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Public Participation: Contributing to better Water Management. Experiences from eight case studies across Europe

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Description / Abstract

The EEA Report No 3/2014 evaluates whether the provisions for PP included in the WFD actually contribute to achieving the objectives of the directive or at least support the ongoing implementation process by, for example, improving the integration of water management between different actors, incorporating local knowledge and promoting informed decision-making. Common criteria are identified based on key principles of PP, and are tested by analysing eight case studies from across the EU. The report addresses the fundamental question of how PP can improve water-related policies, plans and implementation, especially in the context of river-basin planning and the WFD. A review of the existing literature establishes the theoretical background and outlines the principal objectives of PP mentioned above, as well as the core principles that constitute a good participatory process: openness, protection of core values, speed and substance. These core principles are broken down into a series of evaluation criteria, later used in the case study assessments.

The report considers three main themes of PP. The first is the governance of participatory processes, covering issues of scale, planning and scheduling, and the stakeholder role in organising consultations. The second theme concerns the actors involved in implementation of the participatory process, and the dynamics of their stakes: issues of inclusiveness and influence, and of mutual benefits and trade-offs come into play here. The third theme covers the methods used to engage stakeholders and members of the public, and their effectiveness in promoting social learning.

The review of the eight case studies showed that the institutional set-up, shared or ambiguous remits of authorities, and the links between natural and administrative boundaries can all reduce the effectiveness of participatory processes. These elements should therefore be carefully considered and factored in, in order to plan River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) effectively.

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