

# Approaches to Participation in Evaluation: Some Conditions for Implementation

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## **Approaches to participation in evaluation: some conditions for implementation**

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**Abstract:** Approaches to participation in evaluation rely on the principle of active participation by major stakeholders, including the less organized groups, as fundamental to good evaluation practice. This process offers a number of advantages but implementation requires certain pre-requisites. The goal of our paper is to weigh up the advantages of participation and to examine the conditions necessary for approaches to participation in evaluation to achieve their objectives.

**Keywords:** Approaches to participation in evaluation, public policies, participation, democracy, empowerment

**Résumé :** L'évaluation participative repose sur le principe d'une participation active des principales parties prenantes (dont les groupes les moins organisés) à l'exercice d'évaluation. Cette démarche présente un certain nombre d'atouts dont la mise en œuvre nécessite la mise en place de pré-requis. La finalité de notre papier est de discuter des avantages de la participation, ainsi que des conditions à réunir pour que l'évaluation participative puisse atteindre ses objectifs.

**Mots-clés :** évaluation participative, politiques publiques, participation, démocratie, émancipation

In the field of public policy evaluation, participatory evaluation has undergone major growth on an international scale over the past fifteen years. Participatory evaluation finds its roots in the citizen participation programmes that emerged in the United States in the 1960s, and in a growing awareness of the importance of representing multiple perspectives in political decision-making. Participatory evaluation has developed primarily in the sectors of social, educational and health care services.

We can consider two principal streams of participatory evaluation: Practical Participatory Evaluation (Cousins and Earl, 1992) and Transformative Participatory Evaluation (Tandon and Fernandes, 1984). These loosely correspond to pragmatic (utilisation of the evaluation) and emancipatory (empowerment) functions (Cousins and Whitmore, 1998). The approach of Practical Participatory Evaluation aims primarily to foster the utilisation of the evaluation. The core premise of Practical Participatory Evaluation is that stakeholder participation in evaluation will enhance the relevance, ownership, and thus the utilisation of the evaluation. The approach of Transformative Participatory Evaluation aims primarily to empower individuals or groups through their participation in the evaluation process. It focuses on learning inherent in the process and on any social action and change that may result.

Collaborative and Empowerment evaluation approaches (Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman, 1996) are closely linked with these two forms of participatory evaluation. Beyond their specificities, collaborative, participatory and Empowerment evaluation approaches share some common values that

reinforce the implementation of a participative process. They are practical and/or transformative depending on the task at hand. They involve a certain diversity of participants whose participation and power control are more or less extensive. They aim to widen and enrich public debate through an organised exchange of participants' points of view, and therefore contribute to participatory and discursive democracy. They make participation necessary as far as they involve complex matters loaded with value-laden issues. All these approaches intend to varying degrees, to promote the profits of participation in evaluation (greater external validity of the evaluation, greater utilisation of the results of an evaluation, collaborative public engagement, contribution to participatory and discursive democracy, process of empowerment).

The aim of our paper is not to explore deeply what distinguishes or gathers these various evaluation approaches (for this purpose, see Cousins and Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman and Wandersman, 2005) but to discuss, by highlighting their shared values, their supposed advantages and the prerequisites to ensure their effective functioning. Study of the prerequisites will enable us to respond to a certain number of limits which are generally attributed to these approaches. We will use examples of participative evaluations carried out in France to illustrate our cases, in particular in the area of sustainable development, which recommends the use of participative processes.

After an introduction to collaborative, participatory and empowerment evaluation approaches, their shared values and supposed advantages, we will define the prerequisites and conditions necessary for an effective participative process within the framework of evaluation. We will also touch on the consequences of participation on the final outcome of the evaluation, as well as the role of the evaluator.

### **Collaborative, Participatory and Empowerment Evaluation approaches: some shared values, some supposed advantages**

Approaches to participation in evaluation share some common values. They agree on the common principle of active participation by major stakeholders as being fundamental to good evaluation practice. The major stakeholders may include public decision makers, technical appraisers, direct and indirect

beneficiaries involved in the public policy under evaluation, and representatives of the community. They seek to break with the managerial tradition of evaluation which sees itself as neutral, and is based on the work of the evaluator as an independent expert using objective quantified methods. This traditional design of evaluation ‘solid, scientific, quantitative’, provides “hard figures” useful for the decision maker, ‘hard figures’, backed up by transparent and systematic methods (Pollitt, 1999, p.154-155). The goal here is to produce an evaluation process, claimed to be ‘value free’, which provides the most objective possible views on the problem of evaluation and the consequent decisions. In this regard, this approach aims to be independent of the value systems and objectives sought by any particular stakeholder.

In contrast to the managerial tradition of evaluation, approaches to participation in evaluation are based on the supposition that any human intervention in a process is not neutral and therefore conveys a set of values which helps determine the process i.e. the evaluation process is ‘value engaged’. Any evaluation process cannot be value free and cannot assume ‘a neutral, non-politicized bystander position, protected from idiosyncratic predispositions of the evaluator or the context, producing credible information that is not unduly biased by its sponsor or by bad decisions of the evaluator’ (Greene, 2002, p.2-3). The evaluator as a stakeholder will contribute to the evolution of the decision process and the construction of the final choice. ‘It is not possible for evaluators...in the hopes that our practice will not perturb the situation or influence it via some form of unwanted bias’ (Greene, 2002, p.2-3). The fact that approaches to participation in evaluation, especially empowerment evaluation, seek to break with the managerial tradition of evaluation does not mean that they are mutually exclusive. It does not mean either that internal and external forms of evaluation can not be mutually reinforcing. These approaches pursue different objectives which can, however, be additional (Fetterman and Wandersman, 2007, p.183).

Because evaluation is the projection of a system of values as a frame of reference, and the expression of a peculiar point of view on action, it is necessary to favour the expression of diverse points of view on public action in order for the social legitimacy of the evaluation to be as wide as possible. Approaches to participation in evaluation seek to bring together, widely and actively, the diverse stakeholders in the evaluation exercise. The principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation developed

by House (2005) contribute to achieving this objective and providing the common base for different approaches to participation in evaluation

- Inclusion: Inclusion means working with under-represented and powerless groups as key stakeholders in the evaluation process, not just sponsors and well-organised groups. This does not mean that every interest, value or view concerned will be given equal weight, merely that all relevant ones should be considered in the design and conduct of the evaluation.
- Dialogue: The evaluation study should encourage extensive dialogue between, and within interest groups. The aim is to enhance understanding of interests, values and views amongst the various participants.
- Deliberation: The aim is to achieve, through rational discussion, a set of outcomes, values and conclusions involving all those concerned. It may be only through participation in the process that stakeholders are able to formulate and construct their interest in interaction with others.

The greater the importance given to the principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation, the greater the active participation of stakeholders will be in the evaluative process. The implementation of an active participation by major stakeholders is supposed to offer some advantages to evaluation approaches. These one intend to promote the five following aspects that we discuss:

- A greater external validity of the evaluation
- A greater utilisation of the results of an evaluation
- A collaborative public engagement
- A contribution to participatory and discursive democracy
- A process of empowerment

Each of these is discussed in turn.

### ***A greater external validity of the evaluation***

Approaches to participation in evaluation are supposed to offer greater external validity to evaluation, because stakeholder discussion favours expression of a diversity of points of view. Evaluative judgement is built upon a multiplicity of informed opinions. Stakeholder participation in the evaluation exercise is seen as the guarantee of a better consideration of society's engagement in the goals of future projects. This gives such projects greater external legitimacy. The fact that stakeholders are part of the evaluation process makes this one more relevant to them, because it addresses their particular concerns. Using adequate evaluation methods can also increase the credibility of the evaluation process and therefore its external validity (Eckley, 2001, p.3).

Participation of all groups of legitimate players confers greater external validity upon an evaluation. From a concrete point of view, the question of knowing how to identify these groups of legitimate players and how to bring them into the process is not as simple as it seems. We can illustrate this difficulty using the example of social policy project in the Rhône Alpes region of France. The desire to invite jobseekers to sit on the steering committee for the evaluation of this policy came up against the existence of various jobseekers' associations. Who should participate in such a case, and who is the legitimate group of players here?

### ***A greater utilisation of the results of an evaluation***

The results of an evaluation have more chance of being used if the major stakeholders have taken part in the different stages of the evaluation process, and consequently have better understood the results of the evaluation. Moreover, stakeholders will be more likely to adhere to the results of an evaluation if they have themselves participated in its formulation and implementation. Consequently, we could imagine that recommendations will be more easily put into place and that resistance to solutions proposed will be weaker. If we implement a process which truly takes care of community priorities, we will have a greater chance of bringing real and sustainable change to that very same community. Participation is particularly well suited to formative evaluation and favours operational change to the proposals under evaluation by

bringing collective knowledge into the programme. 'Some researchers provide evidence of the capacity of participation to enhance evaluation use' (Patton, 1997, p.87-113).

This very objective is pursued by practical participatory evaluation and by some collaborative evaluation approaches such as Utilization-focused Evaluation (Patton, 1997), which are more about evaluation utilization than about empowerment.

In France, the development of participative approaches (in particular up-stream) has focused on providing greater use of the results of an evaluation. Early examples of participative evaluation processes in the 1980s had the aim of finding ways out of conflict situations with associations, particularly in the case of transport and infrastructure projects (the Mediterranean high-speed rail line, construction of the A85 highway...). Public decision-making bodies encouraged recourse to participative processes in order to resolve conflict. It is interesting to note that these processes have mainly come about after implementation of an initial non-participative process.

### ***A collaborative public engagement***

Through the organised exchange of points of view, participation allows the evaluative process to become a collaborative exercise of public engagement. Confrontation of one point of view with that of another, better understanding of what motivates other stakeholders, highlighting of points of convergence and areas of insurmountable conflict, will enable the collective definition of the decision making problem. In effect, this is about gambling on collective intelligence beyond the difficulties raised by the conflicting points of view so as to collaborate in the decision problem and to envisage a shared solution.

This objective is common to participatory evaluation approaches which recognise that development processes are the result of actions and interactions on the part of diverse social players, all of whom are performing parts in the same play. As a result, active participation, capacity building and learning by all relevant actors becomes a fundamental, rather than an instrumental condition, and the approach focuses on facilitating collective rather than individual learning.



The example of the evaluation (1997-2001) of the environmental plan of the town of Grande-Synthe (around 23, 500 inhabitants), situated in the North of France, demonstrates that is entirely possible to develop collaborative public engagement. The collaborative process made use of an existing participative organisation, the town's urban projects workshop. The role of this workshop was to intervene in all districts of the town, coordinating individual projects with the general urban project. It was made up of municipal elected-representatives, technical specialists and inhabitants (on a voluntary basis). By regular exchange of the opinions and skills of all groups of players, the workshop enabled the development of a climate of trust between all participants. In the words of the municipal elected-representative for urban planning, "Within the context of discussion between elected-representatives, technical specialists and inhabitants, each had his or her own role to play. The technical specialists defended the project, the elected-representatives spearheaded it, while the inhabitants gave their points of view and made proposals. Success of this process was down to respect of some basic rules. During discussions, participants had to develop their skills in listening, understanding and accepting different points of view. The elected-representatives and technical specialists were thus obliged to accept questioning of their ideas, and to take a step back from their absolute certainties and technical convictions."

### ***The contribution to participatory and discursive democracy***

Through seeking to give voice to those traditionally excluded from public debate, in particular the least favoured groups, approaches to participation in evaluation aim to widen and enrich public debate. Moreover, through participation in the evaluative process, citizens will become better informed and involved and more able to judge and exercise control upon public action. At this point, we can note the emancipatory goal expected of approaches to participation in evaluation. Warren (1993) underlines that citizen participation depends on the quality of the individual as a social actor. Through simple participation a citizen will lose his or her feeling of apathy, isolation and powerlessness. Evaluation therefore contributes to participatory and discursive democracy.

The main purpose of discursive democracy oriented evaluation is to promote practical knowledge, learning, public debate and accountability (Hanberger, 2006, p.25-28). The contribution to participatory and discursive democracy is a key-action of transformative participatory evaluation and especially of empowerment, “that is a fundamentally democratic process based on deliberation, communicative action, and authentic collaboration” (Fetterman and wandersman 2005, p.159)

In France, it was not until the 1990's, in particular, with the publication of the 1989 Viveret report that the idea of democratising participation in the evaluation of public decision-making was adopted. An initial reconciliation between evaluation and participatory democracy was first visible some fifteen years ago in the area of evaluation of transport infrastructure projects, into which the principle of community participation is clearly written in legislation. Some laws favours the widest possible public participation upstream of town and country planning decisions. Evolution of legislation was largely due to the existence of conflicts around, and sometimes leading to, deadlock in the implementation of infrastructure and transport networks.

Since 1995, the National Commission of Public Debate (NCPD) guarantees public information and participation in the drawing up of planning projects that incorporate major socio-economic stakes, or having a significant impact on the environment, or on town and country planning. The NCPD was partly inspired by public consultation practices used by the Quebec Office of Public Audience on the Environment ('BAPE'). The NCPD is responsible for organising and chairing public debate. It also has the task of making public the documents associated with a particular debate. This could lead in particular to a counter-appraisal, allowing for the involvement of other participants in the debate. Public debate takes place in the early stages of the evaluation process. It is neither the place for decision, nor for negotiation, but a time for dialogue during which the population can acquire knowledge and express themselves on the project in accordance with the rules defined by the NCPD. NCPD does provide neither decisions, nor recommendations, but only a careful account of the debates conducted during the process. Debates led to date by the NCPD concern major national and regional town and country planning projects, for example, transport infrastructure, town and country planning, motorways, high speed rail lines, high tension electricity cables, landfill sites. For infrastructure projects of a smaller scale,

participation is limited to a public enquiry during which the community is invited to comment on the project. However, such consultation takes place far downstream of the evaluation and decision stage and causes frustration among the public, who wants to be heard further upstream with regard to the choice of options.

In France, some regions have developed interesting participative and discursive democracy procedures, in which citizens are consulted and are active in drawing up regional policy and evaluating the results of this. Since 2005, such is the case in the Poitou-Charentes Regional authority, which has set up citizen's assessment panels. These panels are made up of citizens who are directly concerned by the actions of the regional authority. An example is judging regional policy on climate change. Evaluation of climate change policy by members of the citizens' panel revealed a significant rate of satisfaction from these. For 60% of the participants, participation on this panel brought them both enrichment on a personal level as well as the opportunity to contribute to construction of a collective process. Comments from participants reflect this. Sitting on the citizens' panel was "an individual awakening as well as a source of personal enrichment". Participants also said, "the experience forced me to think more, to develop my knowledge of certain subjects and to know other opinions", "we hope to have made a few steps forward in dealing with the problem of global warming".

### ***The process of empowerment***

Approaches to participation in evaluation are supposed to empower people through their participation in the evaluation process. Evaluation is conceived as a developmental process in which, through the involvement of stakeholders (particularly the underprivileged) in all phases of the evaluation, power dynamics among participants are changed and less powerful stakeholders become sufficient.

What distinguishes transformative participatory evaluation and empowerment evaluation from other participative forms of evaluation is precisely their commitment to and power in developing among stakeholders the capacity for self-determination.

In France, there are still very few examples of empowerment evaluation today. An interesting case-study is that of the town of Grande-Synthe in the *Nord* Department. The mobilisation of town inhabitants and other stakeholders bears witness to the ability of local players to take their evolution into their own hands. The town is behind the participative process initiative for the drawing up of a local agenda 21. Even if the process itself did not have a long lifespan, the same cannot be said for mobilisation of the town's inhabitants. Indeed, having drawn strength from their implication in public action and the experience gained in the local agenda 21 process, inhabitants and other stakeholders continued their actions towards a collective interest objective in other shapes and forms. This gave birth to an association for sustainable development. A number of catalysts sparked development of this association ; conviviality, defending common values, the search for personal enrichment and the collective interest and the desire to play an active part in the development of their city. Association members include inhabitants and other stakeholders who are convinced of the importance of playing a role in local public action. The association has become a source for proposals (rather than contestations) to the municipal council.

### **Conditions for the implementation and the applicability of approaches to participation in evaluation**

A number of prerequisites must be observed if approaches to participation in evaluation are to achieve their objectives. Citizens must be informed of, motivated and trained for the evaluation. The evaluative process must then be supervised. The costs of such actions may often be judged to be prohibitive with regard to the supposed benefits of participation, which are difficult to quantify.

More importantly, because evaluation is subject to constraints of time, in particular the need to achieve results and to make decisions within a given timeframe, the necessary upstream phases of information, motivating, training and supervision of participants, are generally neglected or carried out in a hurry. Because of this lack of forward-planning and preparation (the upstream phase of an evaluation is generally under-estimated), approaches to participation in evaluation have every chance of failing to deliver its expected benefits.

Approaches to participation in evaluation must be properly organised. In order to achieve its objectives, participation presupposes that a certain number of conditions be brought together. Informing, motivating and training participants, allowing interest groups to construct a shared vision and balancing expression of points of views, are indispensable if participation is to be successful.

***Informing, motivating and training participants (particularly weaker interest groups) to take part in evaluation***

Clear information, concerning the terms of the evaluation and the opportunity to make a point of view heard, is necessary in order to mobilise different groups of individuals, particularly weaker groups, and to bring them into the evaluation process. One main challenge of approaches to participation in evaluation is to give voice to groups of stakeholders who are generally excluded from the evaluation process. However, it goes without saying that bringing weaker groups to the table is not enough to ensure their participation. Community engagement and participation cannot be imposed. Expressing an opinion requires, as a minimum, willpower as well as the ability to seize the opportunity to participate. For this reason, the weakest groups are generally isolated and unable to promote their point of view with others.

En France, the formalisation of consultation areas on a district level, such as neighbourhood committees for city policy, development committees, commuter committees for transport, offers the opportunity to be informed and to discuss upstream of the implementation of public projects. The inconvenience of these committees is that participation is generally limited from a quantitative point of view. Moreover and in many cases, only certain categories of the population are represented (retired people). In order to mobilise a younger population for example, it would be more effective to make use of existing local organisations. Organisations such as youth centres and young-people's associations already play a determining role in mediation. Opinion leaders and "big brothers" on housing estates could also be called into the process.

Balanced participation would pre-suppose that all groups possess a comparable amount of information about the stakes of the evaluation, as well as the skills to formulate and argue about future collective projects, according to these terms. Balanced participation also pre-supposes that different

groups have been instructed in the evaluation of public policy. Training sessions are often necessary in order to introduce the limits and expectations of an evaluation, its time-frame, the stakes and what is to be expected from participants.

In the case of the citizens' panels in the Poitou-Charentes region, four days were needed to inform and train participants to work together on the proposed topic. One day was given over to informing citizens and training them in consultation, while three days were necessary to formulate a decision and present this to the "sleeping partners" in the process.

Informing, motivating and training participants to take part in evaluation are all the more necessary if we want to avoid harming the external validity of the evaluation and making results unusable. Indeed, if participants are not informed and trained, the parties involved will have only a partial and very local vision of the stakes of the public action under evaluation and no evaluation skills or experience. Debate between participants may be reduced to local management stakes which will not give way to a more general re-evaluation of management choices. This is because the real decisional stakes will not have been discussed. This can lead to a weakening of the quality of the evaluation with regard to a process based on scientific approach. A poor quality evaluation will not be used. Approximations and poor analysis may result in in-action because they can be used as arguments to justify the status quo. Rutherford (2000) notices for example that using inexperienced people to conduct fieldwork and data-processing results in a lack of scientific standards and therefore a loss of rigour and precision in data. The external validity of the evaluation and the utilisation of the results of the evaluation will suffer from the lack of strength of the results and the conclusions obtained.

It is well-known that informing and training participants takes time. However, feedback from participative projects often states that it was, effectively, time which was lacking.

### ***Enabling underprivileged groups to build a common view***

Motivating certain groups is a first step forward, but does not automatically ensure the ability to participate. At this level, it is often easier for individuals or groups to mobilise themselves (e.g. against infrastructure projects) than to have the resources needed to organise themselves and build a shared

vision. Reacting to a decision is one thing, anticipating the impact of a decision requires an information process of a completely different nature. It is far easier to group together in defence of public property or heritage when it is threatened than to build in advance a shared vision of a local or regional dynamic. The prelude to a participative process consists in getting people to discuss and define a common view point. This stage is essential, particularly for the most underprivileged groups. Such groups are generally in a position of inferiority in confronting opposing points of view and the negotiation process. In effect, they do not often possess a clear vision of the problem as a whole, nor do they have a common position to be voiced in negotiation due to lack of sufficient organisation and thought about a common project beforehand. The common concern of different approaches to participation in evaluation is the principle of giving the weakest groups the opportunity to express conflicting points of views so as to build a shared vision, thereby allowing them to actively participate in the evaluation.

‘The Empowerment Evaluation’ (Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman, 1996; Fetterman 2001; Fetterman and wandersman 2005) deals precisely with making people aware of the existence of common interests and bringing them together around a collective view (Miller, Campbell, 2006). This stage is important for enabling people to express the values they share according to the purpose of a project. Empowerment evaluation requires a significant time to give expression to these values and has an identity-forming function for the community. It is only through the ‘Empowerment Evaluation’ phase that representatives of the community as bearers of a shared vision of a locality or region can debate with confidence and defend their ‘project’ before other stakeholders such as public decision makers, funding agencies, etc (Floc’hlay, Plottu, 1998, p.266).

At this stage, the success of methodology tools lies notably in the recourse to images or representations of reality in order to facilitate speech. A concrete support-tool will enable a greater number of people to take part and to express themselves. The present and future exercise (also known as force-field analysis) can help to build a common vision. It is a difficult task for people to express themselves with regard to the future of a situation without a support-tool. The present and future exercise involves community members in drawing what their current situation looks like and what they would like their future situation to look like. They also identify what will help them get to their desired future situation, and what

obstacles they will have to overcome. The goal is for community members to clarify a common vision, and to begin to plan how to get from where they are now to where they want to be (Canadian International Development Agency).

Other tools can be used to help stakeholders express and construct a common vision. The transect walk (Nabasa et al., 1995) enables community members to debate and validate information gathered in the field. A historical time line allows them to note down events which have marked the history of their community, and to better understand the perceptions of the collective community. Drawing up a resources map enables discussion of the use of these resources to plan change.

In order to facilitate the expression of points of view by under-privileged groups, various forms of artistic expression can be used, such as music, dance, drama... In France, the city of Rennes conurbation set up drama workshops to allow people in difficulty to express an opinion. In this case, drama was considered to be a prelude to public participation. Drama techniques are used in reference to the "Theatre of the oppressed" method, created and developed by Augusto Boal in Brazil. His method is to dramatise situations which are most often interiorised and experienced as in deadlock. Here, drama can make these situations intelligible and give individual stories a collective dimension. The language of drama comes naturally to human-beings and is thus easy to seize. Consequently the spectator becomes an actor on stage and eventually, the protagonist of his or her own life.

During this phase the evaluator has a very different role to that which he is normally given in the conventional design of evaluation. He is not the agent of an external appraisal, but on the contrary, is a part of the assessment resource, engaged in the process. He can be by turn a 'facilitator', a term used in 'empowerment evaluation' (Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman, 1996) or 'maieutician' because he should clarify players' questions. He should explain social stakes and values and be clear about which criteria are useable. He should engage players in a process of analysis and understanding of the situation. He does not represent the stakes of the participants, but favours democracy by giving voice to these groups of participants and by making sure that the widest possible range of perspectives and values are represented. He has also a role in helping disagreements and conflicts in a community to be articulated. In order to better understand the logic behind each group of participants, the evaluator has to fully



understand the communities represented by these groups. This point allows us to deal with the question of citizen representation in approaches to participation in evaluation. It is easier to associate different stakeholders when the evaluation concerns projects on a local scale *by* and *with* the people, whereas it is not always possible to include all citizens concerned in the evaluation for projects of a national scale. Therefore a system of representation is needed in this situation which closely resembles a democracy *for* the people.

If people feel too reluctant to participate, the evaluator must convince them of their interest to participate, either directly or through representation. If people participate, they have even more chance of seeing their points of view taken into account. Moreover, the experience will strengthen their links with the community. The evaluator must firstly find a way of identifying and engaging with the people involved. Filming the perceptions and expectations of populations is one way. Mobilisation can also be encouraged from watching such a film. It is important to establish motivation through individual contact. To do this, the evaluator needs to seek the help of key people on the ground, local opinion leaders, who will be more likely to convince future participants due to the fact that they are already known to them. The evaluator must then motivate people to participate through clear explanation of the objectives, the roles of each party, the responsibilities of each one, so as for them to feel involved. This can take the form of meetings, workshops and more convivial sessions (games). The aim is to create a dynamic and friendly atmosphere so as to give the project a sense of social engagement and to ensure lasting mobilisation. Using a variety of tools and by means of simple methods accessible to all will bring about immediate sharing of results with all key stakeholders. This in turn will lead to a greater commitment and a greater local learning. If certain participants are afraid to reopen debates on questions that are known to involve clear disagreement within the community, the evaluator must convince them that it is better to deal with disagreement early on, in order to avoid deeper conflict at a later date. It is better to build collectively at the early stages rather than become immobilised by sterile conflict which benefits no one.

### *Ensuring conditions for a balanced expression of view points*

Establishing an awareness of common interests, as well as disagreements, is necessary, but not sufficient, for effective and balanced participation. Different participants must be able to express and to defend their point of view. Consequently, the unequal capacity of groups to defend their point of view can result in the situation whereby whoever shouts the loudest imposes their vision to the detriment of the expression and due consideration of the views of the weakest groups. Indeed, if conflicting points of view are insufficiently managed, participation can lead to a false sense of democracy. Discussions will finally be led by the most powerful stakeholder groups who will impose their points of view upon the weakest. The outcome will be a paradoxical situation whereby the weakest are excluded from a process whose entire existence is to enable them to be heard. Otherwise if participants act as representatives of established interest groups and have long-established views on a topic, their participation can result in a sterile confrontation of points of view blocking any decision through participants sticking to their guns. The outcome of such confrontation is the status quo. Even more so, one can anticipate that through such a process participants agree on the lowest common denominator, to the exclusion of the most critical points of view (Lehtonen, 2006 , p.188). In the event the participation process, which is supposed to bring added value to the construction of actions, results in a decision which is neither particularly ambitious nor innovative. Preventing such risk requires careful planning.

The evaluator has to provide for an equal expression of the participants' points of view and to organize the confrontation of interests. His role is to mediate, to facilitate by proposing methods and tools as an aid to negotiation, and helping participants to conduct the evaluation. In this type of intervention, results are never guaranteed. In order to reach its objectives, or at least some of them, the evaluator needs to be both trained and experienced in achieving dialogue. He or she should be assisted by local players who drive the process as necessary. He or she must also employ any appropriate tools and communication media necessary to help with the task in hand

At this stage, it's necessary to favour simple and visual tools, tools easy to use by participants and which make exchanges between participants easier. Such tools can be colour voting methods. This method consists in using a predefined set of colours to represent possible answers, allowing participants

to give their point of view on a certain number of points. The colours used are the international standard of traffic light (dark green, amber, red) to which are added light green and pink to nuance answers, as well as white for a 'don't know' and black for an abstention. This provides a scale of seven colours in which dark green represents the answer 'I agree totally', light green 'I agree', amber 'I have mixed feelings', pink 'I do not agree', red 'I disagree totally', white 'I don't know' and black 'I do not wish to reply'. This can be transposed to a coloured matrix giving instant visibility to points of consensus and disagreement and allows for debate among participants during which anyone may change his or her colour and justify his or her opinion. Colour voting methods have been used in town and country planning for small scale projects at neighbourhood level.

When projects are on a large scale and include a wide range of stakeholders, more formalised methods using software such as the MACTOR software package may be used to favour the expression and construction of a common vision.. The MACTOR method of analysing the behaviour of participants seeks to gauge the balance of power between actors and study their convergence and divergence when faced with a certain number of associated stakes and objectives. By means of this analysis, the MACTOR method aims to assist in making decisions so that participants can give voice to their agreement and disagreement about the project, and build alliances.

The MACTOR method has been used by local authorities and the state to assist in taking strategic decisions. First, each participant reveals their objectives, their goals for the project, both existing and developing, their motivations, constraints and internal means of action, and their past strategic behaviour. Then, the meeting of participants according to their goals, objectives and means of action identifies a certain number of strategic outcomes on which actors have convergent or divergent aims. The MACTOR method helps to position participants in relation to a hierarchy of objectives and to identify convergence and divergence by means of diagrams. Balance of power between participants is calculated by the MACTOR software package and integrated into the analysis of convergence and divergence between the participants. New diagrams of possible convergence and divergence between all participants can thus be obtained. The comparison between the series of diagrams enables one to observe how potential alliances and conflicts become distorted by taking account of the hierarchy of objectives and the balance of power

amongst participants. The MACTOR method brings to light the interplay of potential alliances and conflicts among actors and in this way helps to facilitate a negotiated solution. It is obvious that if the participants desire a successful outcome to negotiations they have every interest in being honest.

Multicriteria Decision Aid (Roy, 1996) is one among the many possible methods that can be useful in conducting participative evaluation processes. It is interesting, because it offers a formal framework and methods to provide a structure for the negotiation process, enabling the negotiation process to result in a concrete decision. Multicriteria Decision Aid is a method of identifying and selecting rival projects. It brings about an exchange between participants on evaluation criteria to be taken into account for decision-making. It enables the different opinion of participants to be transcribed into quantitative and qualitative criteria, not simply a single indicator which is usually in monetary form. The use of quantitative and qualitative criteria enables all the dimensions of a project to be taken into account, rather than the exclusive use of those which are easy to assess in quantitative and monetary form. Each participant, aware of the different stages of the process, is asked to reveal his system of values, defining a specific weighting of criteria for each, if he wants his opinion to influence the final decision. This requirement avoids selfish strategic behaviour. In this way, the negotiations do not aim to discuss the systems of value but rather to define the solutions which are acceptable to each participant. The system of values of each party will not be questioned and the negotiation can therefore be of a cooperative nature and encourage the search for new solutions. At this level, the decision-making process is based on deliberation. The aim is to establish a climate of confidence and share a common contribution to the problem (Roy, 1999). The possibility of a veto enables everyone to define the scope of what solutions are considered as unacceptable. By comparing the solutions which are acceptable to each actor, taking different vectors of weighting into consideration, we can show whether a negotiated solution exists or not (for a presentation of the stages of Multicriteria Decision Aid and an applied example, see Floc'hlay and Plottu, 1998). Multicriteria Decision Aid had been used at national and local level for the construction of dams, waste disposal sites, airports, motorways etc.

Hierarchical Evaluation (Plottu 1999), using Multicriteria Decision Aid, goes one step further to ensure conditions for a balanced confrontation of view points. Hierarchical Evaluation bases itself on the

identification and definition for each participant group of the nature of impact of the project under evaluation upon land and community. Three hierarchical levels of impact (heritage, strategic and profitability) are distinguished and can be used in particular on a local scale for the evaluation of town or country planning projects.

- Heritage or patrimonial impact: defines the impact, whether negative or positive, of the project on an essential component in the self-identification of a group as a single community (for example on cultural and environmental assets).
- Strategic impact: is the positive or negative impact on the future development of a community, e.g. the impact on a local key resource such as an economic activity, or an environmental resource, that represents an opportunity for development and an ‘uncommitted potentiality for change’ (Bateson, 1972).
- Profitability impact: is the positive or negative impact on short term scale that affects individual satisfaction according to economic utility. It does not query the potential of future development or challenge elements of the identity of the community,

One of the evaluator’s objectives is to allow each participant group to unveil the nature of the stakes underpinning their position. Highlighting the nature of the stakes raised by each group exposes the unequal skills of stakeholders to argue their position. Certain strongly defended positions may represent only minor stakes, whereas stakes of a more vital nature represented by weak groups will be heard with more difficulty. Hierarchical Evaluation allows to find a solution of the controversial debate by prioritising a principle which favours the most significant issue. Should a conflict arise, an heritage impact held up by some parties would be given priority over a strategic or profitability impact held up by some others parties, regardless of any hierarchical order between the decision-making parties. For a group, the act of setting out the nature of the interests at stake can prevent closed attitudes to negotiation. The goal is to make the outcomes of participation derive more from the force of argument than the force of persuasion, preventing powerful groups from taking over the participatory process.

Hierarchical Evaluation can be used for the evaluation of town or country planning projects, such as transport infrastructure projects. We have used Hierarchical Evaluation to examine the choice of route

for the A85 highway in France. This major project brought about conflict between the technical appraisal which defined one particular route, and the local population in favour of another. Here, evaluation based on the qualification of impacts (heritage, strategic, profitability) brought about a result which was contrary to that of the technical appraisal based only on a quantification of impacts (a comparison of the financial impacts of the loss of agricultural land and forests). By highlighting the hierarchy of impacts of each route, it was possible to demonstrate that the route favoured by the technical appraisal bore a negative impact on local heritage, being incompatible with a local project supported by all of the community and aimed at preserving its rural identity (For a more complete presentation of this case, see Plottu and Plottu, 2007).

All these tools can be used in the three steps (empowerment, negotiation, decision making) of the Model for the Operationality of Democratic Evaluation (M.O.D.E.) that we proposed in Floc'hlay and Plottu (1998). Colour vote methods and the MACTOR method can be used at the stage of empowerment evaluation to get underprivileged groups to discuss and to build a common view point. Hierarchical Evaluation can be used during the dynamic process of negotiation between the participants, and Multicriteria Decision Aid Methods provide a means of progressing from negotiation to decision making.

Approaches to participation in evaluation have a cost, that is sure, however, this cost will allow numerous conflicts to be avoided. The field of urban and rural planning provides numerous examples of conflict linked to an absence of participation upstream (the high speed rail Mediterranean line, construction of the A85 highway...). The cost of participatory evaluation linked to information, mobilisation, training and supervision of all participants is compensated by the avoidance of the cost linked to delay and obstruction which can stem from a non participative process. It is more efficient to take the time to debate, confront points of view and identify areas of conflict upstream of a decision than to manage insurmountable conflict downstream, which is costly for the community. The best solution is to integrate the necessary cost and means of participation into the global cost of the project.

It is clear that even if obtaining a common position is an ideal, consensus is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The existence and goal of participation are not to build consensus at any rate. Highlighting irreconcilable points of view has just as much merit. Identification of areas of disagreement and potential conflict is of great use to the decision maker, who is free to take his or her own decision in full view of the facts. Even if the outcome is not consensus, debating all ideas leads to better understanding of arguments and as a consequence constitutes the first step in accepting other ideas and differences, and building tolerance towards the values of other people in society.

Construction of the Somport road tunnel under the Pyrénées mountain-range between France and Spain well illustrates the difficulties encountered (conflict, deadlock and the cost of these...) in implementing a project which had no real participative process. This project attracted sharp criticism from its very outset. Despite opposition, as well as cancellation of an act of law declaring the project to be of public utility, it was not abandoned. The project finally received the support of the prime-minister, and work continued. The project is still not completed to this day, and its total cost is now calculated at twice that of the initial estimate.

### ***Prioritisation in the field of application***

The implementation of approaches to participation in evaluation pre-supposes time and means. This type of evaluation cannot be improvised on the job. The contributions of such evaluation vary according to the areas evaluated and the desired result of the evaluation. In particular whether the evaluation is to take place upstream, in support of strategic decision making, on-going, as a navigation tool, or downstream i.e. retrospective evaluation of public action.

In the framework of ex-ante evaluation, one discusses the opportunities for undertaking a public action. Participation represents *a priori* a certain interest for the community in the evaluation of major long term projects or programmes such as infrastructure or planning projects. When it comes to projects concerning the future of a community, it seems to be important to prioritise an evaluation process which

enables confrontation of as wide a sample of points of view as possible, as well as diverse visions of the future and different models of society. Therefore, approaches to participation in evaluation can be prioritised in the fields of the environment, sustainable development and planning or even development support (see Estrella and Gavanta (1998) for a review of literature covering experiments in participatory evaluation).

In an on-going evaluation, stakeholder participation, by the effects of learning it generates, will help to readjust an action which takes place. In the case of sustainable development, it can be noted that approaches to participation in evaluation, through its emancipatory function for the weakest participants, constitute itself an action in favour of sustainable development. It also contributes to participatory and discursive democracy, concepts at the heart of sustainable development.

When the evaluation is a managerial evaluation i.e. 'value for money' and/or the evaluation takes place downstream from public action, the question of participation has less purpose. Stakeholder participation will help to formulate a different view of what has taken place, but cannot change the past. Nevertheless, their point of view are interesting because they will help to change the definition and the implementation of the futures policies. However there is a danger that if the methods chosen 'downstream' are inappropriate, i.e. offer a little opportunity for broad participation, they may fail to identify lessons for the future that are inclusive and participative.

## **Conclusion**

Stakeholder participation in evaluation has the interest of bringing the decisional stakes of society to the debating table. It involves evaluating the opportunity to undertake a project which strongly engages society. It lies within a certain conception of the governance of public action and requires institutional conditions, such as public decision making processes and the existence of centres for debate which are accessible to citizens, which are favourable to participation.

Approaches to participation in evaluation are not easy to implement. Its implementation pre-supposes a certain number of stages such as informing, motivating, training stakeholders, allowing



participants to construct a shared vision, guaranteeing conditions for balanced confrontation of points of view, which require financial means and which are not, in terms of timing, necessarily compatible with available resources nor the timeframe of the public decision.

The French examples of participative evaluation that we have used, principally concern sustainable development. The sustainable development concept is effectively favourable to the development of participative evaluation. Participation not only responds to the idea of good management highlighted by sustainable development, but also, when it favours emancipation, the second objective of sustainable development, that is improving the situation of populations in difficulty, Sustainable development encourages the growth of participative evaluation. The sustainable development manuals and literature published by the government (ex Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Planning) encourage local authorities to develop participative evaluation processes for their projects. This also poses challenges for evaluators, to change our habits, and implement the kinds of approaches outlined in this article.

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