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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GUIDELINE

Guiding document to improve the
participatory processess

Zbatuar nga:

eurONATUR

 **EcoAlbania**

Financuar nga:

 **Austrian
Development
Agency**

Foreword

Public participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that communities have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, environment, and future. Effective public engagement fosters transparency, inclusivity, and trust between decision-makers and the public, ultimately leading to more informed, equitable, and sustainable outcomes.

The water sector in Albania is among the most complex sectors in terms of governance. The involvement of many stakeholders, as well as the development of processes within a massive regulatory framework, often makes decision-making processes too complicated for the public to follow. Moreover, the engagement of actors participating in the water governance process separately and even more the internal fragmentation within the key stakeholders often creates large gaps that separate decision-making from other actors such as the scientific community, civil society and local communities.

Since water is a sector that is inevitably interconnected with many other sectors such as agriculture, rural development, tourism, nature protection, it consequently its governance requires a comprehensive approach. This is precisely the main approach of the “ESPID 4 Vjosa” project to bridge different stakeholders and create an enabling environment for a participatory decision-making on the water sector. In this respect this guideline is part of the project contribution to create a better model of governance in the water sector in Albania.

This Public Participation Guideline is designed to provide a structured approach for engaging communities, stakeholders, and citizens in decision-making processes. It outlines key principles, regulatory framework, best practices, and practical steps to facilitate meaningful participation, ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard and considered.

By following these guidelines, policymakers, government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders can create opportunities for dialogue, empower communities, and enhance accountability. Public participation is not just a procedural formality, it is a fundamental right that strengthens democratic institutions and promotes social cohesion.

We encourage all stakeholders to use this guideline as a tool for fostering a culture of engagement, where every voice matters, and collective action leads to positive change. Together, we can build more responsive, inclusive, and resilient societies.

Abbreviations

ESPID 4 Vjosa	Enhancement of Science-Policy Interface Development for the Vjosa River
AMBU	National Agency for the Management of Water Sources
NEA	National Agency for Environment
NAPA	National Agency for Protected Areas
VWRNP	Vjosa Wild River National Park
VCSN	Vjosa Civil Society Network
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
EU	European Union
NPIE	National Plan for European Integration
REA	Regional Agency for Environment
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
NACH	National Agency for the Cultural Heritage
EC	European Commission
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
PPP	Public-Private-Partnership
GIS	Geographic Information System
MoTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment

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Introduction

01

Strengthening Democracy is a core pillar of stability and safety in most nations. Ensuring this requires two things: access to information and active participation. This is crucial not only at large processes such as national elections but also locally, for example, when regional development plans initiate construction of new features in any village or in common space.

Effective public participation is a feature of democratic countries that leads to more effective governance and is of particular importance when decisions are made about the use and management of natural resources, which often affect public and private property. It is recognized worldwide as a best practice in environmental governance. Involving the public in environmental policy decisions can enhance a country's international reputation and demonstrate compliance with global environmental agreements and human rights obligations.

Public participation means involving citizens in the formulation, analysis and implementation of policies, laws and regulations. These processes aim to inform and engage the general public, including local communities and stakeholders in decision-making, ensuring that individuals and communities are aware of initiatives by authorities that affect their daily lives. It is further a strategic approach to natural resource management that improves the outcomes and sustainability of environmental projects.

Public participation lends legitimacy to government actions and decisions. When people are involved in the decision-making process, they are more likely to understand, accept and comply with outcomes. Involving the public in the process of adopting policies is crucial for overcoming potential conflicts in later stages of the process. People have more trust in their leaders and institutions when their opinions are taken into account. This is unfortunately often neglected by public authorities, who later face public opposition. Early and continuous public involvement helps to identify and prioritize potential problems and concerns that could become obstacles to project implementation. If these are addressed proactively, delays can be avoided, costs associated with conflict or litigation can be reduced and project planning and execution can be improved.

In return, involving a broad range of stakeholders in decision-making processes on key environmental issues provides access to local knowledge, expertise and perspectives that can significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of decision-making. A broad range of stakeholders can uncover potential problems, opportunities and solutions that policy makers themselves may not be aware of. Local people, including marginalized groups, know the local conditions best and also have different traditional (local) knowledge that can lead to more equitable solutions that do not favor or disadvantage any particular group in the community. Involving local communities can lead to linking traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices, which can improve biodiversity conservation and ecological resilience and lead to more innovative and adaptive solutions to complex environmental challenges.

Projects designed with public participation are more likely to meet the real needs of the community and therefore represent a more efficient use of funds. Public participation can also uncover opportunities for cost-sharing and partnerships that can reduce the financial burden on governments.

Public involvement in environmental initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship of natural resources, strengthens community bonds, and builds social capital. This increased sense of community can be invaluable in times of environmental stress or in mobilizing collective action. By that it can be ensured that conservation and management strategies are based on a deep understanding of the local ecosystem and cultural context. This can lead to more sustainable and ecologically sensitive practices that are more likely to be successful in the long term.

The public can be involved in the public participation process through consultations and meetings, as well as through specially designed stakeholder engagement processes.

1.1. ESPID 4 Vjosa Role on Public Participation

Despite the various plans, strategies and laws, Albania is increasingly confronted with environmental problems that are exacerbated by the lack of coordination between the various actors. In a national political context where scientific knowledge is often not understood or used by policy makers, a growing alienation has emerged that not only rejects but excludes opportunities for cooperation.



The ESPID 4 Vjosa project, which aims to build a bridge between the main actors in environmental policy-making, namely the authorities, the scientific community and civil society, has the improvement of public participation as one of its main objectives. In this respect, the project has helped to improve communication between these three main actors and over the years has succeeded in creating communication channels, especially between the scientific community and decision makers in Albania.

Figure 1:
During the
second Round of
Consultations with
National Authorities –
2nd Pit-Stop
© B. Guri



Data collection and sharing with leading institutions has been a very important part of the ESPID4Vjosa project. The approach of conducting joint research and monitoring activities in the field between the scientific community and the experts of the main institutions such as AMBU, NEA and NAPA shows the potential for sustainable cooperation and direct involvement of science in the decision-making process. In addition, the project engaged in the dissemination workshops and meetings with staff from municipalities, universities and experts trained for this purpose.

Figure 2:
During the first round
of workshops with
local stakeholders
– The workshop in
Vlora © L. Lazaj





Figure 3:
Mapping of issues
in the upper Vjosa
valley from the local
stakeholders during
the 1st round of
workshos in Permet
© L. Lazaj

Furthermore, all data collected during the project have contributed to important policy-making processes, such as the preparation of the Vjosa Wild River National Park Management Plan or the Vjosa Integrated River Basin Management Plan screening process.

In addition to the scientific-political approach that completes the puzzle, the ESPID 4 Vjosa project has helped to develop a comprehensive participatory approach. This was achieved through the establishment of the Vjosa Civil Society Network (VCSN). The network consists of a dozen NGOs active in the Vjosa river basin and committed to environmental protection and social rights. The network, whose policy monitoring capacity has been collectively strengthened, is a structured body that first seeks membership in local decision-making bodies such as the Vjosa River Basin Council and then in other public institutions responsible for nature and natural resource management.

The ESPID 4 Vjosa project has followed a comprehensive and consultative approach with stakeholders since its inception. The project expert group together with the EcoAlbania team has built the entire work of preparing technical reports that include the most specific topics of water governance precisely by defining the issues that are most important in the specific case of Vjosa.

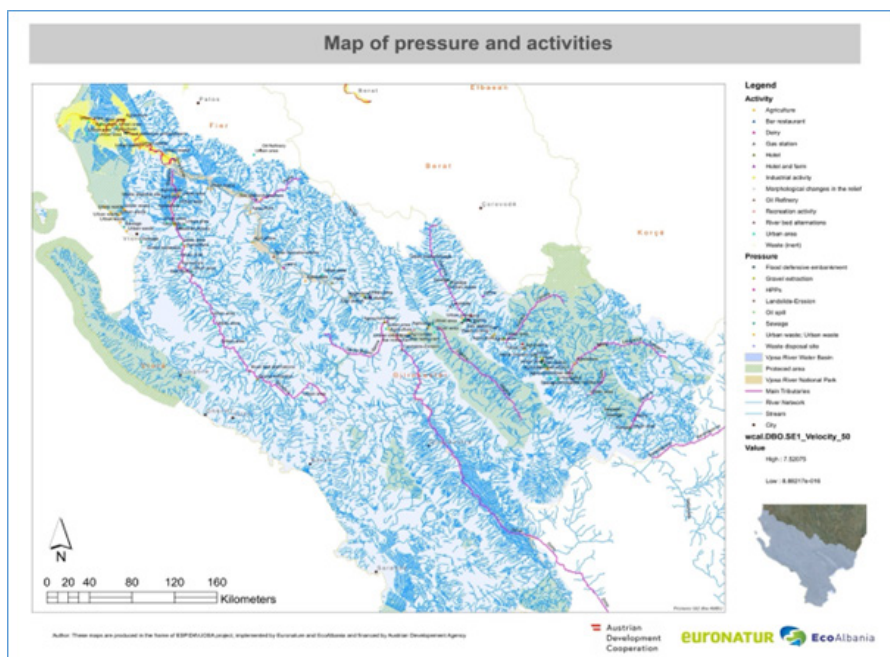


Figure 4:
Map of the pressures and issues at final stage prepared by the experts
© L. Lazaj

The topics analyzed were determined jointly with the technical representatives of AMBU. For this reason, in the first “Pit Stop” meeting between the project experts and the AMBU staff, these thematic areas of analysis were determined, also based on the orientation of the needs of AMBU itself as the main coordinating authority for the governance of the Vjosa basin.

After the determination, the project experts continued their work on drafting the shortened thematic reports, while in parallel with this process, consultation with local stakeholders continued.

Two rounds of consultations with local stakeholders were held throughout the Vjosa basin, with meetings held in Përmet, Tepelena, Gjirokastrë, Vlorë, Këlcyrë, Selenica, Memaliaj and Dropull. The consultations included local government stakeholders, state agencies, representatives of civil society, the private sector and local academia. The entire process followed was a comprehensive and very fruitful one, where through the exchange of

information presented by the expert group and the knowledge of local stakeholders, it was possible to verify and clarify certain issues. Through the consultation in these meetings, a map of the main pressures and issues identified in the Vjosa basin, which belong to the 7 thematic areas previously agreed upon with AMBU, was built.

To conclude the participatory and consultative cycle, the maps and summary reports were presented in a second, more extensive meeting not only with AMBU but also with other central authorities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Tourism Agency, the Protected Areas Agency, etc

In conclusion, the mapping of issues developed through a participatory and consultative process will continue to serve AMBU and other subsequent initiatives that will work in the field of good water governance in the Vjosa basin. The most important of these is undoubtedly the drafting of the Vjosa Integrated River Basin Plan.

1.2. Creation of the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP)

The Vjosa in Albania is one of the last, if not the last, large European rivers that has retained its natural structure, biodiversity and natural processes throughout its main course; it is a free-flowing river, unrestricted by dams or barriers. The key to understanding the Vjosa phenomenon is that it and its tributaries function as a self-sustaining, preserved ecosystem, supported by natural processes, notably river flow and sediment transport. Its ecosystem functions and biodiversity became a key reason for its designation as National Park in March 2023.

Only the water areas and the active floodplain along the watercourse are included in the national park. Still, just over 12,000 ha of river and active erosion banks and floodplains are inside the national park. However, grasslands, fields, slopes and other surface formations remain outside the park boundaries (we call them the 'Vjosa Valley'). This is why the concept of zonation in the VWRNP is different from that of other protected areas; for the most part, the outer boundaries and the inner zonation only include the watercourse and the areas flooded and eroded by the watercourse. As a rule, these areas along the river Vjosa and its three tributaries are publicly owned, which makes it even easier to define the boundaries and zones in this park. The park boundaries do not encroach on private fields, forests or pastures.

For a VWRNP to really come to life it must be comprehensive (including protected river stretches in Greece, where the river Vjosa originates and flows under the name Aoos). Comprehensiveness also means including all free-flowing tributaries and the river estuary (which should be achieved in the next stages). Of course, such a park also needs to be properly managed. These are all tasks for the future. The concept of the VWRNP



is unique, as it is the first national park in Europe, and probably beyond, to be based exclusively on a river ecosystem that is large enough to be in dynamic equilibrium, as it is supported by undisturbed natural processes. Of course, there are strong influences on the river ecosystem from the surrounding, predominantly agricultural and partly urban areas, and it would be unrealistic to expect that the negative pressures from these fringe zones will cease immediately.

However, if the concept of a wider 'buffer zone' is implemented (perhaps as one of the zones of the future UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve), which would include the whole of the Vjosa Valley and in which the management and exploitation of natural resources would gradually be based on the principles of sustainability.

Figure 5:
Photo from the event
of establishment of
the Vjosa WRNP in
Tepelena on March
2023
© A. Guri

A specific campaign to involve the public, local communities and stakeholders in the work of the Park was carried out during the establishment process and also in preparation for the elaboration of the management plan. This process should be continued in the future, because it will help to support effective management of the protected area and sustainable development of the local communities.

Before and at the time of the establishment of the National Park, there was an extremely high level of public support, both local and wider, for the establishment of the National Park. This support remains high and can be sustained through public involvement in decision-making processes in the context of national park management and through the development of projects that stimulate local community action. Sustainable community tourism is one such incentive, along with sustainable agriculture.

Partnerships with local communities and key stakeholders are the basis for the effective achievement of the National Park's objectives. The partnership between the Ministry of Tourism and Environment in Albania, Patagonia Inc. and IUCN played a crucial role in the process of establishing and preparing for the management of the VWRNP.

1.3. Purpose of this document

The purpose of these guidelines on public participation is to ensure a structured and cooperative approach to involving the public in environmental planning and decision-making. These guidelines aim to create a framework where all stakeholders, including government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, community members, and special interest groups, can work together effectively to achieve common goals. By fostering an inclusive, transparent, and respectful dialogue, sharing information and resources to support informed participation, working collaboratively to integrate public input into environmental planning and decision-making, and monitoring and reporting on the implementation of environmental projects and the effectiveness of public participation, the guidelines seek to promote a participatory process that is equitable, accountable, and effective in addressing environmental challenges and advancing sustainable development.

This guidance is written to be useful in principle for involving the general public in environmental projects throughout Albania, although most of the content relates to the experience of establishing and managing the VWRNP. The target audience for this guidance covers both sides; on the one hand there is the general public, including NGOs, local institutions and other stakeholders, and on the other hand there are the decision-makers who, together with the experts, are preparing the various projects with expected environmental impacts.

Environment and Humans – the Albanian Context

02

The relationship between the environment and humans in the Western Balkans, particularly in Albania, is complex and dynamic. Historical legacies, socio-economic changes, and environmental challenges have all played a role in managing this relationship.

The landscapes in Albania were shaped by ancient civilizations, which influenced land use, agriculture, and settlement patterns. Under the communist regime, Albania experienced extensive state-led industrial projects and agricultural collectivization, resulting in significant environmental degradation.

Albania boasts a high level of geological and biological diversity, with many endemic species and specific habitats and ecosystems. It is rich in water resources, with numerous rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. These resources have been vital for agriculture, energy, and human consumption, so conservation efforts have been challenged by economic development pressures. Industrial activities and unsustainable agricultural practises, uncontrolled urbanisation and inadequate waste management have led to significant air, water and soil pollution. The extensive use of natural resources, such as water and gravel extraction and the use of water to generate electricity, has dramatically affected the state of freshwater ecosystems. Legal and illegal logging has reduced forest cover, impaired biodiversity and – together with overgrazing - contributed to soil erosion.

Since the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Albania has faced the challenge of finding a balance between economic development and environmental protection. Efforts have been made to implement environmental policy measures and to integrate into European environmental standards. However, in recent years in particular, the massive development of tourism has threatened the existence of numerous natural areas, especially along the sea coast, but also in the valuable national parks. In addition, Albania, like many other countries in the Western Balkans, is increasingly confronted with the effects of climate change, e.g. extreme weather events that affect agriculture, water supply and human settlements.

Despite the threat of massive land-use developments, Albania still has the last free-flowing large river on its territory, not only in the Balkans, but also more widely, the Vjosa River. It is preserved to this day in all its original glory, is mainly due to the involvement of the public and local people who did not want the pristine river and a national pride to be dammed up with hydroelectric dams.

It was the reasonable voice of the people and the understanding of the decision-makers that saved Europe's last free-flowing river from major interventions. A new perspective for the river was presented: the protection of its natural values within the National Park's boundaries and the development of the area in terms of sustainable management of natural resources, including tourism development. Here again, however, it may be stuck: tourism, if well managed, can be a great opportunity for nature conservation and for the development of the local community. If this is not the case, tourism poses a major threat to the river and its ecosystem, perhaps no less than hydroelectric power stations. Tourism based on the construction and promotion of hotels or yacht marinas or sandy beaches to replace the natural dunes is destructive to nature and brings relatively few benefits to the local population, since the bulk of the profits go to the owners of the tourism infrastructure. It is therefore to be expected that public participation in decision-making on major development projects will be needed in the future, but these could bring more harm than good to the people and nature along the Vjosa River.



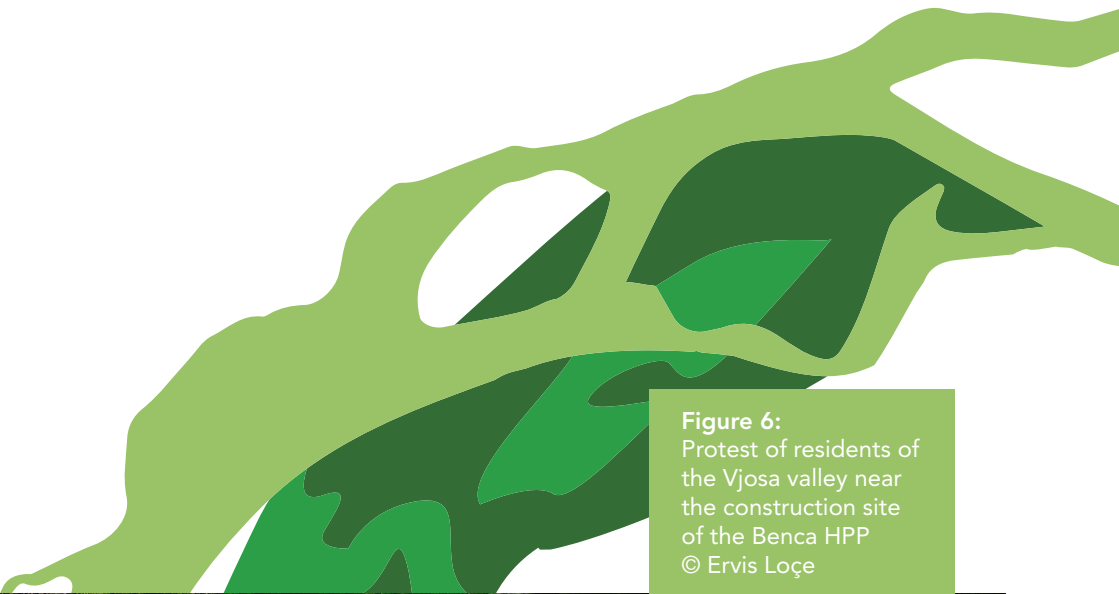


Figure 6:
Protest of residents of
the Vjosa valley near
the construction site
of the Benca HPP
© Ervis Loçe



Legal Obligations in Albania for Public Participation in Decision-Making Processes

03

Albania has established a legal framework that aligns with European Union (EU) directives to ensure public participation in decision-making processes, particularly concerning environmental matters. The legal frameworks and regulations that promote transparency and accountability and also empower citizens to contribute to sustainable environmental management and policy-making include:

3.1 International Environmental Law and Albania

In national law, the general international principles of environmental protection are generally enshrined in the constitution as the country's basic law. The entire mandatory legal framework for implementation in the country is defined on the basis of these principles. The relationship between international law and Albanian domestic law is defined in some articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania.

Article 5 of the Constitution states that "The Republic of Albania shall apply the international law binding upon it", and Article 122 of the Constitution states that the Republic of Albania recognizes and applies the international treaties ratified by it and published in the Official Gazette, as they thus become part of the internal legal system of our country. The treaties to which the Republic of Albania is a party, including the environmental treaties, have become part of the internal legal order of Albania through the adoption of laws by the Albanian Parliament.

The Republic of Albania has entered into a number of commitments under various environmental treaties and has made their provisions binding for implementation on its territory by ratifying them by law. For example, Law No. 8216 of 13.5.1997 ratified the Republic of Albania's accession to the Basel Convention "on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal"; Law No. 8294 of 2.3.1998: ratification of the Bern Convention "on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats"; Law no. 8556 of 22.12.1999: implementation of accession to the United Nations Convention "to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa"; Law no. 8672 of 26.10.2000 ratifying the Aarhus Convention on the right of the public to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters"; Law No. 9021 of 6.3.2003 implementing the accession to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; Law No. 10277 of 13.5.2010 implementing the accession to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Chemicals and Hazardous Pesticides in International Trade, etc.

3.2.Aarhus Convention

The Aarhus Convention has played a pioneering role in promoting the rights of Rio Principle 10. The Convention remains innovative in its link between environmental and human rights, its commitment to future generations and its focus on governance and processes. It was adopted on June 25, 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark, and entered into force on October 30, 2001. Albania ratified it in 2000.

The context and objective of the Aarhus Convention are set out in the preamble and in Articles 1-3. In particular, the preamble emphasises the link between environmental and human rights and the importance of these rights for environmentally sound and sustainable development.

Article 1 sets out the objective of the Convention, which is "to contribute to ensuring the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate for his or her health and well-being" by ensuring that Parties guarantee the right of access. Articles 2 and 3 define some key terms such as "environmental information", "the public" and "the public concerned" and set out general provisions on the functioning of the Convention.

Access to information:

Access to information forms the first pillar. It is appropriate that it is at the forefront of the Convention, as effective public participation in decision-making depends on comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information. However, it is also important in its own right, as the public may seek access to information for purposes other than participation. The pillar of access to information is divided into passive and active access. The first concerns the public's right to request information from the authorities and the authorities' obligation to provide information in response to a request. This type of access to information is referred to as "passive" and falls under Article 4. The second part of the information pillar concerns the public's right to obtain information and the public authorities' obligation to collect and disseminate information of public interest without the need for a specific request. This is "active" access to information, which is regulated in Article 5.

Article 5(9) and Article 10(2)(i) of the Convention require Parties to progressively establish inventories or registers of pollution. This was facilitated by the adoption of a protocol in 2003.

Public participation:

The second pillar of the Aarhus Convention is the public participation pillar. Its effectiveness is based on two other pillars: the pillar of information, which ensures that the public has access to all relevant information in order to participate in a timely and meaningful way, and the pillar of access to justice, which ensures that the public has access to a review procedure if it is denied the right to participate. The Convention sets out minimum requirements for public participation in different types of decisions on environmental matters: specific projects or activities (Article 6 and Annex I), programmes, plans and policies (Article 7), and implementing regulations and legally enforceable rules of general application (Article 8).

The first category concerns the participation of members of the public who may be affected by or otherwise interested in the decision-making on a particular activity and is covered by Article 6. Article 6 sets out the requirements for public participation in decisions on the authorization of any of the activities listed in Annex I to the Convention. In addition to the specific activities listed in the Annex, it also covers all activities that are subject to an environmental impact assessment with public participation under national law.

Article 6 also stipulates that the public participation requirement applies, where appropriate, when the operating conditions for an activity listed in the Annex are reviewed or updated or when a modification or extension of an activity listed in the Annex reaches the thresholds of that Annex. Finally, Article 6 provides that Parties may decide to apply its provisions to decisions on other activities not listed in Annex 1 that may have significant effects on the environment. Article 6 imposes clear step-by-step obligations on Parties to implement an effective public participation procedure (see below for a model public participation procedure).



Public participation is divided into three parts:

Decision-making for a specific activity (**Article 6**)

Development of plans, programmes and policies (**Article 7**);

and the drafting of laws, regulations and legally binding standards (**Article 8**).

The minimum requirements for participation under the Convention are summarised in “seven” steps, which are widely recognised as an international benchmark.

The seven-step model lists:



Notification



Early participation



Access to the necessary information



Opportunity to comment



Adequate consideration of the participation



Immediate notification of the decision taken



Repeat as often as necessary



The Maastricht Recommendations for Promoting Effective Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making (the Maastricht Recommendations) are based on existing best practise and are intended as a practical tool to assist public officials in the day-to-day design and implementation of public participation procedures in environmental decision-making relating to projects, policies, plans, programmes and legislation that cover a wide range of activities that may have an impact on the environment, human health and well-being. The recommendations may be useful to members of the public, including non-governmental organisations and the private sector, who are involved in environmental decision-making.

Access to justice:

The third pillar of the Aarhus Convention is access to justice, which is set out in Article 9. Access to justice helps to implement the information pillar (in particular Article 4 on requests for information) and the public participation pillar (in particular Article 6 on public participation in decisions on certain activities) in national legal systems, as well as any other provisions of the Convention that Parties wish to implement in their national law in this way. Access to justice also provides the public with a mechanism for direct enforcement of environmental law.

The Convention provides for the right to challenge

- the refusal or inadequate response to requests for information
- the legality of a particular activity
- Acts or omissions that violate national environmental law

The procedures must be fair, equal, timely and affordable.

Procedures for access to justice must be fair, equitable and expeditious. The remedies offered must be adequate and effective, and there must be access to enforcement remedies where appropriate. Finally, and most importantly, administrative and judicial procedures must not be so expensive that they discourage people from seeking access to justice.

Article 3 (8) states that Parties shall ensure that persons who exercise their rights under the Convention "shall not be penalised, persecuted or harassed in any way for their involvement". 3 (9) The Parties have recognised the importance of creating a safe and enabling environment for environmental defenders, including the essential protection of whistleblowers. This was reaffirmed in the Maastricht and Budva Declarations.

3.3 Alignment with EU Directives

Albania's alignment with EU Directives, underscored by the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2006, obliges the country to harmonize its environmental legislation with the EU *acquis*. This process includes the implementation of Directive 2003/4/EC on Public Access to Environmental Information, which establishes the public's right to access environmental information and sets conditions for how this information should be provided. Also, the process should be aligned with Directive 2003/35/EC on Public Participation, which defines the public's right to participate in environmental decision-making, aiming to enhance the legitimacy and democratic nature of government policies and projects, ensuring that Albania's environmental governance is transparent, inclusive, and aligned with European standards.

The main objective of the Republic of Albania's foreign policy is EU membership, and within the overall European integration process there should be the same relationship between the *acquis communautaire* and Albanian domestic law.

Currently, the Republic of Albania has the status of a candidate country for EU membership and in this phase of integration the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), which was signed on 12 June 2006 and entered into force on 1 April 2009, is a fundamental document. With the adoption of the National Plan for the Implementation of the SAA (NPISAA) in September 2007, work began on drawing up a plan for alignment with the »*acquis*«. The National Plan for European Integration (NPPIE) is a document prepared by the Albanian government as part of the process of Albania's integration into the European Union.

Horizontal legislation is a legal framework that includes three EU directives: the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EU), the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC) and the Environmental Information Directive (2003/4/EC).

Albania has partially or fully adapted its national legal framework to these directives as part of the EU accession process.

3.4 National Legal Framework on Environment

The national legal framework in Albania, designed to enhance public participation and transparency, includes Law No. 44/2015 »Code of Administrative Procedures in the Republic of Albania,« which provides a comprehensive framework for administrative processes, including public participation, Law No. 119/2014 »On the Right to Information,« ensuring every citizen's right to request and obtain information from any public body, with obligations on public authorities to respond within legal timeframes, and Law No. 146/2014 »On Notification and Public Consultation,« which establishes procedures for public notification and consultation, ensuring public involvement in decision-making processes, collectively forming a robust legal foundation that supports transparent and inclusive governance in Albania.

As an economy in transition, Albania is on a rapid development path. Rapid urbanization, economic and infrastructural development, especially in the field of mass energy and tourism infrastructure, is increasingly threatening the environment and existing natural resources, thus affecting the development of the country and the ecological health of ecosystems. Climate change is an additional exacerbating factor.

The need for rapid development has left the country unprepared in terms of regulatory and institutional framework, especially in the environmental sector. In this regard, the entire environmental sector in Albania has undergone a complex and in many cases rather delayed development, which does not guarantee the preservation of environmental quality.

The process of development of environmental legislation in Albania after the 1990s can be divided into three phases: the first from 1990 to 2000, the second from 2000 to 2011 and the third from 2011 to the present. The first law on environmental protection after the communism era is Law no. 7664 of 21.01.1993 "Environmental Protection". This law laid the first foundations for sustainable environmental protection in parallel with the development of society.

The international principles of environmental protection were recognized, the bodies responsible for environmental protection and environmental management were determined and the method of control and provision of environmental information was regulated. During this period, legislation was enriched by other sectoral laws that contribute to the management and protection of the environment. Thus, environmental protection is also reflected in the criminal norms of the 1995 Penal Code, which includes a chapter on environmental crimes.

With the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania in 1998, the right of the individual to be informed about the state of the environment and its protection was recognized as a right and directly protected by the Constitution.

The National Environmental Action Plan of 2001 gave a significant boost to environmental legislation. This plan was the starting point for the development of a comprehensive package of laws for environmental protection. With the recognition of Albania as a potential candidate country by the European Union (EU) in 2000 and the adoption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2006, environmental protection became a permanent requirement in the EU integration process. Under these conditions, the completion of environmental legislation and its alignment with European Union directives was a priority in order to fulfill Albania's obligations for EU integration.

Law no. 8934 of 05.09.2002 "On Environmental Protection" laid the foundation for modern environmental legislation. Compared to Law No. 7664/1993 "On Environmental Protection", this legal act fulfilled the constitutional requirements for the right of citizens to a healthy environment, the rational use of natural resources and the prevention and control of environmental pollution.

With the establishment of the Ministry of the Environment in 2001 as the central institution for environmental protection, the institutional aspect of environmental bodies has taken on a new dimension. Within its structures, directorates, sectors and subordinate organizations have been established that directly serve the implementation of the obligations that this Ministry has for environmental protection.

Environmental protection is currently regulated by a series of laws and subordinate acts that have been issued to implement them. The main laws that constitute the legal corpus of environmental law in Albania are Law no. 10431 of 09.06.2011 "On Environmental Protection", Law no. 10440 of 7.7.2011 "On Environmental Impact Assessment", Law no. 111/2012 "On Integrated Water Management", etc., laws that are adapted to EU directives. This legal basis aims to ensure the highest standards of environmental protection. The sectoral laws and normative acts represent a complex and well-regulated panorama of environmental protection. Environmental legislation takes account of current developments and offers sustainable solutions to problems in the field of environmental protection.

As far as public participation in environmental decision-making in Albania is concerned, the legal framework is a horizontal structure that starts with the Constitution. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania stipulates in Article No. 56 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania the right of citizens to information on the state of the environment and its protection by state institutions. Public participation in environmental decision-making allows citizens to express themselves and decision-makers to take into account opinions and concerns that are important for decision-making. This right increases the quality, accountability and transparency of the decision-making process and helps to raise public awareness of environmental issues.

In this respect, horizontal legislation for the sector to ensure constitutional law is regulated by Directive Law No. 10431 "on the protection of the environment". This law is the basis for all sectoral legislation in the field of environment in Albania.

Based on the horizontal law, the main laws that specifically regulate public participation in environmental decision-making in Albania are the following:

- Law no. 146/2014 "On the right of the public to access to information and public consultation"
- Law no. 10440/2011 "On the environmental impact assessment"
- Law no. 91/2013 "On the strategic environmental impact assessment"

Law 146/2014 applies to all development projects, plans or policies and decisions. Any development initiative undertaken by a public or private authority or a public-private partnership must go through the process of information sharing with the public and stakeholders likely to be affected.

The Act clearly defines the terms "public hearing" and "public consultation" and the entire mechanism for organizing each of these processes. The mechanism and procedure, as well as the stakeholders involved in the public hearing or consultation, are detailed in the other two laws, the EIA which SEA Acts, and redefined according to the project or decision-making process.

However, the classical form of environmental decision-making process that requires public participation in Albania generally involves four main actors:

- The *National Environment Agency* (NEA) as the main institution that prepares and issues the environmental permit for a development project
- The *Regional Environment Agency* (REA) as a subdivision of the National Environment Agency in the area where the project is to be developed. The REA is also responsible for the full review of the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted by the developer, as it acts as an expert on the local environmental context.
- The relevant municipality or municipalities that will extend their jurisdiction to the area to be developed or that will extend the expected impact of the project
- The promoter in its capacity as the entity that will develop a project that is expected to have an impact on the environment. The promoter may be a private entity, a partnership, a public entity or even a consortium in the form of a public-private partnership (PPP).

In special cases where the project is to be developed in a specially protected area, e.g. a nature reserve or an area of cultural interest, other institutions such as NAPA and NACH (National Agency for Cultural Heritage) are also involved in the consultation process.

In this context, the EIA Act clearly defines the role of each actor in the preparation of documents, reports, EIAs, feasibility and socio-economic assessments and their dissemination to the interested public. The chain of information dissemination for the consultation process follows the line of the developer → NEA → REA → Municipality → Interested public.

On the other hand, the law and the corresponding DCM also determine the deadlines, the notices for hearings or public consultations and the mechanisms that should be used for the distribution of the notices.

The law also defines the role of the REA as the organizational secretariat of the hearing in the function of hearing all parties and registering their objections. The REA is the institution that compiles the hearing report and forwards it together with the critical report on the EIA of the project in question to the NEA for the final decision. The NEA is the institution that weighs up all the files, reports and objections and then decides whether or not to grant an environmental permit.

3.5 Environmental Information System

The Environmental Information System, administered by the National Environment Agency, includes data on various environmental components, pollutant discharges, natural resources, and the effects of pollution on health, ensuring comprehensive coverage of environmental data, and this system guarantees that the public can access detailed environmental information, thereby facilitating informed participation in environmental decision-making, making it an essential tool for transparency and public engagement in environmental governance.

Law no. 10431/2011 “On Environmental Protection” forms the basis of environmental legislation and defines the principles and general conditions of environmental protection. The aim of the law is to protect, preserve and improve the environment and thus improve the quality of life. The legal provisions are intended to ensure sustainable development. The basis of this law are the principles on which all other legislation is based, such as requirements, responsibilities, rules and procedures for environmental protection.

The law defines the basic concepts of environmental quality, while the establishment of specific norms and standards is delegated to the Council of Ministers, which must issue regulations on the permissible limits of a pollutant through secondary legislation. For activities that may have an impact on the environment, a prior environmental permit is required, which sets out the necessary conditions to ensure that the activity/installation complies with the requirements of the applicable environmental legislation. Environmental permits are issued according to a system consisting of three criteria based on the scope and nature of the activity to be authorized and the possibility that the activity may cause pollution on a scale that may damage the environment and endanger human health.

Monitoring the state of the environment is one of the most important mechanisms of environmental protection. The National Environmental Monitoring Network is the environmental monitoring mechanism established by law under the direction of the NEA. This body manages the environmental information system, which enables the integrated protection and management of the environment and its components, the monitoring of the implementation of environmental policy, mutual reporting at national and international level and the provision of information to the public. The most important document that forms the basis for environmental information is the report on the state of the environment, which is prepared annually by the NEA in cooperation with various institutions and external experts.

The law has attached great importance to the right to information by dividing it into two parts:

The public's right to request environmental information and the authorities' obligation to provide this information in a timely manner;

The obligation of public authorities to ensure that the public has every opportunity to obtain information without having to make a prior request in order to have the opportunity to participate in the procedures for determining the state of the environment, preparing and approving strategies, plans and programs related to environmental protection.

Chapter VII of the Act regulates the purpose and functioning of the environmental information system and the manner in which information is provided. The establishment of the environmental information system serves to protect and integrate the management of the environment and its components, to monitor the implementation of environmental policy, for mutual reporting at national and international level and to inform the public.

This system is managed by the National Environment Agency (NEA). The data contained in the environmental information system is guaranteed by the information collected by the authorities, which are obliged to submit it regularly to the National Environment Agency.



Except in cases where it is a criminal offense, this law provides for administrative and judicial remedies against anyone who harms the environment, as well as the public's right to participate in decision-making, giving the public the opportunity to play an active role in environmental protection. Just as everyone has the right to a healthy environment, everyone is responsible for actions that damage the environment, according to the "polluter pays" principle, which aims to prevent and compensate for all environmental damage and to restore the environment;

The National Environment Agency is a body established by law that is responsible for drafting and implementing environmental policies, monitoring the implementation of environmental laws and approving activities that may have an impact on the environment, as well as other powers assigned by law or regulation. The inspection of environmental protection is carried out by the Inspectorate for Environmental Protection.

The Environmental Protection Inspectorate is obliged to take all measures under this Act that are necessary to ensure compliance with the conditions of the relevant environmental permit and the requirements set out in the provisions of specific legislation. If an activity poses a potential risk of serious environmental pollution, the Environmental Inspectorate has the right to decide to suspend that activity.

Following the territorial and administrative reform based on Law 139/2015 "for local autonomous administration", the municipalities have been given several competences in the field of environmental management. Thus, the municipalities are responsible for decision-making at local level in relation to forest management, waste management, including wastewater treatment, and biodiversity protection. In this regard, municipalities in particular must develop and enforce management plans for all of the above sectoral aspects.

In addition, due to the recent amendments (early 2024) to Law No. 81/2018 "On Protected Areas", the municipalities, together with the National Territorial Council, can make decisions that may consist of intervening in the protected areas to promote projects for the development of infrastructure in the field of tourism.



Guiding Principles of Best Practice for Public Participation Process

04

Effective public participation is crucial for fostering inclusive, transparent, and accountable decision-making. The following six guiding principles outline best practices to ensure meaningful engagement of the public in the processes that shape their communities and daily lives.

GP 1

DEFINITION OF THE GOALS

Clearly define the goals of public participation and what is expected of the participants. This includes clarifying the scope of the decision-making process and how public input will be used, which will help manage expectations and reduce potential frustration.

GP 2

PROVISION OF INFORMATION & TRANSPARENCY

Make all information about the data and plans available to everyone, including people with disabilities and non-native speakers. Provide clear information about the process, the decisions to be made and how public input will be used. Transparency builds trust and allows participants to contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way. This may require using multiple communication channels, such as public meetings, online platforms, printed materials, etc.

GP 3

INCLUSION OF STAKEHOLDERS

Ensure that all parts of the community (communities, residents, businesses, environmental NGOs and other relevant parties) have the opportunity to participate, including under-represented groups. Involve the public early in the planning process and maintain participation during implementation and monitoring. Early involvement ensures that public input can influence the outcome, while ongoing involvement allows for adaptive management based on new information or feedback. It is important to recognize and address power imbalances and potential conflicts between stakeholders. This includes creating a safe and neutral space for dialogue and using conflict resolution or mediation techniques where appropriate. Adapt the participation process to local customs and communication styles and ensure that it is culturally appropriate.

GP 4

ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Public participation procedures, such as surveys, public meetings, online forums, etc., should be established to provide feedback to participants on how their input has been considered and incorporated into decisions. This closes the loop in the communication process and emphasizes the value of public participation. Ensure that public participation is sought at a time when it can most effectively inform decisions.

GP 5

IMPLEMENTATION

Implement measures to ensure that the public participation process is accountable to both, participants and the wider public. Outline how decision makers will consider and respond to public input.

GP 6

EVALUATION

Evaluate the effectiveness of the participation process and make improvements.



Figure 7:
During the scientific
work on the Shushica
River, the group of
Austrian experts
© Joshua David Lim



Steps for Planning the Public Participation Process

Steps in planning the public participation process for various public decisions include:

05

Establishing clear goals and scope of public participation in the process

Clearly articulate the goals of the public participation process, determining what you aim to achieve, such as gathering input, building consensus, or making informed decisions, so that stakeholders understand the purpose and direction of their involvement. Make sure that their contributions are focused and relevant, and ultimately fostering a more effective and meaningful engagement process that supports the overall objectives of the project. This should be achieved through clear communication of these goals from the outset: you set the stage for a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative participation process that not only gathers valuable input but also builds trust and consensus among all participants, leading to more informed and robust decision-making outcomes.

Example of determination of the goals in planning the construction of a solar panel farm would be a public statement outlining that the community feedback is integrated into the final site selection and ensure all concerns are addressed transparently. This should be done through gathering community feedback on site selection and potential concerns about visual and site impacts.

Identifying the public and stakeholders

Map out all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, community members, and special interest groups, ensuring inclusivity by identifying underrepresented groups, so that the participation process encompasses a diverse range of perspectives and interests. This is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. By mapping out these stakeholders thoroughly, you can ensure that no important voices are overlooked, fostering a more equitable and effective engagement process that accurately reflects the community's needs and priorities, ultimately leading to more inclusive and well-rounded decision-making.

Example of identification of the public and stakeholders for a proposed construction of an industrial hall near the river; the stakeholders would include locals, environmental NGOs, in particular fishing and bird-watching associations, and hydrologists and should include also underrepresented groups, such as local fishermen who rely on the river for traditional self-sustainable fishing.

Ensuring that the public is objectively and fully informed about the decision-making and public participation process

Ensure that all relevant information about the project, its impacts, and the participation process is accessible, using clear, non-technical language and multiple formats such as print, digital, and audiovisual to reach diverse audiences. Disseminate information through various channels, including public notices, websites, social media, local newspapers, community centers, and public meetings, so that everyone, regardless of their preferred mode of communication or access to technology, can stay informed and engaged. This is essential for fostering transparency, trust, and broad-based participation, ultimately making the engagement process more effective and inclusive by ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to understand and contribute to the project.

Example indicating proper and objective provision of information on a particular project would be opening of a space in the local community where planners present the details and answer questions from the public about the planned development.

Plan the process, methods and tools for public participation, including a plan for engaging all public and stakeholder groups and outlining how decision-makers will respond to public input

Create a detailed plan outlining the methods, tools, and timeline for public participation, considering the organization of meetings and workshops to provide information, answer questions, and gather feedback, using interactive techniques such as small group discussions, Q&A sessions, and brainstorming. Prepare and conduct surveys and questionnaires to gather quantitative and qualitative data from a broad audience, ensuring they are easy to access and complete, while also holding focus group discussions with specific stakeholder groups to delve deeper into particular issues or perspectives. Use digital tools such as online forums, webinars, and social media to engage with stakeholders who may not be able to attend in-person events, thereby creating a comprehensive and inclusive approach to public participation that leverages a variety of methods to ensure broad and effective engagement from all community members.

Example would be a preparation of a local action plan for energy efficiency; at workshops for local population and business incentives for energy efficiency should be discussed (or option should be given to provide input via internet survey). The result of this phase would be a timeline on the action plan, with milestones, specifying how feedback will be reviewed and reported.

Provide the necessary resources to carry out the process and a timeline for activities

Why financial resources are needed: financial resources must be secured to cover expenses such as venue rentals, technology for virtual participation, advertising, and materials for outreach and communication. This can be achieved through budgeting within an organization, applying for grants, or seeking sponsorships from stakeholders or community partners.

A dedicated team or individuals should be assigned to organize, facilitate, and manage the public participation process. This may include staff, volunteers, and/or external consultants with expertise in community engagement, facilitation, or conflict resolution. Training for these individuals may also be necessary to ensure they are equipped with the skills to effectively handle diverse perspectives and encourage inclusive participation.

Clear and transparent communication materials must be developed to ensure the public understands the purpose, scope, and potential impact of their participation. This might include reports, summaries, presentations, or visual aids that simplify complex topics.

Collaborating with community organizations, local leaders, or advocacy groups can help reach underrepresented populations and build trust within the community.

Conducting the activities and facilitating the dialogue

Schedule events at convenient times and locations for all stakeholders, providing translation and interpretation services if needed, offering training and resources to help stakeholders understand the issues and effectively participate in the process. This could include workshops on environmental topics, public speaking, and advocacy, fostering an environment where all participants feel comfortable expressing their views, and ensuring that facilitators are trained to manage discussions respectfully and constructively. This will contribute to the creation of a comprehensive and inclusive participation process that empowers all stakeholders with the knowledge and confidence to engage meaningfully, while maintaining a respectful and productive dialogue that encourages open and constructive contributions.

Example in a forest repopulation project: a moderated discussion should be held in a town hall on possible locations along the river where re-planting of trees should happen, The discussion should be moderated with facilitators who guide the discussions, ensuring all voices are heard and the dialogue remains constructive

Obtaining feedback and analysing comments and suggestions

Recording all feedback received during the participation process and analyzing the input to identify common themes, concerns, and suggestions is a crucial step. It is essential to ensure that the feedback is considered in the decision-making process, clearly explaining how public input has influenced decisions and why certain suggestions may not have been adopted, while also communicating back to participants about how their input was used, which can be done through reports, newsletters, follow-up meetings, or updates on project websites, thereby maintaining transparency and fostering trust in the public participation process.

Example on obtaining feedback on a major development project should include collection of the public feedback (at public forums, for example) which reveal certain concerns of the public, such as noise pollution and habitat fragmentation. The result of this step should conclude that based on community feedback, noise mitigation and ecological preservation measures have been incorporated into the design of the new development.

Informing decision-makers about public opinion (while being transparent about how public opinion was gathered) and communicating the results of the process to all participants

Informing decision makers about public opinion might include organization of public meetings and workshops where stakeholders can express their opinions and concerns directly to decision-makers. These gatherings should be supported by recording and publishing minutes or summaries of these meetings to highlight key points raised by participants, and/or using online and offline surveys and questionnaires to collect quantitative and qualitative data from a broad audience. In the records/minutes the survey methodology, sample size, and demographics of respondents should be shared. The aggregated results should be published to show how opinions were collected and analyzed. It is recommended to conduct focus group discussions with selected stakeholder groups to gather in-depth insights, providing detailed reports on the focus group composition, discussion topics, and key findings. Another useful tool is to carry out structured or semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including community leaders, industry representatives, and locals, using online forums, social media platforms, and dedicated project websites to gather and share public opinions. Ensure that online discussions are moderated and documented with summaries of key points made available to the public. Formal public consultations where stakeholders can submit written comments and feedback should be organised in a way that all submitted comments are publicly available.

Example: planning the wind-farm; representatives of the public receive a technical report presenting survey data showing overwhelming community support to the wind-farm, however expressing concerns about farmland loss and potential collisions with birds of prey. Efforts are made that the report is published and available to all stakeholders and locals and that a public forum attended by the decision-makers is organised where they can hear key stakeholder insights directly.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the public participation process and making suggestions for further work

It is essential to establish criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation process, which could include metrics such as the number of participants, diversity of stakeholder representation, and the quality of the feedback received. Also, it is important to conduct regular reviews to periodically assess the progress of the participation process and make necessary adjustments, soliciting feedback from participants on the process itself, while also publishing reports on the outcomes of the participation process, including the decisions made, how public input was incorporated, and the impacts on the project, thereby ensuring transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in public engagement efforts.

Example: the project on setting up the Nature-based solution project on flood retention has been concluded. Local community conducts a survey among the residents and other stakeholders and publish the findings in a form of 'lessons-learned' from public participation in the Nature-based project on mitigation of the floods.

Participation Methods and Tools

06

The following methods and tools for engaging the public could be used:



Public meetings and hearings (including printed materials prepared in advance)

Public meetings and hearings are formal settings where project plans, decisions, or proposals are presented to the public for feedback. These events are often supported by printed materials, such as reports, brochures, or summaries, to provide attendees with background information. Typically held at accessible community locations, these meetings allow stakeholders to raise concerns, ask questions, and voice opinions in a structured format.



Workshops and focus groups



Workshops and focus groups are interactive settings designed to gather more detailed, qualitative insights from smaller groups of participants. These sessions often include activities like brainstorming, role-playing, or collaborative problem-solving to encourage participation and build consensus.



Surveys and questionnaires (could be distributed through various channels, such as online platforms, by mail or in face-to-face meetings)

Surveys and questionnaires are versatile tools used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. They can be distributed through online platforms, mailed to households, or conducted in person to gather feedback from a wide audience. Surveys can include multiple-choice questions, open-ended responses, or scaled ratings.



Digital engagement platforms (websites, mobile apps and social media channels)



Digital platforms, such as websites, mobile apps, and social media channels, provide innovative ways to engage the public. These tools can host virtual town halls, post project updates, collect feedback, and enable discussions in forums or comment sections.



Collaborative mapping (using the GIS tools, where stakeholders can contribute their local knowledge, identify key resources, and visualize the potential impacts of management decisions on a map)

Collaborative mapping utilizes GIS tools to allow stakeholders to contribute their local knowledge, identify key resources, and visualize the impacts of decisions. For example, participants can mark areas of concern, suggest project boundaries, or highlight critical environmental features directly on a map.

Local committees (formed of community representatives, experts and stakeholders to provide ongoing input and advice throughout the project lifecycle)



Local committees consist of community representatives, experts, and stakeholders who provide ongoing input and advice during a project. These committees are typically formed at the project's outset and meet regularly to discuss progress, challenges, and solutions.



Informal consultation methods (street surveys and informal gatherings, which can be particularly effective in engaging hard-to-reach or marginalized groups)

Informal methods, such as street surveys, pop-up consultations, or informal gatherings, are used to reach hard-to-engage groups. These methods rely on casual interactions in public spaces or through direct outreach to gather input from marginalized or underrepresented populations.

Each tool has distinct strengths and challenges, making them most effective when combined and tailored to specific community needs. The advantages and disadvantages of each tool are shown below:



Pros

Public meetings promote transparency, foster community trust, and provide direct interaction between decision-makers and the public. They are effective for addressing large groups and gathering diverse perspectives.

Public Meetings and Hearings



Cons

These meetings can be dominated by more vocal participants, potentially overshadowing quieter voices. They require significant time and resources for planning and often have limited reach to individuals unable to attend in person due to time or location constraints.

Workshops and Focus Groups



Pros

Workshops allow for in-depth discussions and creative problem-solving. They foster collaboration among stakeholders, enabling a deeper understanding of complex issues.



Cons

These tools are resource-intensive and time-consuming. Focus groups may not represent the broader community if participants are not carefully selected to reflect diverse perspectives.

Surveys and Questionnaires



Pros

Surveys can reach a large number of people, making them cost-effective for collecting broad-based data. They provide anonymity, which can encourage honest responses.



Cons

Poorly designed surveys can lead to biased or incomplete data. Response rates may vary, especially for mailed or online surveys, potentially skewing the results.

Digital Engagement Platforms



Pros

Digital platforms reach a broad and diverse audience, especially younger generations or those in remote areas. They are cost-efficient and provide ongoing, real-time engagement.



Cons

Accessibility issues arise for those without internet access or digital literacy. Ensuring meaningful engagement requires active moderation and updates to maintain public interest.

Collaborative Mapping



Pros

This tool provides a visual and interactive method for understanding spatial impacts, which can enhance decision-making. It empowers local stakeholders by valuing their firsthand knowledge.



Cons

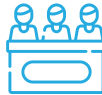
Collaborative mapping requires technical expertise and access to GIS tools, which can limit participation. Misinterpretation of spatial data by participants may lead to confusion or inaccuracies.

Local Committees



Pros

Committees ensure continuous and consistent stakeholder involvement, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability. They integrate expert knowledge with community perspectives for balanced decision-making.



Cons

Committees may become dominated by certain interests or individuals, leading to bias. Ensuring balanced representation requires careful selection and active facilitation.

Informal Consultation Methods



Pros

Informal consultations are accessible and can reach individuals who might not participate in formal settings. They foster organic, candid conversations and can uncover unique insights.



Cons

These methods are less structured, making it harder to document or analyze data systematically. They may also be limited in their reach if not strategically planned.

Stages of Participation

07

In general, three levels of public participation can be distinguished.

The lowest level of public participation in the context of environmental projects and initiatives is the provision of information. At this level, there is no more than the appearance of participation. Decision-makers and authorities provide information and expertise to the public and communities. The result is that the public is made aware of environmental issues and perhaps some local knowledge is incorporated into the decision-making process.

By receiving access to information, communities can take the next steps, such as defining their own goals, deciding on whether to support or oppose specific projects, and actively participating in subsequent stages of the decision-making process. This empowers them to engage more meaningfully in public consultations, advocate for their interests, and influence outcomes to better reflect their needs and perspectives.

The second phase, added to the basic public information phase, is public involvement. This may be public consultation, where decision makers ask questions of local stakeholders but do not attach any real value to local views as they are not committed to incorporating these views into the decision-making process. At a slightly higher level, the views of the public are accepted, but there is still no feedback. The final stage of “involvement” involves genuine interaction between the decision-makers and the public, and this is where a new partnership can emerge. This stage is about helping to build the capacity of both public authorities and local bodies.

At this stage, local communities are not passive recipients of information anymore but become active participants and partners in the decision-making process. They become organized to participate effectively in consultations and involvement opportunities. They can define and their specific goals, concerns, and desired outcomes, collect and incorporate local knowledge, actively participate in public consultation process (at meetings, for example). Also, they collaborate with other stakeholders and require transparency and accountability from decision-makers.

The highest level of public participation is referred to as empowerment or sharing of decision-making power and responsibility between government institutions and local people and stakeholders. At this stage, people “own” the solutions, locals feel valued and empowered, which leads to positive engagement, improves local capacity building and enables control over activities that affect people’s lives.

At this level, local communities can fully exercise their ownership (working with government and other actors to develop and implement solutions that meet local needs and priorities), engage in decision-making bodies, and ensure that both government institutions and community leaders remain accountable for their roles and responsibilities. Their role may also include evaluating the process of community involvement in the decision-making process.

Roles and Responsibilities of Different Stakeholders in the Public Participation Process

08

By clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the public participation process, stakeholders can work together more effectively to ensure that public participation processes are meaningful, inclusive, and lead to better environmental and social outcomes. The following table presents the key groups of stakeholders, together with their roles and responsibilities in the public participation process:

Government Institutions

Policy Makers and Regulators	Environmental Agencies
Roles Develop and enforce laws, regulations, and policies that mandate public participation.	Roles Oversee and manage environmental projects and ensure they adhere to environmental standards.
Responsibilities Ensure compliance with national and international legal frameworks. Allocate resources and support for public participation initiatives. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of public participation processes.	Responsibilities Provide accurate and accessible environmental information to the public. Facilitate and coordinate public participation activities. Integrate public input into project planning and decision-making.

Local Authorities

Municipal Governments	Local Agencies (such as RAPA)
Roles Implement and manage local environmental projects.	Roles Implement and manage local environmental projects.
Responsibilities Organize public meetings, consultations, and workshops. Ensure that local community members are informed and engaged. Address and incorporate local concerns and suggestions into project plans.	Responsibilities Organize public meetings, consultations, and workshops. Ensure that local community members are informed and engaged. Address and incorporate local concerns and suggestions into project plans.

Local Authorities

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Roles

Advocate for environmental protection and sustainable development.

Responsibilities

Educate and inform the public about environmental issues and rights.

Mobilize and organize community participation in environmental decision-making.

Provide technical expertise and resources to support public engagement.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Roles

Represent local interests and act as a bridge between the community and authorities.

Responsibilities

Facilitate communication and trust between the community and decision-makers.

Assist in gathering and presenting community input.

Advocate for the needs and concerns of local residents.

Community Members

Individual citizens and representatives of the special interest groups

Roles

Participate in public consultations and decision-making processes.

Responsibilities

Stay informed about local environmental projects and their impacts.

Provide feedback, suggestions, and concerns during public participation activities.

Engage constructively with other stakeholders to influence project outcomes.

Community Leaders and Representatives

Roles

Lead and organize community efforts in public participation.

Responsibilities

Represent the interests of the community in discussions with authorities and project planners.

Encourage and facilitate widespread community involvement.

Communicate community feedback and ensure it is considered in decision-making.

Private sector

Businesses, developers, industry representatives

Roles

Contribute expertise, resources, and solutions to ensure sustainable outcomes in environmental projects.

Responsibilities

Provide and share information about project impacts and mitigation measures with stakeholders.

Participate in public consultations and incorporate stakeholder feedback into project planning and implementation.

Implement mitigation measures, monitor environmental and social impacts.



Public Participation in the process of Establishment of the Vjosa Wild River National Park

09

8.1 Public participation prior to the WRNP declaration process

The campaign for the protection of Vjosa

The Vjosa Wild River National Park Declaration is one of the best examples of bottom-up civil society initiatives. In the run-up to the decision, an intensive and comprehensive campaign took place. The campaign, which started small but with a clear vision and the right approach, has grown over the years to encompass too many different stakeholders.



Figure 8:
Public event as part of
the campaign for the
protection of Vjosa
© Elona Shkëmbi

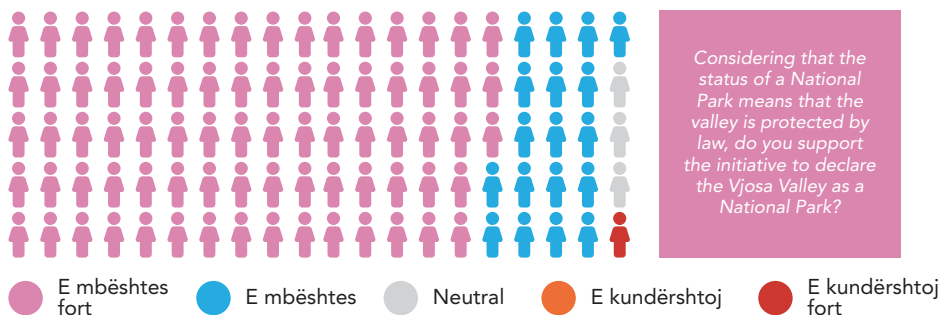
The campaign, which started at the end of 2013, has in more than ten years managed to involve local communities along the Vjosa, the private sector, local decision makers and politicians at the national level. It has also succeeded in attracting the attention of scientists, artists, lawyers and many others. The campaign soon reached beyond Albania's borders and the Vjosa became a European and even global issue. However, participation was always at the heart of the campaign, which spread positive messages about the conservation of the exceptional natural heritage. The inclusive and participatory approach of the Vjosa campaign was one of the most important keys to its success.

Approach to the public

The inclusive approach that the campaign has taken over the years has enabled it to use almost all means and mechanisms to reach the public and key stakeholders. Thus, direct meetings, round table discussions, public meetings, large public events, protests, petitions, etc. have been used as means to influence decision making. Participation in public hearings and public consultations was also a common campaign tool. However, one of the indirect forms of participation was the use of the media, not only to communicate but also to participate in the public debate on decision-making.

Just two years before the proclamation of the national park, the campaign also used public opinion polls as a direct means of expressing the will of the community in decision-making about Vjosa. The national opinion poll was conducted by one of the largest and most reliable independent companies. The results were impressive, as the majority (about 96%) of the Albanian population supported the proclamation of Vjosa as a national park.

Vjosa National Park?



78%

e qytetarëve shqiptarë e mbështesin fort shpalljen e **Vjosës si Park Kombëtar**.

18%

Moreover, about **18%** of respondents support the declaration of the **Vjosa Valley National Park**.

In total, about **96%** of respondents say they support the declaration of **Vjosa as a National Park**.

Figure 7:

Polls results on establishment of Vjosa WRNP

© Public Opinion Poll / ADRA

8.2 VWRNP Declaration process

Mapping the stakeholders

An important part of the process of designating the Vjosa WRNP was a thorough stakeholder assessment. This process was carried out in close cooperation with MoTE, NAPA, IUCN and EcoAlbania. From an organizational point of view, the process can be seen as a good model for Albania, where governmental and non-governmental organizations work together to achieve a successful outcome.

In terms of content, the stakeholder assessment and mapping was a key document developed on the basis of a standardized methodology. First, the stakeholders were identified. Then a preliminary analysis was conducted to categorize all stakeholders based on their sector and geographical location. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the stakeholders' approach, influence and direct interest in the decision-making process was carried out. Based on this analysis, a stakeholder map was drawn up. The results of this map formed the basis for the development of the stakeholder engagement plan. The tools and approach for stakeholder engagement have been selected based on the characteristics of each group.

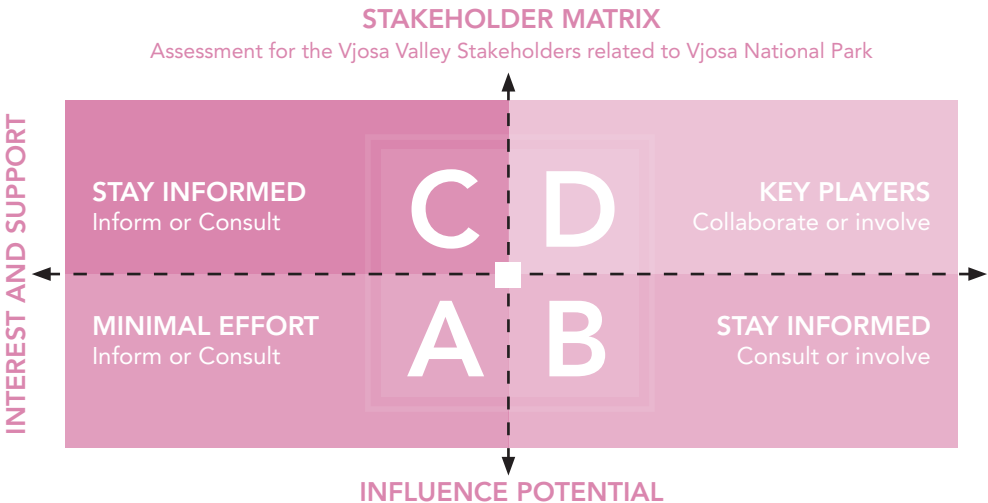


Figure 8:
Infographic from mapping of stakeholders report
© From the Stakeholder Report of WRNP

Stakeholder engagement plan

The Stakeholder Plan was the second guiding document developed as part of the proclamation of the Vjosa National Park. It summarized the four dimensions of a planning document: Stakeholders, Timeline, Tools and Resources. In this context, this document served to make a consultation process with interested stakeholders as comprehensive, inclusive and effective as possible in order to obtain as much input as possible from local perceptions and knowledge.

According to the plan, the various stakeholder groups have been contacted both through face-to-face meetings or workshops and through the preparation of semi-open questionnaires to capture their perceptions of the National Park.

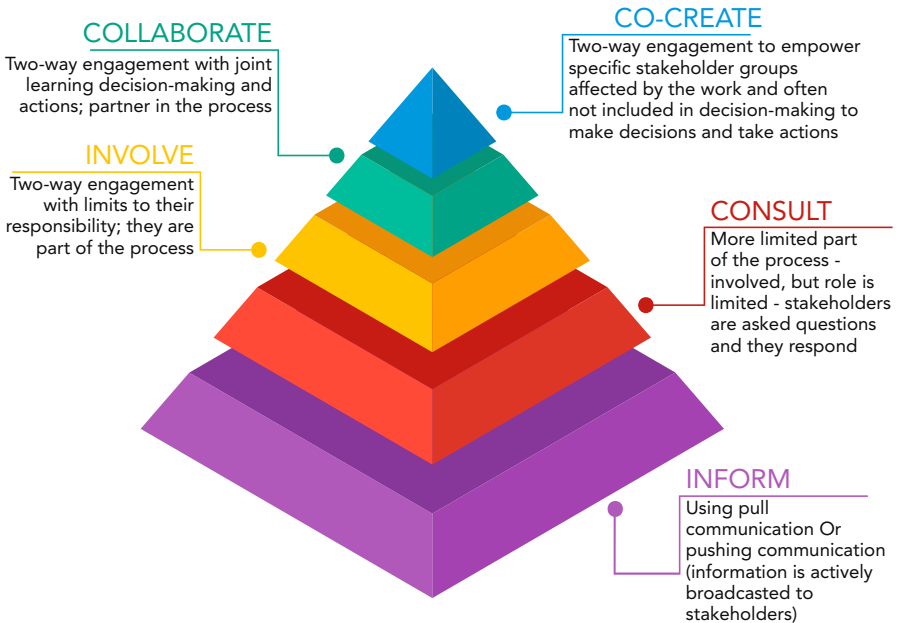


Figure 9:
Infographic from mappinf of stakholders report © From the Stakeholder Report of WRNP

The data collected at the workshops and meetings were carefully analyzed together with the data from the questionnaires by experts. The second stakeholder analysis served to further improve the feasibility study for the designation of the Vjosa National Park. In addition, the conclusions from this analysis are a direct form of public participation in the decision-making process.

Stakeholder involvement process

As part of the implementation of the stakeholder engagement plan, a broad and comprehensive consultation process was carried out with the target groups and the local population in the Vjosa Valley.

The consultation, which covered all municipalities in the Vjosa Valley from Permet to Vlora, was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the expert group that prepared the feasibility study for the WRNP declaration mainly presented the main features of the plan and focused on collecting input from local stakeholders.

Engagement Plan Matrix

Assessment for the Vjosa Valley Stakeholders related to Vjosa National Park

Stakeholder	Level of Engagement	Barriers to Engagement
Stakeholder	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	Prompts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could they lose? • Lack of connections to them • External influences? • Have they likely to be resistant? • Is significant effort needed from them?
Plan i Angazhimit	Enablers of Engagement	Responsibility for Engagement
<p>With the barriers and enablers in mind, identify engagement activities with associated timings and resources</p> <p>Activity examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Phone calls • Press events • Letters • Newsletters • Websites • Advertising 	<p>Prompts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could they benefit? • Existing connection to them? • External influences? • Have they previously expressed interest? • Are they likely to be interested? • Is minimal effort needed from them 	<p>Name of individual(s) from the team that would be responsible for each of the stakeholder/stakeholder group</p>

Figure 10:
Engagement Plan Matrix © From the Stakeholder Report of WRNP

This phase drew on local knowledge and perspectives rather than scientific evidence and analysis. Various tools have been used to gather the local perspective. Face-to-face meetings and workshops, questionnaires and fact-finding missions with stakeholders were organized.



In the second phase, the dialog continued with the presentation of the study and reflection on the contributions from the meetings of the first phase or with arguments as to why some of the contributions could not be taken into account. In this phase, the classic instruments of management meetings were used to involve the public.

Figure 11:
Photo from the
workshops on
stakeholder
engagement.
© B. Guri

The period between the two rounds of meetings, as well as the period between the second round and the final decision making, was also an open period for suggestions and recommendations, which have been carefully collected by the team responsible for preparing the feasibility study.

8.3. Preparation and Adoption of the VWRNP Management Plan

The stakeholder consultation process for the preparation of the Integrated Management Plan for the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP) was structured to gather insights, foster communication, and incorporate to ensure comprehensive engagement with local communities and key stakeholders.

The key findings from the stakeholder consultation for the Vjosa Wild River National Park reveal a complex tapestry of sentiments and concerns, with 86% of stakeholders expressing support for the park's establishment, although many emphasize a pressing need for more information to fully understand its implications. The majority believe that the park will not only enhance the natural environment but also bring significant economic benefits, particularly through the development of tourism. Yet communication issues are a major hurdle, as 74% of interviewees highlight a lack of information and transparency from authorities, which erodes trust and complicates decision-making processes.

While social media and television emerge as the most effective channels for raising awareness about the park, significant environmental concerns persist, notably regarding pollution, habitat degradation, and biodiversity loss. Issues related to agricultural practices and irrigation further complicate the picture, impacting local livelihoods and raising economic challenges, as there are widespread concerns about how new park regulations might affect traditional livelihoods and access to essential resources.

Figure 12:
Engagement Plan
Matrix © From the
Stakeholder Report
of WRNP



Finally, conflict areas are evident, with notable disputes over water extraction projects and infrastructure development within the park's boundaries, illustrating the need for careful management and ongoing dialogue to resolve these tensions. The lessons learned from the stakeholder engagement process for improved engagement in the management of the Vjosa Wild River National Park emphasize the need for enhanced communication with regular and transparent updates from authorities to keep stakeholders informed and engaged,

Inclusive decision-making process where stakeholders are involved in all stages of the park's development is required to build trust and ownership. It should be supported through capacity building activities and by providing resources and training to local communities and authorities to manage the park effectively. It is also recommended to focus on youth through engaging children and youth with educational programs to foster long-term conservation values, and leveraging local knowledge by incorporating local knowledge and expertise into the management plan to ensure it reflects community needs and values, creating a holistic approach to ensure the park's success and sustainability.





Case Study: Sustainable development of the River Landscape Kamp

Kamp River / Austria: Sustainable development of the River Landscape Kamp: Presentation of a management process with regard to the requirements of the EU-Water Framework Directive

10

10.1. Introduction and Aims

The floods and inundations of August 2002 with a 1000-years recurrence interval (HQ_{1000}) affected the Kamp Valley / Austria and set completely new conditions for life (environment and people) in the valley. Flood protection in particular and spatial and landscape and landscape planning were confronted with challenges. From an ecological point of view this extreme event led to an extraordinary development with self-formed free-flowing sections: while other rivers in Austria were and still are heavily trained by hydraulic engineering measures.

In order to improve the ecological functionality and/or to expand the retention area in the sense of passive flood protection (targeted by the EU-floods Directive), the Kamp has flooded former retention areas and created bed forms and morphological structures in the floodplains that are typical for this river in its natural state. At the same time, the question of how to deal with the issues of flood protection / natural retention / prevention needed to be revisited. Solutions were necessary that, however, also *fulfil the needs of the local population* and comply with national and EU-wide legal requirements such as the EU Water Framework Directive. With this background, the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences was commissioned in autumn 2003 by the Lower Austrian Provincial Academy in close cooperation with the Office of the Lower Austria Provincial Government, Water Group, to develop an integrative overall concept with the aim of 'sustainable development of the Kamp Valley river landscape' by the end of 2006. The focus was on ensuring the safety of the population, including their living and economic environment, in the event of future flood events and taking ecological functionality into account. The central task of the project was the development of a so-called integrative management plan, which in turn forms the basis for detailed planning in the selected municipal area of Gars am Kamp (major local village in the Kamp Valley). The work was carried out in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, with the *involvement of the population (participation)* and in co-operation with the local civil engineers (Fig. 13).

The aim of this chapter of the guidelines for public participation is to illustrate how public participation should be incorporated into the development of river basin management plans. Moreover, how public participation takes place in the project structure and project processes, particularly with regard to local knowledge, and to present the most important methodological approaches that were used. Specific results are only given as examples.

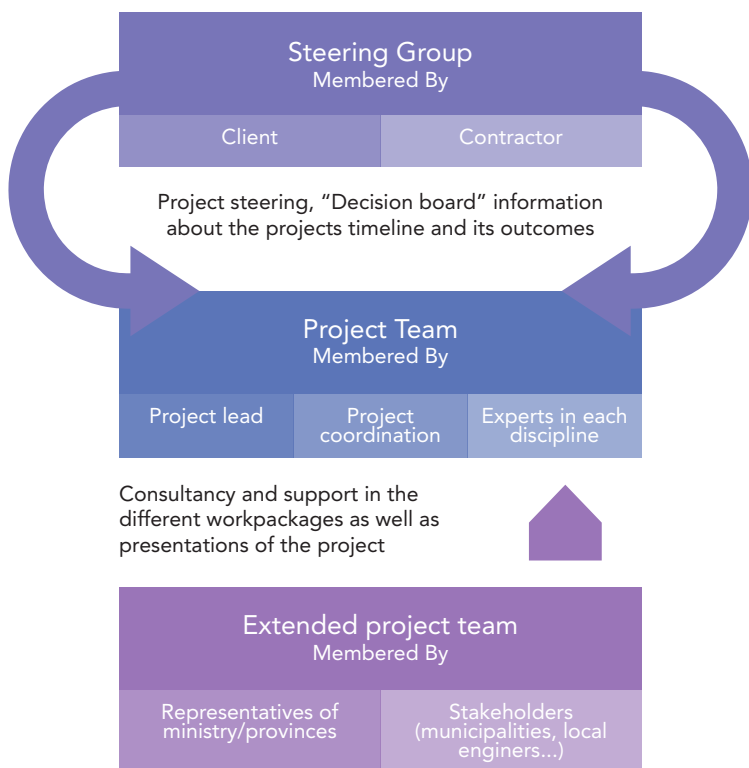


Figure 13:
Organization of the Kamp project with the transdisciplinary approach.

10.2. Study Reach

The Kamp rises south-east of Karlstift at 920 metres above sea level and flows into the Krems-Kamp drainage channel at 180 metres above sea level. The catchment area of the Kamp covers 1753 km² and is therefore the largest in the Waldviertel (northern district of Lower Austria). The most important tributaries are the Kleine Kamp, the Zwettl, the Purzelkamp and the Taffa. The natural discharge characteristics are characterised by high discharges in spring (March, April) and low discharges in late autumn (October, November). Downstream of Wegscheid, the river is altered by the management of the three storage power plants between Zwettl and Wegscheid (Ottenstein, Krumau and Wegscheid power plants).

In addition, the Kamp is utilised for energy by a large number of small hydropower plants. The Mühlkamp is finally diverted at Kammern, which flows into the Kamp-Krems diversion channel after around 21 kilometres. The project area comprises the Kamp catchment area at the highest spatial level. The central planning area was the central and southern Kamptal between Zwettl and Langenlois; detailed work was planned for a selected municipality (pilot municipality).

10.3. Project Philosophy

In addition to an integrative, coordinated approach and the inclusion of the innovative guiding principle of the EU Water Framework Directive in terms of river basin management, the planning philosophies described below represent important methodological cornerstones in the project.

10.3.1 Interdisciplinarity

Riverine landscapes such as those of the Kamptal encompass a wide variety of ecosystems with their biocoenoses and habitats as well as man-made structures. Comprehensive processing therefore requires an interdisciplinary processing team that includes as broad a spectrum of expertise as possible. For this reason, the specialist disciplines of landscape planning, biology, ecology, cultural engineering, sociology, spatial planning, agriculture, forestry and economics worked closely together in the project within the framework of different disciplinary work packages. This approach, which was new in terms of its diversity in Austria in 2003, required intensive coordination between the disciplines - particularly at the beginning of the individual work phases - which primarily took place in workshops and working meetings.

10.3.2 Transdisciplinarity

In addition to the above-mentioned interdisciplinary approach, the aim of reflecting the multitude of specialist areas and user interests relevant to a river landscape such as the Kamp required the intensive involvement of administration and practice from outside. In particular, the relevant departments of the Lower Austrian provincial government, the civil engineering offices working on site and stakeholders from the Kamptal were important partners. Against this background, a project structure was defined at the organisational level together with the clients, which, in addition to a 'steering group' consisting of the client and contractor (project management), includes a so-called extended project team (see Fig. 13).

This extended project team was made up of representatives from the relevant specialist departments, the local civil engineering offices, local authorities, etc. and serves to provide the project team with technical advice, particularly with regard to work in the work packages and project presentations. Steering group meetings were held continuously at intervals of around three months, while meetings within the extended project team were held on an ad hoc basis.

In addition to the project organisation, there was also a strong transdisciplinary approach at the technical level. For example, the project team and the client attached great importance to the fact that the relevant departments of the Lower Austrian provincial government were also represented at the workshops held at the beginning of the respective work phases. This made it possible to clarify methodological, content-related and scheduling issues in good/adequate time and to define an agreed procedure. In addition, the specialised departments involved were closely incorporated in the content-related work. For example, the work package managers were involved in an intensive dialogue with the relevant state authorities, particularly when developing the sectoral guidelines.

10.3.3 Participation

In modern planning processes, significant space was requested and given to citizen participation. The background to this is the knowledge that local problems can be better identified and solved with the involvement of those people affected on the ground in the catchment. In addition, public participation promotes acceptance of necessary, possibly also 'unpopular' measures and thus plays a central role in the sustainable organisation of the living and economic environment (cf. Partl et al., 2005; Aarhus Convention, 1999). The EU Water Framework Directive also takes up this planning philosophy and demands that the public be involved in the planning process (EU, 2002). The basic prerequisite for this was that the public is sufficiently informed, which in the project primarily takes place in the form of information events and a project website. However, the focus of 'Citizen Participation Kamptal' was on the active involvement of the population (similar to the ESPID project). In addition to the technical 'Leitbild', a two-stage citizens' 'Leitbild' was developed by the people of Kamptal, which sets out overarching objectives at regional level and elaborates these in detail at municipal (group) level.

10.3.4 Scaling of planning processes

The floods showed that an isolated consideration of individual river sections is not sufficient from a flood protection and management perspective. In particular, the boundaries of competences and various responsibilities made it difficult to integrative management plans and to implement measures as well as the prevention of future catastrophic events. In addition, developments were ongoing or already established in the entire catchment or in longer stretches of the river, which resulted in specific boundary conditions for the local development of a municipality. Conversely, local measures could have a cumulative effect on at least downstream riparian area or entire river sections. Thus, a key principle of the project was therefore the scale-orientated consideration (upscaling and downscaling of processes) of the study area.

10.3.5 Philosophy of the 'Leitbild'

The term 'Leitbild' originally comes from spatial planning and refers to a rough picture of a desired future that coordinates action towards this goal. Since around 1990, guiding principles for spatial planning and policy (guiding principles of countries, regions, cities) have been increasingly developed (cf. Kanatschnig et al., 1999).

The development of guiding principles has also been a natural part of water-related assessments and planning for some time. However, for a long time the guiding principles were focussed on ecological and subsequently on water management issues only. However, increased efforts towards an integrative planning process have led to economic and social issues increasingly becoming the subject of the formulation of guiding principles and objectives (cf. Egger et al., 2003). The project described here follows this philosophy - also against the background of the EU Water Framework Directive.

10.3.6 Sustainability

River landscape planning in the sense of sustainable development of a river landscape was committed to the principle of sustainability. This principle calls for equal consideration of ecological, social and economic aspects and thus ensures 'safeguarding the quality of life at the highest possible level' (Kanatschnig et al., 1999).

10.4 Planning Process

The study 'Sustainable development of the Kampthal river landscape' followed the following proven planning steps - also against the background of the EU Water Framework Directive (cf. Jungwirth et al., 2003): [Phase 1] Investigation and analysis of the current situation as well as the strengths and weaknesses - development of a technical basis, [phases 2 and 3] development of guiding principles / objectives / wishes as a reference and value standard for the evaluation and planning process and [phase 4] development and evaluation of a concept of measures ('overarching management plan'). As a final planning step, the overarching management plan was detailed in a planning perspective in a pilot municipality [Phase 5] (Fig. 14).

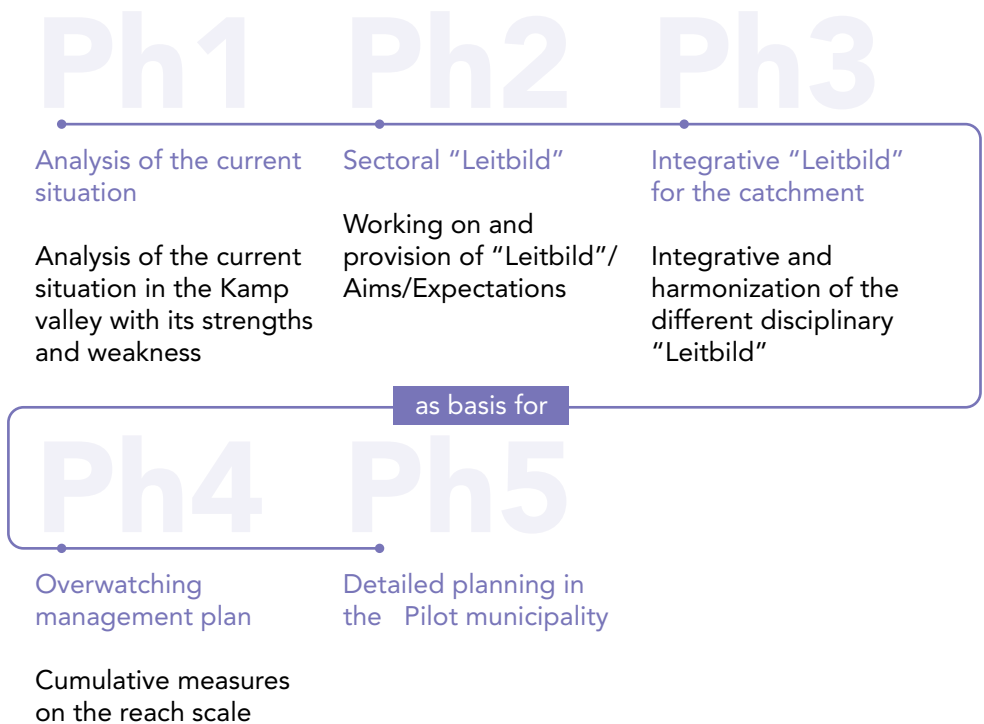


Figure 14:
Overview of the different project phases.

10.4.1 Analysis of the current situation

As the basis for all work steps (working packages), the analysis of the current situation was given significant space in the project. It comprised the inventory [1] of physical and biological components (hydrology, hydraulics, sediment regime, aquatic and terrestrial organisms and their habitats, etc.), [2] anthropogenic uses of the river and surrounding area (water management, agriculture and forestry, fisheries, settlement/commerce/infrastructure, energy industry, etc.) and [3] existing legal framework conditions, guidelines and programmes, etc. which took almost two years in total (period 2003 – 2005).

Depending on the various disciplines, different methods were used, such as sampling (e.g. in the form of fishing, bedload sampling), comprehensive mapping (e.g. land use, river morphology), modelling (habitat modelling, physical modelling in the hydraulic engineering laboratory), surveys/workshops (citizen participation, see Muhar et al. in this issue) or literature/internet research. Individual work packages did not carry out their own surveys, but were based on existing baseline data (e.g. macrozoobenthos & phytobenthos and nature conservation baseline data). The result of this phase was a comprehensive analysis of the current status of the relevant topics in the study area provided in reports and GIS-maps.

10.4.2 Sectoral – “Leitbild”

Building on the current status analyses and as a central basis for further work, sectoral ‘Leitbilder’ were developed for the specific tasks of floods, vegetation management, alluvial and dead wood, hydraulic engineering and energy management, sediment regime and river morphology, groundwater, hydraulic engineering in settlements, ecology (fish fauna; macrozoobenthos & phytobenthos; alluvial vegetation and watercourse structures), spatial planning, agriculture/forestry as well as tourism. *Parallel to the disciplinary work, interested Kamptal residents formulated a single citizens’ ‘Leitbild’.* A workshop was held in autumn 2005 to determine the methodology for defining the guiding principles, in which the following guiding principle structure was defined by the project management together with the experts and representatives of the relevant departments of the Lower Austrian provincial government: [1] Characterisation of the approach, [2] evaluation of the current status / presentation of the values and deficits and [3] derivation of priorities for action from the viewpoint of the people.

With the exception of the quality elements of the EU Water Framework Directive (fish fauna, macrozoobenthos, phytobenthos) dealt with in the project, the characterisation of the approach was carried out in the sense of an 'operational target status'. For fish, macrozoobenthos and phytobenthos, the very good ecological status / very good ecological potential was defined in accordance with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive and the national methodological guidelines (Haunschmid et al., 2004, Koller-Kreimel and Jäger, 2001).

Depending on the various scales, the processing was carried out in different degrees of detail. At catchment level, the target aims were described verbally (target scale 1 : 25,000 to 1 : 50,000), with the focus on those targets that were relevant for the central planning area. In contrast, in the central planning area, the relevant management issues were spatially allocated in detail at a scale of 1 : 5000/1 : 10 000, although non-localisable objectives were also presented here in a descriptive form.

The merging of the individual sectoral objectives/guiding principles into an integrative model (see Fig. 15) as the basis for the overarching management plan was the central theme of this phase. The main focus here was on an intensive dialogue between the specialised disciplines, through which the different and sometimes contradictory objectives from the sectoral mission statements - around 350 key areas of action from 14 work packages - were to be harmonised into a common mission statement. As a first step, all the sectoral formulated action priorities were compared in the form of a matrix, which made it possible to visualise interactions between the action priorities - potential conflicts, positive reinforcements. Priorities for action that do not interact with each other were also identified in this phase of the project.

Fig. 15 shows, for example, that there was great potential for a conflict between the work packages on flow behaviour (WP5), vegetation and deadwood management (WP6), energy management (WP9e) and river engineering (WP9w) and those on ecology (15.1 Fish fauna, 15.2 Macrozoobenthos & phytobenthos, 15.3 Floodplain vegetation and river structures and 15.4 Nature conservation principles). These potential conflicts raised, among other things, from the main areas of action with regard to (i) river continuum and (ii) residual water as well as those of economic interests of power plant operation; - However, but also from flood protection issues (deadwood/vegetation management versus alluvial forest areas, etc.). *It was also striking that the key areas of action from WP20, public participation, show potential conflicts with more or less all work packages.* This can be attributed to the large number of topics and areas addressed in the citizens' mission statement.

Subsequently, the *identified potential conflicts* were resolved in an *interdisciplinary dialogue against the background of existing legal frameworks* (e.g. EU Water Framework Directive, Water Rights Act, Lower Austrian Nature Conservation Act). Conflicts that could not be resolved in this work step were identified and incorporated into the next work phase in the form of solution scenarios. In principle, the interactions were presented at a general, non-localised level in order to be able to identify all potential conflicts and positive reinforcements. The solution approaches, which were formulated as instructions for action to resolve the potential conflicts, were also at a higher level, but refer to local/sectional circumstances where necessary. As a result of the harmonisation process, an integrative model was now available which, in addition to the main areas of action without conflict potential, contains solution approaches or solution scenarios for all potential conflicts and thus represents the central basis for the overarching management plan.

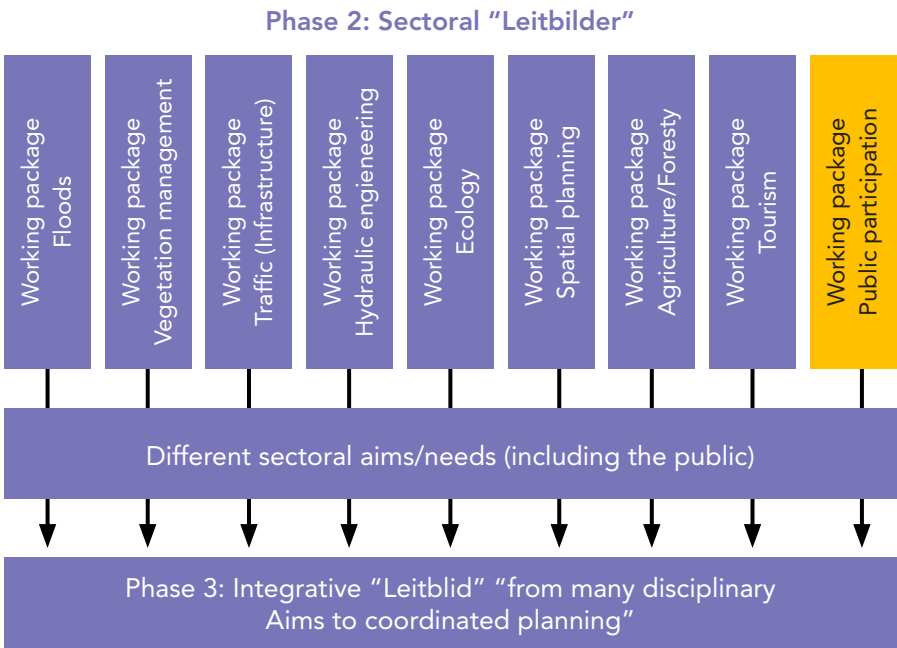


Figure 15:
"From many disciplinary aims to coordinated planning" – schematic description of the integration; working package public participation highlighted in yellow.

work should take place in close cooperation with local stakeholders. The planning process in the pilot municipality was designed to be as open and comprehensible as possible for the other municipalities in the central planning area so that methods, approaches and experiences from this process could be made available in advance for further detailed planning.

10.7 Summary & Conclusion

The extreme floods of 2002, which also severely affected the Kampthal, have made it clear that life and economic activity in river valleys will face new challenges in the future. Above all, an integrative, holistic approach that goes beyond the local level and incorporates the needs of the population was an important starting point. The *"Sustainable development of the Kampthal river landscape"* study commissioned by the state of Lower Austria aimed to take this methodical approach - also against the backdrop of the EU Water Framework Directive. A key success factor was the interdisciplinary work in a team in which all affected specialist areas were represented as well as authorities, interest groups and the population. The involvement of the public went far beyond the mere provision of information.

Another important step was the development of an integrative mission statement based on the professional mission statements and the wishes and goals formulated by the population. This reference system enabled a transparent evaluation of the current situation on the one hand, and on the other hand it was an essential basis for a comprehensible development of measures. The planning bases commissioned by the Lower Austrian provincial government (in particular flood protection measures, hazard zones and alarm plans) were also included.

Overall, the "guiding principle" of the EU Water Framework Directive for river basin management was taken up and implemented with the described working method. After completion of the project at the end of 2006, methodological recommendations for similar projects were drawn up on the basis of the experience gained. However, an EU comparison of 16 projects and studies with an EU WFD background (Hofbauer and Preis, 2005) showed that here too, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, scale and participation were recognized as essential basic principles and applied in a similar way. The Kamp project can thus make a contribution to the ongoing national and EU-wide discussions on the implementation of the EU WFD and in particular on integrative river basin management. Also for countries with EU accession status, such as Albania.

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A stylized graphic of a mountain range in white, set against a teal background. The mountains are represented by simple, rounded shapes of varying heights and widths, creating a silhouette effect.

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