

Public participation and sustainability transitions

EEA-Eionet day, 1 March 2023

Workshop report

Room: Spisehuset, DGI Byen

Number of participants: approximately 60

Speakers and moderators:

- **Ana Jesus**, Sustainability transitions, EEA
- **Ralph Wollmann**, International Academy Transformation for Environment and Sustainability at UBA Germany (TES Academy)

Objectives:

- Explore and discuss the role of public participation in sustainability transitions and in the implementation of the European Green Deal
- Exchange examples, challenges and opportunities associated with the practice of public participation

Description: Since the establishment of the Aarhus Convention two decades ago, public participation in environmental decision-making is a legal right in Europe. Its role and application across countries and EU institutions has been evolving over time. Participation is now increasingly recognised not only as a matter of justice and democracy but also a practical necessity for transitioning to sustainability and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. In the words of the European Green Deal ‘citizens are and should remain a driving force of the transition’. Achieving sustainability goals arguably requires profound transformations at the personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal levels. This points to the need for engaging and experimenting with heterogeneous actors with a variety of perspectives, interests and competencies, representing all action levels. The session is designed to facilitate interactions among Eionet countries for sharing, discussing and making sense of experiences with public participation and broader societal engagement. It will benefit from the presentation of the International Academy Transformation for Environment and Sustainability (TES Academy) of the German Environment Agency, which aims at creating transformative spaces for mutual learning, joint reflection and collaboration for fostering collective action towards sustainability.

Agenda:

Time	Item	Description
14:00-14:10	Let's get started! Interactive exercise	Participants are invited to stand up and place themselves in the room according to whether they agree / disagree with the statements: 1. Public participation slows down policymaking, which we cannot afford in times of crisis

		<p>2. 'Ordinary' citizens are perfectly capable of contributing to important decisions</p> <p>3. Have you ever been part of a process where public input led to better decisions or outcomes?</p>
14:10 - 14:18	Welcome and introduction	Welcome, purpose and agenda + introduction to public participation.
14:18 – 14:30	Your organisation's experiences with public participation	<p>Participants are invited to stand-up whenever the participation category applies to their organisations' experience of public participation:</p> <p>What public participation practices does your organisation use?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Informing Consulting Involving Collaborating Empowering None <p>Starting from the answers they gave, participants are invited to spend the next 8' in pairs sharing their organisations' experiences with public participation and future aspirations. For example in terms of successes, failures, enablers, barriers, hopes, fears.</p>
14:30 – 14:45	The TES Academy	<p>Ralph presents the TES Academy and offers his thoughts on a couple of questions, based both on his and on his organisation's experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What enables participation with impact? What needs to happen for citizens to become a driving force for sustainability transitions in Europe?
14:45 - 14:53	Ideas, insights & inspiration	<p>Participants are invited to discuss in pairs the questions below and to write their thoughts down on post-its</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What ideas sparked your attention? What insights do you take away? What inspired you?
14:53 - 14:55	Thank you	Lorenzo thanks everyone for their participation

Interventions

Public participation, Ana Jesus (EEA)

- Public participation has a central place in European Green Deal, VP Frans Timmermans: "Green transition will only happen if it is perceived as fair"
- Sharing experiences to start discussion
- Values, needs and stakes differ in civil society; How do we ensure that the transition is fair?
- Different formats, methods and purposes to engage – wide range of approaches to public participation ranging from informal ways to formal procedures
- Important to highlight that public participation provides a safe space to express conflict, even if not necessarily resolved
- Public participation increases the impact of citizens and other stakeholders on decisions and the more it allows for collaboration and empowerment (instead of just informing) the less control the established decision-makers have
- Public participation minimises acceptance risks, it enables the identification of tensions and solutions, it surfaces distributional effects (winners and losers) and thus improves governance - even if it takes more time
- Meaningful participation defined as consequential

- Participants stood up to indicate the purposes public participation is used in their organisation: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, empowering



TES Academy, Ralph Wollmann (German Environment Agency)

- In-house research project lasting from 2022-2024
- Extending participation in transformation processes by intensifying collaboration and empowerment
- Scientific results will not always be sufficient and not convincing enough to achieve outcomes, public participation can help ensure this by engaging with new untraditional, also not like-minded, actors
- 4-people unit so far based on the notion that we need collective action to reach goals
- Transformation is complex, iterative, and public participation can ensure that we connect to other actors
- Strive to have heterogeneity in participants
- “Actor analysis” to identify desired actors to include



Questions for Ralph Wollmann:

- *What enables participation with impact?*

The respective guidance principles for the Academy's work are: bringing together multiple perspectives, encompassing personal reflection to systemic change, holistic learning, thinking from local to global, and mutual learning at eye level

- *What needs to happen for citizens to become a driving force for sustainability transitions in Europe?*
 - Use the results of participation processes (different from one-off events) to frame actions - consequential participation is essential to establish trust
 - Let new ideas and alliances emerge instead of presenting pre-structured knowledge and master plans
 - Establish trust through collaboration experiences
 - Break the silo mentality of experts and also between sectors (authorities, NGOs, business, academia, etc.)
 - Pool resources to put initiatives on a regular basis.

Follow-up event:

At the end of the session, Ralph introduced the idea of running an online follow-up event in May 2023 to discuss new collaboration approaches being used or required by environmental agencies to better fulfil their task. This could be a virtual TES Academy event run with those participants of the Eionet workshop interested in going further by sharing their experiences in the field, as well as clarifying the requirements for such instruments to improve participation on the level of collaboration and empowerment. Such a discussion could deepen the insights and motivate people to collaborate.

Participant's take-away messages: *What ideas sparked your attention? What insights do you take away? What inspired you?*

General

- How do we best engage the public in practice?
- Holistic approach
- Engagement needs capacities and competencies to do it → learn it first to better engage

- Professional moderation + facilitation is necessary
- What are best tools: consensus, consultative?
- Offering the relevant info is the first level. When even that is not offered by local authorities, then it is hard to talk about environmental democracy
- Trust between participants
- Common trust
- Building trust in the stakeholders group
- Create safe working space
- Different formats = all good
- Learning eye to eye
- Acting local
- Mutual learning
- Involve participants emotions and physical experiences
- Gather different groups
- How to define diversity? What criteria?
- We have to leave open space to people's ideas
- Listening to knowledge from the public
- Constructive response to public feedback. Report on implementation of feedback
- Public participation from start to finish of project, at every stage – keeping public informed
- Do not start with formal exchange of info – leave space for participants expertise
- Cooperation with NGOs is important
- We have to empower NGOs with relevant information

TES Academy

- TES Academy
- TES Academy: interesting initiative but I missed the concrete examples/cases
- It would have been interesting to have an example of how the TES Academy works. Storytelling
- I need concrete examples on how the TES Academy works. What are the products? What 'next level'?
- Case studies/ examples
- I was inspired to see the effort UBA makes with public participation – well done! It will be interesting to see how it goes in the future
- Organisation of an institution that educate people in participation
- Good to see some real-life cases on how the TES Academy works

Eionet

- The EEA should make regular in-person meetings for the Eionet
- Make Eionet meetings outside Copenhagen to create more commitment in the EEA member countries
- Put newcomers to Eionet in the spot light to let them introduce themselves (commitment)
- Complement works meetings of EEA with informal joint experiences to connect people to each other