

# **Involving the public in policy development at multiple scales**

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## **Abstract**

The paper reports on a workshop involving 120 participation experts that addressed the issue of scale and public participation in policy development. The HAP method used in the workshop is briefly reviewed followed by a discussion of positive issues related to scale identified by participants. A number of themes are identified in the paper including that there are numerous flexible and diverse participatory methods available, that information technology makes working at multiple scales simpler and that there is increasing interest in looking at multiple scales. Negative aspects of scale and participation identified by participants include the problem of establishing the relevant scale in the first place, too few examples of participation at multiple scale and resource requirements. The final action plan suggests ways to improve how good participatory methods are at involving people at multiple scales focusing on four areas. First, the role of new tools such as information technology. Second, funding research into multi-scale linkages. Third, sharing experience of using multiple methods at different scales, and finally, evaluating what works, when.

## **1. Introduction**

Deliberative participatory processes have typically involved small numbers of participants at a local level. There is an increasing awareness of the need to build participatory processes at the regional, national and even EU level, facilitating dialogue between different groups in the formulation of science-based policies. Given the presence of globalisation and environmental issues that do not respect national boundaries there seems to be a need for scaling up participation in policy deliberation (see e.g. Buttel, 1997; Smith, 2001; Bulkeley and Mol, 2003). In scaling up participatory instruments a range of problems arise such as language barriers, differences in political culture and discourse traditions, and also practical problems connected to facilitating useful dialogue with large numbers of participants as well as the economic consequences of such big events.

One of the stated aims of the PATH project was to explore how different values and interests are best mapped, represented and taken into account at different scales in science-based policy formulation. The plenary workshop at the PATH conference was designed to examine the theme of scale and public participation and benefit from the knowledge and experience of the 120 delegates. This paper sets out the results of the H-form and Action Planning (HAP) method (Kenyon and Hunsberger, this proceeding) for the question "how good are participatory methods at involving people at multiple scales?".

## **2. HAP method**

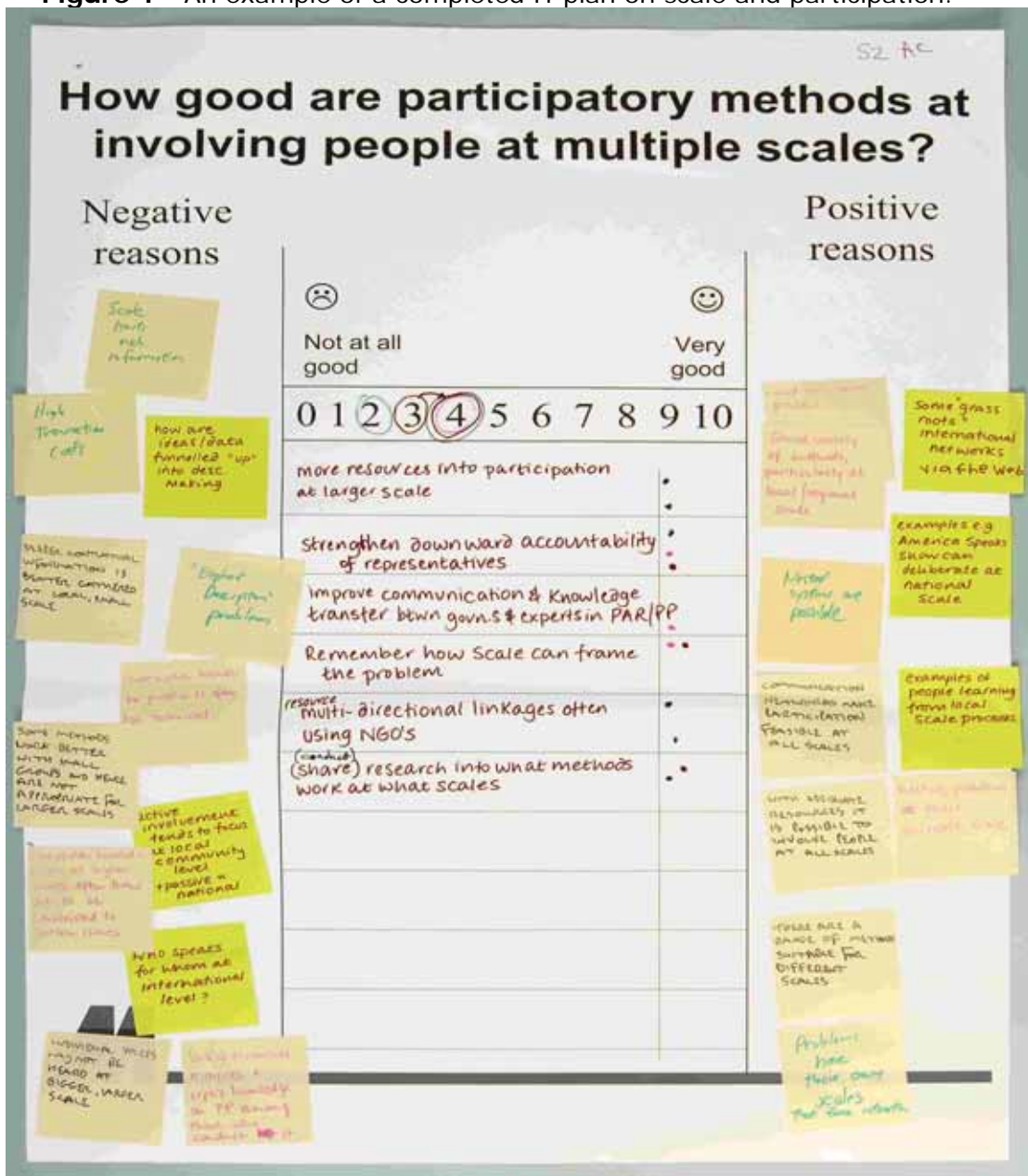
The HAP method is discussed in detail in Kenyon and Hunsberger (2006, this proceeding) and involves the following 6 steps.

1. Individuals considering a question and providing a score;
2. Individuals writing positive and negative reasons for that score;
3. A group discussion focussing on the positive and negative points offered;

4. Individuals suggesting actions that could be taken to improve the score in future;
5. A group ranking of the suggested actions;
6. Planning for each suggested action by examining questions such as: Why is the action important? Who should be responsible to do what to make it happen? When should it be done?

The follow-up to the HAP process involves writing up the outputs and disseminating them to participants and policy-makers, and following up on action points. This paper is part of that follow-up process. The raw material from the HAP process can be found at <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/pathconference/index.html#output>

**Figure 1** - An example of a completed H-plan on scale and participation.



### 3. Results

The rest of the paper is dedicated to setting out the results of the HAP process on scale. It should be noted that we have tried not to add our interpretation to the outputs from the worksheets, but transcribe and summarise what came out of the workshop. Before setting out the results however, we should note a concern about the question. Several groups commented that the question was difficult since "scale" was not defined and could relate to different things including political scale, geographical scale, number of people and temporal scale. Indeed, Gibson et al (2000) define scale as a spatial, temporal, quantitative or analytical dimension used to describe a phenomenon. Workshop organisers were aware of the general nature of the question, but felt that it would allow broad issues to be identified and analysed, and, crucially, to allow participants from a wide and varied background to take part in the workshop. The outputs should be seen in the context of the broad question and potential differing interpretations of it.

Seven groups of PATH conference participants chose to consider issues of scale in the plenary workshop. There were between 4 and 7 participants in each group. As set out above, the first task was for participants to individually provide a score for the question: 'How good are participatory methods at involving people at multiple scales?', where 0 was very bad and 10 was very good. The mean score offered by participants was 4, with a mode of 3 and a median of 3.

#### *3.1. Positive and negative responses on scale and participation*

The next task, also to be completed individually was to write down positive reasons for the score, i.e. why a zero score was not given. A number of themes emerged from the positive reasons to the question. First, participants stated that there are many participatory methods all of which are **flexible, diverse** and able to be adapted to a specific situation and scale. Nesting, integrating and using multiple participatory methods means it is possible to develop a process to suit any/every scale. Second, it was noted that **information technology** (e.g. GIS, internet) was making it easier to enable participation at multiple scales. Third, although there were few examples of multi-scale methods, those that are available are good, and provide **examples** of participation at all scales. Fourth, problems come with their **own scales** and because of this they force interaction between the different scales involved. Fifth, **new approaches** are being developed to improve participation at multiple levels. Sixth, there is **increasing interest** in looking at different scales both from policy-makers and researchers.

Following the positive reasons, participants were asked to give three negative reasons to explain the score they offered. That is, why did they not give the question a score of 10? The negative reasons provided by the seven groups were more diverse than the positive reasons, but a number of themes emerge. One theme relates to **establishing the scale(s)** at which participation is needed in the first place. This is not always a simple task and it is not clear how all scales identified should or can be taken account of. Indeed, some issues are difficult to upscale and the example of biodiversity was given. A related theme considered by several groups is the possible (or likely) conflict between different scales, for example between governance at different levels, local, regional, national and international.

Another set of negative points relates to participatory methods themselves. Some participants felt that participatory methods work better at smaller scales, and that development of methods was needed. Many people stated that there were **not enough good examples** of participatory process being undertaken at

large-scales or multiple scales. More examples of large scale participatory processes are needed as well as examples of integrated methods which facilitate involvement of people at local, regional and national level. However, even if suitable methods can be developed, limitations exist with respect to resources. Many participants felt that **requirements** for participation at different levels were problematic. Funding and other resources required for large scale participatory processes were prohibitive. Several participants stated that the skill base required from practitioners and within commissioning institutions was lacking. Others mentioned the fact that data is not always available at different scales.

Representation of the “public” was another recurring theme in this stage of the HAP process. The issue of **representation** becomes more apparent at larger scales. Questions related to who represents whom, and which scale an actor is acting from/on become relevant since values and interests will differ at different scales. Cultural and social differences become apparent and can be challenging in participatory processes. There was also concern that capture and manipulation of participatory processes by interest groups was more likely to occur at larger scales. In terms of representation getting people involved at larger scales was also identified as a problem. Active involvement tends to be better at the local level. People are more passive at the national level (as evidenced by low electoral turnouts).

A final group of concerns on scale and participation relate to **funnelling ideas and data into decision-making**. This was felt to be harder and less transparent in large-scale processes. Integrating participatory outcomes into the decision-making process was difficult, not least because relevant institutions are unclear what to do and how to use the data, and in many cases are unaccustomed to considering information from multiple scales. In other cases participants felt that the issues was not that it was unclear how to funnel participatory recommendations into decision-making, but rather that the recommendations may go against current policy, or contradict expert opinion.

Once the individuals had written positive and negative reasons for their score, a group discussion was held where participants read out their reasons and clarified them. No notes were made of the discussion, but additional positive and negative points may have been added. The discussion was used as a forum to air ideas, interact with other and stimulate ideas for the next stage of the HAP process.

### ***3.2. Actions to improve scale and participation***

Following the discussion participants were asked to reconsider their score. 27 (84%) participant scores stayed the same, 3 increased and 2 decreased their score. The next task was for individuals to suggest an action that could be taken to improve the score in future. As with the positive and negative points, the actions can be grouped into a number of themes.

Many suggested actions exposed the need for **more examples and research** on trans-national/large scale/multi-scale participatory processes. This would provide an evidence base for the use of participatory processes in policy development at different scales. Alongside this there were calls for greater comparison between such exercises and for the repetition of such processes to increase legitimacy. Further, many participants suggested that experiences of such process needed to be better shared through conferences and internet-based groups.

Another set of suggested actions centred on **developing capacity and support in decision-making institutions** for multi-scale participatory processes.

Participants asked for more institutional support, more institutional experimentation and better communication between institutions and participatory experts. Also related to institutions, participants suggested greater transparency at integrating decisions at different levels into policy-making at different levels. Greater downwards accountability was thought to improve the score in future. A further suggestion was that processes which encourage multi-scale methods be institutionalised. Finally in terms of institutions more funding and resources were requested.

There were some actions which suggested **increased use and testing of information and computer technology** to improve public participation at multiple scales. Finally, several suggested actions were about **motivating potential participants**: “Get people involved and excited” was one of these along with actions relating to educating people about participatory democracy and encouraging participatory education and action in schools.

Each group had between four and seven suggested actions on their H-diagram, corresponding to the number of people in the group. In order to reduce the number of suggested actions to take forward to action planning each group voted for the action(s) which were most likely to improve how good participatory methods are at involving people at multiple scales in future. Table 1 shows which actions were chosen in the voting process and why they were considered important.

### **3.3. Action planning on scale and participation**

Nine suggested actions were taken forward to the action planning stage of the HAP process where PATH conference participants were invited to consider:

- Who should be responsible for what to make the suggested action happen?
- How can they encourage it to happen?
- When should it be done?, and
- How will we know when it is done?

**Table 1 - Prioritised actions taken forward to planning stage of HAP process**

| <b>Action</b>   | <b>Why Important?</b>  |
|---|--|
| Further look into how new tools of the information society can be used  | New technologies have potential which has so far not materialised. They could be efficient, open new possibilities, and facilitate involvement of large numbers of people in different locations and (to some extent) in different cultural contexts |
| Resource participatory research through multi-directional linkages to learn what works at what scales   | Rhetoric not backed by resources at present; knowledge base needs strengthening  |
| Share experiences of using multiple methods that work at various scales and evaluate their effectiveness                                      | It needs to become an accepted practice that participatory processes are used at multiple scales   |
| Appraise systematically under what conditions participatory processes are successful and when other types of processes would work better      | Methods are being developed but we need to find out more about what works, by what criteria, under what conditions   |
| Strengthen downwards accountability of representatives  | A link between the small number of deliberators and their constituencies would make all people feel linked to the process  |
| Case examples that demonstrate what is possible in designing and delivering processes that work at 2-3 spatial scales within the same process | To be able to manage the specificities of the different scales simultaneously (translate between levels)   |
| Get people excited and involved in PP by  | If people are not engaged they cannot  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| giving people basic education of participatory democracy and transmitting values of democracy at early ages.  | participate! If people are successfully engaged at the local/project level then it will be easier to engage them at the larger more strategic levels.  |
| Increase networking on participatory methods at multiple scales through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conferences between practitioners and policymakers at multiple levels</li> <li>• expansion of deliberative democracy, consortia of researchers and practitioners (on-line, face to face, global)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share learning and practice</li> <li>• Increase awareness</li> <li>• Build political support</li> <li>• High potential for breakthrough thinking</li> </ul> |
| Invest more resources in doing projects at multiple scales (to increase our knowledge of effective practices).  | We need the case studies to prove potential and effectiveness.   |

In all, four of the suggested actions were taken forward to full action planning (these are shaded in Table 1). Others were not completed because there was limited time available, fewer participants in the final session and limited interest in some of the actions. The four suggested actions that were completed are set out below. The completed action plan displayed on the conference wall is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2** - The "Scale" action plan from the PATH conference workshop



The first suggestion in the final action plan was to **look into how new tools of the information society could be used in participatory processes**. This was considered because participants thought that new technologies have potential that has so far not materialised. Information and communication technologies (ICT) could be open new possibilities, and be efficient at facilitating involvement of large numbers of people in different locations and (to some extent) in different cultural contexts. The action planners suggested that this was something that should be carried out by researchers, technology companies, participatory practitioners, NGOs and governments. Greater ICT use could be encouraged and explored if funding was provided and existing tools were disseminated and

awareness of the need for such tools was raised. These actions should take place now, but the process itself is ongoing and will probably never be complete.

The second suggested action was to **resource participatory research through multi-directional links to learn what works at which scales**. This was considered important so that the rhetoric could be backed by resources and because the knowledge base on scale and participation needs to be strengthened. The action planners thought that research funding agencies should be responsible for funding research on scale and participation and that authorities, foundations and NGOs at all levels should be responsible for the practice of participation at different scales. This action point could be achieved within a strategic framework by raising awareness of scale in participation and by a better theoretical understanding of the scale issue. Planners felt that this action should be taken soon and within a timetable and set of milestones in the form of a strategic plan.

**Table 2 – Final action plan on how to improve the effectiveness and quality of participatory methods at involving people at multiple scales**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Action 1</b> | Further look into how new tools of the information society can be used on Participatory processes (e.g. Internet referendums, discussion fora, e-surveys) Also in actual meetings these instruments could perhaps be used, possibilities to have larger meetings.  |
| <b>Why?</b>     | The new technologies have a potential which has so far not materialised. If it could be materialised it might be very cool – efficient and open possibilities, which have so far not been available. But that remains to be examined. They facilitate involvement of large numbers of people, also in different locations and (to some extent) in different cultural contexts. |
| <b>Who?</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Researchers</li> <li>- Technology companies</li> <li>- Participatory practitioners</li> <li>- NGOs</li> <li>- Governments</li> </ul>  |
| <b>How?</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide funding</li> <li>- Disseminate existing tools and raise awareness of need</li> </ul>  |
| <b>When?</b>    | Now  |
| <b>Done?</b>    | It is a process which is probably never complete   |
| <b>Action 2</b> | Resource participatory research through multi-directional linkages to learn what works at what scales  |
| <b>Why?</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Problems have their own scales</li> <li>- Rhetoric not backed by resources at present</li> <li>- Knowledge base needs strengthening</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Who?</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research funding agencies: research on participation</li> <li>- Authorities at all levels and foundations/NGOs: practice of participation</li> </ul>  |
| <b>How?</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising awareness</li> <li>- Based on a better theoretical understanding of the scale issue</li> <li>- Within a strategic framework</li> </ul>  |
| <b>When?</b>    | Soon... tomorrow at 15.32!   |
| <b>Done?</b>    | When milestones in the strategic framework are met   |
| <b>Action 3</b> | Share experiences of using multiple methods that work at various scales and evaluate their effectiveness to feed into institutionalising processes that encourage multiple methods that best achieve diversity of scale (within practical budgets)   |
| <b>Why?</b>     | It needs to become an accepted practice that achieves both participatory processes at multiple scales  |
| <b>Who?</b>     | Start at the European level for co-ordination. EC provides start-up funding (in area of ERANET). Some national actors to do the application.   |
| <b>How?</b>     | Integration on the European level. The national actors take care of the regional and local levels  |
| <b>When?</b>    | As soon as possible  |
| <b>Done?</b>    | It's a continuous process. Milestones could be first common participating activity   |
| <b>Action 4</b> | Appraise systematically under what conditions participatory processes are successful and when other types of processes would work better<br>More institutional experimentation<br>How to institutionalise participation at unequal levels and across levels?   |
| <b>Why?</b>     | Methods are being developed but we need to find out more about what works, by what criteria, under what conditions   |
| <b>Who?</b>     | Authorities in co-operation with practitioners and researchers   |
| <b>When?</b>    | Start now  |

The third suggested action was **sharing experiences of using multiple methods that work at various scales and evaluate their effectiveness** at feeding into institutional processes. This was considered important so that it becomes accepted practice that participatory processes are used at multiple scales. Conference participants felt that such action should be co-ordinated at the EU level where start-up funding could be provided along with co-ordination and integration of the process. National actors would also have a role to play in

developing regional and local level participatory methods and becoming involved in the application of the participatory processes. The planners of this action also thought it needed to take place as soon as possible and that it is a continuous process where milestones might be set out to aid progression.

The final suggested action is similar to the previous one and was to **appraise systematically under what conditions participatory processes are successful** and when other types of processes would work better, the aim being to find out more about what works, by what criteria, under what conditions.

The planners of this action suggested that authorities in co-operation with practitioners and researchers might be the groups responsible for making it happen and that the process should be started immediately.

#### **4. Summary and discussion**

On average the scores indicate that participants thought that participatory methods are currently not very good at involving people at multiple scales. This is because:

- it is difficult to establish the scale(s) at which participation is needed in the first place and then how these scales should be taken into account;
- there are too few good examples of participatory processes implemented at large or multiple scales;
- the requirements in terms of resources, data and skills are often absent;
- the issue of representation is difficult at large and multiple scales; and
- it is difficult to funnel ideas into the decision-making process in a transparent way at multiple or large scales.

However, the positive reasons for the score offer some reasons for optimism that participatory processes may be developed to address large or multiple scale issues. The fact that there are numerous flexible participatory approaches and new approaches being developed all the time allowed participants to believe that integration and innovative use of participatory processes would enhance participation at multiple and large scales. The potential use of information technology was also seen as positive as was the increasing interest in the links between the different scales of problems from policy-makers and researchers.

The action points suggested by the participants illustrates what could be done to improve participatory methods at involving people at multiple scales. The basic message from these action points is that more investment should be made in developing, conducting and evaluating participatory processes for multiple scales, possibly using more information and computer technology, and then in sharing the results. Also, education on deliberative democracy is considered vital, as are clear links between those involved in participatory processes and their constituency.

The final (incomplete) action plan focuses on the need for more examples of the use of participatory processes at multiple and large scales and the increased evaluation of these examples to look at what works and does not work, when, where and why. These examples might embrace new technology as a means of involving more people in policy at different scales. Explicit is the need for information exchange when such processes have been undertaken and evaluated.

#### **4. Conclusions**

It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss and critique the HAP method. Such discussion can be found in Kenyon and Hunsberger (2006, this proceeding). However, it should be noted that implementation of the HAP process at the conference workshop meant that all of the suggested actions could not be developed into action plans. Had this been the case, the final action plan may have looked different.

The final output of the process is clearly a product of the conference participants. Whilst some delegates could be categorised as policy-makers or practitioners, the vast majority were academics, and the final results should be viewed with this in mind. That said, the outputs indicate that there is a real or perceived lack of examples of the use of participatory processes at multiple scales, and addressing this, and evaluating and disseminating future work in this area, is a concrete outcome that can be addressed by policy-makers, funders and researchers at different regional and national scales.

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