Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency Practice Guide

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Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency

Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency: Practice Guide

MNP publication number 550032007

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The Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency consists of the following three volumes:

- Main Document (550032007)
- Checklist (550032006)
- Practice Guide (550032009)

A Dutch edition is also available.

You can download the publications from the website www.mnp.nl/en or request your copy via email (reports@mnp.nl). Be sure to include the MNP publication number.

The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) functions as the interface between science and policy, producing independent assessments on the quality of the environment for people, plants and animals to advise national and international policy-makers.

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Contents

1. Introduction

If you have picked up this Practice Guide, then you must have reached the stage in your project where you are ready for some practical information. You know *what* you want to achieve with participation and now it is time to find out *how*.

This Practice Guide gives information about:
- selection of stakeholders
- selection of methods
- interactive workshops
- participation methods
- practical tips for participation projects

One of the most frequently asked questions about participation is: 'Who should we invite?' The answer sounds simple, 'It depends what you want to achieve', but that is not really a satisfactory answer. Chapter 2 of this Practice Guide deals with the selection of stakeholders and what methods are available for selecting stakeholders suitable for different purposes.

Chapter 3, on selection of methods, gives hints on how to arrive at the right method. Of course, this depends on your purposes but, even more than that, it depends on your ambitions for participation and the time and resources you have at your disposal.

Interactive workshops are introduced in chapter 4 as the basic form for participation activities. Techniques for interactive meetings (also known as facilitation techniques) can be used across the board. These are techniques which promote creativity through group interaction, but which also allow everyone to make their voice heard and their position clear. These techniques are therefore very important and will be dealt with at length.

There are a multitude of participation methods, as chapter 5 shows. They are 'total packages', which have all been designed for a particular situation and context, and for that reason none of them will be entirely suitable for MNP projects. These methods are often very intense and they are best suited to situations where participation is *the* main element of the project. For this reason it is advisable to work with experts in the field of participation and communication, so the methods are described briefly here to give you an impression of what they involve and where you can obtain further information.

Good process management is an important condition for a participation process to succeed, so chapter 6 offers practical tips for organising participation projects.

2. Selection of stakeholders

Many people inquire about a good method of selecting stakeholders. They are keen for everyone necessary to be involved in the process. Unfortunately, there is no standard method that can be applied to all situations. Here too you will be faced with various dilemmas and difficult choices. You will often have to follow your intuition. This chapter will, however, offer you a number of points to consider and suggestions for selection methods.

2.1 General points to consider

For participation to be a success, it is important that the participants chosen fit in with the aims of the project. These aims are divided into four main categories in the Guidance for Stakeholder Participation:

- quality aims (such as knowledge, values)
- instrumental aims (such as support, being known about)
- democratic aims (everyone can participate, representativeness)
- emancipation aims (such as empowerment of participants)

Suppose that the MNP is commissioned to evaluate the future of Dutch agriculture and the commissioning agents take the view that participation should be an important component of the project. There are various aims and aspired levels of participation conceivable for a project of this nature: to create support for future policy; to explore prospects or expectations about future developments, including the values at stake; and so on. It depends on your concrete objective and aspired level of participation, which people you should involve in the project. Proceeding from the aims listed above, there are a number of possible starting points for the search for the right participants:

- scientific and other knowledge
- stakes or interests
- values
- representativeness
- communication and social skills

To the extent that, for instance, different weights are given to knowledge, interests and values in the project, the composition and ratio of participants will also change. If, for example, you want to gather specific knowledge, representativeness and the representation of specific interests will be less important than other factors or perhaps not important at all. On the other hand, if you want to explore different perspectives, then knowledge and the representation of interests will play a lesser role.

The question still remains, however, as to who should and should not be invited. Project leaders often want to invite as complete a population of stakeholders as possible. That is usually impossible (because not all stakeholders are known), or unfeasible in practice (because it would make the process unworkable). Selective invitation does not have these disadvantages, but then you run the risk that important actors are (intentionally or unintentionally) excluded or feel that they have been excluded. One possible way out of this dilemma is to aim for qualitative representativeness: adequate representation of the field of stakeholders so as to involve the most typical, the most distinctive and the most influential positions. A selection like this would include the familiar middle-of-the-road representatives, and perhaps also a rather more peripheral but committed activist. However, this option is not always available: with issues which are the subject of much social debate, the MNP cannot permit itself to be too selective in who it invites, because support for its reports is at issue. For projects in which participation is a matter of major public concern, two participation routes can be mapped out: one which is open to everyone and to which a wide range of people are invited, and one where selected people are invited with a specific aim in mind.

Another important point is where you are going to start your search for participants: will you start with organisations and people, or will you take values or perspectives as your starting point and look for people who fit them? The danger with the first approach is that you will only reach the 'usual suspects' and possibly overlook important perspectives. We know from experience that 'the odd one out' in a participation process is often responsible for spurring on the process and can lift the interaction and quality of the discussion to a higher level.

For every participation process it is also important to pay sufficient heed to the diversity of the group. Even if the participants have something important in common (such as all being farmers), it is still essential that there are enough differences

between them to stimulate fruitful interaction. Then again, homogenous groups are to be recommended if you want to investigate a particular standpoint (for instance, to answer questions such as 'Why is the environmental movement opposing the proposed policy so fiercely, when at first sight it can be expected to benefit the environment?').

The communication and social skills of the individual participants are a further criterion that should not be underestimated. Can this person express himself well and can he communicate effectively with the people or organisation he represents? The Check List addresses this point.

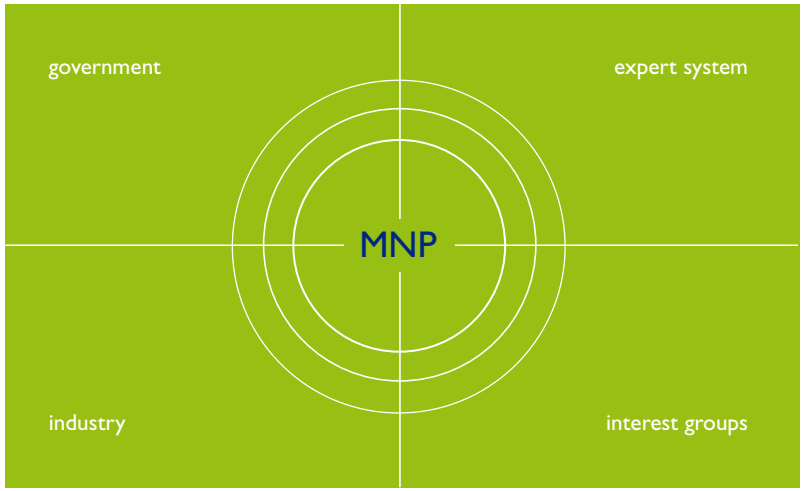
2.2 Mapping

A good tool to help in the selection of stakeholders is to map them out first. You can use the three criteria mentioned above (knowledge, interests and values) to perform all kinds of analyses on the participants. Examples of analysis schemes can be found in the Check List and in the Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication, but it is important to just try it yourself in a way that suits the problem you are trying to address. Here are a few suggestions:

- Put all the actors concerned on one or more hypothetical axes with, depending on the case, continua from local to global players, from typical defenders of the environment to economically oriented actors, from professionals to amateurs and so on. Try also to switch this around: think about possible value orientations and try to find a representative for them rather than the other way round.
- Map out the available knowledge in the field: on what subjects is there knowledge available; what kind of knowledge is it (scientific knowledge, knowledge gained from experience, etc.); who has this knowledge? Look also at areas where knowledge is lacking or insufficient.
- Divide the actors into different areas or spheres of interest: government actors, market parties, NGOs, scientists and any other groups that can be distinguished (see Check List 3.1).
- Distinguish between key players and more peripheral figures by placing them in two or three concentric circles. Knowledge can be a criterion for ranking, but so can power or values. Placing the various central-peripheral cards that you produce in this way on top of each other can clarify things a great deal.

There are various ways to do mapping. First, make use of the existing knowledge of the project team. Brainstorming about different perspectives and interests in connection with the problem (with the aid of interactive meeting techniques, for example) can take a group a long way. Compile a list of selection criteria together and draw up priorities with the group.

Figure 1: Example of arrangement of actors on a mind map.



2.3 Newspaper cuttings method

Analysing newspaper articles is another way to find out who the key stakeholders are and what their viewpoints are. You can look at the frequency with which certain groups are mentioned in the media and how their views are reported. However, this method cannot be used if the debate is not being conducted in the media or if some stakeholders are not given a chance to express their views. In that case it is advisable to use other sources as well. Remember too that the newspaper cuttings method can be very labour intensive (see also the Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication, Detailed Guidance, p. 19).

2.4 Argumentative analysis

Sometimes it will be necessary to study the participants' existing arguments and values in some detail before the start of the interactive sessions, for instance, to examine what the participation sessions could focus on, or to assess opportunities to approach the issues from particular positions. This is especially important where support and consensus are concerned. A useful tool in that case is to set out the various positions and arguments in a table. After all, when someone puts forward an argument, there are various, often implicit, elements behind it: a view of the problem or the solution to it, an ideal picture, a strategy, an image of potential coalition partners and opponents, etc. The table below is an example of this kind of analysis. Adapt the categories to suit the specific needs of your project. In the Check List to accompany the Stakeholder Participation Guidance (Table 3), you will find another example, which emphasises stakeholder identification.

Table 1 Analysis of arguments

Elements of arguments	Stakeholder 1	Stakeholder 2	Stakeholder 3	...
Definition of problem				
Aims/ Normative view				
Ideal situation				
Strategy for finding a solution				
Coalition partners				
Opponents				

Secondary information (newspaper articles, reports, press releases etc.) can also be put into the tables, as well as information obtained from interviews. Make sure you use all the knowledge available in the project team.

2.5 Involving stakeholders in the selection

It is advisable to opt for a formal selection process if your project is one where participation is the main objective and legitimacy plays an important role. Involving the main stakeholders is an option here, for instance, by using prior interviewing and/or snowball sampling (see the Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication, Detailed Guidance, p.18). Snowball sampling is a technique for finding participants by asking people who they think the stakeholders and key stakeholders are around a particular issue. The people mentioned by the people in the first sample are then asked the same question and this process is repeated until no new names are mentioned. This method is especially to be recommended if you have little idea of who the stakeholders are. Snowball sampling can also be used to ask about views on the substance of issues ('What do stakeholders think the interests of the other parties are?') or to search for key actors.

2.6 Random sampling

Demographic representativeness is especially important when members of the general public will be involved in a participation project, for instance, a project looking at the social desirability of certain trends. The MNP is not involved in projects like this very often, but for the sake of completeness they should be mentioned. To select 50 people for focus groups, for example, 5,000 invitations to participate may be sent to people selected at random from the register of births, marriages and deaths. The potential participants are asked to send in a reply form, giving information about their background and stating their reasons for wanting to take part. A selection is made from the replies based on certain socio-demographic criteria (gender, age, education, address, ethnicity). This is a common way to try to achieve a representative sample. It will, however, be clear that a significant pre-selection process by the participants themselves has taken place here, simply by the fact that they have put themselves forward for selection. Another option is to use the services of companies such as TNS NIPO, which already have huge databases of potential respondents and their socio-demographic data.

2.7 Summary of methods of stakeholder selection

The table below presents a summary of which methods of selection are suitable for different selection purposes.

Table 2 Methods of stakeholder selection

Selection method	Purpose of selection	Target group
Mapping, Newspaper cuttings method, Analysis of arguments	Mapping out different perspectives	As diverse as possible: e.g. farmers, town-dwellers, animal rights activists, business people, religious groups etc.
Snowball sampling	Involving stakeholders in the process	Stakeholders in general or principal stakeholders
Knowledge Mapping	Gathering knowledge	Experts and 'hands-on experts'
Selection from the register of births, marriages and deaths and other sources	Mapping out social preferences	Various groups: over-65s, school children, business people, people with limited education etc.
Random sampling	Legitimacy through representativeness	The general public

If you do not have time to work with one of these systematic approaches, make use of the knowledge already present in the project team. A group can go a long way with brainstorming on different perspectives on the problem (with the aid of the moderation method, see chapter 4). Draw up a list of selection criteria together and set priorities. Possible selection criteria to consider are: styles of thinking, perspectives and socio-demographic background.

3. Choosing the right form

There are many factors to be considered when choosing the right participation method and these have been dealt with in the last chapter. Choice of the right form will be determined not only by what your aims are but, even more important, by your aspired level of participation. For instance, if your desire to involve people in the assessment is motivated by democratic considerations, you could find yourself at the top (co-production) or the bottom (listening) of the participation ladder. Your position is dependent on the level of participation you aspire to. It is important, therefore, to decide on an aspired level of participation for your project and then to choose a suitable form for that.

This Practice Guide introduces the 'interactive workshop' as the basic form. Adapted to your situation, this form of workshop is almost universally usable and is particularly suitable for less ambitious participation schemes. Two important points here are frequency and time required. Are you planning a one-off activity or a series of workshops? How long will you or can you spend on it?

Apart from the practical considerations, this depends once again on your aims and aspirations. Co-production will need several workshops with rounds of feedback. It is important to allow enough time between workshops, but the participation process also has to run in time with the progress of the project. Try to make good plans in advance and then adjust them where necessary. Sometimes a short but intensive workshop will provide sufficient input into the project.

The participation methods described in chapter 5, are mainly to be found on the top half of the participation ladder. They are especially suitable when participation is being used for issues where there is a large measure of uncertainty and great public interest: complex problems in other words.

Table 3. Implications of participation for the MNP

	Aspired level of participation	Direction of communication	Forms of participation	Advantages	Disadvantages/pitfalls
Interactive	Co-decide	MNP <-> SH*	• Not very common in practice • Examples: joint management of nature databases and participation in IPCC working groups • The main target group is fellow scientists	• Optimal use of participants' resources • Fulfils democratic motives	• In extreme cases the stakeholders determine the content of MNP reports • MNP risks losing control
	Co-produce	MNP <-> SH	• Interactive scenario-development • Alternation of research and participation; research-led participation process • Use of participatory procedures)	• Increases commitment of participants • Reflective approach to co-production can make a major contribution to the production of knowledge • Ideally, generates support *and* produces knowledge	• Demands open-mindedness from the MNP • MNP has to commit to results to some extent, which is only possible if everyone is open to this • Intensive process • Participants' choice and quality of the facilitator are key factors for success
	Take advice Consult	MNP <- SH	• Interactive workshops for: - defining the problem - research design - conclusions • Bilateral sessions • Review of project design and conclusions - written reports - workshops • Themed workshops for knowledge production	• Can result in new perspectives • Highly goal-oriented approach. Can be put into action at key moments in a project	• Less easy for the MNP to steer the process; process can produce unintended results • Stakeholders may disagree with the framing; can lead to unrest • Difficult to guarantee transparency
Non-interactive	Listen	MNP <- SH	• Set up feedback channels • Keep an eye on the media • Receive complaints, protest and criticism	• MNP gets answers to questions it did not ask: prevents tunnel vision • MNP is able to draw attention to problems at an early stage	• Difficult to draw a line between where listening brings benefits and where it does not • Can be very time-consuming
	Study	MNP <- SH	• Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups	• Large numbers of stakeholders can be reached with relatively little effort • Information can be collected in a very targeted way	• A strong framing effect may occur: other factors which were not asked about may be relevant
	Inform	MNP -> SH	• Presentations	• Takes relatively little time and effort	• Can cause dissatisfaction among stakeholders • No opportunity to make a contribution, no 'real' participation
	No participation	MNP SH	None	• Project receives little attention. Under certain circumstances, this may be desirable	• No feedback, no utilisation of external sources of information, no legitimisation

*SH = stakeholders

4. Organising interactive workshops

The MNP will not be setting up large-scale participation projects very often. Organising interactive workshops is likely to make up the largest part of the participation activities at the MNP, which is why we have devoted a separate section to this subject. The practical tips in chapter 6 are, however, still useful for organising interactive workshops. The same advice holds good here too: attend to the process properly! The best way to make a workshop into an interactive workshop is to use techniques for participation meetings.

4.1 Techniques for participation meetings

Techniques for participation meetings come from the toolbox of those engaged in facilitating group processes. They originated in industry and adult education. Examples include written discussion, mind mapping and brainstorming. Nearly everyone has used post-it notes and cards in meetings at some time. A workshop or meeting structured in this way is known as a 'facilitated workshop' or 'moderated workshop'. The moderation method can be used for different types of meetings: from a team meeting through an interactive workshop to a scientific conference. Moderation can be used in each of the methods suggested in chapter 5.

The *moderation method* is an interactive form of process management. It is a collection of techniques that can be used at different stages of a process, each time to serve a specific purpose such as defining a problem, generating ideas and solutions, or reflection. These are techniques that aim to stimulate creativity, but also to allow everyone's voice to be heard and different positions to be made clear. As visualisation techniques are used a great deal, everyone is always kept informed and the discussion is well documented. Ideally the process is well-structured for the convenience of the participants.
Some form of written discussion is usually involved, such as everyone being given three cards on which to write something. The advantage of this is that people who would not have said anything can contribute and extrovert types who talk a lot can be curbed, which is why these techniques are suitable for steering group processes in the right direction. This method of working and a good facilitator will ensure that everyone is actively involved in the workshop and that more support is generated for the results.

Figure 2 The moderation cycle (Seifert 2002)

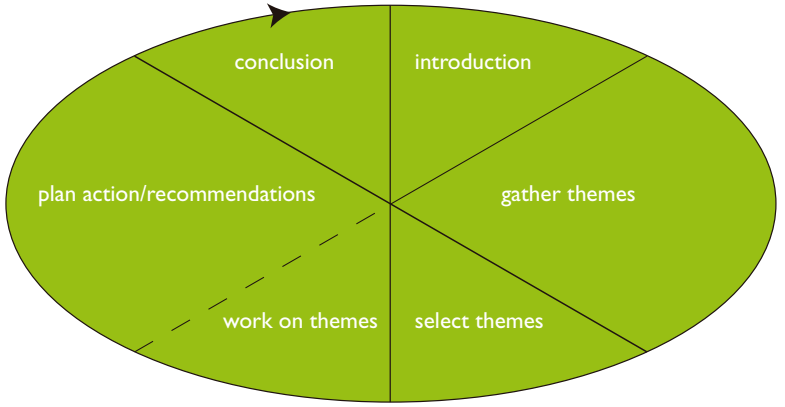


Table 4 The moderation cycle

Phase	Aim
Introduction	• explain the rules of play for the day • make expectations explicit • formulate aims • create a positive work climate
Gather themes	• plunge into the theme • brainstorm about the theme • cluster different aspects of the theme Select themes: • select the most important themes on which to work through the following steps
Work on themes	• gather more information • analyse the problem • generate solutions • take decisions where appropriate
Plan action/recommendations	• plan concrete implementation of the generated solutions • establish responsibilities and commitment
Conclusion	• reflect on the group process • evaluate the session

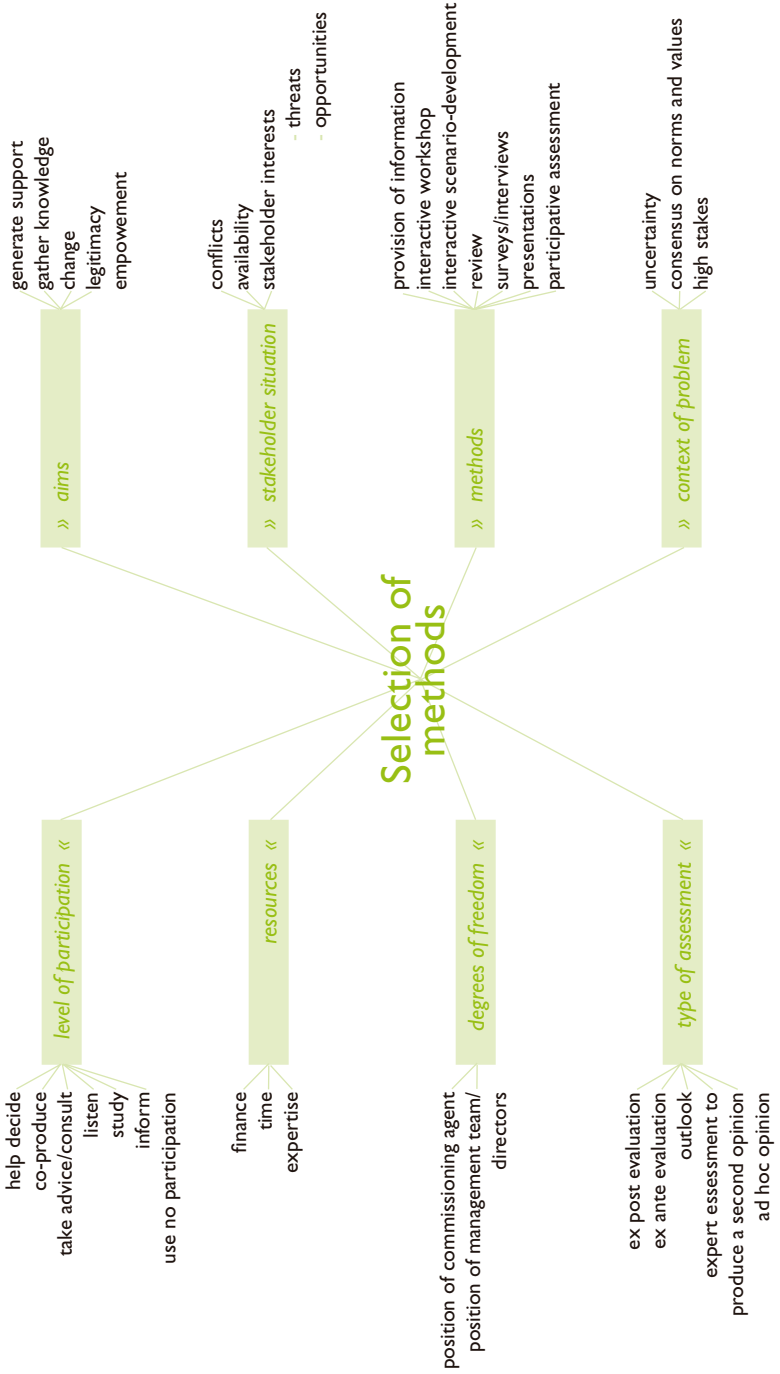


Figure 3: Example of a Mind Map

The moderation method is simple and is also suitable for use on a small scale. Some experience is required for larger meetings, but this experience can be gained on 'safe' territory, for instance, by leading an internal MNP meeting using the moderation method.

This cycle forms the basic structure of each meeting or workshop led using the moderation method. There are a number of tools that the facilitator can work with for each phase: cards, topic storage systems, mind mapping, SWOT analyses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and others.

In practice you do not have to go through all the phases of the moderation cycle. It depends on the purpose of the meeting: if, for example, the meeting has been called to explore a problem, the group can spend much more time on the brainstorming phase.

Brainstorming techniques are important to mobilise, bring together and document the knowledge available among the participants. One example of a brainstorming technique is mind mapping. A mind map is a visual map of thoughts or ideas. One topic is at the centre, and from that hub lines go out to all kind of sub-topics. This method enables you to identify many aspects of the issue. It is a simple way to organise ideas, give the participants insight and present information in a convenient form. All the information is available at a glance. Figure 1, for example, represents the mind map underlying this Practice Guide. The main theme, 'How do I choose a suitable participation method?', is linked to a large number of variables that help to determine that choice. Choice of the right brainstorming technique depends on group size, what the problem is and how familiar the facilitator is with the technique. There are other similar techniques too, such as 'concept mapping' or 'cognitive mapping', and special software programs are available (e.g. MindManager).

As well as thorough preparation, a suitable facilitator is crucial. In fact, anyone can learn but some people are more suitable than others. The more that is at stake in the workshop, the more important it is to have an experienced and independent facilitator. The more open the content of the process, the more important it is that the facilitator has and maintains good control over it. He or she must be aware of what is going on between the participants, both in terms of the substance of the issues and in terms of relationships. Any underlying power struggles or implicit conflicts must be handled with tact and care, so that they do not interfere with

the group process and communication is kept open. If problems of this type are anticipated, it may be best to work with two process facilitators. Then one can lead the discussion, while the other visualises, that is writes up and clusters what has been said.

4.2 Getting the participants actively involved

Interactive workshops come in many different forms and have many different aims but they have one thing in common: the people attending are invited to participate actively. The workshop should be designed in such a way that the participants are encouraged to contribute their own values, knowledge and opinions. Organisers can achieve an optimal workshop outcome by:

- creating trust,
- stimulating creativity, and
- attending to the welfare of the participants.

Trust and creativity are closely linked. When people are given the opportunity to get to know each other in a safe environment, this will also help stimulate creativity. In an ideal situation no-one should be afraid that his or her question or idea will come across as stupid. Creativity techniques often have a playful element: making group collages, drawings, role play, describing situations with Playmobil figures, to name just a few. These light-hearted methods can elicit information that is not so easy to put into words, but a lot of trust and confidence is needed for people to allow themselves to submit to this. Organisers with limited experience in leading workshops are often rather resistant to these playful forms, because they are afraid that the participants will think that they are not being taken seriously, or that the participants will be disinclined to join in, or that the techniques will not produce enough 'real' results. However, a good facilitator will almost always manage to dispel the initial resistance and scepticism. A half-hearted use of these methods, on the other hand, can have the opposite effect to what is intended, certainly if it is clear that you, the organiser, do not entirely believe in it. This is why participation games have to be led by someone who has some experience with them and, even more important, is wholeheartedly behind them.

Another point to consider is the physical needs of participants. These are often given insufficient attention at workshops. Participants sometimes have to sit on chairs listening to presentations for hours. The human body was not designed for that. No-one has such a long attention span. As a result, the way many workshops are designed makes people tired and passive. It is easy to understand why workshops are set up like this: after all, the organisers want to make the best possible use of the short time available. However, they fail to take sufficient account of people's physical and mental limits. You should try not to make that mistake, by keeping passive activities (such as presentations) as short as possible, and planning in plenty of breaks, opportunities to get fresh air and move around, and refreshments.

4.3 Working with large groups

In theory all the advice in this Practice Guide applies to working with large as well as small groups. With large groups, however, it is extra important to find ways of working that give all the participants the opportunity to make a contribution. Splitting up the group into several parallel groups is one option. Another good idea is to set up a central information point (known as a 'market square'), where people can get information about what is going on in the other groups at any time. If project leaders decide to do this, however, there must be enough facilitators to facilitate the different groups. Some participation methods are especially suitable for large groups, such as the 'open space conference' (see chapter 5).

Useful literature for organising workshops

General:

- Chambers, R. (2002), Participatory Workshops. A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities. London: James & James.

- Lipp, U. & Will, H. (1996), Das große Workshop-Buch. Konzeption, Inszenierung und Moderation von Klausuren, Besprechungen und Seminaren. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag.

The moderation method:

- Seifert, J.W. (2002), Visualization, Presentation, Moderation. A Practical Guide to Successful Presentation and the Facilitation of Business Processes. Weinheim: Wiley. *(short and easy to use)*

- Kwakman, F.E. & Postema, A.T.C. (1996), Het team als probleemoplosser. De moderatiemethode. Deventer: Kluver Bedrijfsinformatie. (*the Dutch-language book*)

- Klebert, K. et al. (2002). Die Moderationsmethode. Das Standardwerk. Hamburg: Windmuehlen-Verlag. (*the most complete manual in German)*

- Various training agencies in the Netherlands offer training courses in the moderation method.

Games and activities:

- Hamsink, M. & Hagedoorn, N. (2006), Beweging in je brein. Zestig werkvormen voor inspirerende trainingen, workshops en presentaties. Den Haag: Academic Service.

Working with large groups:

- Bunker, B. & Alban, B.T. (1997), Large Group Interventions: Engaging the Whole System for Rapid Change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publ.

5. Participation methods

Scores of methods are described in the literature on participation. Only a small selection is presented in this chapter, with particular emphasis on how they can be used by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. NB: the methods presented here do require some time for preparation and working through.

Table 4. Methods for stakeholder participation

Section	Method	Suitable for	Target group	Participation level	Advantages	Pitfalls
5.1	Focus groups	Purposeful discussion of a problem	Small homoge-neous groups (max. 15)	Consultation	Highly focused on one theme	Dissatisfaction about the focus can arise. Good leadership of discussion necessary
5.2	Delphi method	Integrating different types of knowledge, outlooks	Mainly scientists, no restrictions on number	Consultation	Not time-critical	Highly focused on scientific expertise
5.3	Scenario work-shops	Scenario-development, outlooks	Experts and 'hands-on experts' from various quarters	Co-production	Brings together different types of knowledge	Strong connection with the project necessary
5.4	Future workshop	Defining problems, generating policy options	Medium-sized groups, diverse public	Consultation	Can be completed in a day	Can get stuck in one phase. Requires strict control by the facilitators
5.5	Open space confer-ence	Defining problems, knowledge production, setting agendas	Suitable for very large groups and diverse public	Co-production	Leaves room for issues of current concern. Very flexible	Demands a lot of experience from process supervisors
5.6	Group model building	Gathering knowledge about causal connections. Modelling	Experts and 'hands-on experts', parties who are directly involved	Co-production	Optimal use of available knowledge	Risk of too much data, becoming unmanageable
5.7	Group decision support	Generating, compiling, categorising, prioritising and developing ideas and strategies	Small to medium-sized groups	Consultation or Co-production	Flexible and can be used in variety of situations, generates a lot of ideas fast	Limits to scope of theme, tendency to tool-based design

5.1 Focus groups

What is it?
Focus groups are group discussions which focus on a specific topic. The method comes originally from market research and is often used to survey opinions and collect information. A professional facilitator leads the debate. Focus groups are suitable for exploring opinions and gathering information or additional information about a subject. Focus groups use group discussion. Group dynamics add value to the insights, as participants ask each other questions and the discussion contributes to opinion-forming.

What can it deliver?
Focus groups deliver qualitative information about a subject:
- Exploration of a subject, identification of new subjects
- Production of contextual information, backgrounds and motives of actors
- Interpretation of events and connections between events

Frequency and time required
Focus group sessions last about 2 hours. Depending on the theme, you will need 1 to 3 sessions.

When to use it
For
- identifying problems
- generating ideas (e.g. developing policy options)
- gathering information (e.g. exploring perspectives)
- evaluations (of policy, policy options, processes etc.)

When better not to use it
If
- the subject is highly controversial
- you want to persuade the participants of something or they want to learn something
- the aim is to reach a consensus
- the participants cannot or do not want to speak freely
- the theme is too broad
- the participants already know each other and there are tensions
- no trained panel chairman is available

Advantages
- The focus is on a single clearly defined theme.
- It is a small-scale, flexible and fairly economical method

Pitfalls
Individuals can dominate the course of the discussion. 'Group thinking' can occur. A good facilitator is necessary.

Participants
6-15 participants per group. Participants have a homogeneous background or share common characteristics (age, sector, interest etc.).

Points to consider
The right questions are very important. Are you learning what you want to learn and are the participants' questions to the point?

References

- Elliott, J. S. et al. (2005), Participatory Methods Toolkits. A Practitioner's Manual. Focus groups. Download from http://www.viwta.be/files/ToolkitFocusGroup.pdf
- Morgan, D.L. & Krueger, R.A. (1998), The Focus Group Guidebook. London: Sage.

5.2 Delphi method / Policy-oriented Delphi method (Policy Delphi)

What is it?
The Delphi method is an iterative process in which participants with a certain degree of expertise in a particular field are subjected as individuals to several rounds of questions. The aim is to arrive at a shared expert opinion on a particular field. Anonymity is an important element.
The participants are presented with statements in the different rounds (usually 3-4) to which they can respond. At the same time they can give feedback on how the previous round went. In this way lines of argument are well supported. A Delphi procedure can be conducted in writing or online. A face-to-face variant also exists, but the disadvantage of this is that the anonymity is lost.

The Policy-oriented Delphi method (Policy Delphi) follows the same principle, but the difference is that with Policy Delphi the aim is not consensus, but the exploration of different perspectives and arguments.

What can it deliver?

Ordinary Delphi:

- new ideas
- a shared expert opinion

Policy-oriented Delphi:

- overview of existing arguments and perspectives
- development of new policy options
- insight into desirability and feasibility of policy options

Frequency and time required

- Demands a certain amount of time. 3-4 rounds are probably necessary.

When to use it

For

- large degree of uncertainty in a scientific field
- complex problems with many conflicting opinions

When better not to use it If

- the intended participants do not have sufficient expertise
- there is a shortage of time and manpower

Advantages

- The anonymity gives people the courage to speak freely
- The written form guarantees that full due is given to everyone
- Views evolve and are properly supported by arguments
- Especially suitable for stakeholders with specialist knowledge

Pitfalls

- When participants are not diverse enough, a biased picture can develop
- Procedure demands a lot of the participants. Risk of premature drop out

Participants

- 10-50 participants

Ordinary Delphi:

- Experts (scientists and/or other specialists)

Policy-oriented Delphi:

- Stakeholders with vision and knowledge of issues

Points to consider

- Analysis of interim stages is time-consuming. The process can soon run up to several months.
- The Delphi method requires the trust of the participants when sensitive subjects are involved. Guarantee anonymity and confidentiality!

References

- Linstone, H. A. & Turoff, M, ed. (2002), The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications. Available from http://is.njit.edu/pubs/delphibook/

See also chapter III B.1: The Policy Delphi.

5.3 Scenario methods

What is it?

Stakeholders use scenario methods to explore potential future scenarios and identify key themes. A great deal of emphasis is placed on policy choices, as well as events which cannot be predicted or managed. The MNP uses these methods regularly, for example in the Sustainability Outlook (MNP, 2004).
Various forms of participation can be used during the scenario development process, such as the Delphi method, in-depth interviews, focus groups, interactive workshops or group model building.

There are usually a number of different phases to developing a scenario Elliott, J. S. et al. (2005):

1. Raising points of view, insights and facts
2. Identifying the focus issue
3. Identifying key factors in the specific environment and in the macro environment
4. Ranking strengths and motives according to interest and uncertainty
5. Selecting scenario logics

6. Developing scenarios
7. Exploring implications
8. Selecting important indicators and guides
9. Presenting scenarios to the concerned public
10. Generating and discussing options

Participation can be used in any of these phases. When and how much participation to use is a choice that project leaders have to make. It is possible, for instance, to use pre-prepared scenarios or to allow the participants to develop the scenarios themselves.
Backcasting is a special form of scenario analysis, which involved reasoning backwards from a desirable picture of the future to the steps that would have to be taken to make it into reality. The picture of the future could be an outlook on the future chosen by the group itself or a policy objective (for instance, '80% reduction of x by the year 2010').

What can it deliver?
- Consensus on the most important trends in the long term.
- Development of robust policy strategies within different scenarios.

Frequency and time required
Frequency and time required are very variable, depending on the method chosen. Allow time for several meetings.

When to use it
For
- complex controversial problems
- unpredictable future events
- when there is a perceived need to intervene

When better not to use it
If
- the purpose of the scenarios is unclear
- quantifying is an aim and there are not enough supporting figures and data

Advantages
- Can produce completely new insights about the future
- Integrates existing knowledge and makes it available
- Can help with the development of robust policy strategies
- Can contribute to better communication between the participants

Pitfalls
The results must tie in with the purpose of the scenario development. Otherwise there is a danger that they will be too general, or the opposite, too technical or detailed.

Participants
The participants come from various professional fields and social contexts, from decision-makers to scientists, stakeholders and expert practitioners. Diversity and creativity are important.

Points to consider
- Various gradations of participation are possible. Will you use your own prepared scenarios or let the participants develop the scenarios themselves? How closely will you steer the process?
- Decide on the focus in advance. Is the main aim to produce scientific knowledge or to develop social perspectives?
- Focus on creating an open atmosphere and promoting creativity.

References
Elliott, J. S. et al. (2005), Participatory Methods Toolkits. A Practitioner's Manual. Download via http://www.viwta.be/files/handboek.pdf
Dammers, E. (2000), Leren van de toekomst. Delft: Eburon.
MNP (2006), Methoderapport Duurzaamheidsverkenning. A.C. Petersen, ed. Bilthoven: Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

5.4 Future workshops

What is it?
The future workshop is a method of group-based problem-solving. Under professional guidance, participants use meeting and creativity techniques (such as the moderation method.

Three phases can be distinguished:
1. The criticism phase: participants can express criticism and give their view of the problem. The status quo is diagnosed.
2. The utopia phase: participants describe their ideal situation, without censure based on practical considerations
3. The creative phase: back to reality. What is achievable and how?

All participants are equal on this day and represent no-one but themselves.
The method was developed in the 1960s by Robert Jungk.

Frequency and time required
Can be completed in a day, two to three days is better. Stand-alone events.

What can it deliver?
- New creative solutions and new perspectives, without losing sight of what is practically possible
- Motivate participants, large network effect

When to use it
For
- policy impasses
- developing policy options

When better not to use it If
- there is a great difference in hierarchical status between the participants
- there is serious hostility between the participants

Advantages
Can be carried out in a day (but two or three days is better).

Pitfalls
Too much or too little input in terms of content: if important information is missing, the result is less relevant. If too much information is given, this can exert too much control over the process.

Participants
Minimum of 12 participants, max. 25. The participants must be interested in the subject and able to work together.

Points to consider
Strict process control is important. Otherwise there is a danger of getting bogged down in a particular phase.

References
Jungk, R. & Mullert, N. (1987), Future Workshops. How to Create Desirable Futures. London: Institute for Social Inventions.

5.5 Open Space Conference

What is it?
The Open Space Conference is sometimes called the 'institutionalised coffee break'. People attending conferences often find the coffee breaks to be the most important part of the meeting. It is there that they make personal contacts, exchange information and make plans together. While the Open Space Conference is tightly organised, the specifics of the process remain open. Only the general theme is set (for example, 'What are the issues for Dutch nature policy in the near future?'). The participants themselves can put on (planned or spontaneous) workshops on topics of relevance to them. They are free to choose their own workshops. This approach results in more active participants. The participants write up the results of their workshops. While the conference is going on, the results are made available to other participants via photo reports, so that everyone is also aware of the other discussions.

What can it deliver?
- A fast but good overview of issues of concern to the conference participants
- New perspectives
- More commitment and support from the participants, because they are able to take the initiative themselves

Frequency and time required
One-off event. Time required: 1-4 days.

When to use it
At the beginning of the project to:
- compile research questions
- throw light on an issue from as many perspectives as possible
- develop ideas for solutions and policy options

When better not to use it
If
- the issue is not really important to the participants: participants have to be involved, otherwise the workshops do not work
- the organising body is not genuinely open to all subjects
- significant key figures cannot or do not want to take part
- the question is defined too specifically

Advantages
Optimum use is made of the knowledge and motivation of the participants. It will become very clear which topics are of great interest and which not, and where there is a need for further research.

Pitfalls
If little or nothing is done with the results, that can lead to dissatisfaction among the participants. Make clear beforehand what you plan to do with the results.

Participants
Especially suitable for large groups from about 20 to 1,000 people. The larger the group, the more process supervisors are needed to handle the ongoing documentation.

Points to consider
Open Space Conferences require a great deal of confidence in the self-direction of the participants. The organisers have to be able to let go of the process.

References
Owen, H. (1997), Open Space Technology. A User's Guide. San Francisco: Berret-Koehler.

5.6 Group Model Building

What is it?
Group Model Building is based on system dynamics, a method developed since the 1950s for building models and simulation. It is known in environmental circles from, for instance, Meadows and Forrester's model in 'Limits to Growth' (1972). Vennix (RU Nijmegen) developed Group Model Building (GMB), a participation variant of system dynamics, in which participants develop conceptual models over several sessions - under guidance – of/for the problem in question, sometimes also with the aid of visual software. The participants most probably have different perspectives on the whole issue and these perspectives can be linked together in a model. The model builder operates as group facilitator: someone who helps the group to develop a model, in which a shared view is gradually created.
Group Model Building consists of three phases:
1. formulating the problem
2. structuring the problem
3. generating options (if required)

The process takes from a couple of weeks to a few months, depending on the complexity of the problem and the number of participants. It usually requires two to four meetings.
There is also a quantitative variant of Group Model Building, but quantifying the models does demand a great deal of investment in time and manpower.

What can it deliver?
A shared conceptual model, in which the participants' views on the problem and their knowledge are incorporated. Group Model Building also reveals where knowledge is missing and can therefore lead to new research questions.

Frequency and time required
Two to four group meetings, each lasting one day. Depending on the number of meetings, the time required will be 1 to 4 months.

When to use it
- when the stakeholders have very different perceptions of the problem
- suitable for analysing problems and generating policy options

When better not to use it
If the atmosphere among the participants is very oppositional or hostile and they have little respect for each other's opinions.

Advantages
Group model building links the knowledge available among the participants, so that it can be used more effectively. The results are supported by the participants, because they own the process and its outcome. Group Model Building helps in the formation of consensus on the solution to the problem and can increase commitment to the strategy to be followed.

Pitfalls
The conceptual model is sometimes less accessible for people who did not take part in developing it.

Participants
Mainly small groups. Larger groups can be broken down into subgroups, so that several models are produced, which can then be presented to the other subgroups. This allows different approaches to be considered, which can produce added value.

Points to consider
GMB requires good supervision of the process by a person with specific experience. Sometimes several facilitators are needed. It also demands the requisite time for organisation and reporting. The process should be open enough to allow room for diversity of topics, concepts and opinions.

References
Vennix, J.A.M. (1996), Group Model Building. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
Vennix J.A.M et al., ed. (1997), Special Issue Group Model Building. *System Dynamics Review*, 13 (2).

5.7 Group decision support[1]

What is it?
Group Decision Support involves the use of a Group Decision Support System (GDSS) in a workshop: a network of computers with special software for computer-supported meetings. The MNP uses the Policy Lab of Utrecht University for this (see References). GDS is a method of supporting group processes, which can also be used to complement other participation methods (for instance, scenario workshops or face-to-face Delphi).

The method uses a combination of written input via the computer and group discussion. As such it is a hybrid of focus groups and Delphi. Using the computer ensures that everyone has an equal chance to make a contribution and guarantees anonymity where necessary. In the discussions, the participants exchange ideas and examine the issues in more depth.

The software consists of a number of tools that can be used for surveys, brainstorming and sounding out opinions among other things. The results are compiled and analysed by a central server and then projected, so the participants can react to them at once. If required, the results can then be processed, prioritised or classified. The workshop is led by a moderator (panel chairman), while a technical facilitator operates the central server and software.

What can it deliver?
- Collection, categorising and prioritising of new and old ideas and strategies.
- Overview of different views, arguments and motives.

1. This section was written by Arjan Wardekker

Frequency and time required
Several workshops are needed, certainly for complex subjects. Sometimes it is also useful for each subgroup (policy-makers, scientists etc.) to follow its own path. The process will certainly take several months.

When to use it
For
- taking stock of old and new ideas
- categorising, weighing up/comparing (e.g. multi-criteria analyses), prioritising and developing ideas
- refining and analysing arguments
- forming policy strategies and action plans
- formulating knowledge questions
- evaluating policy (ex post) or policy options (ex ante)

When better not to use it
When
- a very broad subject has to be dealt with
- the atmosphere between the participants is hostile and they have little respect for each other's opinions

Advantages
Flexible method that can be used in a variety of situations. The simultaneous input via computers means that much more information can be contributed in a short time than with face-to-face discussion. This prevents proceedings being dominated by a few individuals and, if necessary, anonymity can be guaranteed. An electronic session report becomes available almost immediately (generated by the software) and various analyses can be performed after the session (cross correlations, etc.).

Pitfalls
The workshop is exacting and can take up to a maximum of 4 hours. There are limits to what can be investigated/discussed. Use of the computer creates the risk of a highly tool-based design, while participants often feel the need for a face-to-face discussion. Allow enough time for this.

Participants
Mainly small to medium-sized groups (around 4-20 participants), but in theory can also be used for large groups, depending on the facilities available and the terms of the software license.

Points to consider
An experienced panel chairman and a technical facilitator are important for the workshop to proceed smoothly. It is difficult to estimate the time required. It often turns out that there is not enough time. Keep your eye on the time, scrap sections if necessary, and plan to do important sections at the beginning as much as possible.

Literature
- Turban, E. & Aronson, J.E. (1998), Decision Support Systems and Intelligent Systems. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- GroupSystems: GroupSystems Workgroup Edition & Professional Suite, Version 3.4. See: http://www.groupsystems.com/.
- Utrecht University's Beleidslaboratorium: http://www.cs.uu.nl/beleidslab/.
- Wardekker, J.A. & van der Sluijs, J.P. (2006), Evaluatie van Onzekerheidscommunicatie in de Milieubalans 2005 and background reports. Utrecht: Copernicus Institute, Utrecht University. See: http://www.chem.uu.nl/nws/www/research/risk/Uncertainty%20Communication.htm

6. Practical tips for participation projects

The practical tips in this chapter stem from experience with participation to date, especially experience in the MNP. A number of problem areas emerged time and again from the evaluation of projects, showing that good process management is a necessary condition for a participation process to be a success. The ingredients for good process management are set out in this chapter.

» *Communicate!*

Participants like to know where they stand: Who is leading the meeting? What is the role of the participants? What will happen if the MNP does not agree with the advice of the group? These and other questions go round and round in the participants' heads. It is important to address these issues in some detail at the beginning of the process, since, if that is not done well, confusion and dissatisfaction can soon arise. For this reason all participants should have all the information that is relevant to them at their disposal. This is information about:

- the initiator
- the project context and the political context
- the role and background of the process supervisors
- the rules of play for the process
- the aims of the process
- the knowledge input: who is arranging this and where will the knowledge come from
- what will happen with the results
- expectations of the participants.

On the one hand, transparency is essential for participation processes; on the other hand, you cannot just tell everyone everything. Even in a participation process, there will be subjects which should be treated with a certain caution or even subjects which should be kept confidential, for instance about discussions with the commissioning agent. Be clear about this and say what you are not disclosing and why. In this way you should avoid mistrust developing because people feel that they have not been properly informed. Continue to keep people informed after the process has come to an end about the results of the project and any follow-up. This is useful, both for relationships with the stakeholders and for later projects for which the MNP may want to invite the same people or organisations to take part again.

» *Ensure good facilitation*

A good facilitator can make or break the process. Some experience in leading groups is essential. It is also helpful if the facilitator has some knowledge of the subject at issue, in some cases thorough knowledge may even be necessary. If you are expecting a 'difficult' group, because, for example, the stakeholders are strongly opposed to certain proposals, always hire a professional facilitator and consult beforehand on how to facilitate a fruitful meeting. It can also help if the facilitator is an outsider, i.e. not an employee of the MNP.

What are the qualities of a good facilitator?

Ideal facilitators/moderators should:

- be independent and neutral
- be aware of their impact on the group
- be able to respond to group processes and apply methods flexibly
- be able to enthuse and motivate the group
- have sufficient knowledge of the substance of the issues
- be able to put themselves in other people's shoes while maintaining impartiality; take people seriously
- have experience of supervising group processes
- be a good listener.

» *Keep people involved!*

One very common problem is that participants fail to turn up or drop out during a participation process. What can be done about this? Two points deserve to be given particular attention.

1. Ensure sufficient motivation

Spend plenty of time on personal contact with the participants. Explain to them why their contribution is important and exactly why they have been asked to take part. Feed back interim results to the participants, so that they can review their

contribution and add comments or make any necessary corrections. If participants do not feel that their presence counts, they will tend to stay away. Make the process into their process by involving them in preparations at an early stage and asking for their advice. Ask them what they expect from the process and discuss this with them (see Check List 3.3). Apart from that, make sure that the process is well organised and do not forget that it is also important that the participants enjoy themselves.

2. Be careful about what you ask of the participants

Most participants will already have a pretty full diary, whether they are people in a managerial role, working parents etc., so think carefully about what you are asking them to do. There are creative solutions to this: not everyone needs to attend every meeting. You could plan an open process, that participants can step in and out of as they go along. Always say why people should come. You could also plan two different processes, one with more frequent meetings and one where the participants only meet at key moments. Some people are invited to attend all kinds of meetings on a regular basis, especially if they are specialists in a particular field. Avoid stakeholder fatigue by enquiring beforehand whether the person concerned has already been asked to take part in another participation process at the same time. If you really do want to involve this person, consult with him/her about what contribution he or she could make.

» Be flexible

A participation process will never proceed exactly as planned: the method may on reflection turn out to be less suitable for the problem; the discussion may take a completely different direction and the original focus shift. This is inherent to a participation process and not something you should try to avoid. It is far better to anticipate this by planning times to evaluate and reflect as you go along and by creating opportunities to change course. In this way you will ensure that the process remains open.

» Be realistic and allow enough time

Participation processes sometimes succumb because the organisers try to do too much in too little time: a lot of issues, aims, participants and results. A good participation process takes time. A review of the final report involving the stakeholders only a few weeks before the final deadline will not be very effective, because the opportunity to make a contribution at this stage is limited. This may meet the formal requirements for stakeholder participation, but it is doubtful whether it will generate support for the report. A participation process that proceeds at too rapid a pace can be very counterproductive. However, time is also a scarce commodity for the MNP and it often turns out to be the main problem when planning participation projects. When time is scarce, it is useful to ask yourself these questions:

1. Can the aims really be achieved in the time available?
2. How much input will the participants really have in the process? Is there enough time to do something worthwhile with their contribution?
3. Is the process open enough? Is there time to change course or deal with other eventualities?

If you re-examine your project plan critically with the aid of these questions, you will be in a better position to ensure that your project fulfils your ambitions for it. Try to allow the time that you really need to achieve your aims. Sometimes, less is more: that applies to participation projects too.

» Watch the timing

It is important not only to allow enough time for the whole process, but also to plan the right activities at the right time. It is a classic participation dilemma: if you plan the participation too late in the process, there is little left to contribute; if you plan it too early, the process lacks depth because people discuss everything at a very general and superficial level. Because of this the results are often disappointing. Try to avoid this by choosing the timing for participation carefully. It can sometimes help if something has already been worked out (for example, a vision of the future, project plan or definition of a problem), that can serve as a starting point for the participation project. By kicking off the process in this way, the issue is made more tangible. The disadvantage of this, however, is that it can result in a degree of control that is too much for some participants.
Whatever you choose, the planning of the project must be adapted to suit the needs of the participation process as far as possible, and not the other way round.

For politically sensitive studies certainly, the timing of the publication of results is also important. Give stakeholders the opportunity to prepare a response to the final report by sending them a copy under embargo a few days before publication. If the conclusions are unwelcome, however, it is advisable not to leave too much time

between informing the stakeholders and the official publication, on account of the stakeholders' need to use the conclusions to influence public opinion.

» *Take the necessary steps to ensure that the process runs smoothly*

A successful participation process depends on good organisation for its survival. Things that may appear peripheral, such as food and drink, suitable venues, breaks etc. can, if they are not well organised, disrupt the whole process. This is why the following points deserve attention:

- Send the invitations out in good time
- Include information about the purpose and form of the participation in the invitation
- Ensure that you have good facilitators
- Ensure that you have suitable venues (enough space, air and light)
- Arrange good catering
- Prepare a detailed plan
- Appoint someone as process manager and define clear responsibilities in the team.

» *Make clear who you are inviting*

It often happens in practice that the project leader sends out an invitation to a particular individual and then the organisation in question decides who is sent to take part in the project. This can cause problems, because the project leader may not get the person he wanted, and the person who is sent feels that he or she is representing his or her organisation, feels bound by the official line of the organisation, and so will exercise restraint in expressing his or her own opinions. This can be avoided to some extent by making personal contact with the individual you want to invite first, and then explicitly inviting him or her, either in a personal capacity or as a representative of the organisation.

» *Create scope for an iterative process*

A participative process has much to gain from allowing scope for dialogue and interaction. Questions and ideas usually emerge during the process that demand further input from the people taking part and their organisations. Participants want to get a response to things that they have worked out and that cannot always be given ad hoc. Genuine co-production requires that feedback rounds be built into the process.

7. References

- Elliott, J. S. et al. (2005), Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual. Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA).
- Meadows, D. H. et al. (1972), The Limits to Growth. New York: Universe Books.
- MNP/UU (2003), Leidraad voor Omgaan met Onzekerheden. Bilthoven and Utrecht: Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and Utrecht University.
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- Seifert, J.W. (2002), Visualization, Presentation, Moderation. A Practical Guide to Successful Presentation and the Facilitation of Business Processes. Weinheim: Wiley.

Guidance for Stakeholder Participation – Practice Guide

The Guidance for Stakeholder Participation is intended to support and guide project leaders at the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency in their choices in the area of stakeholder participation. This Practice Guide contains information on the following subjects:

- stakeholder selection;
- method selection;
- interactive workshops;
- participatory methods;
- practical hints for participatory projects.