

# Citizen's jury as an innovative method of public participation - EE

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

## 2. Key Approaches

- Participation

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The case describes how local people, who are not specialists, can take part in discussions and the decision-making process of complex environmental issues. Citizens' juries can be used in different societies and in a variety of problems and are probably more suitable in countries where participatory methods are not widely used.

## 4. Overview of the case

The citizen's jury was used in Estonia as a means of bridging the gap between major stakeholders concerning decisions of river basin management. A jury in the Emajõgi basin helped to collect public input into developing solutions of water management problems. It proved to be an effective approach to collect opinions of stakeholders about major issues in a river basin that could be used in the further development of a water management plan.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

The Emajõgi River is 101 kilometres long with 10 rural municipalities (average population of 1000-2500) and one city (100,000 inhabitants) lying near the river. There are extensive untouched natural areas with two wetland nature reserves.

Public participation has gained wide recognition as a key principle for modern environmental resource management. However, in most central and eastern European countries, there is no long history of public participation. One major problem is that amongst ICZM managers there is not enough knowledge about practical and effective approaches to public participation and empowerment or about the tools that enable the public to make informed decisions in water management. There is also little awareness of the different methods and channels which are available for the involvement of various stakeholder groups.

A citizen's jury is a randomly selected panel of citizens, which meets to carefully examine an issue of public significance through discussions, examinations of information, and questioning of witnesses. The members of the jury are given the chance to hear views and receive information from a variety of expert witnesses. The citizens' jury allows the participants to learn in depth about one or a number of issues relevant for the public. Finally, the jury presents their recommendations to the problem issue.

### b) Objectives

Citizens' juries have proven to be a suitable method to use as a participatory method in different socio-economic, cultural and

political situations although they have largely been confined to the social sciences. Therefore, the approach was used to achieve higher public participation in water management planning.

## **6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)**

### **a) Management**

The work was done by the Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation in cooperation with Linköping University, Sweden and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands.

### **b) ICZM tools**

The citizen's jury took place for two days, in 2003, with the participation of 14 randomly selected people from the river region. Before the jury, one pre-meeting also took place. The participants listened to presentations of witnesses from different sectors and stakeholder groups involved on the issues regarding the development of water transportation on the River Emajõgi from the River Port Authority, the public administration, environmental NGOs and local businessman. The aim was to give an overview of the problem from different and even conflicting interests and organizations. After each presentation, the participants had an opportunity to put questions and give their own concerns and arguments. They then worked in groups to compile one page of recommendations.

## **7. Cost and resources**

No costs are available.

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

The citizen's jury report was taken into account when preparing the Lake Peipsi water management plan and was also taken into consideration in River Emajõgi regional planning. There was a great deal of positive feed-back from environmental authorities, officials of the Ministry of the Environment and the entrepreneurs about the whole process. It increased the environmental knowledge of the jurors/ citizens and the witnesses/presenters who heard about the problem from other perspectives. As a positive follow-up and on their own initiative, the citizens organized a roundtable inviting the jurors and the organizers and a river shores cleaning campaign was also planned.

## **9. Success and Fail factors**

The initial selection of participants is of key importance to achieve a high commitment of stakeholders and to achieve the best results. An important aspect of a citizen's jury is that it promotes political dialogue aimed at mutual understanding, which does not mean that people will agree, but rather that they will be motivated to resolve conflicts by argument rather than other means. The feeling that someone is so much interested in the opinions of citizens', came as a surprise to a number of participants. Several witnesses also mentioned that this was the first time they had listened to the opinions of local people and were surprised to see the extent of people's awareness. The citizen's jury showed that people, when thinking together in a pleasant constructive atmosphere, prevent conflict and, by way of compromise, reach solutions; and these people do not all have to be experts.

The citizen's jury is, however, a relatively expensive method and is a time-consuming process as the preparation of the jury has to start several months before the event. Therefore the cost-effectiveness of the method should be taken into consideration before planning the event. It is wise to use the citizens' jury method only when dealing with complex issues where there are several conflicting interests. For smaller problems this method is too resource (man power, finances, knowledge) demanding. The citizen's jury is also demanding for the participants since participation requires preparation, the event tends to last several days, and requires intense concentration. The initial response to the jury was low and it was felt that this was because the tradition of public participation in Estonia is new. Additionally, in the beginning of the process, there was a lot of hesitation and uncertainties because citizens' juries had not been organized in Estonia before. Furthermore, local

people and politicians are not yet too accustomed to the principles of public participation. As a result, there was under-representation of some groups e.g. women and the under thirties.

Both the witnesses as well as the jurors stressed that the great advantage of the event was the fact that the Peipsi Centre for Trans-boundary Cooperation had assembled the specialists from various fields in one room.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

The experience showed that local participants have a large capability to master relatively complex issues and they can give a fresh perspective on the issues at hand.

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## 13. Sources

- Focus Groups and Citizens' Juries: River Dialogue Experiences in Enhancing Public Participation in Water Management. (2004) Kangur K. Peipsi CTC, Estonia
- <http://www.gwptoolbox.org>
- [http://riverdialogue.ctc.ee/index.php?tree\\_id=1](http://riverdialogue.ctc.ee/index.php?tree_id=1)



Focus Groups and Citizen Juries (1.69 MB)