

Participation and Social Learning in the case of a River Valley Development Planning Process in Flanders

Stakeholder Workshop Report



This report has been produced as part of
Workpackage 5 of the HarmoniCOP Project

Marc Craps & Silvia Prins
October 2004
Centre for Organizational and Personnel Psychology (COPP)
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Prepared under contract from the European Commission
Contract No. EVK1-CT-2002-00120
Deliverable nr. 11

www.harmonicop.info

Place and date of the workshop:

“Huis van Chievres” (St. Anna Room), Great Beguinage Leuven
Wednesday, September 15th 2004, 9.00 – 17.00 h.

Facilitation of the workshop: collaborators of COPP, involved in HarmoniCOP

- René Bouwen, professor of Organizational Psychology at K.U.Leuven
- Marc Craps, coordinator of HarmoniCOP for COPP
- Silvia Prins, doctoral researcher COPP

Objectives of the workshop:

- To socialize the theoretical concepts and frameworks used by the research team in the case study
- To inform the persons and organizations directly involved in the case study about the main findings by the COPP researchers with these conceptual frames
- To analyze and discuss jointly among researchers all participants the main learning conclusions that can be drawn from this study
- To contribute to the relevance and transfer of the learning conclusions of this study to the river basin management and to the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Flanders

Participants of the workshop:

17 persons were selectively invited to attend the workshop according to the following criteria:

- Being actively involved in the organization and putting in practice of the case under study, or
- Representing an important stakeholder group for the Demer river, or
- Having relevant personal experiences and interest in public participation in river basin management, or
- Being actively involved in the implementation of the WFD in Flanders.

The complete list of organizations and functions of the persons that attended the workshop, and those who excused their absence, can be found in attachment nr. 1 to this report.

Program of the workshop:

WHEN	WHAT
09.00 - 09.30	1. Welcome and general introduction to the workshop
09.30 - 10.00	2. Participants' ideas about participation and expectations of workshop
10.00 - 10.45	3. Conceptual frame for “Participatory management and natural resources”
10.45 - 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 - 11.15	Questions and aclarations about conceptual framework
11.15 – 11.45	4. Presentation of findings about paradoxical tensions and challenges concerning participation in the OPD
11.45 – 12.45	Discussion of the findings
12.45 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 14.15	5. Conceptual frame for “Social learning and natural resources management”
14.15 – 15.45	Debate about what and how we can learn of the case study findings
15.45 – 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 – 17.00	6. Operational results and final conclusions of the workshop

1. Welcome and general introduction to the workshop.

One of the facilitators welcomes in name of COPP.

Participants introduce themselves: name, institution, relationship with the case study and/or participation in river basin management.

The facilitator clarifies the aims of the workshop, gives an overview of the program and of the proposed ways of working. (See former page)

In attachment nr. 2 to this report there is a list of the documents that the participants of the workshop received.

Already before the workshop officially started there was an informal discussion between some public officers involved in the OPD and the COPP researchers, concerning a paper on “boundary management in the OPD”, written by the researchers. This paper was presented at an international conference a couple of months ago and recently put on the internet by the conference organizers. The OPD officers are not happy with the fact that the case is not made anonymous; they do not agree completely with its conclusions and fear negative consequences on the OPD process. The researchers express their own surprise that this document was put disposable via the internet; they recognize their lack of precaution to anonymize the case and invite the officers to take the workshop as an opportunity to discuss the findings of the case. To prevent a malaise between the public officers and the researchers, the authors of the concerned paper propose the following action steps:

- They will immediately warn the webmaster of MOPAN to withdraw the paper from the website; they apologize for their lack of prudence that made this virtual publication possible
- Research publications based on the OPD case will not reveal any particular names of places, institutions or persons to guarantee anonymity
- Articles and presentations of the OPD can only be presented to an external public with the agreement of the main officers involved in the study, specially when this public belongs to the context of the case
- Conclusions of the case analysis do not have to reflect the perspective of the main officers; differences in interpretations between different actors and with the researchers are an essential aspect of the multiparty process and will if necessary be clarified in publications.

All the participants at the workshop agree with this proposal and confirm their trust in the study and the research team. In the last part of the workshop researchers and participants have come back to this incident to draw important learning conclusions from it.

2. Participants' ideas of participation and expectations of the workshop.

The participants expressed their main concerns regarding participation and water management, for instance as follows:

- “The first experiments with participatory government started already more than 30 years ago. However they were countered because without adequate information and insight of the participants they led to worse instead of better decisions. How can you inform and involve representatives of organizations and the public at large in such a way that they can really contribute to better decisions?” (public officer nature)
- “Interest groups and the public tend much more than public authorities, to protect their personal or sectoral interests, rather than to acknowledge the importance of knowledge and expertise. Personal interests risk to obscure factual knowledge and existing insights. How can this be avoided?” (municipal officer)

- “Often we are in a position to lead multiparty initiatives, but we lack the necessary process knowledge and experience to take up this role. I’m eager to learn about this today.” (NGO staff member)
- “According to my personal experience people stick to the NIMBY (“Not in My Back Yard”) syndrome, even after a sectoral diagnosis seems to have created some initial goodwill among the involved parties to take into account different perspectives. How can we guarantee the long term involvement of the public in a multiparty initiative?” (public planning officer)
- “Often it is not clear which interest groups have to be involved in an initiative, or they are not clearly organized. As a consequence they risk not to be taken into account in an adequate way. How can we know who the representatives of the public are and which interests they serve? And who stands for the general interest, as this is apparently not just the sum of the expressed particular interests?” (consultant)
- “At which moments in planning process participation has to be introduced and in which way?” (consultant)

3. Conceptual frames for participation, multiparty collaboration and natural resources management.

Introduction by the facilitator:

Multiparty collaboration is about democracy in an interdependent world. Water is a very nice symbol to represent this interconnectedness. It links different social groups, different uses and different kinds of knowledge. Not everything is possible at the same time. Water resources are under pressure and societies have to learn to manage this situation. Social theory can contribute by developing frameworks to grasp those aspects of reality that before were not taken into account adequately, for example by talking about 'multiparty collaboration'. But social theories may not be considered as general recipes. They have to be invented and agreed upon among all actors in a concrete context.

Slide presentation

After coffee break there is an opportunity for clarifying questions.

There is concern among the participants about who has to take the final decision in a multiparty initiative? Looking at decision making in the Flemish case under study, it seems that there is a kind of “consultative participation” but not yet a real participatory approach, as at the end of the process there is still a political decision taken by the Minister. Prof. Bouwen explains that a decision – from an organizational process point of view – is not taken at one moment, but that it grows in the course of a process. Participation is not a question of all or nothing, there maybe an evolution towards more involvement of stakeholders in the process, and still the decision being legally sanctioned by a Minister. If there is broad involvement, however, this creates a societal platform which increases the chance for successful implementation

Some participants observe that the cultural context in Flanders is not very favorable for a collaborative way of working. There is, for instance, not much tradition of stakeholder organizations that are adequately organized and have representatives that take up an active role and give feedback to their constituencies.

Prof. Bouwen stresses the importance of spending time and attention at the beginning of a participatory process to establish “ground rules” which have to be taken into account by all the involved actors, like for instance that representatives have to give feedback to their constituencies. The participants observe that as a consequence of such ground rules representing a stakeholder group may become more a burden for people who generally take up this task in their free time, and that there is a risk that they will withdraw. A participatory policy approach has a high cost, in terms of

time and money, of which the government - promoting this kind of alternative policy approach, - seems not to be aware and not willing to invest in it. The absence of the environmental organization in this workshop and their low key participation in the valley development planning may be meaningful from this point of view. The representative of the environmental organization who was invited to this workshop explained largely to the organizers on the telephone that his organization does not have sufficient funding and specialized and experienced personnel to fulfil the societal expectations in them to represent adequately nature interests in numerous commissions and workgroups. He announced the possibility that in a near future his organization possibly would withdraw from many of those participatory commissions and eventually change again to a protest strategy at the end of processes in which they deliberately have not taken part.

Prof. Bouwen draws the attention to the importance of convening in a multiparty collaborative approach. This actor is able to bring all the others around the table, and his contribution consists in the first place in developing “common ground” among all the other actors involved. Do the public officers see such a role for them in policy planning processes?

4. Paradoxical tensions and main findings concerning participation and multiparty collaboration in the Flemish case study.

Presentation of slides concerning: (see attachment 4)

- Framing and reframing:
- Leadership and other functions
- Boundary management

For each of these concepts the facilitator explains:

- How the researchers define and understand these concepts
- Some examples illustrating the concepts in the case study
- Paradoxical tensions and challenges related to the concepts for the actors involved in the case

Discussion of the findings:

Looking at the valley development study from a multiparty collaborative perspective – as it is proposed by the COPP research – gives an image of different possible frames that can be adopted to intervene in the initiative. For the public officer of the Nature Administration this image is erroneous because the process in this case is not starting from scratch. There are already certain frames given at the start of this study which are the result of antecedent processes, like for instance the Flemish Regional Plan (considering the river under consideration as a regional structuring element and thus the Flemish regional administration as the competent authority), the Habitat guidelines, etc. As a result of these antecedent plans and processes, according to the public officer nature conservation and flood prevention have already been identified and have to be respected as the dominant frames for the valley development. He considers it as his mission as a public officer of the nature administration to safeguard nature conservation. This particular interest does not discard for him the willingness and openness of the administration to take into account other additional interests and visions about how to develop the valley, like for instance in relation to recreation.

But according to one of the consultants, who had intensive direct contacts with numerous stakeholder representatives, the public officers of the nature administration underestimate the negotiation possibilities that are still open among the involved actors regarding nature in the valley. In his opinion nature *conservation*, advocated by the nature administration, is already accepted by all the stakeholders and the public at large in the area, but nature *development* is a much more debatable and thus interesting focus on nature. This is about expanding nature areas and improving environmental qualities and goes beyond just trying to safeguard the already degenerated natural areas. Such an

approach may generate more suspicion in the public. Developing means growing, extending, but to which point? Who shall be affected then? But a development approach creates also much more possibilities to involve stakeholders, for instance to develop new recreational areas with a high nature value.

The public officers accept that stakeholder groups may be well situated to defend their particular interests, but according to them the nature administration is best placed to defend nature interests, for the well being of the whole society. They argue that as a matter of fact environmental groups depend to a high degree on voluntary work, and that they do not have the means to protect nature against other pressure groups which are much better organized and funded.

The facilitator observes that – following this argumentation - the public officers in charge of the valley study are assuming different roles which are difficult to combine, e.g. as convener and as advocates of nature interests. Both roles may be absolutely necessary and justified, however, when combined in one actor both roles will inevitably cause role conflicts, e.g. agricultural groups will probably react skeptically to an invitation by a strong nature advocate. During multiparty meetings when the administration has to take up the double role of defending particular interests (e.g. nature) and facilitate the process, it may be useful to separate clearly both roles and distribute them over different persons, even if they belong to the same institute.

The public officers think that they have already come to a workable solution for the role conflicts that are discussed here. In the Planning Committee for instance, the two officers of the nature administration are taking up already a different role: while the head of department of Nature Administration coordinates the meetings (facilitation), the officer in charge of the study takes up the role of defending nature interests. The Steering Committee is presided by a high ranked public officer whose position – according to the organizers of the process - is supposed to give him moral authority over the different interest groups. One working commission on hydrological aspects is presided by a public officer of the Water administration because he has the necessary high technical expertise that they suppose of primordial importance there, but in another working commission, a representative of a non-governmental organization is presiding the meetings. .

The non-governmental and municipal representatives doubt if this distribution of tasks gives really solution to the skepticism of the stakeholders and the public at large. According to them, the Nature and Water administration have initiated the study; they have their own agenda and will draw the final conclusions. As a consequence it is not clear for the other stakeholders what their contribution can be.

According to the public officers there are so many considerations to be taken into account in a valley development plan, and they are technically so complex that they are difficult to communicate to the public. Especially environmental considerations are hard to be understood by local actors as the natural environment is a complex and interrelated system. They do often not understand the relevance of certain local interventions, which are only relevant on a larger scale, like for instance protection measures for a bird species habitat. Is it necessary that local actors have an opinion about technical solutions?

The facilitators relate this question to a more general reflection on the relationship between expert knowledge and local knowledge. They underline that technical knowledge and technical solutions are never just instrumental, but that they have always implicit value judgments. Technical knowledge is instrumental in function of certain interests. If these implicit interests cannot be communicated to the public and be debated by the public, then there is a “technocracy”, where specialists decide for the public without public consent. Generating informed public debates requires efforts, not only from the experts, to translate their knowledge in an understandable language, but also from the stakeholders, to try to understand what is precisely at stake in the proposed technical solutions.

5. Joint analysis of “Social learning for sustainable management” in the case study

Short slide presentation, clarifying the tuning between social-relational and content aspects in social learning processes.

The core challenge for social learning is to create work contexts in which social learning is possible. In most of the participatory initiatives, there are many standardized and ritualized meetings among the involved actors, which are however not very useful from a social learning point of view. Formal meetings may be not rewarding and engaging for many external stakeholders. The facilitator gives the example of an erosion project in which he has been involved. There the farmers became interested when the engineers unfolded their maps and the farmers could identify their own plots of land and the consequences of certain interventions. Then he asks the participants:

What activities can you imagine for your case with a high social learning potential?

- The workgroup “Recreation” organized an excursion for all the members to another natural reserve, which has already been developed as a recreational area.
- In the workgroup “hydrology” external stakeholders are invited to take actively part in the modeling process, while this is still in development, there is still a lot of internal discussion among different public officers and administrations, and the final outcomes are not yet known.

According to the participants of the workshop the Social Learning principles explained in the lecture have already been applied to a certain degree in the organization of the planning activities in the study case. Especially the workgroups started as part of the Steering Committee are considered interesting meeting point for social learning, as well as the daily follow-up commission, whereas the functioning of the Planning Committee and the Steering Committee itself currently do not offer much opportunities for social learning. As a result of these social learning opportunities there seems to be an enhanced awareness among various stakeholders of the importance of the valley study and a willingness to contribute to it. But not all participants agree with this evaluation. They point to the relatively low participation of stakeholders in the workgroups as an indicator of weak social learning

Difficulties for social learning identified in the case under study:

- Timing and budgetting. For instance, to take into account adequately the farmers’ interests and to involve them in the initiative, a specific study on farming issues was foreseen. However as the funding of this additional study was not allocated in time, the results of it will only be known as the planning process is already well (too) advanced.
- Starting from technical models. For instance, the workgroup “hydrology” has as its starting point abstract water models and scenario’s which are not so appealing for stakeholders as for instance the “vision on recreation”, with which the workgroup “recreation” started. In the latter case this vision is based on principles that can be discussed among the participants, and then applied to a territory; in the first case the model is just a formal representation of a territorial reality.
- The quality of the stakeholder organizations (particular interest groups and municipalities) and of their representatives. There is few tradition and culture of participation and representation in most of those organizations. Representatives receiving an invitation do not pass it to their colleagues, even if they are not personally interested or in the possibility to assist. Another question is how representative the participants in the Committees are and if they defend the interests of their constituencies or just their own personal interests.
- The high number of participants, especially in the formal stakeholder meetings (Planning and Steering Committee). This complicates direct interaction among the participants. The Daily Follow up Commission considers these Committees as an occasion to transmit information in a unilateral way, while the interesting discussions take place in the smaller and more informal

workgroups. Public officers organizing the meetings of the Planning and Steering Committee do not have the process knowledge, nor do they have sufficient facilitation skills to set up those meetings as social learning moments.

- The discontinuous character of formal participation mechanisms. The meetings of the Planning and Steering Committees are so scarce – almost every six months – that their members have forgotten mostly of what has been discussed in the former meeting before a new meeting takes place.
- Some participants in the formal negotiation and decision groups (Planning and Steering Committees), officially representing the stakeholders, are not the same as those participating in the informal workgroups, where social learning is taking place. As a consequence they do not even understand the information that they receive in the meetings of those Committees.
- Various participants of the workgroups can not read correctly the plans, which are the basic tools to focus the discussions. As a consequence they are not able to express their opinion.
- Controversy concerning the legal authority over the area under study. The convening organization, in charge of the technical studies (the regional Nature and Water administration) does not have the legal authority over the river, under the authority of the Navigable Waterways administration. This undermines the credibility of the study and the convening power of the Nature and Water Administration¹. Until a couple of months ago the officers of the Nature and Water Administration were hopeful that the legal authority over the river would be passed over to their administration. However with the new minister appointed after the elections a few months ago, this legal transfer now seems more unlikely than ever. At the other hand the public officers of Water and Nature acknowledge that there is a positive evolution since a couple of years in the relationship between their and the Navigable Waterways Administration.

Suggestions to enhance social learning in the initiative under study:

- Technical knowledge has first to be translated in such a way that it becomes understandable and relevant for specific stakeholders. GIS and other visual tools may be helpful, but sometimes a site visit or a field trip may be even more helpful for this purpose. It enables people to observe in a concrete setting to which level the water may rise after a specific proposed intervention.
- Public officers, in charge of organizing participatory processes, should receive training and methodologies, for instance how to design and facilitate large group meetings in such a way that they become opportunities for social learning.
- Stakeholder representatives that are important for the process, could be visited separately to explain and discuss with them those aspects that are most relevant for them, in a language that they can understand. However their involvement may not be reduced to individual, separate consultation, because then they do not have the opportunity to learn to appreciate and take into account the perspective of other actors on the same situation, resulting in an enhanced risk that in the end the public administration is confronted with a sum of incompatible desires towards the valley.

• ¹ Two members of the Navigable Waterways Administration were also invited for the workshop, but they excused their absence, and so they do not take part in this reflection.

6. Final conclusions and operational results of the workshop.

Main learning conclusions	Practical implications.	Commitments
The importance of relational knowledge for all participatory planning processes, including the implementation of the WFD in river basin management planning	Before starting a participatory process, try to make a realistic estimation of what this implies, in terms of (human and financial) means, and guarantee their disposability.	This question will be highlighted in the report of the workshop, of which COPP will deliver a dutch translation to the participants. The latter will socialize the content of it among colleagues and superiors.
The importance of being clear on certain ground rules between different parties, right from the start of the process. This lesson also has important relevance for WFD-based catchment planning	When starting a participatory process, be clear with the stakeholders about the limits of their participation, tune expectations between initiators and external actors: what is their input in the process, and what will be done with it? Be clear what participation implies for stakeholders, e.g. in terms of feedback to their constituencies.	The officer representing the WFD implementation project will feedback this report to the central desk and colleagues
There is already some social learning taking place in the case; but this is restricted to the members of the core group	Preparing and writing out the technical specifications for a joint study is a adequate practice to stimulate social learning	
	Public officers need methodologies and examples of practices to work with multiparty groups	COPP team will deliver to workshop participants an inventory and bibliography of inspiring manuals, work forms and examples of practices for social learning
	Public officers have a need for training related to multiparty process facilitation and setting up participatory processes	COPP team will deliver to workshop participants:an inventory of training offers concerning multiparty process facilitation, related to natural resources policy
The distinction between a stakeholder and a convener; the difficulties when combining both roles	When preparing meetings, the daily follow up commission will explicitly take care of assigning clear roles to different officers, including facilitation	
The importance of communication for “integrated territorial management”	An “integrated management” service over the existing departments of the public administration should stimulate such initiatives	The participants can only signal this need, any of the participants is in a position from where he/she can influence this directly.

The workshop ends at 17.00 h.

Attachment 1:

Participants of the workshop:

- Catchment coordinator Dijle river
- Dijle river planning officer (and representing Ainal Water WFD Implementation project)
- Local officer coordinating the valley development initiative under study, Ainal (Flemish administration), division Nature
- Leading officer of Ainal Water for the valley development initiative, coordinating the “hydrology” workgroup
- Ainal Nature officer in charge of the valley development study
- Consultant of the private firm in charge of the technical studies for the valley development initiative
- Municipal officer of Aarschot, involved in the valley development initiative
- Staf member of “Regional Landscape”, a non-governmental organization, coordinating a workgroup of the valley development initiative on “recreation”
- Tthesis student on “collaboration and water management” at K.U.Leuven

Invited persons who excused their absence:

- Demer river planning officer
- Leading officer of Ainal Nature for the valley development initiative
- Councillar of Aarschot municipality
- Officer of Flemish Navigable Waterways administration, following up the valley development initiative
- Ainal Water officer in charge of WFD implementation project
- Provincial water planning officer
- Farmers Organization representative
- Representative of ecological non-governmental organization involved in the valley development initiative.

Attachment 2:

List of documents that the participants of the workshop received in their folder:

- Workshop program and list of participants
- HarmoniCOP flyer (dutch version)
- “Multiparty samenwerking: uitdagingen en knelpunten” (*Multiparty collaboration: challenges and obstacles*), a reprinted slide collection of main concepts and theories related to multiparty collaboration
- “Multipartij samenwerking als sociaal leren voor interafhankelijkheid: ontwikkelen van relationele kennis voor een duurzaam beleid van natuurlijke hulpbronnen” (*Social learning for sustainable management of natural resources*), a reprinted slide collection
- Main findings of the OPD case study: a reprinted slide collection of paradoxical tensions and challenges identified in the case study
- Bouwen, R. & T. Taillieu (2004). Multiparty Collaboration as Social Learning for Interdependence: Developing Relational Knowing for Sustainable Natural Resource Management. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 14: 137-154.
- Prins, S. Craps, M. & E. Van Rossen (2004). *Managing Psychological Boundaries in a Collaborative Effort: the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in an Integrated Study of a River Valley*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Multi-Organizational Partnerships, Alliances and Networks (MOPAN), 23-26 june 2004.

Attachment 3:

Main findings of the case study

Concerning framing/reframing

This means:

- That we can only know reality and intervene in it from a particular perspective and with particular action logic. A frame is determined by the (professional, social) group to which we belong and the situation in which we are involved
- Different kinds of frames are used in relation to environmental and water issues (Lewicki et al. 2002)
- As different actors look at a situation with a different frame, they consider different aspects as problematic and propose different actions
- Parties in a joint initiative will position themselves and the others by the way they frame and eventually reframe the issue under consideration.

Examples of framing in the OPD:

- “policy preparation” is the preferred frame of the public officers
- “technical study” is the frame used for consultants and by all actors who consider themselves as specialists or experts in one way or another
- “nature development plan” is a frame that legally determines which stakeholders should be involved
- “Flood prevention” puts local governments (municipal, provincial) on the foreground of the OPD
- “Nature conservation” is the frame used by official and non-governmental actors identified with nature
- “Development of integrated valley vision” connects the broad public and a wide diversity of social interest groups

Paradoxical tensions related to framing/reframing in the OPD:

- On the one hand there is a need of convergence: one clear frame to which all actors can stick and with which they can identify: a vision of the OPD which serves the “general interest” and makes it possible to advance, reach deadlines, etc.
- On the other hand there is also a need of divergence: different kinds of knowledge and competencies have to be taken into account to enhance legitimacy and feasibility of the results

Challenges:

- Is the OPD sufficiently taking into account all relevant criteria and considerations?
- Does the current social process generate a societal platform which will make the implementation of the results possible?
- Are there examples of reframing among the actors involved in the OPD (learning from each other to see situations in a new, alternative way), and what made this learning possible?

Concerning different functions and leading a collaborative process:

This means that:

- Different functions and positions have to be considered in relation to a multiparty process: leading – facilitating – content contribution – (political, financial, moral) support – resistance
- Leading means: giving a certain direction to an initiative; this is generally related to a vertical structure and conferred on a top-down basis

- Multiparty implies (more) horizontal structuring, hence alternative concepts of leadership (“distributed”, “joined up”, “shared”, etc.) are required
- Leadership functions tend to put emphasis on task content and procedures; but especially in multiparty initiatives relational processes (managing distrust, institutional rivalries, exclusions, etc.) are very important = facilitating
- Awareness of exclusion can lead to (overt or hidden) resistance to an initiative.

Examples of different actors and functions in the OPD:

- A minimal Nature and Water: convener, leading, financial support, expertise, local context knowledge
- Navigable Waterways Administration: formal (legal) competence on the river, expertise, local context knowledge
- Related regional administrations (wood, landscape, territorial ordering, etc.): expertise, local context knowledge, certain legal competencies (are development proposals compatible with sectoral laws?)
- Local governments: to represent local interests, giving feedback on proposals from local perspective
- Officially recognized organizations (related to nature, woods, fishing, landscape, recreation, ...): to bring in sectoral interests, feedback on proposals

Paradoxical tensions related to different functions and leadership in the OPD:

- On the one hand the collaborative approach implies that all partners are equal, as different aspects related to water and nature, to river and environment are interrelated, and different actors will necessarily have to contribute for a successful implementation.
- But on the other hand there are considerable asymmetries between the different parties involved in the OPD, for instance concerning financial means (the water and nature administration monopolizes funding), time (for public officers this is their main job, for others in their free time), expertise (ICT modeling generates complex information which makes it difficult to grasp its significance and possible impact on concrete living conditions and to formulate an opinion on it); experience (for some officers daily since many years, for others very sporadic or accidentally); legal influence (in the end there will be a political decision by the Minister, but different actors have different possibilities to influence this decision process, eventually outside the OPD)

Challenges related to functions and leadership in the OPD:

The asymmetries between the actors involved in the OPD risk to create a technocratic hierarchy. How can enough involvement of all relevant actors nevertheless be guaranteed?

Concerning boundaries of the OPD

By “boundaries” we mean:

- Every project or initiative necessarily has to be limited: physically (space), in time, and socially: which actors are considered as insiders or outsiders, which issues will be considered relevant and which others will not be considered?
- Boundaries are not only a question of formal or observable signs, but they are also subjective and psychological: they relate to identities.
- Boundary management is a core concern for every multiparty initiative

Some examples of boundaries and their management in the OPD:

- “The essence of the initiative is nature conservation and flood prevention” (which means that other issues like e.g. agricultural and industrial development are excluded from the core of the study)

- The strategy deals in terms of an “ideal” or “maximum scenario”, which means that only one frame is taken into account (nature conservation); whether a “minimum scenario” has to take into account a maximum number of other frame considerations.
- The procedure, the negotiation process and even the (kind of) results are to a high degree predetermined by the technical specifications of the study

Paradoxical tensions related to boundary management in the initiative under study

- On the one hand there are rigid boundaries managed by the leading actors, because of the “hard conditions” they perceive in the political and financial context frame of the study
- But on the other hand, as they enter into a participatory action, they perceive the need for a much more flexible and emergent approach, because of the unpredictable changes and results as a consequence of (uncontrollable) demands and initiatives of external stakeholders which become involved.

A recurring question in the case under study related to this tension is:

- Is it better to prepare a river valley development plan which is already as advanced as possible, before presenting and discussing it with the stakeholders (caring to have ready adequate answers to all questions that may be expected from the stakeholders)?
- Or is it better to involve the stakeholders right from the beginning in the development of such a plan, without knowing where to this will lead?