

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES IN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT: A CRITICAL APPROACH

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a strong trend in policy making towards the inclusion of multiple agents in decision making processes related to environmental policies, as it is believed that some problems (par excellence environmental problems that are characterized by high degree of complexity and uncertainty), cannot effectively be addressed by a sole agent. There exists a growing body of literature about participatory processes that are used to deal with complex environmental problems. In this paper the authors present the main characteristics that such a process must obtain, so as to correspond to the concepts of democratic pluralism and sustainable development, but also address the critical issue of effective internal communication that is a generic factor in such processes. Multi-stakeholder processes are advocated for their capability to successfully include multiple groups in environmental decision-making processes. This ability stems from their basic theoretical values and ideologies, such as the concepts of sustainable development, good governance, democratic pluralism, participation, equity and justice. However by making use of multi-stakeholder processes and by employing them to ecosystem management decision making, leads to the establishment of some fundamental characteristics that should be apparent in decision-making processes such as, partnership, collaboration and solidarity, transparency in the decision making process, access to information by all interested groups, inclusiveness, legitimacy, accountability, responsibility and the building of communication channels.

The authors assume that the success of such processes is based mainly on the establishment of effective channels of internal communication that will help the successful interaction between multiple agents of different educational, ideological, social and economic backgrounds. Existing literature on the issue as rule takes for granted the 'communication language' and investigates the mode of presentation of the needed information for establishing an effective method of communication, which is believed that eventually will lead to optimum decisions. Presumably if such communication channels are established, the multi-stakeholder processes are successful in addressing complex environmental problems.

The question that remains to be answered however is how this could happen and under what conditions if the physical language is incapable to establish the effective channel of communication. This situation may occur when the physical language is differentially 'understood' through the mediation of 'jargons' that are related to the differentiated profiles of participants in the discourse. The authors suggest that the cooperative construction of simulation models could help in overcoming the physical language barrier by enhancing the sharing of available information and the exchange of ideas between participating groups and by clarifying the concepts that are essential to the process.

Key words: sustainable policy, participation, simulation