

What is Nostrum-DSS?

It is a Co-ordination Action, funded by the EC FP6, aimed at improving governance and planning in the field of sustainable water management in the Mediterranean area:

- by establishing a network among the science, policy, and civil society spheres,
- by fostering active involvement of the relevant stakeholders,
- through the development and dissemination of Best Practices Guidelines for the design and implementation of DSS tools for IWRM.

What is the Nostrum-DSS Leaflet Series?

These short documents summarise the main output of the project and represent an **entry door** to the wide range of products and resources available on the project's web site. The series includes three kinds of leaflets:

- Case studies leaflets
- Policy leaflets
- Technical leaflets

To whom is this leaflet addressed?

As part of the Policy leaflet series, this document is mainly addressed to **policy and decision makers** interested in gaining insights into how *DSS tools and approaches* can support them in their everyday work, but may be useful to researchers and practitioners too.

For further information see the NOSTRUM-DSS website:

→ <http://www.nostrum-dss.eu>

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What is Public Participation?

Public Participation (PP) can generally be defined as any procedure or method allowing stakeholders to influence the outcome of a decision-making process.

In water management, the stakeholders are **all the actors** that influence or can be influenced by the development and implementation of a water plan or policy. The core stakeholders to be involved in water management can be representatives of government ministries, local authorities, NGOs, private sectors, service providers and water users. The aim of PP in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is open and transparent policy and decision-making, which sets the ground for peace, stability and democratic change in the Mediterranean Area.

Why use Public Participation?

Sustainable water management can only be achieved through the integration of the knowledge, experiences and interests of the actors involved in the decision making process from all the different sectors (such as the urban, agriculture, industry, tourism, environment, health, energy and transport sectors).

The identification and involvement of the relevant stakeholders help to:

- avoid unfair and unjustified policies;
- ensure the acceptability of the decision taken: stakeholders are more likely to trust the process and its outcomes, feel a sense of ownership, support the project and work towards its successful implementation;
- ensure that the policies or plans developed address people's needs;
- resolve conflicts and generate solutions which are sound, equitable and acceptable to all actors through enhanced dialogue and communication;
- ensure social learning through communication and exchange of information among different social groups;
- set up a more complete base of information for the design of improved plans and strategies;
- in general, to enhance the quality of the decision, as well as the project's effectiveness and efficiency.

'Dialogue is the beginning of wisdom' [International Network of Basin Organizations, 2002]

'How should the rights of majorities and minorities be balanced? This is the judgment at the heart of participative process' [Byrne & Davis, 1998]

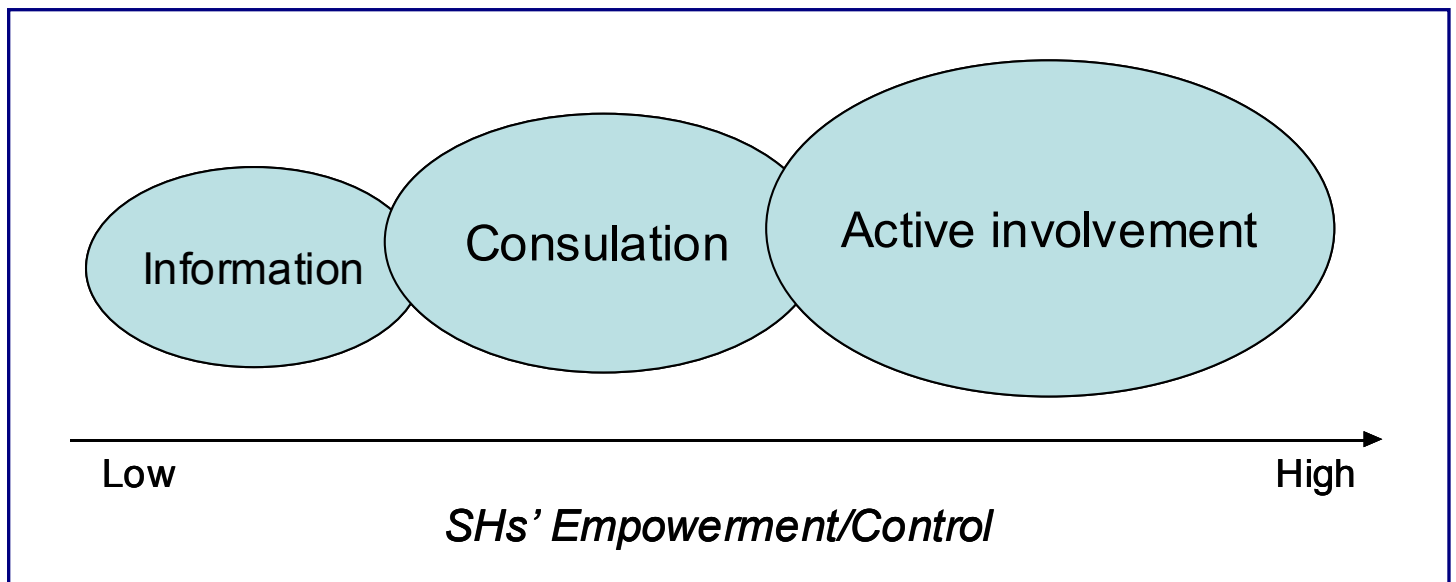
Experiences from the Nostrum-DSS Case Studies

Croatia

Some of the conflicts arising from the competitive use of waters in the Cetina river basin were solved thanks to meetings with official bodies and stakeholders.

Israel/Palestine

Focus Group meetings were organised to discuss the various alternatives for solving the different problems of the Dead Sea watershed shared by three countries.



NEL GRAFICO SOPRA HAI DIMENTICATO LA “t” DI “CONSULTATION”

Different forms of public participation

The broad term of PP refers to the different levels of involvement summarised in the figure above:

- 1) In processes of **information** and then **consultation**, one-way communication takes place, and knowledge is simply provided or received. These forms are often not considered as real participation but are preliminary, crucial steps to prepare for the active involvement of the different interest groups in policy-making.
- 2) Proper participatory processes allow for a certain degree of **empowerment** of stakeholders. The different relevant actors identified through preliminary analysis of the social networks are regularly and **actively involved** in the subsequent analysis of the problem at hand. The actors involved contribute to the design of future policy or decisions, within a **two-way communication process**.

Public participation in the Mediterranean

In the Mediterranean region, the uneven distribution of water resources and the conflicting interests involved in the management of **transboundary river** basins aggravate disputes between water users. Further impediments derive from problems of communication due to **diverse cultures and languages** among actors from different neighbouring countries. IWRM and public participation are also high in the governments' agenda. Years of experience in Public participation development and implementation are already available: advanced research and rich discourse represent a firm theoretical basis for stakeholder involvement. However, PP approaches and practices have yet to be institutionalised, particularly the issue of **stakeholders' representation**.

Tools to support Public Participation

A wide range of **platforms and methods** (such as informal meetings, citizen juries, workshops, focus groups, electronic conferences) allow for the different forms of participation. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) also provide valuable tools for the implementation of participatory processes. In a decision-making process, meaningful information needs to be collected, structured, evaluated and presented in an understandable way. Several computer-based tools, such as **DSS** have been developed to **help policy and decision makers** in this process.

In particular:

- DSS help multidisciplinary teams involved in the analysis of a water problem to establish a **common language** and think in a structured way. Criteria, objectives and constraints about the problem become more explicit through the whole process of development and application of a decision support system.
- the graphical features of a DSS **support communication** between stakeholders with different backgrounds. Visual aids in DSS also become more and more important when audiences are composed not only by policy makers but also by citizens.

Communication capabilities help in fostering public participation and are particularly developed in Deliberation Support Tools and Group Decision Support Systems which aim at facilitating collaborative decision making

To see operational solutions to implement PP in practice see the NOSTRUM-DSS final products

→ | <http://www.nostrum-dss.eu>

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