

Re-focusing research and researchers in public participation

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

According to recent articles on public participation the practice of involving citizens and organized stakeholders in decision making keeps expanding in North America, in Britain, continental Europe and the world at large (e.g. through international development projects). In addition to the geographic spread, citizen participation is now used for spheres as diverse as city and land use planning, managing transboundary waters, forestry, technology risk assessment, transportation, community development, and many others (Roll and Ojassoo 2006; O'Connor et al. no date).

Despite this “rise of public participation” (Rowe and Frewer 2004, 514) two pivotal questions (Webler 1999; Webler and Tuler 2001) have been asked for a long time (Rosener 1978) and not yet found conclusive answers:

1. Why should public participation be done at all?
2. If it should be done: how?¹

Two distinct professional approaches have attempted to find answers: One approach can be called “research-based” because empirical research

¹ A third question – closely linked to the two previous ones and also much discussed in the research literature – is: “How should public participation be evaluated?” As the problems of evaluation are not central to this article, this discussion will not be pursued here. Good overviews can be found in Rowe and Frewer (2004) and Abelson and Gauvin (2006).

as well as the systematic study and development of theory is used. The other approach here is named “craft-based” as it uses applied principles and methods and the therein generated practical experiences to answer the two pivotal questions.

This article is arguing that it is time for researchers of public participation as well as for researcher-practitioners (see below) to pay more attention to the craft-based approach:

- With the mentioned rise of public participation there seem to be increasing numbers of researchers of various disciplines who are requested to design public participation processes.
- Yet often these researcher–practitioners don’t have (yet) the necessary practical knowledge.
- The knowledge that the research literature on public participation can offer to these researcher-practitioners is expanding but still limited and does not provide all the required knowledge.
- At the same time, the craft of public participation has outlined elaborated pathways to answer especially the question of how public participation processes should be conceptualized and implemented in a given situation.
- Yet, only few researchers who study participation seem to seriously consider the knowledge produced in the “world of craft”- as an area of further research – if they take note of it at all.

After a short discussion on the research method used for this article and the definition of the main concept these arguments will be developed in detail. The article will conclude with a proposal of what the current situation in research- and craft-based disciplines of public participation” should entail for researchers.

1.2 The research method used

Ideally, in order to substantiate the points of the argument established here, a systematic literature research and – based on this – a thorough assessment of the contributions of research and craft to public participation would have been carried out as well as a systematic study on the situation of researchers who provide advice on public participation. In reality, and due to resources constraints, the research approach has been more restricted.

The impression on the increasingly practical involvement of researchers in public participation developed on first-hand experiences in two interdisciplinary European research projects, called AquaStress (see <http://environ.chemeng.ntua.gr/aquastress>) and NeWater (see <http://www.newater.info/everyone>), which are attempting – among other goals - to implement public participation in mainly European but also some African and Asian sites. The author's role in these projects is to support the implementation and the evaluation of participatory processes in about a dozen sites. The perspectives obtained here are enriched with data gained from the literature reviews on the research- and the craft-based approaches.

These literature reviews have been “semi-systematic”: Research literature has been considered on the basis of previous work on evaluating public participation processes (von Korff 2006) as well as especially those articles that provide an overview of the research field (e.g. Webler 1999; Rowe and Frewer 2004; Abelson and Gauvin 2006). The selection of the “craft literature” was partially based on handbooks that the author has consulted for practical advice (especially Creighton 2005), partially on those guides that were directly downloadable on the internet (see references). But it is clear that not all of the possibly relevant literature could be included into this article and the argument made here must therefore remain tentative.

1.3 Public participation defined

Broadly speaking, public participation seems to be widely understood (see Rowe and Frewer 2005, 253) as a process (also called a “practice” or “procedure”) by which people who are not elected or appointed decision-makers (i.e. the “public”) engage (i.e. “participate”) with these officials on agenda-setting and/ or decision-making on issues and policies that affect them or that interest them.

Whether this means that the public only consists of “ordinary citizens” rather than ... organized groups of individuals...” (Abelson/ Gauvin 2006, 2) or also includes “companies, economic and public interest groups ... and experts” (HarmoniCop 2005, 2; similar: Beierle and Cayford 2002, 6) is moot. Here the broader second view is adhered to.

Participation itself has been specified by differentiating the various levels in which power is delegated to members of the public (this is discussed

by Arnstein 1969, Nelkin and Pollak 1979, Wiedemann and Femers 1993; Rowe and Frewer 2005; also Creighton 2005, 8 and others). The lowest two levels of power-delegation are often called “information” (where officials convey messages to the public such as in newsletters or briefings), and “consultation” (where input is sought from the public such as in surveys, focus groups, or public hearings). Above this, two-way communication between the public and officials occurs and terms such as “active involvement”, or “active participation” and others are used. Different views exist (e.g. Portland Development Commission 2007, 4; Rowe and Frewer 2005, 254; O’Connor et al. no date 1) with regard to on what level “real participation” starts. For the purposes of this article a concept is adopted which holds that the information level can (and usually has to) be part of public participation but that participation starts only from the consultation level.

2 The rise of participation and the growing involvement of researchers in its application

2.1 The expansion of public participation

“Dialogue, deliberation and citizen engagement are increasingly familiar hallmarks on the current public participation landscape”, write Abelson and Gauvin (2006,1) for Canada. Delli Carpini et al. (2004, 316) note a “renaissance” of public deliberation in academia and governance for the USA (in a similar vein for the USA also Beierle and Konisky 2000, 587; Bryner 2001, 49; Webler and Tuler 2001, 29; Creighton 2005,1). And Rowe and Frewer (2004, 512) observe that “in the United Kingdom and elsewhere the issue of public participation is one of growing interest to academics, practitioners, regulators, and governments.” (Similar also for the UK: Petts and Leach 2000,1). For continental Europe various authors expect (e.g. Roche 2003 for France) or observe (Hansen and Mäenpää no date) the widening use of public participation in decision making.

The drivers of these developments are considered to be:

- Increasing concern for the environment, an associated desire for accountable and sustainable decision making, and the view that for these purposes it is necessary to engage the interested and affected public

- Subsequent international agreements and legislation such as the Rio Declaration (1992), the Aarhus Convention (1998), or the EU Water Framework Directive (2000) that encourage or oblige governments to involve the public in specific decision making processes
- National legislation requesting public participation (for France see Roche 2003, for the US Creighton 2005 and Beierle and Cayford 2002) possibly before the background of dwindling trust of citizens against the political institutions
- The spread of the internet and other media technologies such as GIS that offer new opportunities for two-way communication
- International or national agencies such as the World Bank or the Commission of the European Union that make public participation increasingly a requirement of projects that they are funding.

To qualify this advance of public participation somewhat Abelson and Gauvin (2006,1) observe that it “would be naïve to think that public participation has become institutionalized within Canadian culture...”. Similar observations almost certainly apply to most other national, regional or local governance cultures though there might be exceptions as Creighton (2005, 2) for example notes that “in [US regulatory] agency decision making [public participation] is increasingly considered standard practice.”

2.2 The challenge posed by the expansion of public participation

The expanded interest in public participation does not mean that there are always the skills to practice it because “[i]t is one thing to make a commitment to public participation in the abstract. It is quite another to do it.” (Creighton 2005, 2) The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management website (http://www.ciwem.org/policy/policies/stakeholder_engagement.asp) mentions that there “are specific skills associated with getting the best results from stakeholder engagement activities, and there is a need for training in, and wider awareness of, these.” And Hansen and Mäenpää (no date, 20) state that public participation “remains troublesome in practice.”

In fact, the expansion of public participation as a legal requirement or an incentive for obtaining projects seems to have created a situation where especially researchers (but probably also public administrators) find themselves increasingly required to practice skills that they sometimes still need

to acquire. The situation in the European Commission funded projects AquaStress (AQS) and NeWater (NW) reflects this.

2.3 The situation of researcher-practitioners

The goal of AQS is to develop, test and propose interdisciplinary solutions for situations of too much, too little or too polluted water. The goal of NW is to promote the transition to river management systems which can better cope with flooding, drought and pollution. Both projects work at a total of nearly 20 case study sites - mostly located in Europe. Effective stakeholder participation is considered among the most important elements of both projects (NeWater 2003, 56; AquaStress 2005, 32 and 74).

Specifically designated project partners have been selected for working in the case study sites. In their majority they are researchers facing – among others - the following responsibilities:

1. Involving groups of key stakeholders into the strategic planning and follow up of project activities in the case study sites. These groups with advisory character might be more or less ad hoc and vary in size in the different sites, but usually require the project partners to consider the stakeholders needs with regard to AQS and NW.
2. Coordinating the exchanges between the numerous international AQS and NW project researchers with an interest in the case study sites on the one hand and the local stakeholders on the other. This task is especially challenging as – ideally - the interests of researchers from various scientific disciplines need to be bundled into local projects that also meet the needs of stakeholders.
3. Supporting or directly organizing local participation processes as a result of the exchanges described under the two previous points. The content of these participation processes might involve the coordination of stakeholder relevant research activities, the organization of public dialogue or direct advice for water managers of how to conduct specific public participation processes that include decision making.

Clearly, these tasks go much beyond the traditional training of researchers especially when they are engineers or hydrologists such as in many cases in NW and AQS. Researchers of various disciplines thus have become practitioners of complex participation processes. And AQS and NW

are not the only cases. Commission-funded projects, such as *HarmoniCop*, *encora*, and others have required similar tasks.

While some researcher-practitioners may have already collected the required experiences to carry out such tasks others feel less prepared. For example, in a training workshop on public participation at the beginning of the NW project, the 16 participants – asked for their expectations of the workshop – generated more than a dozen statements such as the following: “How to deal with stakeholder meetings, how many meetings to plan, how many stakeholders etc”. “How to deal with possible disagreements”. “How to build trust in stakeholders especially for foreign scientists”. “How to deal with power relations in basins”. (based on the workshop minutes by Sullivan 2005). They also requested a practical “how-to” manual for guidance.

These and other impressions (see for example the case study of Irvin and Stansbury 2004; also a report - von Korff 2005 - on AQS project participants’ needs of public participation training) show that there is a need for practical support among at least some of the scientists responsible for implementing participatory methods. This is not surprising, considering the described expansion of participation. This situation of increased demand is met by the supply of available knowledge from research and from craft.

3 The contributions and limitations of research

For more than three decades researchers have attempted to provide responses to the two questions of why public participation should be done at all and if so, how it is best carried out. The following seems to characterize the state of research on these two questions.

3.1 Research on why public participation should be used

Until recently arguments why organized stakeholders and the wider public should be involved into political decision making had been mainly derived from theory such as political science perspectives on democracy (considerable literature has been summarized in Fiorino 1990; also in Delli Carpini et al. 2004) as well as from socio-psychological approaches such as social learning (see e.g. Webler et al. 1995; Delli Carpini et al. 2004). Following Fiorino (1990) and Webler et al. (1995), the theory-derived rea-

sons for undertaking public participation can be classified into four categories: Normative, substantive, instrumental and social learning.

Normative

According to this line of argument, public participation and especially the level of involving people in dialogue or deliberation, is “fundamental to democracy” (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14) because otherwise many decisions will be taken without reflecting the values of the public. For example, the decision to recharge an aquifer with treated waste water might be taken after waste water experts have specified a certain degree of health and environmental risks. And yet, the level of risk acceptable to the affected public is likely to be quite varied. A more democratic decision would be to include this spectrum of values into the decision.

Substantive

As public values and knowledge flow into the decision – so the argument goes – the final decision will also be more informed and thus of higher quality than a mere expert decision. More specifically speaking, the public may offer locally available information, discover mistakes, or generate alternative solutions (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14).

Instrumental

Integrating the public’s concerns into decisions will better legitimize these decisions, create trust between the public and the authorities, and – if done recurrently – can legitimize the political system as a whole (Delli Carpini et al. 2004, 334; Beierle and Cayford 2002, 14 and 74).

Social learning

According to a social learning concept as described by Webler et al. (1995) public participation can increase individual “cognitive enhancement” as well as “moral development”. Cognitive learning does not only refer to knowing more about the problem discussed but also about own and other group members’ points of view; and also about methods, tools and strategies to communicate well and solve problems constructively (1995, 446). Moral development includes aspects such as being able to see things from somebody else’s point of view, developing a sense of solidarity with the group and becoming able to solve problems in a way that considers what is good for the group as well as for oneself (similar also Fiorino 1990; and Delli Carpini et al 2004). There are positive repercussions on the

individual's integration in the community, the existing social capital, and the political system as a whole as participants increase their civic competences and commitment (Fiorino 1990; Delli Carpini et al 2004).

Contrary opinions

Not all researchers share the optimistic arguments concerning the potential benefits of public participation. Fiorino (1990) mentions voices arguing that only experts can understand the complex matters associated to decisions involving risk and that elites are usually more rational in their decision making than the wider public. A more specific critique is that some public participation processes such as those depending on consensus seeking might take longer and are more costly than non-consensual methods (Coglianese 1997).

The evidence

The empirical evidence regarding the benefits of public participation remains "thin" (Delli Carpini et al. 2004). Here, three thorough studies have been considered. In the first, Coliagnese (1997) studied negotiated rulemaking - a consensus-based process used by federal regulatory agencies of the US administration involving "representatives from regulated firms, trade associations, citizen groups, and other affected organizations, as well as members of the agency staff." (1257). Looking at 13 years of negotiated rulemaking and comparing the time used and the frequency of ensuing litigation with more non-consensus-based forms of rulemaking, Coglianese (1997, 1335) concludes that "[n]egotiated rulemaking does not appear any more capable of limiting regulatory time or avoiding litigation than do the rulemaking procedures ordinarily used by agencies. ... Once promulgated, negotiated rules still find themselves subject to legal challenge. The litigation rate for negotiated rules issued by the EPA [US Environmental Protection Agency] has actually been higher than that for other significant EPA rules."

However, this result seemingly contradicting instrumental and substantive reasons for public participation might be explained with the (ineffective) way negotiated rulemaking has been implemented. Colgianese (1997, 1323) himself hints at this possibility when he writes that "agencies have sometimes ... not been able to include all the organizations who feel they will be affected by a rule." However (and this will be discussed in the next section) including all those affected by a decision is one principle of effective public participation processes.

A rather positive picture about the effects of public participation is drawn in the second work considered here (Beierle and Cayford 2002). The two authors – using a case survey method - looked at 239 cases of environmental decision making involving public participation in the North American Great Lakes region. According to them (2002, 74 and 75) “[T]he case study record shows ... that public participation is more than just a theoretical appealing component of democracy...”. “Involving the public not only frequently produces decisions that are responsive to public values and substantively robust, but it also helps to resolve conflict, build trust, and educate and inform the public about the environment”. The authors also write, however, and this confirms the caveat about Coglianese’s findings, that “*In* understanding what makes participation successful, process [i.e. how things are done - YvK] is of paramount importance.” (Beierle and Cayford 2002,74).

A summary of the potential of public participation is offered by the study of Delli Carpini et al (2004). The authors mainly and extensively reviewed social psychology research about the functioning of communication (and specifically deliberation) in groups and come to the conclusion that there is “substantial evidence that deliberation can lead to some of the individual and collective benefits postulated by democratic theorists. However, “the impact of deliberation and other forms of politics is highly context dependent. It varies with purpose of the deliberation, the subject under discussion, who participates, the connection to authoritative decision makers, the rules governing interactions, the information provided, prior beliefs, substantive outcomes, and real world conditions. So, “although the research ... demonstrates numerous positive benefits of deliberation it also suggests that deliberation under less optimal circumstances, can be ineffective at best or counterproductive at worst.” (336) A very similar finding for public participation in general resulted already from a study project of the US National Research Council in 1996 (quoted in Webler 1999, 59).

In summary, even though the positive evidence probably remains to be further developed and validated, the three thorough studies mentioned here seem to draw rather a complementary picture. If done well, public participation has much potential, possibly as much as stipulated by theorists. When done poorly, it might have dear consequences. Thence the importance of understanding how to do public participation well.

3.2 Research on how public participation should be practiced

In 1993 (356) Wiedemann and Femers deplored that the “recommendations found in most public participation literature consist of reworded platitudes and rules of thumb, based on ideology rather than rigorous empirical analysis.” Today the picture looks different.

In their study of 239 public participation cases in the Great Lakes region Beierle and Cayford (2002, 49) identify four factors that are closely associated with success (defined as incorporating public values into decisions, improving the substantive quality of decisions, resolving conflict among competing interests, building trust in institutions, and educating and informing the public) and independent of the type of participation mechanism used (e.g. citizen advisory committee or negotiation). The factors are:

1. The agency responsible for the process is responsive to the communication and resource needs of participants.
2. Participants are motivated and have faith in the chosen process.
3. The quality of deliberation - characterized by open, efficient and meaningful exchanges - is high.
4. The public has at least a limited degree of control over the process used.

Beside these four factors, nine criteria or principles for determining an “effective” public participation process deserve attention: Rowe and Frewer (2000) developed these out of a comprehensive literature study basing their work on – among others – previous notions according to which a “good” process should be “fair” and “competent” (as specified by Webler 1995) meaning that exercises have to be perceived by participants as unbiased (fair) but at the same time they also have to deliver qualified and useful (competent) results. Rowe and Frewer (2000) developed the fairness and competence criteria further, terming them acceptance and process criteria. Using a random sample of the general public in the UK Rowe et al. (2001) validated the importance of the criteria for effective public participation processes in general. The (slightly revised) criteria (Rowe et al. 2004, 93) are summarized in the following tables:

Table 1. Acceptance criteria

Representativeness	The participants should comprise a broadly representative
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	sample of the affected population
Independence	The participation process should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way
Early involvement	The participants should be involved as early as possible in the process, as soon as value judgements become salient
Influence	The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy
Transparency	The process should be transparent so that the relevant population can see what is going on and how decisions are being made

Table 2. Process criteria

Resource accessibility	Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief
Task definition	The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined
Structured decision making	The participation exercise should use/ provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision making process
Cost-effectiveness	The procedure should in some sense be cost-effective from the point of view of the sponsors

Researchers have furnished additional advice, albeit based on less evidence than in the previous two cases. Wiedemann and Femers (1993, 367), relying on four case studies, for example, advise against seeing public participation as a goal in itself but rather as a tool for achieving objectives as better reaching a decision. And some case studies (such as Webler et al 1995, 460) recommend detailed components of public participation processes such as “site visits, face to face small group work, an egalitarian atmosphere, repeated meetings over several months, unrestricted opportunities to influence the process” etc.

Despite these at least initially confirmed general or broad principles of how to conduct participation exercises much research remains to be done. According to Rowe and Frewer - who recently drew up a research agenda to ultimately develop a theory of “what works best when” - one of the key questions that need to be answered is what kind of method (or “mechanism”) to use in which kind of situation (2004, 551). This question comes very close to two major concerns of practitioners:

- to be able to properly design and plan a participation process in a given context,
- to know and be able to apply a wide range of participation methods.

It is here where the craft of public participation has much to offer.

4 The contributions and limitations of craft

Practical guides - also called manuals (when they are short) or handbooks (when extensive) - have existed at least since the 1980s (see for example references in Webler 1999) in order to help practitioners design and implement (and also evaluate) public participation processes. In contrast with the research literature, these guides are usually not based on systematic research but rather on some kind of mix of the practical experiences of the authors, plus their more or less spelled-out insight into research and the corresponding literature. Increasingly these guides are available on the internet (see references). As this literature is usually not discussed by the researchers of public participation, this section will start by presenting various types of guides and then illustrate some of the advice contained therein.

4.1 Various types of practical guides

Guides by public participation specialists

Some guides are written by consultants who are public participation specialists with sometimes several decades of experience (e.g. Creighton 2005; Straus 2002). These guides typically intend to provide help in all kinds of domains in which participation processes are used – from water management to urban planning (see also Steyaert and Lisoir 2005).

Guides by institutions that are responsible for public participation

Various public institutions have by now developed their own guidelines for participation processes. These guides are usually specialized on the specific legal and other contextual requirements of these institutions, such as road construction in Australia (Vic Roads 1997), or urban planning in Oregon (Portland Development Commission 2007). Sometimes, but not always, these manuals resemble closely the more general handbooks of

consultants as the latter are retained as authors (see e.g. United States Department of Energy 1999).

Guides by researchers

Some researchers have begun to propose their own practical guides (e.g. HarmoniCOP 2005). Some of them do so realizing that “public participation is an art as well a science” and that the formal results of science do not suffice to provide such practical guidelines but that they have to be supplemented by “informal insights” (Beierle and Cayford 2002, 63).

Varying content of the guides

The most comprehensive handbooks (like Creighton 2005) contain three major areas:

1. Definitions, principles and theory of public participation.
2. Guidelines of how to construct a participation process. Here guides usually emphasize that they are not trying to provide “cooking recipes” or one-size-fits-all approaches but rather a series of steps that planners can use to design processes that fit their unique circumstances (see VicRoads 1997, Portland Development Commission 2007, Creighton 2005).
3. Descriptions of the various methods (or “mechanisms”) that exist to get information to the public (such as newsletters, briefings, displays etc) and from the public (such as surveys, workshops, public hearings etc.).

Many guides focus only on one of these areas. Straus (2002), for example, focuses largely on principles and theory, Portland Development Commission (2007) or Miskowiak (2004) on process design steps, and Steyaert and Lisoir (2005) on methods.

Audiences

Audiences are in all cases those that are responsible for implementing public participation processes. Some guides – even those of government agencies – are addressed explicitly also to the public in order to encourage it to participate more effectively (e.g. United States Environmental Protection Agency 1996).

4.2 Useful advice contained in the guides

Reasons for doing public participation and general principles

Like research, the practical literature furnishes reasons of why public participation should be done and largely mirrors the four major reasons (normative, substantive, instrumental, social learning) proposed by research. Clearly, the public authorities that have authored guides subscribe to these reasons (to various extents) and in some cases make them very explicit in their own way. The Portland Development Commission, for example, considers social learning as one of several reasons for doing public participation as by practicing it “Portland citizens are smarter, savvier and increasingly engaged in community development” (Portland Development Commission 2007, 6). The Australian authority for managing roads in the state of Victoria (VicRoads) considers that public participation “will result in better solutions to the problems to be solved in developing the transport system.” (VicRoads 1997, 3).

With regard to guiding principles of how public participation should be done, the practical literature echoes the proposition coming from empirical research discussed above (notably the four general principles explicated by Beierle and Cayford (2002) (stated in Section 3.1) as well as the acceptance and process criteria of Rowe and Frewer (2000). Practitioners however add their own criteria or formulate them in their own poignant ways:

Creighton (2005, 20) for example, states that managers should see public participation as an opportunity that allows them to “get the mandate they need to act” rather than viewing it as a required evil. By introducing this principle, Creighton is talking about a fundamental attitude change for many managers, a view that is echoed by Beierle and Cayford (2002, 75).

Another principle stipulated by Creighton (2005) is that the participation process be well-integrated into the decision-making process. This means that at any point during the decision process it should be clear why and on what exactly the public is involved in order to avoid the impression that the public input affects nothing.

Similar and additional principles have been formulated by government agencies. VicRoads (1997, 6) for example states that it will:

- communicate what decisions have already been made about the project and what decisions will be influenced by community participation
- identify the community interests, issues and concerns about the project
- ensure all interested parties are engaged in the decision making process at the appropriate level and at an appropriate time
- etc

Step-by-step guides to construct a public participation program

Contrary to what is available by research, the craft literature in detail answers the question of how to construct a public participation process that fits into each unique situation that a decision-maker might face. To do so, guides usually offer a series of steps that the planner is supposed to go through on her way to construct the process. These step-by-step guides can be more or less detailed. Creighton (2005) possibly offers the most detailed one. He distinguishes three main phases, with a total of 16 major steps - each one containing detailed advice of how to proceed including a discussion of the rationale behind the step and practical examples.

There is not enough space here to specify the various phases and steps mentioned in the different guides. However, one example might be sufficient to show that comprehensive advice is offered which in this detail is not found in the empirical literature:

For Creighton (2005) the first phase in the planning of a public participation process - called "decision analysis" - serves to clarify all decisional aspects of the process within the organization or organizations that are responsible for the process and for the ultimate decision. This involves a series of steps: Selecting a decision analysis team (the selection criteria are described); clarifying who the decision maker really is and what their stance is towards a participatory process (Creighton proposes specific questions that can be asked); finding out what the problem to be solved really is (a method to facilitate agreement on this within the decision analysis team is proposed); planning the various phases of the decision process; anticipating what potential organizational constraints could exist (that for example a decision has already been made); deciding whether in the view of all the precedent information a participatory process should still be undertaken and if so on what level (Creighton also provides criteria for this level assessment).

The idea of a decision-analysis phase is important because most of the research literature does not mention it specifically. And in practice it is not always carried out or requested (own experiences in Cyprus and France). Even some practical literature (e.g. HarmoniCOP 2005) recommends starting the process directly with a stakeholder analysis, a step that for Creighton occurs only in a second phase called “process panning”.

Public participation methods

Besides general principles and detailed steps to design processes, many guides also offer more or less concise descriptions of how to use methods such as Citizen Advisory Committees, Samoan Circles, Open Space, Consensus Conferences, Citizen Juries, Public Hearings, etc. Steyaert and Lisoir (2005) for example, offer a 10-page description of a “Charette” (a consensus-seeking method which is especially useful for participatory design issues) plus 12 other methods. Creighton (2005) describes at length how to work with citizen advisory groups and more briefly characterizes over 60 other methods.

While it is true that also research has described and discussed various methods (see e.g. Fiorino 1990, Coliagnese 1997, Bryner 2001, Carr and Halvorsen 2001.) what is missing – and researchers are stating this themselves (e.g. Rowe and Frewer 2005, 286) – is more systematic knowledge about *how* the various methods should be practiced.

In summary, this brief review of the craft literature yields the following observations as relevant for the work of researcher-practitioners as well as for further research on public participation:

1. The practical literature, generally speaking, offers more detailed advice than the research literature on how to design and implement public participation processes.
2. At the same time, the insights stated in this literature are not based on systematic empirical research. So far they are “rules of thumb” based on experience that in many cases, however, appear to work.
3. Yet some propositions in the craft literature, like for example with what step to start a participation process, can be contradictory from one guide to another.

These observations mean that:

- Researcher-practitioners – such as work in AQS or NW - can find useful – albeit not always unequivocal - information for their practice in this literature
- Researches interested in the further study of public participation find a wealth of –sometimes contradicting – potential hypotheses of how public participation is supposed to work. It is up to them, to specify these hypotheses and to put them to the test.

5 The attention that research has paid to the practical literature so far

Ironically, despite the know-how accumulated in the practical literature, researchers of public participation have a tendency to almost completely ignore the field of craft. One of the few exceptions is Thomas Webler (but also Beierle and Cayford 2002; Chess and Purcell 1999) who has called for a research agenda that would end the mostly separated existence of science and craft (1999). And yet the research agenda on the evaluation of public participation recently compiled by Rowe and Frewer (2004) again let the practical literature out of sight.

6 Conclusion

This article has shown that the geographical and thematic expansion of public participation has created a situation in which many researchers find themselves confronted with new tasks – namely the design and implementation of participation processes – for which they do not always have yet the required skills.

In this situation, the researcher-practitioners of public participation find some initial advice in the knowledge that research on public participation has established: This knowledge concerns the important question of why public participation should be done. Four general reasons – normative, substantive, instrumental and social learning have been developed by theory. The research by Beierle and Cayford (2002) as well as Delli Carpini et al (2004) provides initial confirmation for these reasons but at the same time hint at the importance of understanding *how* public participation gets implemented.

Yet, research has advanced only a bit on this latter point. Hitherto, with the general principles of Beierle and Cayford (2002) as well as the acceptance and process criteria of Rowe and Frewer (2000), it has developed and initially validated general orientations of how public participation should be practiced. Research, however, has not progressed much when it comes to providing more specific advice of how public participation should be designed, planned and implemented. Some researchers have responded by providing their own practical guides.

It is on the question of how to design and implement, where the craft-based approach offers considerable help to researcher-practitioners. Detailed manuals with relevant steps to consider guide the practitioner through the complex process of choosing, planning and implementing specific methods of public participation. And yet, this know-how is usually based on individual experiences and exchange with colleagues rather than on systematic and controlled verification. And not in all cases the various practical guides seem to be in agreement in their recommendations.

Despite this rich, but not-yet systematically researched, and sometimes contradicting knowledge of the practical literature, most researchers of public participation have shown little interest in considering the advice provided by the field of craft as a route to advance the research-based knowledge..

This article argues that researchers should begin to seriously and systematically consider the propositions of the craft literature. They should be able to derive from here hypotheses for further research with useful practical implications. For example, the proposal by Creighton (2005) to always go through a specific process of decision analysis as one requirement for an effective process could be such a hypothesis.

Hypotheses could be tested and researched in various manners. Other empirical research on public participation (Beierle and Cayford 2002; Rowe et al. 2001) has already demonstrated possible routes to undertake such research and yet other methods are conceivable (see e.g. Webler 1999).

But even before this research is undertaken, it is almost certain that a more profound look from the world of science into the world of craft would fertilize both worlds. Practitioners would see their approaches either confirmed or refuted and researchers would become better able to support the design and implementation of public participation processes. And re-

searcher-practitioners such as those from the AQS and NW projects would find validated advice for building their newly required skills.

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