

## **Water Services, Stakeholder Preferences and Conflicting Interests: Importance of Public Participation in Water Management**

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The Water Framework Directive (WFD, 2000/60/EC) is a piece of European legislation created to ensure the sustainable use of water resources in the EU. A central guideline included throughout the directive is a call for the participation of stakeholders in the management of these resources. Involving stakeholders is an important step to ensure that catchment management plans take into consideration local experience in the development of these plans and the impact of the plans on local interests.

The decision support tool, CATCH, is a model for water management in a catchment area. It was developed for structuring a dialogue as a method for stakeholder participation in the management process (Collentine et al, 2002). It operationalizes principles of deliberative democracy into a framework that promotes discourse and deliberation while maintaining a focus on organizational tasks. This discussion of issues in strategic settings facilitates implementation of the WFD at a catchment level.

To test the usefulness of the stakeholder participation model CATCH, a sub-catchment in an alpine valley in the north-east of Italy, the Alta Valsugana in the Province of Trento, was chosen as the setting for a series of workshops. In the Alta Valsugana water is fundamental for activities associated with agriculture, domestic use, energy production, sports and recreation. In the recent past the valley has had serious problems related to water quality and quantity. The lakes and rivers have had pollution problems and water scarcity has affected some of the municipalities during the summer season, the time of year when tourists are most numerous. Currently, most of the problems have been mitigated; all the wastewater discharges are treated, farmers use less fertilizer and pesticides and more restrictive regulation (a new minimum level for the outflow of water) was adopted to mitigate the problems caused by the hydro power plants. The water quality status of the valley is presently satisfactory, although possible to improve. Implementation of water management plans under the WFD may lead to conflicts within the catchment between different stakeholder interest groups. Including stakeholders in the development of management

plans not only follows the guidelines of the WFD but also could result in a more locally adapted and acceptable plan for the catchment.

The results of the implementation of the CATCH model were very interesting. During the meetings the CATCH model played a very important role in structuring the participatory process. It provided a general framework consisting of a sequence of steps that helped the participants to reach the goal of the process; the identification and evaluation of measures to improve water management in the catchment. The stakeholders who took part in the meeting found the CATCH method to be a useful tool to organize and structure public participation, avoiding the risk of a chaotic and confused discussion where it is impossible to reach a result. At the same time, the flexible structure of CATCH did not force the discussion to remain within rigid borders and did not influence the results, but rather allowed the participatory process to be free. In summary, this test of the CATCH model showed it to be a dynamic and flexible tool, useful for structuring and guiding the participation process, without imposing undue restrictions on influencing the outcome of stakeholder participation in a small catchment.

#### References

Collentine, D., Forsman, Å., Galaz, V., Kallner Bastviken, S., and Ståhl-Delbanco, A. (2002). CATCH: decision support for stakeholders in catchment areas. *Water Policy*. 4, 447-463.