshops were easy to organise, didn't require any infrastructure, and could be run by just two people in each location.

- **Skills and experience of those using or delivering the tool.** The facilitation discussion spotlights the importance of having skilled people run the participation processes. Organisations responsible for developing river basin plans sometimes believe that organising participation does not require a specific skill set. In some cases, like the VTT plan in Hungary, the team appears to have built up its own expertise in engagement over the years in which the plan was being developed. However, in most cases, the PP needs to be completed in a shorter period, which doesn't leave time for 'learning on the job'.

- **The importance of face-to-face engagement.** Face-to-face meetings between the institutions leading the planning process and stakeholders or local communities in affected areas are often critical in terms of building trust. This was mentioned by a representative of a Portuguese NGO, who felt that the organisation of activities at local level was essential for the openness of the process. Similarly, direct contact between technical staff who had developed proposals for the plan with local communities and the farmers in the Tisza encouraged more open discussions about the options. This is not to say that face-to-face engagement is always better than other methods such as online participation, but that it must be included in the mix of tools.

- **Different tools will often be needed to engage different types of stakeholder or members of the public.** One example is social media: while extremely popular with some, certain other groups are more likely to pick up information from more traditional media like newspapers or the radio.

Flora in the Venice Lagoon © Venice City Council. Photography competition: The seasons of the Lagoon — landscape, flora and fauna (*Le stagioni della Laguna — paesaggio, flora e fauna*), 2007

7 Public participation outcomes

Previous sections of this report focused on the process of PP. As noted in the introduction, this is due in part to the information available, as in most cases, the implementation phase had not started or was only starting at the time of writing. The case studies nonetheless provide some information regarding 'intermediate outcomes': stronger networks and increased trust among participants, and improvements to final plans (based on the approach set out in the introduction and on Carr et al. (2012)). Moreover, sectoral participation in implementation is another intermediate outcome of note. Less information is available on outcomes in terms of the final impacts and results of the plans — this is seen in only one case study, the Tisza River basin.

7.1 How the participatory process affects final plans and programmes

Overall, participation can influence plans for water management in the following ways:

- shaping the issues to be addressed;
- improving the information on which the plan is based;
- shaping the measures and suggesting new ones for inclusion;
- shaping the plan itself.

Flora in the Venice Lagoon © Venice City Council. Photography competition: The seasons of the Lagoon — landscape, flora and fauna (*Le stagioni della Laguna — paesaggio, flora e fauna*), 2007

Regarding the issues to be addressed, the WFD calls for public consultation on the 'significant issues' for each RBMP. Moreover, the Aarhus Convention calls for public information and participation early in the process in Article 6. In both the Rhône Méditerranée and the northern Portugal case studies, it appears that participation at the early stage of RBMP preparation influenced the issues to be addressed: in northern Portugal, for example, new information was provided (on alien species, for instance), shaping the plan itself. These case studies suggest that strong participation is particularly valuable at the start of the process. In both cases, meetings were held at this stage to discuss significant issues. In the Rhône Méditerranée, a survey was also sent to inhabitants: it appears, however, that discussions in the river basin committee had a stronger influence than the survey results.

Several case studies also identified examples where participation shaped measures for implementation. In northern Portugal, input clarified issues, corrected data, and resulted in changes in some of the measures, leading, for example, to more realistic time schedules and goals to take into account the reduced financing due to the economic crisis. In Poznań, citizen input led to the addition of several elements (the temporary management of an abandoned urban area, the construction of pedestrian bridges, and the development of a park area) to the plans for the Warta River flowing through the city.

The role of participation appears to have been particularly strong in Hungary: many more meetings were held for the Tisza River flood control works than in any other case study. Discussions helped to identify the location of water retention basins, in particular those for the first round of construction, and in one case resulted in the addition of a site not previously considered. Participation also influenced the approach for compensating farmers affected by these basins. Here, then, the process shaped the measures and, to some degree, the plan itself.

In two case studies, however, the final 'plan' is still in preparation and thus the influence of participation is not clear. For the tidal Thames, the role of the catchment plan process itself concerned participants, who did not have a clear idea how the output would be used in the overall process for the second RBMP for the Thames RBD. Defra and the Environment Agency have since indicated that input will be used in forthcoming phases of work and discussion for the RBMP. In Venice, the participatory process led to better understanding of the proposal, and informal agreements on how it would be implemented were produced.

7.2 Strengthening networks and building trust

In several case studies, participation led to some measure of better understanding and trust among stakeholders. This was observed over the course of the meetings held in northern Portugal, for example, as well as for the state advisory panel in Thuringia.

Participation can also help to overcome opposition and strengthen the buy-in for a final plan. An example is the flood control plan for the Tisza River basin in Hungary, which faced potential opposition from local authorities as well as farmers. In this case, participation proved to be crucial. (Apparently, difficulties have arisen in the implementation phase, however: one approach towards securing agreement was to offer support for municipal and other infrastructures, and some of the projects agreed were not funded, partly owing to financial issues arising from the economic crisis).

Other case studies also show that participation led to greater acceptance and 'buy-in'. In Venice, participation appears to have strengthened acceptance on the part of stakeholders and perhaps members of the public who previously were wary of the park proposal. However, those who strongly opposed the proposal at the start did not change their position over the course of the process.

Greater 'buy-in' is an important result in the Matarraña River case study. But this example shows that networks of trust and cooperation can take many years to establish (see Box 7.1). It is important that initiatives to build networks that are started within the context of a time-limited planning process like the RBMP be encouraged and supported as far as possible after the plan has been completed, in order to allow the progress achieved to be consolidated.

Box 7.1 Matarraña: strengthening trust and cooperation

Matarraña owes much of the trust and cooperation that exist in the region to work done over 10 years ago to build consensus in an area with an intense conflict over water management.

The SMI approach was promoted in the Matarraña area by ECODES, a private non-profit-making foundation. The initiative was launched in January 2002, when 38 respected local people were invited by ECODES to sign a statement of principles for building a shared vision for the Matarraña. The main principle is recognition of the legitimacy of different positions held by people and organisations in the area.

The 38 people working on the SMI held meetings with a whole range of organisations (people affected by the water management works, communities of irrigators, farmers' unions, environmentalists, etc.) to hear their views, clarify their interests and objectives in relation to the use and management of water, identify and explore points of agreement between stakeholders, and identify and catalogue areas where their views diverged. The SMI was not perceived to be replacing or opposing other simultaneous initiatives to bring people together.

After four months, a list of the interests and positions of the different groups was drawn up. All the organisations and groups that had contributed were invited to the event of the list presentation. Participants were asked to specify which of the positions they could sign up to, and this formed the basis for building a common platform for the management of the Matarraña River over the next three years.

This process encouraged dialogue between the different sectors and merged interests. A cooperation agreement signed in 2005 recognised that 'the people of Matarraña are able, as worthy heirs of our ancestors and leaving aside any differences of opinion, to find solutions that we can all agree on' (Fresneda Agreement, 2005).

The consensus-based approach has been supported by the Hydrological Confederation of the Ebro (Confederación Hidrográfica del Ebro (CHE)). From 2006, CHE developed the River Basin Plan for the Ebro RBD (Plan Hidrológico del Ebro) in order to comply with the requirements of the WFD.

Project meeting for the Poznań case study, Poland © KuiperCompagnons

7.3 Stakeholder cooperation on implementation

Another potential outcome of participation is stakeholder support for measures affecting their sectors, including a role in the implementation of some measures. Sectoral integration is indeed viewed as a key objective for participatory processes.

In several case studies, the agriculture sector played an important role in stakeholder discussions. In Thuringia, this sector has also been involved in an initiative to support water management goals; in addition, state bodies responsible for agriculture and water have worked closely together (see Box 7.2). By contrast, in the Rhône Méditerranée case study, the agricultural sector was critical of the RBMP and felt that their concerns had not been adequately addressed: as a result, representatives of the sector voted against the plan in the basin committee. This outcome raises a question about the extent to which the sector will support implementation of RBMP measures that affect agriculture.

While this study has not focused on agriculture, this sector is of particular concern: the Commission's review of the first round of RBMPs notes that this sector is identified as a significant pressure in 90 % of the plans.

Although conflict over water resources sometimes appears to pit agricultural users against other stakeholders, evidence from the Matarraña River case study shows that these differences are not intractable. A careful process that started by giving all those involved the confidence that their views have been heard and understood paved the way for initial agreements and subsequently for a joint plan of action.

Box 7.2 Cooperation on agriculture and water protection in Thuringia

In Thuringia, the agricultural sector participates in a working group on water protection (*Gewässerschutzkooperation*), which brings together selected farming enterprises, technical consultants and the state institutes for agriculture, geology and the environment. The goal is to carry out studies and provide advice on key issues for agriculture and water, including nitrogen management and soil erosion. Furthermore, a group within the regional agricultural association (*Bauernverband*) brings together practitioners from across the state and develops positions, which are then represented in the Water Advisory Council.

A separate working group in Thuringia's state government brings together representatives from authorities responsible for agriculture and water authorities in Thuringia and from their respective technical divisions. A similar group at national level in Germany brings together state officials from across the country who work on agriculture and water; in Thuringia, the working group considers avenues for the application of approaches suggested at national level.

8 Conclusions

The review of these eight case studies identified good practices in PP, which provide relevant lessons for other water-planning and management processes. The report has also highlighted issues that can significantly affect the degree of success — in terms of the process itself and, provisionally, the intermediate outcomes — of particular practices or approaches in different locations, in particular, governance and institutional context. This final section seeks to spotlight good practices from the case studies overall, and to pinpoint issues for consideration when developing PP in water management in the future.

8.1 Key findings

Institutional context

- The institutional context in which participation takes place will play a key role, in terms of **who determines the participatory process** and how it is planned and implemented. The WFD provides a common approach for water management across Europe. In RBMP preparation, however, the institutional context reflects national approaches and can vary greatly. Although the WFD requires trans-boundary planning, public participation approaches so far have focused on the local to national scale. Competent authorities throughout Europe have different histories, approaches and processes. Moreover, it is clear that the institutional context is continually evolving, and the WFD requirements for PP are beginning to change institutional approaches in many countries, as reflected, for example, in the increased institutional integration seen in France and Germany.

- Participatory processes need to take account of the **multilevel nature of water governance**, as well as the need for links between natural boundaries (river basins and catchments) and administrative boundaries. Where this is achieved, participation processes are likely to be more effective, and are viewed as more relevant.

- A key element of water governance is the fact that a **wide range of sector interests** are at play in discussions. Good water governance must bear environmental concerns in mind, well balanced against justified interests of economic sectors like agriculture, energy or transport. Stakeholder dialogue is a key element in policy integration of environmental, economic and social interests. While some stakeholders may view water in an economic light, as a commodity, it should be viewed, along with other ecosystem services, as a public good in the context of its use to society as a whole. This has to be reflected and secured in the debate and resulting decisions as good water governance entails finding workable compromises between conflicting interests.

Approaches to public participation

- **Formal participation mechanisms** such as stakeholder committees, councils or panels and written consultation processes are important for ensuring open and transparent discussions, inviting different views, and focusing these discussions into an efficient decision process. It is vital that a clear process be set up, which accommodates controversial views and allows all parties to be active in the process. It must be clear, right from the early stage of the process, at which level and with what role stakeholders and members of the public are involved and how their contributions will be used at each stage: from influencing the scope of the discussion to how input is taken up in final decisions. The timetable and roadmap of the process must be transparent and clearly communicated as well as any follow-up processes.

- **Involving members of the wider public** appears to have proved more difficult than engaging with organised stakeholders. This is a common problem for planning processes, as the more strategic plans can seem vague or abstract to non-specialists, the more detailed plans are complex and incomprehensible to the layman. Those organising PP processes should make the issues involved as tangible and concrete as possible, and should be clear and open about what is at stake and what participants can expect to get out of their involvement.

- An important element in terms of involving members of the public is producing **clear, non-technical information**. Information provided to participants by most water authorities still tends to take the form of fairly detailed technical reports rather than information tailored to non-technical audiences.

- The WFD calls for consultation on key documents in the preparation of RBMPs, including the draft plans themselves. While this is a necessary step, **active involvement** — and in particular, encouraging involvement of members of the public — calls for additional approaches to consultation. This issue makes it more difficult and time-consuming for non-specialist stakeholders or members of the public to participate, and means that they may not be able to make an effective contribution if they are unclear about ongoing issues and relevant options for action.

- **Trust and transparency in the participation process and in those leading it is generally achieved through practical measures**, as when authorities and their technical staff engage directly in face-to-face discussions and provide direct feedback and tangible evidence of how these discussions have influenced the development of the plan, for instance by producing modified maps that reflect proposals put forward by stakeholders and members of the public. It has to be stressed that the build-up of trust needs a long-term engagement and continuous, open and credible communication in the participation process.

Tools

- The case studies showed that many of the lead institutions employed familiar **methods for engaging stakeholders** and members of the public, and that the degree of effectiveness of these methods depends as much on the way in which they are used as on the methods per se. The way methods are used includes resources deployed, skills and experience of the organisers, and their willingness to improve practices in response to feedback from participants. Similarly, new methods and tools were sometimes transformative, but only when they were used effectively.

- **The use of independent facilitators in participation events** like committee and council meetings or workshops can increase trust in the process. The HarmoniCOP handbook (Ridder et al., 2005, pp. 30–31) emphasises the importance of this role. Facilitators also bring skills in objective identification, sequencing participation processes and managing conflict that can help to avoid common pitfalls. In some countries, lead organisations appear to be sceptical about the value of facilitation. It might be useful to enhance the understanding of what facilitation is and the benefits it offers.

- **There is no common or 'right' set of tools for PP:** all case studies developed their own sets of tools, although there is evidence of organisations leading participation processes adopting methods and approaches used in other places. These lessons learned from others can be a useful way of improving participation. One example is the use of the River Contract model developed in France, in a different institutional context in Spain.

- **Tools that are targeted to specific audiences** are likely to be more effective.

- In all but one of the case studies, **participation led to changes in the plans** under consideration. Participation in early stages in particular has influenced plans.

8.2 Good practice

The case studies confirm that the principles of good practice for PP apply as much to water management as to other areas. Water management authorities with less experience of involving stakeholders and the public in planning and decision-making need not feel that they have to start from scratch. They should draw on the wealth of existing guidance and experience, both for water management and related sectors. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and guidance is needed. The case studies show a wide range of approaches which generally seem to have succeeded. However, similar approaches did not always succeed in the same way, but rather reflected regional differences in perception. Therefore the methodology for PP might need to be adapted to national, regional and local circumstances, in which region-specific aspects of culture, tradition and priorities are taken into account.

The case studies, however, highlight several common important features of good practice participation.

- Starting participation **early in the process**. This was seen most clearly in France and northern Portugal, where stakeholders — and in France, a large number of inhabitants — were able to influence the issues addressed in the RBMPs.

In northern Portugal, the 'journeys' that led to meetings in different towns played an important role at the stage of identifying significant issues. By contrast, it appears that discussion and comments later on at the draft RBMP stage in France, northern Portugal and Germany led to smaller, technical changes and improvements. Although not all changes at this stage were minor: in northern Portugal, input from authorities and stakeholders showed that certain measures could not viably be applied during the economic crisis.

- **Being clear about what the participation process involves** and how contributions from stakeholders and members of the public will be used. In France and Portugal, PP was clearly structured around the stages of river basin planning, and authorities explained how participation would feed into decision-making. While the overall planning process was the same in Germany, participants were less clear about how their contributions would be used.

- **Mapping stakeholders in order to take account of diverse interests and priorities**. Stakeholders and members of the public will have different elements to contribute to the planning process: those developing the plans will need to understand the values, priorities and concerns of the public regarding the management of the water environment, but only some stakeholders will be able or willing to provide detailed input on technical issues. In both Poznań and north Portugal, the processes were designed to allow for different kinds of participation by different kinds of public. The issues at stake also can vary widely depending of the characteristic of the basin. An intensely urbanised inland area, for example, has a different set of interests and stakeholders than a rural, agricultural dominated basin, or a coastal area, such as the Venice Lagoon, where recreational users, fishing, transport and upstream agricultural impacts meet.

- **Providing information relevant to different kinds of public**. In the Rhône Méditerranée case, for example, a website presented the RBMP process as well as key issues in non-technical language. Stakeholders are likely to be interested in understanding how issues and proposed measures will directly affect them.

- **Ensuring transparency of decision-making**. It should be clear to participants how their input will affect final decisions and in hindsight, how and why the comments have been taken on board (or not) in the final RBMPs. This was a concern for stakeholders in a couple of case studies, including the tidal Thames (where the link between the process and the 2015 RBMP was not clear) and Venice, where the process was perceived by some stakeholders as a one-way information approach rather than a two-way participatory process. In the case of the Tisza plan, as the process developed (and expanded beyond the original plan), authorities made sure to provide timely feedback to communities on how their contributions had been taken into account, thereby building trust in the process and its results. Being transparent about how decisions have been reached when there are conflicts between stakeholders fosters participation and acceptance of the process.

- **Using facilitation to reach a consensus**. In cases where there are strong differences in opinion among stakeholders, facilitation can help parties reach a consensus on issues of mutual benefit. This was noted particularly in the Matarraña case study.

8.3 Issues for future development of public participation in water management

Analysis in this report was restricted to assessing the case studies to find good examples and innovative approaches within the context of the participative processes under the existing water legislation. However, the field of PP and communication within societies is rapidly evolving, and the second round of RBMPs may already be seeing different approaches under development at regional and local levels.

The case studies studied here reveal several such aspects.

- **Dealing with participation at multiple scales**. When plans are developed at a large scale — as in most RBDs as well as in broad areas such as the Tisza River catchment in Hungary — a **multilevel process** with workshops and events across the territory can bring in local stakeholders and members of the public who might not otherwise participate. This was seen in the Tisza, the northern Portugal and the Rhône Méditerranée case studies.

- **Involving a wider public**. Engaging the general public in water management processes is often difficult: in many of the case studies, the main participants were from organised stakeholder groups. Some case studies, such

as the Rhône Méditerranée and the tidal Thames, suggested techniques for involving a wider public, for example through surveys, communication campaigns or novel 'pop-up' activities. However, other initiatives, such as the 'water natures' workshops in Portugal, were less successful. It is important for those leading participation processes to think realistically about what kind of involvement can be expected of members of the public, and to plan accordingly. A perceived conflict of interests, a controversial issue, or the sense that public values or concerns are being ignored can all motivate a high level of participation. But once these issues are resolved, most people's interest will taper off, and organised stakeholders are likely to remain involved in studying more detailed or technical issues. In the absence of conflict, lead organisations will need to find creative ways to periodically bring perspectives from the wider public into water-planning and management processes, while relying more on organised stakeholders for ongoing and more focused input.

- **Ongoing involvement in water management**. In several case studies, authorities have created permanent bodies that bring stakeholders together. The most prominent example is in France, where stakeholders have seats in the Comités de bassin, decision-making bodies for the RBDs. In Spain, district water councils are the permanent bodies for participation and decision-making where stakeholders are represented. In Germany and northern Portugal, stakeholders participated in advisory groups. In Italy, the city of Venice has an advisory group specifically for environmental and cultural NGOs. There is a risk, however, that these bodies may limit participation to a small group, or may become institutionalised and therefore no longer represent broader views. In both France and northern Portugal, the multilevel process counterbalanced this risk. In Italy, the consulta in Venice does not face the same risk, as it is open to new members — however, it is still limited to one stakeholder per sector.

- **Financial constraints** are likely to limit the more costly approaches to PP. There is often a trade-off between long-term benefit and higher costs and effort in the short term. PP requires money and time, and the benefits only become clear at a later stage (CIS Working Group 2.9, 2003). The water authorities for the Ebro RBD in Spain (CHE) expressed that they were unlikely to be able to run large-scale and intensive participation activities of the kind held for the first round of river basin planning.

Apart from the case studies analysed in this report, some authors describe PP, social innovation, citizen science and new approaches to communication as developmental stages of a society in transition towards sustainable development. There may be useful experiences from other approaches, such as social innovation, as well as new technology-enabled collective awareness platforms for direct democracy. A key concept of social innovation is the involvement and empowerment of citizens. A recent publication by the European Commission entitled 'Social Innovation and the Environment' (EC, 2014b), stated that one of the benefits that social innovation can bring compared to top-down structured processes is a higher level of trust towards public institutions. At the EU level, there is increasing interest in using social innovation in policy implementation. Research programmes on this issue are promoted under the auspices of, inter alia, the Innovation Union, the Seventh Framework Programme/Horizon 2020, and the European Social Fund. One example of EU financed research is the project entitled 'The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe' (TEPSIE) (Davies and Simon, 2013). This states that citizen engagement and public participation are terms which are often used interchangeably, referring to a broad range of activities which involves people in the structures of democracy.

Social media is acknowledged by the European Commission as an important potential facilitator of social innovation. In this regard, the potential of using ICT systems to underpin and support public participation and co-creation of knowledge is huge. The European Commission is funding a project on Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation (CAPS). This project involves ICT systems aiming to combine open, online social media, distributed knowledge and data in order to create awareness of problems and possible solutions, and enabling new forms of social innovation. Collective Awareness Platforms are expected to support, inter alia, the set-up of more public participatory democratic processes.

8.4 Future focus

This report has provided evidence from eight examples across Europe where PP has played a key role in water management. The review also highlights several topics for further attention.

- It would be beneficial to explore the links between active stakeholder involvement in the preparation of RBMPs and other water plans, and the subsequent role of these stakeholders in implementation, or more specifically, the influence of PP on certain categories of measures and elements in the management cycle. This involvement in measures would naturally be most relevant for institutional partners from sectors outside the environmental administration and would support the goal of strengthening policy integration in water management, highlighted by the EEA and the European Commission.

- Partly because of the timing of the case studies, it has not been possible to study the links between participation and eventual environmental, economic and social outcomes. This is a key area for greater attention, as has already been noted by other authors. Further studies could try to link active stakeholder involvement in the development of water plans with their subsequent involvement in RBMP implementation, as well as in the set-up of the plans of measures (PoMs), and subsequently in the resource management outcomes.

- As information systems and communication structures like interactive tools and social media are rapidly evolving, it is assumed that the current, second cycle of RBM planning and the accompanying PP make more use of these tools. The current study can only consider past developments, which have not taken up much of the current technical innovation in this field. Future studies could certainly take a different approach here and reflect on the use of water information systems, more distributed data approaches and possibly the consequences of the SIIF approach proposed by the Commission (EC, 2012b).

- The involvement of members of the public is often stated as a goal for PP, but the initiatives identified in the case studies have had mixed results. It would be useful to broaden the search field for good practices and innovative approaches to inform members of the public and to involve them in participatory processes. The first successful ECI, for instance, recently allowed EU citizens to stress their urgent interest and the policy relevance of universal access to water and sanitation in the EU. The Commission has reaffirmed the importance of ensuring an open and transparent approach to water management involving all actors including the public. A study following the future impacts of this specific initiative on the implementation of the WFD, and the ECI approach overall could bring fresh insight into the role of PP.

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List of abbreviations

ARH	Administração da Região Hidrográfica
CEP	Collingwood Environmental Planning
CHE	Confederación Hidrográfica del Ebro
CIS	Common Implementation Strategy
DREAL	Direction Régionale, de l'Environnement de l'Aménagement et du Logement
ECI	European Citizen's Initiative
ECODES	Ecologia y Desarrollo
EEA	European Environment Agency
FD	Floods Directive
GWP	Global Water Partnership
IKSE	International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe
INAG	Instituto da Água
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving
PoM	Plans of measures
PP	Public participation
QREN	Quadro de Referência Estratégico Nacional
RBD	River basin district
RBM	River Basin Management
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RBWM	Regional Board for Water Management
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information System

SDAGE	Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et de Gestion des Eaux
SIIF	Structured Implementation and Information Framework
SIWI	Stockholm International Water Institute
SMI	Social Mediation Initiative
TLUG	Thüringer Landesanstalt für Umwelt und Geologie
TMLFUN	Thüringer Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, Forsten, Umwelt und Naturschutz
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
VKKI	Vízügyi és Környezetvédelmi Központi Igazgatóság
VTT	Renewal of Vásárhelyi Plan
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
YTT	Your Tidal Thames

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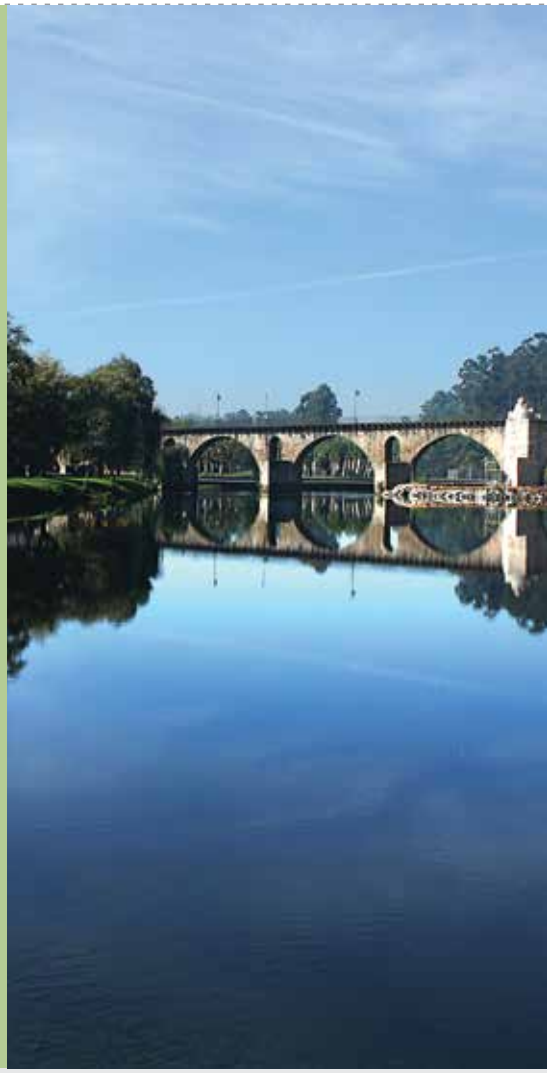

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