

MARGOV – building social sustainability

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Structured in three components - Governance, Citizenship and Dynamic-Spatial Structure – the MARGov project aims to build a Model of Collaborative Governance for Marine Protected Areas using as case study the Marine Park Professor Luiz Saldanha. The objective is to empower local communities enabling them to be agents for change for the sustainable governance of the Ocean, through an eco-social dialogue supported by active participation. This intends to reinforce competences and the co-responsibility of all the actors involved. In this paper the authors present the work developed in the first component – Governance – essential to assure social sustainability.

A successful Marine Protected Area strongly depends on the balance between man and environment, and therefore, on the eco-social dialogue that is possible to be established

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among all actors. According to the literature, the building up of participatory formats that assure the articulation between different groups, enhancing the constructive dialogue aiming at achieving sustainable management, contributes to the overlay of knowledge and different perspectives, and generates enriched and more robust solutions. It also says that such processes generate new synergies and potentiate the exchange of ideas, experiences, technical-scientific cooperation, as well as the integration of knowledge and good practices, and that they frequently create the conditions for the emergence of innovative alternatives.

This paper is about the participatory sessions created and conducted as part of the Governance component of the project, describing the methodology developed for the expanded involvement of local communities aiming at building a model of Collaborative Governance. It also presents the strategy developed by the MARGov team to reinforce the social component, through continuous improvement of a communication strategy and the setting up of a constructive participatory process. Finally, it presents the results of the dialog generated in these *fora* and it discusses all this in the context of a general conceptual framework. It also identifies what made an actual difference, and the lessons learned, theorizing from action and exploring how to pursue.

The issue

The 53 km² of the first Marine Park in Portugal integrated in the Natural Park of *Arrábida* and in the Nature 2000 – Arrábida-Espichel site (Fig. 1), was established in 1998,¹ enclosing an area of high marine biodiversity. The Marine Park Professor Luiz Saldanha covers 38 km of rocky coast

¹ Regulamentar Decree N°23/98 – Oct. 14

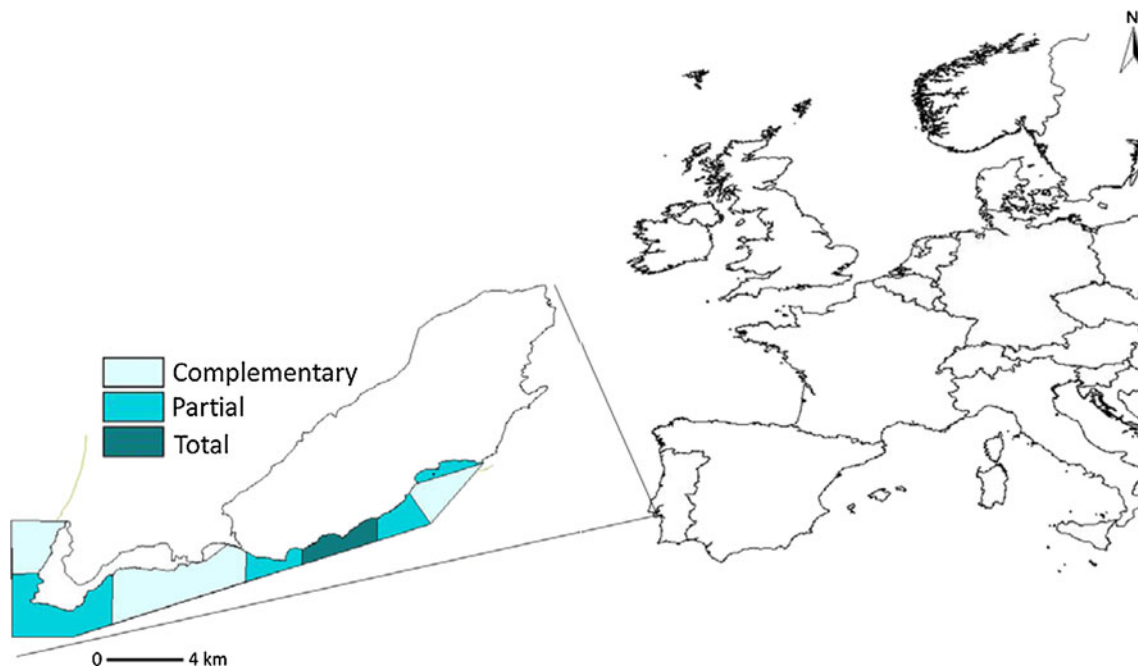


Fig. 1 Location of the Marine Park Professor Luiz Saldanha with indication of the protection level of each area

from the Figueirinha Beach in the Sado estuary to the North of Cape Espichel. Within the Lisbon region, this Marine Protected Area (MPA) is a privileged spot and generates a strong attraction. This implies a strong human pressure, conflicting with its natural values. The establishment of the Park defining zones with restrictions of use aims to address this problem.

Though next to an already consolidated Natural Park, the top-down decision of implementing a Marine Protected Area, imposing stronger management restrictions, put at stake the traditional fishing activity, in particular affecting adversely the local fisherman community of *Sesimbra* town. The project MARGov,² aiming at the development of a collaborative model of governance, emerged as a response to an already installed conflict. The project intends to facilitate and build synergies by a participatory process, creating dialogue platforms that allow a safe and constructive interaction among the parts, acknowledging the different views and collectively constructing shared views over them. Stakeholders to be involved are direct users of the Marine Protected Area and users of the surrounding areas, namely the Territorial Protected Area.

The model now being developed within the project defends the sharing of responsibilities among stakeholders, namely in areas of coastal habitats and artisanal fisheries. The project aims to:

Empower actors for change in order to improve the sustainable governance of the Ocean, by the intensification of the eco-social dialogue;

Strengthen the social and human component to enhance sustainable management of marine protected areas, promoting active participation of local communities;

Structure a GIS for the integration of data to support the collaborative process and to become a database of information/knowledge to support the development of actions for long term management;

Develop a platform for supporting integrated management, namely including a system of sustainability indicators and management indexes.

MARGov intends to encourage:

- **The sharing of management responsibilities** by the different social and institutional stakeholders related to coastal habitats and artisanal fisheries;
- The involvement of stakeholders, contributing to the **exchange of ideas and experiences** and **technical-scientific cooperation**, as well as the **integration of knowledge and good practices**;
- The focus on the **conflict** as a core-strategy in the **search for collaboration** among the stakeholders to build joint definitions of **more robust and less contested decisions**.

The project resulted from the acknowledgement that weak governance and absence of local stakeholders' participation in the management of Marine Protected Areas are obstacles to the sustainability of the Ocean. This is due to

² <http://margov.isegi.unl.pt>

the inexistence of a social agreement about conservation and use of marine resources, and the weak articulation between entities with different competences and legitimacy. Therefore, the proposal consists in developing a model of collaborative governance supported by all types of existing knowledge and by interactive participation techniques. As such the project intends to contribute to sustainable management through the development of a model of collaborative governance that can be extended to a future Marine Protected Areas Network.

MARGov – model of collaborative governance

The project MARGov aims to develop a model of collaborative governance assuring shared responsibilities between stakeholders, including the users of the Park (e.g. fishermen) but also institutional and local authorities.

The MARGov Project is structured in three main components (Fig. 2): (1) Governance – which includes participation, collaboration and decision making. This includes most of the participatory process; (2) Citizenship – that focuses on awareness, education and training, including all the components referring to education for sustainability; (3) Spatial Dynamic Support – targeting information, simulation and management, including geo-referenced registering, sustainability indicators and management indexes.

These three components work in intense mutual articulation, simultaneously potentiating the various dimensions of the project.

In this paper the authors will focus mainly on the first component, and hereby with especial emphasis on the participatory process of the project.

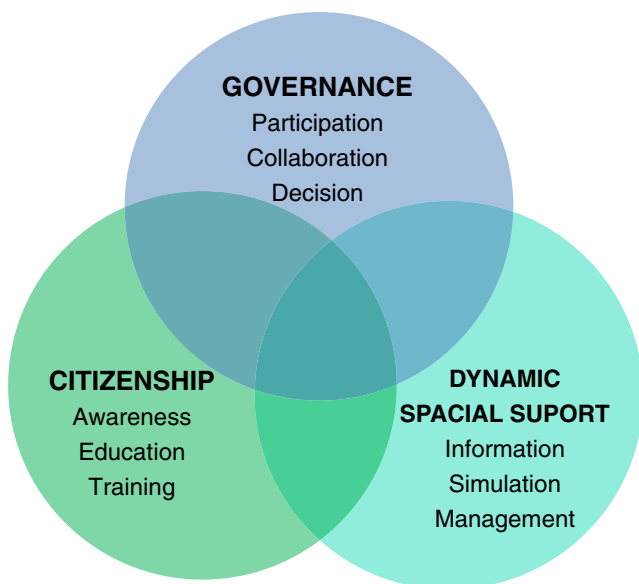


Fig. 2 Scheme of the overall structure of the project MARGov

Collaborative model and stakeholder participation

The participatory component develops under 4 main phases:

- A preliminary diagnosis and establishment of the baseline, which includes the identification of the stakeholders and the mapping of the conflicts;
- The structuring and steering of the participatory and collaborative processes;
- The elaboration of the process for public awareness and education; and finally,
- The elaboration of a proposal for the collaborative management.

Along the process, a GIS and a platform for supporting integrated management is being built, and it will be a key tool to support the participatory process and the long-term management actions. GIS will be crucial to the collection and sharing of the information that result from the diagnosis and the participatory workshops and *fora*. The platform will also integrate outputs of a dynamic conflict simulation model, management alternatives and prospective scenarios.

Launched at the end of 2008, the first part of the project (until July 2009) was dedicated to stakeholder identification and analysis, and the associated development of contacts. Intensive qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out along with intense document analysis in order to develop a sound initial diagnosis. Methodologically, the project team used SWOT Analysis and conflict mapping. Specific entities to be involved for the various key issues that emerged out of this process were also identified. The collected information allowed afterwards the team to characterize the situation of reference. From July to September 2009, the project concentrated on the design and structuring of the participatory process.

Since October 2009, MARGov is implementing collaborative negotiation techniques with the stakeholders aiming to involve users and to identify, acknowledge and address the existing conflicts. We target to create a collective process that will allow reaching joint decisions. These on-site actions promote a constructive dialogue and a “pedagogic development”: Stakeholders learn to be constructive and to build added value as they turn into responsible changing agents. Empowerment of the local agents is intended to result in sustainable co-management of the area. The overall target is to create the key conditions for the development of a collaborative governance model on the long run. Several participatory *fora* and workshops were already carried out, either open to the overall community or specifically involving the fishermen, each of them concentrated on key issues.

The participatory process

This process aims to develop interventions, based on the results of the diagnosis. The team promoted already some, but assertive, steps for public participation in *Sesimbra* region. In the first phase of the participatory process from Oct to Dec 09, the team worked more closely with the fishermen – the most direct users of the Marine Park. Nevertheless the other stakeholders of the process were provided with continuous information. The process, in accordance with the methodology, developed further with particular emphasis on the cycle of Participative *Fora* and Workshops with key actors and the creation of the interface WebGIS.

Participatory sessions

- 1st **Expanded Forum** – 19 Oct 09
- 1st **Workshop** – 21 Oct 09
- 2nd **Workshop** – 26 Nov 09
- 3rd **Workshop** – 16 Dec 09
- 2nd **Expanded Forum** – 13 Jan 10

The participatory sessions during this initial period were launched and concluded with an expanded Forum. Between these *fora*, a series of workshops were organized, for promoting the direct involvement and empowerment of the specific group of direct users of the Marine Park – the fishermen. The methodological strategies of the performed participative events were adjusted along the process to make the most out of the three components supporting the project. For example: during first meetings with the fishermen the project team felt that a more informal model – an informal meeting in a space of proximity (the room where the fishermen' association meets regularly) – would be more appropriate for this target-group. As a result, the MARGov team switches the way it was working with the fishermen from workshops to informal meetings in their own association, and could observe in the following period a significant increase in participation attendance and proposals/suggestions contribution by them.

Building over the conflict

Responsible collaboration

The nineties showed a growing call for participation in conservation projects (Little 1994) that led to an increase of grassroots involvement in the design and management of protected areas (Pimbert and Pretty 1997). Participation emerged to “amplify the diminished voices” through the empowering of the community, sharing the idea that imposition of MPA without broad consensus leads to failure (Christie and White 2007; Few 2000).

Participation *per se* is not *panacea* to all the problems. It can have many features, and – quite often - is innocuous. Pretty (1995) identifies a variety of interpretations for community participation. The range goes from manipulative and passive participation privileging informing to consulting interventions, up to self-mobilization which means that people take initiatives on their own, independent of any institutional intervention. MARGov aims at the latter type, promoting and exercising “active participation”. However, even in active participation processes there is space for a large spectrum of community involvement of all types: from passive functional participation to active empowerment of communities and stakeholders. Evidently, the type of participation in a certain project stage depends on the level of intervention in the decision process that is considered desirable or allowed by the *status quo*.

Moreover, the idea is not being just palliative as reported by West and Brechin (1991) in Few (2000): “even when the park administrators and planners really listen to local concerns, it is often to let them blow off steam in the hopes of deflating conflict”. As such MARGov is to create a constructive dialogue, able to assure continuity on the long run and contributing to shape change agents who find themselves actively involved in co-management.

The main purpose of active participation is assuring interventive and responsible collaboration by all interested stakeholders. Strategies for collaboration have gained grounds by assuring means to address issues related to social-ecological systems, which – again – respond to the growing demand for participation. Supported by two main ideas – the “Social Exchange” and the “Network Approach” – the concept of collaboration is proven to contribute to long term social relationships, essential for long term sustainability (Nkhata et al. 2008).

The central idea is to enhance relational change contributing to two types of capital: “relational capital” and “connectedness”. The amount of relational capital refers to the stock of socio-psychological attributes of social relationships, integrating two attributes: “trust” and “commitment”. The degree of connectedness refers to the social relationships and the strength of those links that mediate change in social relationships, which may be settled through bonds, activities and resources. Growing social relationships “gives way to conservation as relational connectedness expand and relational capital is consolidated” contributing for change from conflict-based relationships to cooperative interactions (Nkhata et al. 2008). This emergent phase is seen as the collaborative state (Nkhata et al. 2008).

The MARGov Team believes strongly that the existing conflict, if adequately addressed through constructive dialogue, can be a decisive asset to the building up of expanded overall responsible management and of a collaborative governance model for the area.

In opposition to a more generalized view, conflict can be an asset at start. In fact it can be an opportunity for change and maturity (Maldonado 2010; Vinyamata 2005; Lipset 1985). However, it has to be adequately addressed. This is crucial, because the involved stakeholders obviously have already reflected on their positions, collected data and information to support their views, searched alliances with others that share their perspectives. Therefore, they already developed intellectual and social capital that, if not present, had to be constructed along the way. This allows the intervention to start in a more advanced phase. It also allows the process to be focused in the most conflicting issues at stake.

Participation process, stages and advantages

Traditional decision making processes are based on majority voting or hierarchical administrative decisions. As to conflict management, these approaches are constitutionally and legally legitimated. Hence, the question on whether the traditional decision making process is in all cases appropriate or wise arises. We do not think so. Especially in conflict situations, dialogue between stakeholders does not happen naturally any more. If stakeholders had no chance to talk before the conflict arose, manifest adversarial dynamics cut contact partially or completely. Conflict takes over and stakeholders remain somewhere in between grumbling silence or open protest.

The participatory approach of conflict management opens a path to dialogue and consequently to mutual education and understanding of the involved interests of stakeholders, aiming at consensus construction as far as possible. Basically there is a need to design a process that addresses and satisfies the procedural needs of involved stakeholders towards constructive dialogue and to bring all relevant stakeholders “to the table”. At first sight it is obvious that participatory processes will very probably not result always in an overall consensus. Hence dialogue and mutual understanding of stakeholders can lead to solutions everybody can, at least, live with.

Participatory processes have their own dynamics and procedural demands. The crucial point is offering a well elaborated process to all participants (politicians, civil servants, entrepreneurs of all kind, and organized or individual citizens) to open an arena where they can talk and reach a consensus on the maximum items of discussion, working together towards a sustainable solution to the given situation. Huge amounts of technical and non-technical information have to be collected, structured or elaborated, to serve as input for competent decision making. Often there is a need to perform different types of large-group methodologies, like public participation workshops, focus groups, parallel group dynamics, etc., interfacing with traditional

meeting structures in order to involve all stakeholders according to their possibilities and needs.

The implementation of any participatory process is complex and demands the intervention of facilitators with sound methodological knowledge, considerable professionalism, experience-proved competence and undoubted trustworthiness.

In the following we will present a short paradigmatic overview of stages of Participatory Processes (PP) building over conflict. We will highlight advantages of a dialoguing process compared to traditional top-down decision making.

1. Preliminary works in all PP consist of a sound stakeholder analysis and a preparation of a preliminary process design

Advantages:

- PP aim to include all interested parties in the process and to open an arena for them to have their say.
- The process is steered by independent professional facilitators. Process and content are separated, which allows all stakeholders to concentrate exclusively on content.

2. In a PP a number of stakeholder workshops are hold. The first meetings are dedicated to issue definition and agenda setting. This includes the collaborative elaboration of the agenda and commonly accepted working rules.

Advantages:

- As facilitators are impartial, all stakeholders understand that there is no hidden agenda or process manipulation.
- The facilitators’ process, guiding authority, creates confidence and works towards the participants’ commitment to the process.
- Each stakeholder may provide information on the case and describe his perception of the situation. All knowledge is important, all information and perspectives are valuable and legitimate.
- Stakeholders educate each other on their perspectives, promoting a mutual acceptance of different visions and “truths”.
- As a result, a common range of issues to be discussed is established and the agenda is set to the convenience of all involved stakeholders.

3. The next step would be a joint conflict analysis, including consideration of emotions and values. The focus in this stage lies on working with interests and needs as these determine a sustainable solution. Stakeholders are encouraged to present the perceived conflict and to explore their interests and needs. Super ordinate values are also translated

into interests, and serve as input for the elaboration of solutions.

Advantages:

- Considering involved emotions provokes a decompression of tensions, helps parties to build trust and enhances the capacity of productive dialogue.
- Ethical, aesthetical or doctrinal values of each stakeholder are openly addressed and persuasion mechanisms are stopped.
- Stakeholders recognize the degrees of commonality of their naturally different interests. Understanding common and compatible interests changes discussion dynamics from adversarial discussion to joint reflection.
- With growing mutual understanding, exclusive interests will be perceived as common problems, and discussion can concentrate on possible consensus and acceptable solutions.

4. Following meetings and workshops will concentrate on generating alternatives for settlement. Stakeholders are invited to propose and discuss alternatives for solutions, aiming at the elaboration of consensual or acceptable solutions for the given conflict.

Advantages:

- Consensus dynamics and search for solutions are only initiated when interests are explored, emotions clarified and defended values known. At that stage all stakeholders contribute with equal forces and decision-making power.
- As facilitators are responsible for process guiding, time will be given to an exhaustive generation of alternatives. Creativity and innovation is encouraged.

5. The PP ends with the joint selection of implementable solutions and - if appropriate - formal settlement.

Advantages:

- In order to select the most practical solutions, facilitators help stakeholders to revise the stated interests and needs, have them eliminate unacceptable alternatives and encourage the modification of identified alternatives for better satisfaction.
- The stakeholders select collaboratively mutually acceptable solutions and transform these into an agreement.
- A joint elaboration of terms of implementation, monitoring and evaluation allows defining criteria for success or failure of the settlement.

As we demonstrated, a well structured Participatory Process adequately combines formal and informal models of

decision making, separating clearly the process from the content. Efficient articulations between intervening stakeholders as well as continuously used and clear rules of interaction meet the necessity of open ground and transparency. A basic condition for success, however, is a good process design on the one hand, but on the other hand sufficient flexibility to change the process design, if necessary or convenient.

Participatory Processes intensify the personal relationship between stakeholders which interact according to commonly defined rules of participation and therefore profit from structured interaction and constructive debate. As PP promotes the exchange of information and ideas, it results in a better understanding of the problems or opportunities offered by given situations and in growing relations of mutual trust.

Besides the undoubtedly useful tangible results like formal settlements, action plans or management models as a basis for the implementation of sustainable solutions, there are – as we saw - a number of intangible societal results, too, that – on the long run – help to establish peaceful actively participating societies

The logic of strategic options

Stakeholder discourses gathered from the intensive in-depth interviews, participant observation and document analysis, namely the results of participatory *fora* and workshops showed strong emotional conflicts that called for the creation of space to allow for constructive dialogue. Without working with the existing conflicts, a collective collaborative joint solution would not be possible.

At the start of the project it was clear that while the expression of the conflict had somehow “lowered the pressure”, it was obviously quite ingrained, hindering the overall acceptance and full compliance to the restrictive rules by the various users of the area. On the other hand, interviews revealed a general recognition that the local values justify the creation of a marine protected area. Stakeholders expressed throughout the participatory process that their disagreement was not principally based on the setting of the marine protected area. Their frustration grew obviously with – to stakeholders’ opinion – the process of implementation. Certain stakeholders felt completely excluded from the decision making process. This originated several levels of disagreement with specific rules established for the MPA.

Having identified an absence of collective discourse from the part of the direct users (especially the fishermen) and difficulties in expressing themselves in more expanded arenas, it was obvious that the project team had – in a first step – to give special attention to them. Therefore, as we showed, first participatory workshops were dedicated to the more

direct users, Intensively, and afterwards the process was expanded to account for the other users.

As shown the initial phase of the participatory process *in-situ* aims to privilege four moments:

- (1) Conflict Identification - identification of the conflict and of the entities to be involved;
- (2) Deconstruction of the Conflict - creation of a space for the emotional and antagonistic discourse to permit deconstruction of conflicts and myths;
- (3) Mutual Interests/Perspectives Recognition - joint identification of common, compatible and conflicting interests by the participants, and mutual education and understanding;
- (4) Development of Joint Proposals - development of joint proposals/solutions.

Some key results:

1. The antagonistic speech that characterized the initial sessions changed gradually to more constructive discourses. This seems to indicate progress in the deconstruction of the conflict, which is essential for a constructive collaborative effort and to progress in future steps;
2. First proposals for constructive solutions have emerged in some of the sessions;
3. Presumable “opponents” in the participatory sessions – to their own surprise – found out common interests; others discovered that a dialogue is possible, even when there is disagreement on facts and situations. These “discoveries” contribute to a change in attitude and play a key role in facilitating a more genuine and open dialogue among participants with opposite views, gaining space for possible negotiations;
4. Various groups begin to feel much more comfortable with their participation in the process, namely in the public sessions. They become more vocal and intervene more often. This proves already some empowerment.

The project still has a long way to go. It is now in a turning point since it is, at the moment, launching the thematic *fora* that are expected to turn the discourse into something much more concrete and will require greater focus from the participants. This is expected to pave the path for long-term collaborative relations and for reducing the conflicts.

Final considerations

The understanding that the successful management of nature protected areas depends on the balance between man and environment, and on the constructive dialogue among different stakeholders was the basis to launch the project

MARGov. MARGov aims to build a Model of Collaborative Governance for Marine Protected Areas using as case study the Marine Park Professor Luiz Saldanha. The project employs innovative techniques, focusing in building up synergies by an active participatory process. Ultimately, the project aims to empower local communities enabling them to be agents for change towards the sustainable governance of the Ocean.

Presently the project has identified the main conflicts among the diverse stakeholders of the civil society – mostly users of the Marine Protected Area - and between these and the authorities with management and surveillance responsibilities. Long lasting user rights were restrained by a management plan implemented by a top-down model generating those conflicts.

By deconstructing the conflicts, and through the implementation of face-to-face collaborative negotiation techniques, the project team has gradually gained the trust of the main stakeholders involved in the process. This trust is mostly supported by the fact that the project facilitators are impartial, not involved in any way in the management structure of the protected area, and thus with no hidden agenda or interest in manipulating the process in any way. So, the facilitator role exclusively focuses in creating safe dialogue spaces for all the participants, in improving the dialogue to lead to genuine constructive contributions, and assuring the same level of intervention to all involved.

The various stakeholders just started to understand the position and interests of each other. Furthermore, there is a consensus about the origin of some conservation and management problems, such as the serious erosion of the coast and its impacts on the local activities and biodiversity, and the lack of institutional coordination; gaps in technical and scientific knowledge have also been identified. The acknowledgement of all these aspects by the participants, favored the change from a general negative discourse to constructive collective discourses. This is allowing for the construction of collaborative solutions, including the proposal of technical resolutions, the suggestion of problem-oriented scientific studies, and the idea of creating an informal co-management body open to a diversity of stakeholders from different organizations of the society.

In a “shared power world” with “no one in control”, where “institutions and organizations should share objectives, activities, resources and power or authority to achieve collective gains and minimize losses” (Bryson and Crosby 1992), it seems close to impossible to attain sustainability without a more intense involvement and collaboration of a growing number of stakeholders.

Moreover, as public institutions in most countries nowadays have suffered profound restructuring, the diversity of competences and responsibilities got much more complex. This development goes at pace with drastic shrinking of public resources, resulting in restrained possibilities of tight

supervision. Therefore, bringing stakeholders to the process seems inevitable, a must for assuring sustainability in the future.

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