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Participatory policymaking and partnerships: their role in innovation for sustainability.

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Abstract

This paper takes a case study approach to exploring the role of participatory policy partnerships and the development of new networks in delivering practical innovation within the sustainable development arena. It looks briefly at the development of partnerships within sustainable development and examines the theory of participation.

The paper's findings are supported from case studies from the following areas:

1. NGO and private sector
 - Forest Stewardship Council: development of forest management standards
2. The private sector.
 - *Roche*: identification of everyday ethical dilemmas.
3. The public sector.
 - *Yorkshire Forward* (UK Regional Development Agency): The power of pictures to enable policy debate on climate change.
 - *UK Government Cabinet Office*: The role of innovative technology in participatory policy dialogue in fisheries management

The paper uses the above case studies to examine the conditions that are necessary for innovation to occur and concludes that a number of factors are needed. These include ensuring the process itself is clear, transparent and accountable. This provides an enabling environment whereby participants are empowered and have the freedom to think and be creative. The open-mindedness of organizations is also critical. Open-minded organizations where debate is actively encouraged tend to be innovative organizations.

The paper recommends the increased use of participatory methods to develop new forms of engagement that provide innovation and lead to meaningful networks. Partnerships and innovation can provide inspiration and empower others to take positive actions to develop policies that improve business performance and deliver sustainability.

1. Introduction

Participation leading to partnerships has been seen as the way forward within the sustainability movement as governments have recognised that to achieve sustainable development goals such as the Millennium Development Targets all stakeholders have a role to play (see www.developmentgoals.org). At the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 the main outputs were the 60-odd partnership agreements involving political, private sector and civil society commitments (see www.wssd.org), for example the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The background to these agreements involved participation from a diverse array of stakeholders; politicians, the business community (international, national and local), civil society groups (local community groups and social and environmental NGOs). The emphasis at WSSD was on identifying and promoting the role of business in delivering solutions to sustainable development. This paper uses the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' interchangeably and was defined by Brundtland (1987) as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

As shown by WSSD decision makers have realised that no decision will be successful unless it has involved everybody with a stake in it (stakeholders). A point emphasised in the mid 1990s in the UK with protests surrounding the de-commissioning of the Braemar oil platform in the North Sea when Shell's decision to dump the platform in the North Sea outraged environmentalists (Acland *et al.* 1999).

As a response to the need for accountability and greater transparency, the last ten years have seen the business community under pressure to recognise their role through corporate social responsibility (CSR). The EU Commission Green Paper on CSR defines CSR as a concept whereby "companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their daily business operations and in their interactions with stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (EU 2001). CSR is still in its infancy but the signs are that more businesses are engaging in the concept and a business case centred on risk and reputation management is beginning to emerge.

Despite some improvements within the CSR agenda the global picture for sustainability remains unhealthy: Global issues affecting sustainability such as poverty, health and education, climate change and water scarcity have worsened. Article 13 has suggested that they have become 'business-critical' issues, to the extent that if not dealt with they will have impacts on the future of the business (Cumming *et al.* 2004). In addition there are still examples where government openness and accountability fail in the context of decision-making and public participation. This was witnessed in March 2004 with the UK Government's decision to allow licences for growing of GM maize, against the groundswell of public opinion conveyed in the public debates it sponsored (<http://www.gmpublicdebate.org>): A case of consulting but not listening perhaps? Or a communications issue where the remit of the consultation had not been adequately understood?

There have been previous reviews of the origin and role of stakeholder engagement and participation (for examples, see Cumming 2001). This paper takes these issues further in that it examines a number of participation and partnerships examples that demonstrate either policy making that leads to innovation within sustainability or through innovation leads to policy-making.

This paper will explore some positive examples of how businesses are responding to CSR and through it to sustainability, and how government stakeholder engagement and partnerships have been designed to develop effective policy or tools to promote sustainable development. A table at the start of each case study provides a summary of how the case study relates to the key themes reflected in the title of this paper. Where appropriate the paper will compare the practice to the theory of participation, visualised in Arnstein's Ladder, to assess what degree of participation they have achieved (Arnstein 1969).

2. How can engagement and partnership deliver innovation for sustainability?
 Engagement and participation are crucial for buy-in and often determine the success of the partnership. Leadership is important here but ownership needs to be shared. A number of partnerships and initiatives have resulted from a desire to clamp down on crime and promote sustainable use of natural resources such as diamond harvest and forestry (see Toyne 2004). However, it took an innovative approach several years beforehand to raise the debate on the principles and criteria for sustainable forest management. The following example describes a partnership approach in this arena that provided a source of innovation.

Case study 1: Innovative partnership lead to sustainable forest management

Partnership	Participatory approach	Policy	Links to sustainability
Business and NGO's.	3 voting chambers (economic, social and environment) of elected members.	Principles and criteria for sustainable forest management.	Conservation and management of forests

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was born after a realisation that the political will to conserve and better manage the world's forests at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 was not strong enough to lead to the appropriate changes that civil society groups and indeed some businesses were calling for. The FSC evolved from a series of discussions. The first was between a group of timber users, traders and representatives of environmental and human-rights organizations who met in California (USA) in 1990 to discuss how they could combine their interests in improving forest conservation and reducing deforestation. Their meeting confirmed the need for an honest and credible system for identifying well-managed forests as acceptable sources of forest products. Forest certification - the process of inspecting particular forests or woodland to see if they are being managed according to an agreed set of standards - was seen as an innovative way of promoting sustainability. Retailers were also interested in having a label that could be identified by shoppers as an assurance that the product they were purchasing came from a well-managed forest. This was important as concerns about the destruction of the 'rainforest' were topical.

In September 1993 in Toronto (Canada) 130 representatives from around the world came together to hold the Founding Assembly of the Forest Stewardship Council. In October 1993 an agreement was reached to launch FSC, and by August 1994 a definitive set of Principles and Criteria, together with the Statutes for the Council were agreed and approved by the votes of the Founding Members.

Today, the FSC label can be found on a wide variety of products from doors, furniture, kitchen towels and wall paper sold in a variety of outlets across Europe, in the UK and the label can be found on over 10,000 product lines.

Governance of the FSC

Of special interest is the governance of the FSC. It is comprised of three chambers: economic, social and environment with elected members who are all given equal voting rights. Like the forestry profession itself, the FSC system includes stakeholders with

diverse array of perspectives on what represents a well-managed and sustainable forest. The diversity of stakeholder hopes to ensure balanced decisions are made and avoid claims that its work is not biased to either chamber.

The FSC is funded by charitable foundations, government donors, members' subscriptions and accreditation fees fund FSC. To ensure its independence it does not accept funding from industry. Until now funding has been received from the Austrian, Dutch and Mexican governments, the European Commission, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, WWF-Netherlands, IUCN-Netherlands, SSNC (Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) and Summit Foundation.

Outcome of the partnership

While the discussion about forest management standards continues, the FSC standards for forest management have now been applied in 60 countries and led to over 41 million hectares of the world forests being certified and tens of thousands of FSC labelled products.

The innovation of combining a multi-stakeholder approach to develop a new certification scheme through participation has been very successful and has been replicated elsewhere, for example, the Marine Stewardship Council (see www.msc.org).

3. *How to create an involving culture within a business to solve social issue*

One of the most important parts of any business is its workforce. They are very often the 'coalface' and see issues as they manifest. Their understanding is key to addressing the problem and creating the solution. The case study shows how a business developing an ethical policy by involving its staff.

Case study 2: Innovative policy making to manage everyday ethical dilemmas

Partnership	Participatory approach	Policy	Links to sustainability
Internally with the business	Engagement and dialogue of staff on issues of concern	Development of internal company policy on ethics	Links to social responsibility

Roche, a global pharmaceutical company, sought in 2001 to identify ethical dilemmas facing employees involved in development of drugs.

The pharmaceutical industry is a highly legislated and regulated environment with numerous industry standard operating procedures (SOPs), guidelines covering aspects of good practice in clinical trials, and review processes through external ethics committees. Through facilitated workshops, run by Article 13, the dilemmas experienced by Roche employees in everyday work that were not covered in SOPs or in Roche's corporate principles were identified and their impacts analysed. The findings revealed that the organization could be at risk if staff did not have a planned way to deal with dilemmas e.g. an ethical concern became a full-blown issue if left unmanaged. The need for some type of internal support to staff on ethical decisions and responsibilities became apparent. Staff did not want another 'policy' but a process that enabled staff to engage with the issues and resolve them. From this debate a process that dealt with four themes: patients, colleagues, trust and integrity was developed. The approach was trialled and human resources staff and trainers have been key to integrating the approach into training and induction sessions. Through trialling, measures of success have been developed so that its implementation can be monitored and the approach improved. The strength of this work was the governance and buy-in generated participation alongside the flexibility of bringing in facilitators and champions of issues in society.

The benefit from this approach is the positive "involve me" culture the business is creating. This sits well in the wider corporate social responsibility agenda in which stakeholders, in this case employees, work in partnership with their organization to deliver an environment where risk, or indeed opportunity, is identified and managed.

By improving their ethical policies in an innovative participatory manner their contribution to sustainability is being more socially responsible.

4. *Exploring new techniques of engagement and partnerships to deliver innovation within the public sector*

This section explores the use of new and innovative techniques to engage stakeholders in public sector policy development. The process of engagement is important in a number of ways; to provide confidence in the process and to create an environment where everyone contributes. By involving a wide range of stakeholders in the process, an informed, robust and rigorous debate can take place. Two case studies below show different innovative techniques to enable engagement.

Case study 3: Creative visioning to produce communication tools for climate change

Partnership	Participatory approach	Policy	Links to sustainability
Multi-stakeholder comprising of policy makers, academics and NGOs.	Picture drawing of life in a low carbon economy in the UK in 2050	Development of pictures visualising impacts of policy changes	Promotion of issue to reduce climate change.

The aim was “the development of ‘stakeholder relevant’ picture(s) of what life in a low carbon economy could look like for our children, grandchildren and us in old age.” The client, Yorkshire Forward, is the regional development agency for Yorkshire and Humberside, a region in the north of England comprising the famous cities of Leeds, Hull, Sheffield and York. They have chosen to make sustainable development their competitive edge and wished to promote positive actions throughout the region on this issue. A key issue in sustainable development and affecting the region was the impact of climate change. With this in mind, Yorkshire Forward approached Article 13. They wanted to create a tool with a small group of stakeholders that would enable a debate about what life would be like in 2050 if society stopped emitting greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide – the chief cause of climate change.

Yorkshire Forward invited stakeholders, including themselves, for a visioning event over two days. The stakeholders represented included industry, policy makers, academics and civil society groups. Article 13 provided the process and materials, managed the event, facilitated the event, and analysed the outcomes of the workshop using their in-house policy and scientific experts.

The central issue was to use techniques that enabled the stakeholders to look at the ‘problem’ differently. Article 13 designed a process whereby the stakeholders painted pictures that demonstrated the issues around climate change – the causes, the impacts, the solutions and the visions. For example, by drawing a car or factory to illustrate the main causes of climate change. These pictures enabled a debate to take place that culminated in four groups drawing what they perceived would be a better quality of life that happened also to be based on a low carbon economy. The group defined a low carbon economy as a 60% reduction in carbon dioxide emission levels based on 1990 levels. Together with the pictures, they produced an action plan of what needed to happen to achieve the picture. For example, changes in consumer behaviour, changes to Government policies or changes in technology.

The overall innovation was the creation of the ‘Wetherby Tapestry’ a wall long series of the pictures that described the work of the group, part of which is shown in the appendix.

picture. Wetherby was the location of the event. After the event, Article 13 produced a story and background technical report to demonstrate how the pictures showed that 60 cuts had been achieved.

The benefit of using this innovative technique was that the pictures enabled a fresh perspective to be taken to deliver a practical yet inspiring solution. The technique used enabled a shift from re-stating the problem to developing a practical solution via very innovative means. The pictures have subsequently been used to stimulate conversations with other stakeholders.

The innovation that resulted from new partnerships being formed when they used the medium of drawing pictures helped develop a different way of describing actions to combat climate change and promote sustainability.

Case Study 4: Innovative participation to inform policy-making for UK fishing industry

Partnership	Participatory approach	Policy	Links to sustainability
UK Government with 100 stakeholders	Stakeholder event using creative technology	UK Government Fisheries policy	Sustainable use of fish stocks.

Article 13 assisted the UK Government's Cabinet Office Strategy Unit in the development of the UK national fisheries policy in September 2003. The UK Government ran a consultation process over a six-month period, revealing issues on all sides of the fishing industry (fishermen, industry, processing, environmentalists, policy makers and regulators). A one-day stakeholder event was designed to provide stakeholders with the latest thinking from the Cabinet Office based on the results of the cabinet office consultation process to date. The design of the event used the combined strengths of the Cabinet Office team, including policy presentations and communications, with Article13's leading edge facilitation and expertise in event management and natural resource management.

For the event approximately 100 stakeholders attended. They came from backgrounds as diverse as UK Government Cabinet Office policy makers, scientists, academics, local communities, producer organisations, processors, consumers and consumer representative organisations, offshore industry representatives and environmental NGOs.

The innovation was the process itself. Dealing with policy issues in such a way was new for the Cabinet Office, as was the use of interactive computer technology. The stakeholders could key in responses to keyboards on their desk. In this way stakeholders learnt from each other as well as from the Cabinet Office, because responses were captured in real time on a projected computer screen by the use of the cutting edge technology. The end result was that everyone felt that they had contributed, there was increased shared understanding and instead of resentment and anger, stakeholders felt that they had a collective responsibility to help the UK Government develop the best policy for the benefit of all. The techniques employed in the facilitation

were specially created to deliver an overarching sense of 'participative policy making'. Innovative policy making was enabled as we were able to 'lower the conflict' level and ensure effective contribution by the participants. This built trust in the results of the event. In the highly emotive subject it is crucial Government policy is seen to be developed in a transparent and consultative way.

The benefits of this approach were;

Maximising the use of time - a large number of stakeholders could respond to specific questions on the presentation of the UK government's current thinking on a specific issues e.g. fish quotas.

Equal participation - The technology allowed everyone to contribute, rather than just the 'usual suspects' who can often dominate public meetings. The stakeholders felt that they had genuinely participated as they were able to put their views forward on a wide range of issues, through a constructive dialogue. The participants fed back their view that they genuinely felt their voice was being heard.

Transparency and shared understanding - All typed contributions appeared on a large screen thus allowing everyone to comment – comments could be either attributable or not – the stakeholders decided, as all the opinions were electronically recorded. This allowed for immediate analysis and immediate feedback to stakeholders, to check understanding.

5. Discussion

The four case studies show different approaches to, fundamentally, problem solving. Common to all these case studies is good governance, as it provides confidence in the process whether it is engagement with stakeholders in developing a fisheries policy, the development of a formal recognised partnership like the FSC.

In addition to governance, innovation is vital as it creates the dynamism and interest to keep stakeholders engaged in the process. For example, with the FSC the opportunity to share and create ideas amongst governments, business and NGOs was an essential part of its development. Innovation was also key in leading to a series of pictures depicting life in a low carbon society in 2050. The impact to sustainability will be in the practical use in raising awareness and stimulating actions to reduce energy consumption.

All the case studies fit in either rung 6 or 7 of Arnstein's ladder (Table 1, Box 1), and it could be debated that there is a fair degree of citizen power, as it is this power that has influenced or stimulated the need for action. The case studies seek to demonstrate the breadth of approaches that seek to make improvements either to social or environmental impacts.

Table 1: Case studies position on Arnstein's ladder

Case study	Rung position on Arnstein's ladder	Comment
FSC	7. Delegated powers	Through the three chambers members of the FSC have voting powers.
Roche	7: delegated powers	Allowed staff to create solutions to everyday dilemmas.
Yorkshire Forward	6: partnership	Allowed multi-stakeholders to collaborate in partnership.
Strategy Unit	6: partnership	Moved stakeholders from conflict to senses of shared ownership of the issue

So what are the lessons learnt and how can they be applied to current and future sustainability issues? Given the urgency of the sustainability agenda there really is a need to improve the way we develop policy and implement policy. If politicians can recognise that society has moved to an 'involve me' approach and design processes that are innovative and allow for the participation of all stakeholders then the resulting policy is far more likely to achieve its intended impact. The innovation counts, as those of who have been in public meetings, sharing information, but *not* feeling totally engaged wondering how and where the process is going.

Within Europe there are many sustainability issues that still need to be resolved and innovative participatory approach that identifies partnerships and actions would help.

the national, as well as European level, for example the future of farming and mobiliz business and civil society to take action on climate change.

Box 1: The theory behind participation

The degrees of participation have been documented by Sherry Arnstein (Arnstein 1999) when writing about the level of citizen participation in planning processes in the US. Arnstein's Ladder is shown below.

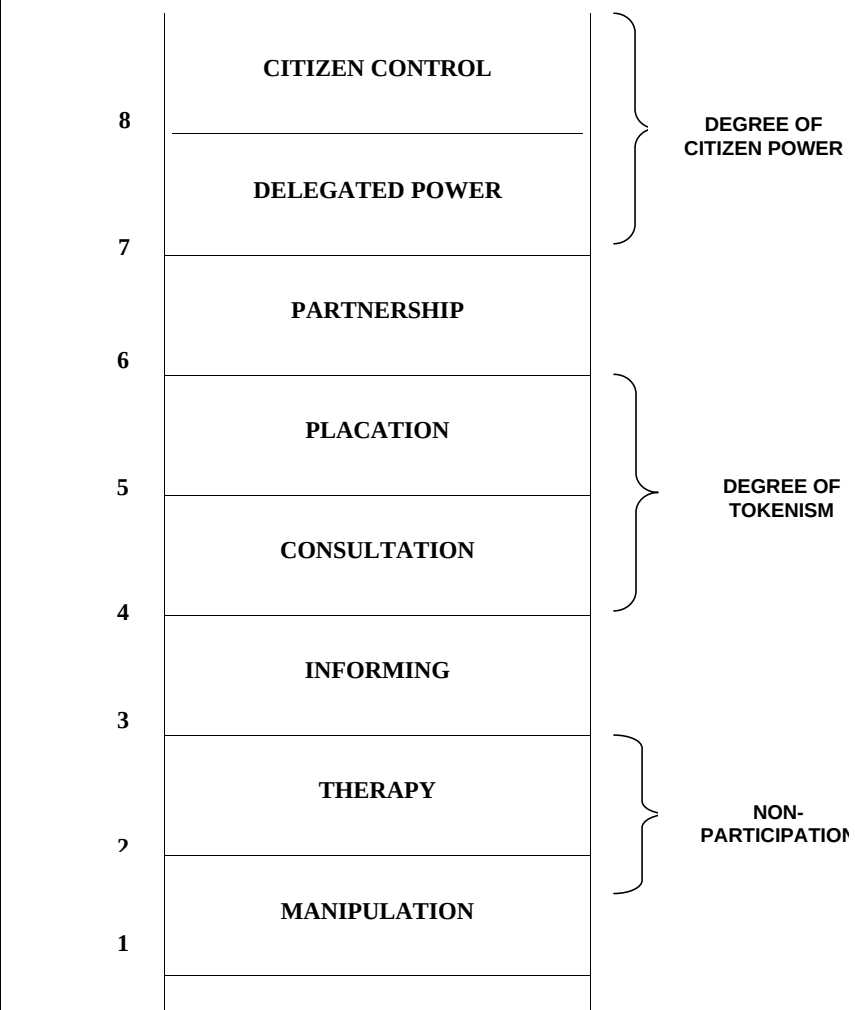


Figure 1. The Eight rungs of the Ladder of Citizen Participation (redrawn from Arnstein 1969)

Box 1 cont'd

The rungs to the ladder are:

Manipulation and Therapy: are the first two and are classified as non-participatory enabling 'power holders' to cure or educate the participants through communication.

Informing, consultation and placation: these are considered as the first steps towards participation. However, the emphasis is either on one-way flow of information or, where there is two-way communication; the received views may not be used or acted on.

Partnership: this rung involves shared planning and decision making responsibilities.

Delegated powers: at this level all stakeholders have sufficient decision making authority to ensure accountability of a process.

Citizen control: here the 'have-nots' take over the entire planning and managing programmes

It would appear that innovative policy is created through innovative means. The creativity is very much dependent on the approach taken. The partnerships and network approach between governments, businesses, NGO's and opinion formers appears to be the interface for such innovation where they create policies to change the 'playing field' of sustainability.

Below we provide Article 13's recommendations for developing participatory policy and partnerships:

1. Map out your stakeholders
2. Understand their positions on the policy/subject you are analysing
3. Identify what the specific issues you are trying to address are
4. Be creative; think about a different process or technique to engage with stakeholders (why should they want to help you?)
5. Before, during and after the process of participation make sure you listen, and are seen to listen to the stakeholders views
6. Use the process to identify new partners and develop agreed measurable actions
7. In the final stages of policy development why test your assumptions and take time to explain why a particular strong opinion was considered but not included in the policy.
8. Implement your policies
9. Go back to your stakeholders and tell them what you have done and why. Measure and evaluate their response
10. Share your experiences so others can learn and take inspiration from your achievements.

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