

T16P14 / Citizens and businesses: approaches to engagement in sustainability governance and outcomes

Topic : T16 / Sustainable Development and Policy

Chair : Valentina Dinica (Victoria University of Wellington)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Note: This Panel is eligible for the GCPSE (UNDP) Grant.

Public engagement (PE) is a key principle of governance for sustainability, enshrined in many governmentally endorsed documents at international, regional and national level. The concept of the public generally includes both citizens and stakeholders, which are driven by

commercial or non-commercial interests. Numerous academics and international organizations include PE in normative conceptual models of governance for sustainability.

Usually, the underlying hypothesis is that PE can facilitate governance outcomes that are consistent with sustainability objectives ('sustainability outcomes'). Nevertheless, it was noted in the literature that the empirical evidence to back this up is still very limited. One reason is that methodologically it may be hard or impossible to credibly show connections between PE and sustainability outcomes, because engagement often regards individual policy/organizational decisions, while any governance structure consists of numerous decisions at various scales, actor structures, opportunities for policy and actor coordination, and the qualities of such arrangements. In addition, governance outcomes will also depend on the extent and quality of implementation, compliance and enforcement – policy activities where the citizens and stakeholders may be involved in various forms, or not.

When discussing relationships between PE, governance (as analytical unit) and sustainability, a more realistic dependent variable is whether the PE features observed empirically offer citizens and policy stakeholders sufficient opportunities to defend sustainability objectives and the adequate implementation of the sustainability agenda. The first scientific contribution of this panel is that it presents theoretical and empirical research analysing how various features of citizen and stakeholder engagement in policy processes may create opportunities or obstacles towards safeguarding sustainability values and outcomes in policy-making and post-decision activities (policy operationalization/implementation, monitoring, compliance, enforcement and evaluation).

In addition to their role of policy stakeholders and target groups of regulatory and economic policy instruments, businesses can also implement the sustainability agenda by means of voluntary initiatives, including partnerships with social and other economic actors. This panel will also pay attention to these types of roles and responsibilities of businesses, by presenting contributions that examine the engagement of commercial actors towards human development that is safe within the Planetary Boundaries. Theoretical contributions and case-studies will reflect on the ecological effectiveness of initiatives under the Corporate Sustainability Responsibility umbrella and on the interplays between these and various regulatory and enabling policy approaches pursuing sustainability outcomes.

Trade-offs and interactions between the three dominant policy approaches - voluntary, regulatory and enabling – are complex. Some broad patterns of interplays have been mapped in the sustainability and policy literature, particularly on interactions between voluntary

agreements, regulations and environmental effectiveness. However, there is limited understanding of such trade-offs with respect to corporate responsibility initiatives and how they may affect the environmental sustainability performance of businesses. The papers

presented in these panels take a holistic approach, by reflecting on these relationships.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel aims to extend the available knowledge on the relationship between public engagement, governance and sustainability. PE is often considered a key governance principle for sustainability, being assumed to lead to better decisions and superior sustainability outcomes, due to more support for implementation. However, the empirical evidence for these strong hypotheses is limited, while only a few PE

features have been considered so far in case-studies and the few quantitative studies available.

Such relationships may be persuasively demonstrated when the analytical unit is a straightforward policy instrument or project/organizational decision. In contrast, assessments will be methodologically more challenging for more complex analytical units, particularly that of multi-level governance. Governance structures consist of numerous decisions at various scales, actor structures, opportunities for policy and actor coordination, and the qualities of such arrangements. An alternative dependent variable is to focus on whether the PE features observed empirically offer the public sufficient opportunities to defend sustainability objectives, while protecting the public from capture by special interests.

This panel calls for papers that address following research challenges:

- What PE features or methods are more likely to enable/obstruct individual governance decisions of high environmental quality, and what contextual factors and characteristics of the environmental challenge may influence such relationships? Papers are encouraged that address a wide diversity of governance features.
- What PE features or methods can be used in post-design policy processes (such as implementation, monitoring and evaluation) to enhance the prospects for sustainability outcomes for the governance structure of interest?
- How to integrate governance conceptualizations with PE assessment frameworks in ways that enable scholars to investigate empirically and comparatively whether the PE options available for various governance structures (applicable for different economic sectors, or various natural resources or environmental problems) enable the public to defend sustainability values and goals. What methodological approaches can be used to investigate empirically such relationships?

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Session 1 Behavioural and policy perspectives to citizen and stakeholder engagement in governance for sustainability

Thursday, June 29th 13:30 to 15:30 (Block B 3 - 3)

Discussants

Valentina Dinica (Victoria University of Wellington)

Public engagement in governance for sustainability: a two-tier assessment approach and illustrations from New Zealand

Valentina Dinica (Victoria University of Wellington)

The culture of public engagement: Harnessing diverse perspectives on sustainability for robust climate policy governance in NZ

Priya Kurian (University of Waikato)

Debashish Munshi (University of Waikato)

Sandra Morrison (University of Waikato)

Building trust in participative groups accompanying river restoration projects: a pre-/post observation analysis

Tobias Schulz (Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL)

Susanne Menzel

Institutionalizing Corporate Environmental Responsibility for Protected Area businesses: behavioural perspectives on policy settings and implementation

Valentina Dinica (Victoria University of Wellington)