



## Harmoni-CA

### **Learning together to manage together- improving participation in water management**

Dr. Dagmar Ridder

University of Osnabrueck, Institute of Environmental Systems Research

Barbarastrasse 12, D-49076 Osnabrueck, Germany

[dridder@usf.uni-osnabrueck.de](mailto:dridder@usf.uni-osnabrueck.de) **Abstract:**

Harmonising Collaborative Planning (HarmoniCOP) was funded under the 5th European RTD Framework (1998-2002) in the thematic programme "Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development" and its key action "Sustainable Management and Quality of Water". The project started in November 2002 and ended in November 2005.

The project aimed to increase the understanding of participatory river basin management planning (RBMP) in Europe as required by the Water Framework Directive. RBMP is the integrated cross-sectoral planning and management of river basins if necessary across political and administrative borders. HarmoniCOP focused on public participation as a means to foster social learning in RBMP. An approach to social learning was developed in combination with tools and methods meant for supporting social learning processes in water management. The resulting handbook complements the guidance document on public participation that was prepared in context with the implementation strategy for the European Water Framework Directive. The presentation will introduce the handbook and its use in participatory processes.

The target audience of the handbook are practitioners in water management - and more specifically - the water managers at a regional level. Therefore the content and style differs substantially from the scientific project reports. The project tried to adapt the scientific results to the real needs of those that would like to use the book. The definition of this group was at the beginning much larger: from the academic world to land use planners, to local NGOs, to people working in international river basin commissions. The project had to realise that they could not fulfil everybody's wish. The following listing depicts some major steps in defining the requirements for the handbook and its further development.

1. An online questionnaire was put on the HarmoniCOP website to get a first feedback on whether there was a need for such a handbook and which form it should take as well as who would be interested in it. The first analysis made clear that the reader group must become much smaller than planned and the content more specific than the HarmoniCOP project anticipated.
2. A needs assessment was conducted. This assessment was composed of a questionnaire design and test phase before conducting the semi-structured interviews in their European partner countries. About 40 practitioners working on regional to national level of water management got interviewed. Again results got evaluated: a reader profile became clearer as well as the requirements for the handbook. The group of external advisors to the HarmoniCOP project – the 'HarmoniCOP stakeholder group' got confronted with these results during the workshops on the handbook development.
3. Storyboarding was used to define the structure and first levels of the book. The storyboarding method made it possible that the handbook structure and major contents could represent a participatory group output.
4. A first prototype of the handbook was developed and there was a workshop to revise structure, content and format.
5. A last workshop, in which a 2nd draft was presented, was used to collect suggestions for improvement from the whole HarmoniCOP team and its stakeholder group. An interactive feedback session on selected handbook items helped to focus the comments.
6. The final editing and layouting phase produced the handbook.

The handbook is structured into 3 main chapters: 'How to start', 'How to manage', 'How to improve'. 'How to start' introduces the social learning concept in more detail and discusses how to develop and initiate a participation strategy that fosters social learning. It discusses everything that needs to be considered before starting a participatory process. 'How to manage', gives ideas and suggestions for managing participatory processes. Moreover, it discusses how to follow up a completed

step of a participatory process as well as tricks to apply and traps to avoid during the process. This chapter contains a large section on the use of tools and methods in participatory processes meant for social learning. 'How to improve' gives information on monitoring and evaluation to improve current and future participatory processes. It presents an evaluation checklist and discusses how the lessons learned can be communicated to people that were not involved in the process.

The chosen format of the book is adapted for 'quick readers'. Also the rather small size of the book with 100 pages is supposed to encourage these people that have little spare time to nevertheless read the book. Additionally, to the printed English version of the handbook, the handbook can be found for download on the internet in Dutch, French, Spanish, Hungarian, German, Italian and certainly also in English ([www.harmonicop.info](http://www.harmonicop.info)).

Some of the key messages of the handbook seem to be banal but experiences show that it is quite difficult to live up to your own principles. Even the HarmoniCOP team had to admit after the project that during the development of the handbook they should have better respected some of the suggestions and tips of the handbook written by themselves! To be mentioned among these are e.g. to devote more time for intermediary reflection and evaluation, to be more flexible in the planning and programming and to use external facilitation. In general, it is claimed that succeeding with social learning does not only lead to changes of the common practises but to changes of the understanding. But the other way around – 'to live that what you preach' - proved to be at least as difficult!

River basin management can only be effective and sustainable if the actors at each level and in each phase and sector become engaged in a social learning process. Together, they have to increase their understanding of the river basin, their uses of the basin and their impact on the basin. They have to realise their mutual interdependence and learn to handle their differences constructively. HarmoniCOP and its handbook are about social learning and social learning is about a new management style. Therefore, the handbook tries to motivate water managers not only to get engaged into effective participatory processes but at the same time to become more reflective about the applied management style as such.