

# 4 Evaluating Stakeholder Dialogues

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Stakeholder dialogue is supposedly a good thing. If successful, it is said to improve the quality of policy decisions, to mobilise urgently needed resources and to increase public acceptance of policy decisions. There is a growing literature that celebrates the expected benefits of involving stakeholders in meaning-making, decision-making and management processes. But do stakeholder dialogues live up to the high expectations that are raised in the literature? What are suitable criteria and indicators of success given that the outcomes are hard to predict? How do the involved stakeholders themselves judge the fruits of their involvement? What can be done to improve the performance of stakeholder dialogues? What are conditions for their success?

The evaluation of participatory processes is a topic that is still in its infancy (Oppermann and Langer 2002: 76, Chess 2000: 769, Rowe and Frewer 2000: 3). Systematic, long-term evaluation studies of stakeholder dialogues are still the exception. The existing evaluation studies vary widely with regards to their purpose, focus, scope and disciplinary perspective. While the methodological and theoretical issues of evaluation have been discussed at length (for example Chess 2000), no set of commonly used indicators for the evaluation has emerged yet. This chapter seeks to make a contribution towards this end by discussing the suitability of criteria sets and procedures for the evaluation of stakeholder dialogues.

The first part of this chapter distinguishes between three types of stakeholder dialogues which are pursued with different purposes in mind. For each of these types, specific indicators of success may be appropriate. The second part of this chapter presents criteria sets from the relevant literature and discusses their strengths and weaknesses. Theory-based and user-based criteria sets are introduced and the possibility of integrating both criteria sets is explored. The third section reviews the most common findings of evaluation studies of stakeholder dialogue. The chapter concludes with a preliminary set of conditions for the success of stakeholder dialogue.

## **4.1 The case for stakeholder dialogues**

### **4.1.1 Defining stakeholder dialogues**

Before engaging with the issue of evaluation, the term stakeholder dialogue needs to be clarified. A wide range of participatory processes is used in environmental policy-making and implementation. Stakeholder dialogues are one of them. They are defined by the fact that they do not involve 'the public' but only those with a stake in the issue at hand. Stakeholders are those with information on the subject at hand, those with the power to influence the decision-making and those affected by the outcome. As explained in Chapter 1, stakeholder dialogues do not pursue the ideal of representative democracy. Instead, the idea is to bring all views into the room, no matter if a view represents 1% or 90% of the population.

Stakeholder dialogues are used for quite different purposes. The selection of participants and working procedures is meant to match the specific purpose of the stakeholder dialogue. In this book, stakeholder dialogues are classified along three purposes:

- clarifying and improving knowledge (stakeholder dialogue for science);
- basing decision-making upon the deliberation of a collective will (stakeholder dialogue for policy-making);
- supporting implementation (stakeholder dialogue for management).

More often than not, stakeholder dialogues for science and stakeholder dialogues for management also aim to resolve a collective action problem by policy-making. It is therefore not always possible to clearly distinguish between the three types of stakeholder dialogue. The next section will introduce the three different types of stakeholder dialogue in more detail.

### **4.1.2 Stakeholder dialogues for science**

Stakeholder dialogues for science aim to improve the knowledge base for decision-making. Their aim is to break the monopoly of "expert science" by providing alternative viewpoints. Most stakeholder dialogues for science involve stakeholders' perspectives in a process of redefining the knowledge base. However, there are many variations in the processes used for stakeholder dialogue. While some aim for consensus and are coupled with the policy process, others are no more than an exchange of arguments with open consequences (and the option of no outcomes at all).

Stakeholder dialogues for science are pitched against the monopoly of science. They take knowledge no longer as something that can be objectively determined by scientists but as socially constructed and inherently value-based (Healey 1997: 29-30). Stakeholder dialogues for science undermine the privileged position of 'experts', whose knowledge is no longer regarded as automatically superior to other ways of knowing. Experts are to be no more than 'specialized citizen[s]' (Fischer 1993: 183). "By demystifying technocratic decision techniques, post-positivist policy inquiry denies the expert's facile claim that there is only one scientific solution to a pressing social or political problem." (Fischer 1993: 167)

Therefore, breaking the hegemony of science requires an end to science's monopoly on knowledge: "Democratize language, ... and other forms of equality will follow" (Barber 1984: 193). Most (but not all) proponents of stakeholder dialogues for science also reject the 'deficit model' according to which the public is considered ignorant and in need of education in scientific ways of knowing (for example Petts 1997: 328, Durant 1995: 75, Street 1997: 142). Instead, lay people's and stakeholders' multiple ways of knowing and communicating knowledge are to be explored, respected and brought together in order to increase the understanding of problematic issues of public concern and to inform action (Innes 1996: 171, Burgess 1995, 1996, Burgess et al. 1988c, Harrison and Burgess 1994).

Deliberation in a stakeholder dialogue for science is unavoidably a political process, in the sense that it involves the careful evaluation of conflicting evidence and decision-making on what should guide the action to be taken (Durant 1995: 77). "In a word, politics is not the application of Truth to the problem of human relations but the application of human relations to the problem of truth" (Barber 1984: 64-65). Depending on the frame of reference applied to a real world problem, the solutions - including the distribution of costs and benefits - will differ. "Issues of risk assessment, for instance, are not simply a matter of discerning scientific risks, but a matter of determining who should bear the risks or costs of a policy choice." (Rossi 1997: 198) This is true even where a stakeholder dialogue is not directly linked to the policy process - the produced knowledge base can never be neutral, even if every effort is made to gather independent, unbiased expertise. French philosopher Michel Foucault has demonstrated how power and knowledge are closely linked, and how all knowledge legitimises certain power relations and ways of making sense of the world at the expense of alternative ones (Hoy 1986). Knowledge is not independent of the world - instead, it actively brings forth the world as it is preconceived (Pretty 2002).

### 4.1.3 Stakeholder dialogues for policy-making

Stakeholder dialogues for policy-making aim to ground decision-making in a deliberative process that forges the collective will of the stakeholders. Again, the processes used to conduct stakeholder dialogues vary widely. While some require a consensus to be achieved or are directly linked to binding decision-making processes, others have open results and no statutory basis. The later ones should be more correctly called stakeholder dialogues for policy advice.

The major strength of stakeholder dialogues for policy-making is that they foster stakeholder's capacity for genuine public thinking and allow their sense of belonging to a political unit to grow as a result of thinking about the question how they want to live together and what needs to be changed. The underlying assumption is that people's very consciousnesses and preferences are formed in social interactions with others and are subject to constant review in the light of new experiences (Healey 1997). In this process of constant social learning, self-interests can be modified to accommodate public interests.

"The affective power of talk is, then, the power to stretch the human imagination so that the I of private self-interest can be reconceptualized and reconstituted as a we that makes possible civility and common political action." (Barber 1984: 189-190)

Barber argues that this process of reconceptualising one's own interests to embrace the common good requires the active participation of each individual citizen, not just the deliberation amongst elected representatives or amongst chosen few in methods of deliberative opinion polling. However, for practical reasons, most stakeholder dialogues tend to select a tiny sample of all existing stakeholders and involve those in a deliberative process to model what all would think, if they could be involved in the same way. The acceptance of the outcomes often depends upon the transparency and legitimacy of the stakeholder selection process.

The nature of the dialogue that is to facilitate learning amongst the participants has recently been explored by Innes and Booher (1999). They use the metaphor of fantasy role-playing to describe the spirit in which deliberation should take place in order to foster learning. They argue that in role playing and consensus building alike, participants "play with heterogeneous concepts, strategies, and actions with which various individuals in the group have experience, and try combining them until they create a new scenario that they collectively believe will work." (Innes and Booher 1999: 12) Innes and Booher call this process a 'bricolage' which "produces, rather than a solution to a known problem, a new way of framing the situation and of developing unanticipated combinations of

actions that are qualitatively different from the options at the table at the outset." (Innes and Booher 1999: 12)

Barber has similarly characterised the strong democratic talk as "an unrehearsed intellectual adventure" drawing on the words of Oakeshott (1962: 198). Of course, the participants' professional and social roles often inhibit the degree to which they can open themselves up to this adventure. Barber argues that participatory processes must ensure the explorative nature of the discourse: "Every expression is both legitimate and provisional, a proximate and temporary position of a consciousness in evolution." (Barber 1984: 183) The learning process is thought to have a real world impact: "Since the players often are the people in a position to have an effect on the resource or the problem, change in their attitudes and knowledge matters and in itself is a major part of the long-term consequences" (Innes and Booher 1999: 11).

#### **4.1.4 Stakeholder dialogues for management**

One purpose of stakeholder dialogues for management is to ease the implementation of already decided policy measures by involving those affected by it. Most stakeholder dialogues for management have a rigid frame (for example the management of a nature reserve) but enable the stakeholders to specify the concrete aims and institutions for the implementation. Stakeholder dialogues for management are often employed where conventional approaches to natural resource management have failed. Conventional approaches to natural resource management tend to impose a management scheme top-down, based on the advice of experts but mostly without involving local people. Local people tend to be regarded as a threat to the natural resource – in protected areas they were to be kept out or removed by force. Establishing management schemes for natural resources without the support of local people proved costly (e.g. budget for armed guards) and unsustainable (Pretty 2002).

Stakeholder dialogues for management have established themselves as the favourite alternative to hierarchical approaches to natural resource management. Stakeholder dialogues for management foster processes of social learning and grow social capital. As part of the dialogue, stakeholders are allowed to reflect upon the complexity of their interactions with the natural environment and to talk about this subject on their own terms. They not only contribute their specific local knowledge but may alter it in the interactions of the group. Best practice of natural resources management in other locations is fed into these stakeholder groups and assessed for relevance to local circumstances. Instead of having

a management scheme imposed upon them, these stakeholder groups are empowered to experiment with pilot schemes and to establish and be involved in their own management scheme. Changes in attitudes and behaviour which develop as a result of learning processes in the stakeholder group are supposed to be lasting and therefore sustainable. The newly formed networks and shared knowledge between the stakeholders is supposed to increase their capacity to do things for themselves in an effective way. The established management scheme is supposed to be sustainable as it is based upon the newly created social capital and attitude and behaviour changes which were the result of the social learning facilitated by the stakeholder dialogue (Pretty 2002, Auerbach 2006).

Stakeholder dialogues for management are also employed as part of a process of evaluating the effectiveness of the management of protected areas (Hocking et al. 2000, Pomeroy et al. 2003). Management effectiveness refers to design issues (size and shape of individual protected areas or a protected area system), the appropriateness of the established management systems and processes and finally to the delivery of protected area objectives (Hocking et al. 2000: 3-4). The purpose of evaluating management effectiveness according to Hocking et al. (2000: 5) is "promoting adaptive management; improving project planning; and promoting accountability". Hocking et al. (2000: 7) recommend to "involve a broad range of stakeholders, including local and indigenous communities living in or adjacent to protected areas, in the assessment process. (...) It is necessary to take account of the interests and concerns of all such stakeholders if they are to accept changed management priorities that emerge as a result of the evaluation."

#### **4.1.5 Three types, many evaluation strategies**

Looking back over all three types of stakeholder dialogue, we can recognise that as each pursues a different purpose, each may lead to a different emphasis in the evaluation criteria. While the success of a stakeholder dialogue for science may depend more on the perceived competence of the process, the success of a stakeholder dialogue for policy-making may depend much more on the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of the process. When evaluating the success of a stakeholder dialogue for management, the fairness of the process (in the form of inclusiveness and openness for local knowledge) may be key factor(s) of success. The differences between the three types of stakeholder dialogue have been discussed at length to demonstrate that there is not going to be one set of indicators that will fit all types of stakeholder dialogue (unless

the purpose is a comparative one). Instead, selecting criteria wisely will be a hallmark of a case-sensitive evaluation. I will now turn to a general introduction to the issue of evaluation, before introducing the most commonly used sets of indicators.

## **4.2 Evaluating stakeholder dialogue**

The following section is an introduction to the basic issues that need to be resolved before engaging in an evaluation. It will provide a brief introduction to the questions why and when to evaluate, what to evaluate, how to evaluate and who should be carrying out the evaluation. (For a more detailed discussion of these issues see Caron Chess 2000). Theory-based and user-based criteria for evaluation are briefly characterised, but the respective criteria sets will be introduced in more detail in the following section (4.3).

### **4.2.1 Why and when to evaluate**

The evaluation of environmental public participation in general and of stakeholder dialogues in particular can be pursued with very different purposes in mind (Chess 2000: 771). The evaluation may be driven by the practitioner's interest to improve practice and process of a stakeholder dialogue. An evaluation may aim to reveal the perceptions of those participating in the stakeholder dialogue in order to measure their satisfaction with the process. An evaluation may be carried out to better understand the intended and unintended effects of a stakeholder dialogue in the short and in the long term. An evaluation during a running stakeholder dialogue can form the basis for mid-course corrections. The justification of expenses for a stakeholder dialogue may be a further motivation for carrying out an evaluation. The results of an evaluation may form the basis for a decision regarding the possible replication of a stakeholder dialogue in the same or another context. Finally, the evaluation may be driven by the academic interest to compare the practice of stakeholder dialogue with ideal type models developed in the theoretical literature.

The timing of an evaluation follows from the purpose pursued (Chess 2000). A formative evaluation that informs the planning of a stakeholder dialogue and forms the basis for mid-course corrections is carried out before and during the stakeholder dialogue. A summative evaluation assesses the worth of a stakeholder dialogue subsequent to completion of

it. An evaluation of the long-term impact of a stakeholder dialogue is carried out years after completion of a stakeholder dialogue. Chess (2000: 779) highlights the rewards of formative evaluation as it allows for what she calls 'adaptive participation', namely design changes on the way in order to maximise the benefits of a stakeholder dialogue. Nevertheless, thorough summative and impact evaluations will be needed as a basis for policy recommendations.

#### **4.2.2 Criteria for the evaluation**

The criteria for evaluation can be derived from theory (theory-based), from the stakeholders involved in the dialogue (user-based) or the evaluation can be goal-free (Chess 2000: 775-6). A theory-based evaluation uses normative criteria which are universally applied to all stakeholder dialogues, no matter what their contextual differences are. Criteria for theory-based evaluation studies of participatory processes in general and stakeholder dialogue in particular are taken from a wide range of academic disciplines including spatial planning, political theory, psychology, sociology, social geography and organisational management. Criteria for theory-based evaluation have been taken from critical theory (Webler 1995), collaborative planning (Healey 1997), risk communication (Rowe and Frewer 2000, Durant 1995, Rossi 1997), public participation (Fiorino 1990, Webler 1995, Rowe and Frewer 2000) and democratic theory (Fiorino 1990, Barber 1984). Very few evaluation studies combine criteria from different disciplines (for an exception: Innes and Booher 1999). The aim of a theory-based evaluation is to assess to what extent a stakeholder dialogue fulfils the criteria (and related indicators) as spelled out in the theoretical literature. The universal set of criteria eases the comparison of cases. It also helps to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of particular participation methods used to carry out stakeholder dialogue. On the basis of this comparison, certain participation methods can be recommended for certain purposes. One of the problems of theory-based evaluation is that there is no one ideal method of stakeholder dialogue that serves all purposes. Another problem is that the criteria employed may seem highly irrelevant to the practitioners on the ground. The practitioners may reject some or all of the theoretical criteria raised by the academics, thus rendering the acceptance and utility of the evaluation findings problematic. The rejection of evaluation criteria by practitioners may also be caused by cultural differences that lead to different value judgements.



User-based evaluation assesses if the stakeholder dialogue has achieved its broader goals and specific objectives as defined by those with a stake in the process. However, initiators, funders, organisers, participants and those affected by the outcomes may have very different objectives in mind. There may even be conflicting objectives. Therefore, one of the challenges is to either integrate these diverse objectives into a single set of criteria or to evaluate using competing criteria sets from the perspective of a certain stakeholder group, for example the funding agency's. Chess emphasises the need for evaluators to pay sufficient attention to agency interests when deriving criteria sets for the evaluation (Chess 2000: 780). The identified criteria sets and related indicators are time and context specific and therefore vary widely from one case to another. The strength of the stakeholder-based evaluation is its closeness to those actually involved in the stakeholder dialogue. It explores their aspirations, their ways of making sense of their experiences, their subjective interpretations of what constitutes success. The subjectivity of the stakeholder-based evaluation is at the same time its strength and its weakness. The lack of external perspective may lead to a blind eye with regards to power relations. The stakeholder-based evaluation would need to pay attention to hidden agendas that some stakeholders may actually have, in order to compensate for its lack of critical distance. A second shortcoming is the fact that a stakeholder-based evaluation is quite demanding. Defining criteria and indicators of success jointly with the stakeholders is not just time-consuming, but also crucially depends upon the willingness of those stakeholders to invest these extra-hours as well.

The utility of a user-based evaluation can be extended if it is opened up to trace unexpected and unintended outcomes, thereby delivering a much more comprehensive account of the impact of a stakeholder dialogue. This is what is at the heart of the so-called goal-free evaluation (Chess 2000: 776). A goal-free evaluation is liberated from undue bias that might result from a narrow focus on stated objectives or theoretically derived criteria. Instead, a goal-free evaluation is a broad assessment of needs and effects with the aim of providing policy advice. A goal-free evaluation is particularly useful when the objectives pursued by those with a stake in the stakeholder dialogue have stated no clear objectives or when the articulated objectives are in conflict with each other.

In general, a user-based evaluation and a goal-free evaluation are more likely to generate a comprehensive set of criteria, while some theory-driven criteria sets may be quite narrow due to their specific research interest. In fact, a combination of these approaches may deliver the best understanding of success and failure of a stakeholder dialogue (Chess

2000: 780). This may also ease pointing out the differences between theory-based and user-based criteria sets.

Section 4.3 of this chapter will introduce theory-based and user-based sets of criteria and indicators used for the evaluation of stakeholder dialogues.

### **4.2.3 Process or outcome criteria**

The scope of the evaluation studies of stakeholder dialogue varies widely. While some restrict themselves to procedural criteria (Webler 1995), others look at process, outcome and capacity building criteria (Oels 2003). There is general agreement that evaluation criteria can be divided into process and outcome criteria (Chess 2000: 774). Process criteria investigate how a stakeholder dialogue is being carried out. Outcome criteria assess the direct output and long-term outcomes of the stakeholder dialogue, including issues like the influence on policy-making. Capacity building criteria are a subset of outcome criteria which have been highlighted by myself (Oels 2003) as an important category of evaluation criteria. Capacity building criteria include all aspects of social capital building that result from the stakeholder dialogue like the formation of social networks and learning processes which can be used as a resource for future participation processes. The evaluation studies also differ with regards to how much attention they pay to the embeddedness of the stakeholder dialogue in wider society and the formal institutions of government. Again, those interested in evaluating implementation of the outcomes of stakeholder dialogues are more likely to study the institutional context (for example Oels 2003).

### **4.2.4 Outsider or participatory evaluation**

An important decision is who should be carrying out the evaluation. Chess distinguishes between outsider and participatory evaluation (Chess 2000: 776-777). Outsider evaluation brings in an external evaluator who leads and carries out the evaluation process. The argument for an external evaluator is to increase the accuracy and credibility of the evaluation by institutionalising a professional distance between evaluator and those being evaluated. For some, this implies minimizing interaction between evaluator and main stakeholders in order to prevent that friendly bonds bias the evaluation.

By contrast, participatory evaluation considers the evaluator as an educator who facilitates a process of self-reflection and learning among

those with a stake in the stakeholder dialogue. This implies the involvement of some or all stakeholders in the design of the evaluation, the criteria, indicators and methods used, sometimes even in the data gathering and analysis itself. By involving the stakeholders, it is assured that the evaluation is useful to them and considered credible (Guba and Lincoln 1989). An extreme variant of this is empowerment evaluation (Fettermann 1996), where stakeholders actively participate in all phases of the evaluation process. Chess (2000: 780) points out that participatory evaluation is particularly prone to undue influence of certain interest groups. She therefore recommends that the issue of possible bias is countered by transparency of how the evaluation was carried out and who was involved in it to what extent.

A third option is a self-evaluation led by the facilitator/organiser of a stakeholder dialogue. Due to a lack of resources and a self-interest of the facilitator, this option is a frequently used type of evaluation (for example Polanyi 2002). However, the credibility of a self-evaluation suffers from the perceived conflict of interests (the need to be successful in order to attract future contracts).

Chess (2000: 780-781) concludes that a combination of outsider evaluation with participatory evaluation is expected to deliver the most insightful results. While the elements of outsider evaluation can minimise the bias, the participatory elements can maximise the utility and resulting mobilisation effects of the evaluation.

### 4.2.5 Quantitative or qualitative methods

A final consideration to be taken care of is the choice of methodology for gathering and analysing data on the criteria and related indicators. Here once more the choice of methods must match the purposes of the evaluation and the selected criteria and indicator sets in particular. Usually some exploration of the perspectives of those with a stake in the stakeholder dialogue using qualitative methods is recommended in order to grasp the categories in which stakeholders make sense of their experience. It is also important to realise that many substantive outputs and outcomes of stakeholder dialogues can not be quantified at all or only at the expense of losing a lot of insights. Overall, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods is recommended (Chess 2000: 781). The methodology in general does not have to be limited to positivist criteria of validity. Instead, Chess (2000: 781) recommends that criteria of naturalistic inquiry as introduced by Guba and Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln 1989) could just as well ensure the quality of the evaluation findings.

## **4.2.6 The use of evaluation findings**

The use of evaluation findings very much depends on the purpose and set-up of the evaluation at the outset. If an evaluation is contracted out by a government agency in order to propose mid-course corrections in a stakeholder dialogue programme or in order to inform the decision about replications of a stakeholder dialogue it is more likely to fulfil this function than if no intentions were linked with the evaluation to begin with. The danger has to be avoided though that the contracting agency requires certain evaluation findings, for example a great success of the stakeholder dialogue. An effective way of reaching policy-makers is to involve them in the stakeholder dialogue and in the evaluation process. This empowers policy-makers to pursue their policy-making on the basis of their own learning and reflections (Innes 1995). Overall, evaluation studies are often inconvenient for those with an interest in all things staying the way they have always been. For this reason, evaluation studies have to expect that their findings will not always be welcome and that strong efforts with regards to outreach are required if they are to have any impact. At times an evaluation may fail to find an audience for reasons outside the evaluators' control (Chess 2000: 782).

## **4.3 Criteria for the evaluation**

At the heart of the debate about evaluating stakeholder dialogue is the question of appropriate criteria and indicators of success. The following two sections will review theory-based criteria and user-based criteria in turn. The sections will also make reference to the methodologies employed to collect data on the indicators.

### **4.3.1 Theory-based criteria**

#### ***Habermas' ideal speech situation***

The most cited set of theory-based criteria for the evaluation of all types of participatory processes used in environmental decision-making has been put forward by German sociologists Ortwin Renn and Thomas Webler (1995). Webler (1995) has taken Habermas' ideal speech situation as a starting point for developing an evaluation framework for deliberative processes. Habermas' definition of fairness is the absence of coercion. Webler operationalises fairness by saying that each person must be able to

attend and initiate discourse, to contribute to it by debating and to make decisions about the nature of the process of the discourse itself. Webler defines three key activities of discourse: (i) agenda and rule making, (ii) moderation and rule enforcement and (iii) discussion itself. Competence of speech requires, according to Webler, access to information and its interpretations, and the use of the best available procedures for knowledge selection. Competence of speech also aims to establish communicative reason as the mode of making and challenging validity claims. Webler therefore prescribes investigation of all three dimensions of discourse to establish the competence of a discourse: theoretical discourse (making epistemic or strategic claims about the nature of the objective world), practical discourse (providing a normative value-basis for judgements and positions) and therapeutic discourse (establishing the authenticity and sincerity of the speaker). In addition, he adds explicative discourse (establishing the comprehensibility of communication) to this list, as it can be found in Habermas' theory of pragmatics. A competent discourse employs cooperative reasoning and instrumental reason as opposed to strategic reasoning. The main tenets of the fair and competent 'ideal speech situation' are summarised in Table 4.1. Each of the numbered letters in the table represents a testable criterion that is linked to clearly defined indicators. Table 4.2 provides three examples of the criteria developed by Webler. It is however beyond the scope of this chapter to reproduce the complete set.

**Table 4.1** Conditions for the fair and competent ideal speech situation.  
Source: Webler 1995: 60

| EVALUATION FRAMEWORK            |                     |           |                        |        |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------------|--------|
| FAIRNESS                        | NEEDS               |           |                        |        |
| ACTIVITIES                      | Attend              | Inititate | Debate                 | Decide |
| Agenda and rule making          | A1,A2, A3           | A1        | A2                     | A3     |
| Moderation and rule enforcement | B1                  | B1        | B2                     | B3     |
| Discussion                      | C1                  | C2        | C2                     | C3     |
| COMPETENCE                      | NEEDS               |           |                        |        |
| ACTIVITIES                      | Access to Knowledge |           | Best Procedures        |        |
| Explicative Discourse           | D1                  |           | D2, D3, H1, H2         |        |
| Theoretical Discourse           | E1, E2, E3          |           | E5, E6, E7, H1, H2     |        |
| Practical Discourse             | F1, F2, F3, F4      |           | F5, F6, F7, F8, H1, H2 |        |
| Therapeutic Discourse           | G1, G2              |           | G3, G4, G5, H1, H2     |        |

**Table 4.2** Three examples of criteria to test for the competence of a discourse.  
Source: adapted from Webler 1995: 63, 78-86

|    |   |
|----|---|
| E6 | The model should provide the participants with the option to delegate determinations of factual truth to an outside expert panel. |
| F1 | The model should not contain any implicit barriers that will bias the distribution of interests that participate.                 |
| F3 | The model should promote both the discovery and the development of mutual understandings of values among all the participants.    |

However, these criteria are to be applied to an ideal type of a participatory process and are not designed to track the particularities of a time- and context-specific process. The second shortcoming is the focus upon procedural criteria only at the total neglect of context and outcomes. Nevertheless, fairness and competence are the most uncontested criteria put forward for the evaluation of participatory processes and are contained in almost all theory-based criteria sets found in the literature.

The application of theory-based criteria to stakeholder dialogues highlights some of the characteristics of this participation method in comparison to other tools used for participation. Stakeholder dialogues are by definition exclusive and do not grant permission to all those interested and willing to actually attend a stakeholder dialogue. The agenda of a stakeholder dialogue and the choice of a facilitator are often predetermined by those who initiate the dialogue. In my opinion, this failure to match the criteria does not mean that the criteria are not applicable to stakeholder dialogues. The opposite is the case: By applying this set of criteria, we are made aware of the limitations to fairness, which specific types of stakeholder dialogue impose upon the discourse. It is exactly the lack of openness to all willing participants that undermines the legitimacy of stakeholder dialogues in a system of formal governance based on representative democracy. Stakeholder dialogues need to address this issue in order to gain influence in the decision-making process.

***Criteria sets which build on the ideal speech situation***

Renn et al. (1999) have recently updated the above criteria set (fairness and competence) by adding the political criterion of legitimacy (formal, argumentative and integrative) and the economic criterion of efficiency (time-benefit, cost-benefit, long-term effects) as additional criteria for measuring the success of participatory processes.

A very similar set of criteria has been put forward by Susskind and Cruikshank (1981). Their proposed set of indicators includes most aspects of Renn et al's fairness, competence and efficiency. Instead of the fourth

criterion of legitimacy, Susskind and Cruikshank use 'stability' to refer to the issue of how likely the implementation of the achieved outcomes is. On the basis of a systematic review of political theories of democracy, Peter H. Feindt (2001) has compiled a set of criteria which also closely resembles Renn et al's fairness, competence, efficiency and legitimacy. Feindt has broken these criteria down for the planning phase of a participatory process, the facilitation of the event itself and for the follow-up phase. In each phase, fairness, competence, efficiency and legitimacy make specific demands with regards to best practice. For Feindt, the legitimacy of the outcomes also depends on a fair burden sharing under specific consideration of weak interests. Learning is highlighted as an integral part of competence.

Rowe and Frewer (2000) propose a set of nine theory-based criteria in order to evaluate desirable qualities of public participation methods. They distinguish between "acceptance criteria, which concern features of a method that make it acceptable to the wider public, and process criteria, which concern features of the process that are liable to ensure that it takes place in an effective manner" (Rowe and Frewer 2000: 3). Their acceptance criteria include representativeness (of the participants), independence (from control or influence of the sponsoring organisation), early involvement, influence (of the output on policy-making) and transparency (of the participation process). Their process criteria include resource accessibility (information, human, material and time resources), clear task definition, structured decision-making and cost-effectiveness of the procedure. In comparison with the other criteria sets introduced so far, the emphasis on independence from sponsor control and on transparency of the proceedings is striking. The application of Rowe and Frewer's criteria to stakeholder dialogues highlights their tendency to an exclusive sampling of the stakeholder groups which leads to an elitist bias of the participants. It also highlights the danger of sponsor influence on a stakeholder dialogue and of lack of policy impact of the outcomes of a stakeholder dialogue (Rowe and Frewer 2000: 23).

### ***Collaborative planning criteria***

Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation has also inspired theory building in the field of planning. A review of the planning literature, known for its interdisciplinary perspective and closeness to local practice, shows the emergence of normative theories of 'collaborative planning' (Healey 1997, Fischer and Forester 1993, Innes 1996a, Selle 1996), a normative argument about how local governance in networks should

ideally be pursued. Planning theories proved the most developed on the subject of evaluating stakeholder dialogues.

Planning theories are of interest to our issue of stakeholder dialogue as they are most experienced with making decisions in the face of conflicting interests. Bringing the conflicting parties and the wider stakeholders of a locality together in a constructive process of deliberation of the collective will has been the aim of collaborative planning theory. Collaborative planning theory breaks with the supremacy of science and with notions of consumers with fixed preferences. Theories of collaborative planning think highly of the citizens' capacity for learning and genuine public thinking if given a chance to deliberate. Conflicting evidence is to be discussed until a consensus emerges. This is supposed to be the opposite to bargaining between conflicting parties. According to collaborative planning theory, a decision can only be as legitimate as the process that willed it into being. A consensus becomes possible as citizens start to listen to each other and to alter own views in the light of their learning. Deliberative processes which are based on collaborative planning theory should ideally match the following process, outcome and capacity building criteria (Healey 1997, Innes 1996, 1998, Forester 1996a, b) and others:

### **Collaborative planning theory**

(Source: my table on the basis of a literature review)

#### *Process criteria:*

- Diversity of stakeholders present
- Constructive dialogue
- Fair process
- Transcending egoistic preferences towards the common good
- Participants are experts on their affairs
- Allowing multiple ways of making validity claims
- Scope for innovation

#### *Outcome criteria:*

- A consensus

#### *Capacity building criteria:*

- New contacts and partnerships
- Learning amongst the participants
- Systems thinking
- Building trust and reviving local democracy
- Generating community spirit



### 4.3.2 User-based criteria

A second option for the evaluation of stakeholder dialogue is to base the evaluation on criteria for success as defined by those with a stake in the stakeholder dialogue. Instead of imposing a theoretically derived measurement, a user-based, or more specifically a stakeholder-based evaluation is interested to define criteria and indicators of success together with those carrying out the stakeholder dialogue, with those participating in it and those potentially affected by its outcomes. A stakeholder-based evaluation takes the aspirations of the organisers of a stakeholder dialogue as the starting point for the investigation, but then adds the aspirations of participants and bystanders alike. Even non-participants in a stakeholder dialogue may need to be interviewed in order to understand the political embeddedness of the stakeholder dialogue.

As the outcomes of most stakeholder dialogues are hard to predict, a stakeholder-based evaluation offers the chance to trace unintended and unexpected outcomes if the list of evaluation criteria is kept open until the end. The research question is no longer a narrow 'Did the process match the criteria?'. Instead, the opportunity is taken to ask: 'What was the impact of the stakeholder dialogue in the widest sense?' The evaluation process is no longer the undertaking of a knowledgeable researcher alone, but is instead redefined as a process of joint learning of researcher and those researched. The non-hierarchical approach addresses the stakeholders as experts in their own right as their experience of the stakeholder dialogue is valued. The general approach to evaluation has best been captured by naturalistic inquiry (Guba and Lincoln 1986).

Most instructive in this respect has been the social audit methodology as developed by the New Economics Foundation/London (Zadek and Raynard 1995, Zadek and Evans 1993). A Social Audit "is a means of assessing the social impact and ethical behaviour of an organisation or set of activities in relation to its aims and those of its stakeholders... Stakeholders are individuals and groups who are affected by, or can affect, the activities under review" (Zadek 1994: 632-633). The Social Audit is the most advanced of a number of tools that have been developed in the field of social and ethical accounting. The most frequently used alternatives to the Social Audit are the 'Ethical Accounting Statement' and the 'Social Assessment' (Zadek et al. 1997).

All three approaches involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders in a very participatory evaluation, carry out the accounting on a regular (usually annual) basis and publish the findings for public scrutiny (Zadek and Raynard 1995). The Social Audit as developed by the New Economics Foundation is moreover committed to target setting, systematic

bookkeeping, external benchmarking, the establishment of an audit group and external verification of results. The other two approaches only commit to a few of these criteria. Since the Social Audit has been further adapted and successfully used by The Body Shop plc, Happy Computers, Shared Earth and several non-governmental organisations including the New Economics Foundation themselves, it is fair to say that it is the most advanced of the three approaches.

An example of an application of this approach to the area of stakeholder dialogue is my stakeholder-based evaluation of a Future Search Conference that was used to launch a Local Agenda 21 process (Oels 2003). The purpose of my stakeholder-based evaluation was to assess how successful a Future Search Conference was in delivering its stated objectives, perceived both before and after the conference event by those with a stake in it. A first step was therefore to identify the spectrum of stakeholders that should be involved in the evaluation. According to the Social Audit literature, stakeholders are all those core to the mission and values of an organisation/intervention, those who create and affect the organisation/intervention, and those most affected by it. The same stakeholders may appear in more than one category. Who qualifies as a stakeholder group and which individual should be asked to speak on behalf of that stakeholder group is of course contested and the evaluator needs to take precautions to minimize the resulting bias.

In my English case study Rushmoor Borough, the stakeholders to the evaluation were:

**Table 4.3** Stakeholders to the evaluation in Rushmoor Borough

| Those who affect the intervention  | Those core to mission and values of the intervention   | Those most affected by the intervention   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Rushmoor Future Search Conference steering group</li><li>– clerical staff / LA21 officer</li><li>– conference facilitators</li><li>– LA21 subcommittee of councillors</li><li>– Directors Management Board of Rushmoor Borough Council</li><li>– LA21 officer steering group</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– LA21 practitioners</li><li>– Future Search practitioners</li><li>– Rushmoor Future Search Conference steering group</li><li>– LA21 officer</li><li>– conference facilitators</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– conference participants</li><li>– the conference participants' organisations and sectors</li><li>– Rushmoor Borough Council /administration</li><li>– the wider local community in Rushmoor</li><li>– the local media</li></ul> |

The Social Audit approach recommends the merging into a single list of criteria put forward by all those with a stake in the intervention. In the process of doing so, the criteria put forward by those core to mission and values of the intervention are to be given more weight than the criteria put forward by those at the periphery. The major advantage of a single criteria list is that it makes life easier for the researcher and that it makes transparent to all the diverse objectives pursued at the conference event. The downside of merging all criteria into a single list is that it blurs the fact that the stakeholders in the evaluation have different interests and that these interests may be served unequally by the Future Search Conference. A Social Audit methodology directs attention away from a critical assessment of power relations, while emphasising the 'common ground', i.e. those objectives jointly pursued by all.

The resulting list of criteria for the evaluation of my two case studies (Oels 2003) is reproduced in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4** Evaluation criteria and data sources generated in a stakeholder-based evaluation of a Future Search Conference in Rushmoor Borough Council, United Kingdom (1997-2000). Source: Oels 2003: 135-136.

| PROCESS       |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|
| Audit Area    | Criteria  | Data Sources  |
| inclusive     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– broad spectrum of stakeholders present</li> <li>– many people who have not met before, not only the 'usual suspects'</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– FSC participant list over time</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul> |
| collaborative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participants able to put forward their heartfelt concerns</li> <li>– all views heard and respected</li> <li>– absence of domination, axe-grinding and polarisation</li> <li>– participants support each other</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul>   |
| competent     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participants treated as experts in their own right-required expertise is in the room</li> <li>– discussions go deeper than headline level</li> <li>– all local key issues are put on the table</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– conference documentation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul>       |

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**OUTCOMES**

| Audit Area                                  | Criteria  | Data Sources   |
|---|---|--|
| consensus about coherent, innovative vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the vision should be capable of guiding action</li> <li>– clear priorities are identified</li> <li>– new solutions to old problems identified</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– conference documentation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– focus groups with non-participants</li> <li>– stakeholder interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul>                                |
| action groups deliver                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participants take responsibility for seeing their project ideas through</li> <li>– action plans are specific and practical</li> <li>– active Council support for at least some conference outcomes and action plans</li> <li>– visible change on the ground</li> <li>– action groups attract resources</li> <li>– regular progress review</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– non-participant observation of action groups</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> <li>– stakeholder interviews</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– document research</li> <li>– follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul> |
| effective outreach                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– each participant gets their organisation and contacts involved in the FSC follow-through</li> <li>– extensive media coverage</li> <li>– some new people join the process</li> <li>– different form of consultation reaches out to the wider community</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– document research</li> <li>– stakeholder interviews</li> <li>– follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul>   |
| Local Agenda 21 strengthened                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– FSC is a demonstration of sustainable development; increased environmental awareness amongst participants</li> <li>– participants carry LA21 into their organisations</li> <li>– media coverage for LA21</li> <li>– LA21 becomes true umbrella</li> <li>– LA21 gains more influence within the Council</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– conference documentation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– stakeholder interviews</li> <li>– follow-up conference observation and documentation</li> </ul>   |

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## CAPACITY BUILDING

| Audit Area                          | Criteria   | Data Sources  |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| networking                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– cross-sectoral action groups</li> <li>– new contacts formed across stakeholder group boundaries and valued</li> <li>– new joint projects / alliances set up</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference documentation</li> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul> |
| learning                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participants genuinely engage with those holding opposite views</li> <li>– participants learn from and with each other</li> <li>– participants let go of prejudices and stereotypes</li> <li>– participants challenge each others' world views</li> <li>– participants recognise the systemic interdependence of their own and others' actions</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conference observation</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant interviews</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul>                                     |
| building trust and community spirit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– more trust between local authority and citizens</li> <li>– participants more optimistic, capable and willing to take on responsibility for local affairs</li> <li>– more things are done 'with' the people, not 'for' or 'to' them</li> <li>– participation methods like Future Search become a common practice locally</li> <li>– community spirit is generated</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– stakeholder interviews</li> <li>– document research</li> <li>– non-participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant focus groups</li> <li>– participant questionnaire</li> </ul>  |

The borders between theory-based and user-based criteria sets however are fluid. A set of evaluation criteria like mine (table 4.4) that has been generated in explorative case study work can now be applied as a measuring stick for a theory-based evaluation. Weber (2005) has already used an earlier version of my evaluation criteria for her theory-based evaluation of a Future Search Conference hosted to coordinate and improve youth support services in the Vogelsberg region near Frankfurt a.M., Germany. This may be justified for two reasons. First, anyone

conducting another stakeholder-based evaluation is not unlikely to generate a similarly comprehensive list of evaluation criteria as mine, possibly with some minor additions and some minor gaps and some difference in weight of the criteria. Before investing a lot of explorative research work to reproduce a table similar to mine, the short cut may be to start with my table in hand. Of course, this is then theory-based evaluation and not a participatory stakeholder-based evaluation with all the benefits attached. A second reason for starting a theory-based evaluation with a subset or the total of the criteria raised in my table is its comprehensiveness. As the comparison of my stakeholder-based criteria set with the theory-based criteria sets in table 4.5 shows, my list includes all of the criteria raised under the labels of fairness, competence, legitimacy and effectiveness by those following Habermas. In addition, my criteria also match or summarise the criteria raised by collaborative planning theories. For those seeking a comprehensive approach to theory-based evaluation, my stakeholder-based criteria set can therefore be recommended as a starting point for the evaluation. However, as pointed out earlier, the weight given to each respective criterion should differ depending upon the type of stakeholder dialogue under review. While legitimacy is most important for stakeholder dialogues for policy-making, competence may be the hallmark of a stakeholder dialogue for science. Evaluation should be designed sensitive to the respective case, unless it is a comparative endeavor. The final word on this however is that the approach to evaluation must match the purpose of the evaluation. Explorative purposes justify a stakeholder-based evaluation, comparative purposes demand a theory-based evaluation. Now that the possible sets of criteria have been discussed at some length, this chapter will turn towards a review of the findings of those rare evaluation studies of stakeholder dialogues that have been completed and published.

**Table 4.5** Comparative view of theory-based and stakeholder-based criteria sets.

| Stakeholder-based criteria generated by Oels (2003) | Renn et al. (1999) | Collaborative planning theory   |
|---|--------------------|---|
| <b>PROCESS</b>                                      |                    |   |
| Inclusive   | Fair               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Diversity of stakeholders present</li> <li>– Fair process</li> </ul>   |
| Collaborative                                       | Fair               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Constructive dialogue</li> <li>– Transcending egoistic preferences towards the common good</li> </ul>            |
| Competent   | Competent          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participants are experts on their affairs</li> <li>– Allowing multiple ways of making validity claims</li> </ul> |
| <b>OUTCOME</b>                                      |                    |   |
| Consensus about coherent, innovative vision         | Effectiveness      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A consensus</li> <li>– Scope for innovation</li> </ul>   |
| Action groups deliver                               | Effectiveness (?)  | /   |
| Effective outreach                                  | Legitimacy (?)     | /   |
| Local Agenda 21 strengthened                        | /                  | /   |
| <b>CAPACITY BUILDING</b>                            |                    |   |
| Networking  | /                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– New contacts and partnerships</li> </ul>   |
| Learning  | /                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Learning amongst the participants</li> <li>– Systems thinking</li> </ul>   |
| Building trust and community spirit                 | Legitimacy         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Building trust and reviving local democracy</li> <li>– Generating community spirit</li> </ul>                    |

## 4.4 Common findings of evaluations

There are many stories reporting successes and failures of stakeholder dialogues in the literature. However, the criteria used for evaluation are rarely made explicit and the evidence is often anecdotal. The aim of this section is to provide more background on the relative importance of each

of the evaluation criteria on the basis of the findings from case studies. The overall impression from the case study literature is that stakeholder dialogues are very successful at establishing fair and competent processes and thereby at generating capacity building benefits. The main point of failure however is the production of outcomes resulting from stakeholder dialogues, thereby leading to a lack of effectiveness. Let us review the evidence in turn.

The evaluation literature presents evidence that stakeholders are capable of agreeing upon a shared knowledge base, an action plan or a management plan if given suitable conditions for dialogue. Stakeholder dialogues have been reported to make a substantial contribution to capacity building. The evaluation literature carries plenty of evidence that the participants of stakeholder dialogues learn from each other and engage in networking with each other. Judith Innes and her team analysed fourteen stakeholder dialogues in California, each of which sought stakeholder consensus on the future of growth and environmental policy. Out of fourteen cases, eight were classified as suitable examples of the 'new planning paradigm'. For these cases, Innes presents evidence that "The stakeholders in all cases became better informed through the process, and valued and used their new personal and professional networks to coordinate and collaborate. In five of the cases, groups incorporated systematic technical analysis into their deliberations. The breadth of the collective knowledge and interests of group members and the lengthy periods for discussion meant that they explored a wide range of factors and their interrelationships." (Innes 1996a: 465) Similar evidence comes from Amy Helling, who found that when participants in Atlanta's Vision 2020 process were asked to list the accomplishments of the process, "nearly all pertained to the collaborative process itself, most frequently mentioning networking among diverse people concerned about similar issues. Stakeholders also said that the connections made through VISION 2020 had extended beyond the VISION 2020 meetings themselves, and that they had involved people who had not been active before, or brought together people who had not previously met." (Helling 1998: 340)

I conclude that learning and networking are likely results of stakeholder dialogue for policy-makings. The most striking finding of the evaluation literature, however, is the lack of implementation of the outcomes of citizen participation in general and stakeholder dialogues in particular. The following section reviews this failure to deliver for each of the three types of stakeholder dialogues in turn.



#### 4.4.1 Stakeholder dialogues for science

This section reviews evidence in the area of participation processes for the improvement of the knowledge base. Quite a few risk and technology assessments which are conducted with citizen participation fail to influence policy-making. They are mostly ignored by the institutions of representative government that could consider their outcomes when making legally binding decisions.

The first UK 'National Consensus Conference on Plant Biotechnology' which was hosted by the Science Museum and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) in 1994 in London to allow for a citizen assessment of plant biotechnology, has been evaluated by Robin Grove-White and colleagues (1997: 28) as "something of a political cul-de-sac, principally because it was not thought possible to link its findings into other statutory or Parliamentary processes, or to be more systematically diffused. By contrast, Consensus Conferences in Denmark and the Netherlands (on which features of the UK initiative were modelled) have a statutory basis and have already helped shape public policy towards biotechnology and other ethically contentious issues." There is no lack of evidence that reports from similar events gather dust on shelves instead of influencing policy-making.

Welp et al. (in press) have pointed out two ways in which stakeholder dialogues for science could benefit policy-makers. First, they can inform policy-makers how lay people think about complex environmental issues. Second, they can provide feedback on the acceptance of planned policies ('reality check'). I would add as a third point that they can provide policy-makers with new ideas and proposals for policy-making. It remains unresolved though, how policy makers can best be involved in and informed about the outcomes of stakeholder dialogues for science. Welp et al. (in press) suggest as a first step to make policy-makers more aware of the benefits. Secondly, they recommend using the media to distribute the learning and to form opinion. Welp et al. (in press) however resist the demand made by Rowe and Frewer (2000) and many others that the outcomes of stakeholder dialogues should be given legally binding status. They emphasize that political support is much more important for a stakeholder dialogue to gain influence than legal status. They also follow O'Riordan (1998) in arguing that formal decision-making authority should remain with the institutions of representative democracy.

#### 4.4.2 Stakeholder dialogues for policy-making

In the area of stakeholder dialogues for policy-making, the evidence is similar. Amy Helling's evaluation of Atlanta's VISION 2020 process can be summed up in the words of one respondent to her survey: "This process has given the false impression to the public that something is being done, when in fact, all that has resulted ... has been the agreement that we need to continue to have more meetings." (Helling 1998: 343) Indeed, Helling found little evidence for progress on the initiatives that originated from the VISION 2020 process "beyond extending desirable networking by continuing to gather people for discussions, meetings, and presentations" (Helling 1998: 342). Out of 41 projects which were initiated by VISION 2020, only eleven were taken forward at all, and out of these, many had achieved no more than to continue to meet. The prospects for the future were not good either, as many interviewees "said they were looking forward to reducing their commitment, but they were nearly unanimous in saying that the most important part of the process was still ahead" (Helling 1998: 342). A major disappointment had also been that "most of the region's political leaders maintained their distance, and many stakeholders complained of their lack of attention." (Helling 1998: 343) Even worse, Atlanta Regional Commission ignored the controversial debates that were led as part of VISION 2020 about Georgia Department of Transportation's plan to build a second, limited-access perimeter highway around Atlanta and simply voted to support this plan (Helling 1998: 343). Helling's evaluation does not forget to mention the tremendous costs of the VISION 2020 exercise, particularly when the volunteer person-hours are added up (total of 25,000) and to contrast them with the failure to deliver.

The key role of the local authority is further illustrated by Penny Street (1997), who reported from a Scenario Workshop used in the UK town of Preston for involving the public in policy formulation on urban sustainable development. As in the case studies presented earlier on, the workshop fell short of enabling participants to make a real input to policy-making. Street identifies the danger that high expectations have been raised while "there was no clear way for participants to take this initiative forward; it was dependent on the Council itself to take action...it is difficult to see how such a range of issues could be dealt with simultaneously and effectively" (Street 1997: 154).

Steelman and Ascher (1997) have argued that while more and more policies require government agencies to provide for public participation, there is a complete lack of clarity about how to obtain public input into decision-making and "how much weight these inputs should be given" (ibid: 72). Left to the discretion of government officials, the scope for

manipulation is considerable. Steelman and Ascher (1997) therefore argue for binding forms of direct policy-making by non-governmental representatives, which avoid the polarisation and simplification associated with (legally binding) referenda while keeping the benefits of more explorative proceedings. Hoggett (1995) - with reference to Arnstein's ladder of participation - warns local authorities that "building a ladder of participation" is not "something one can bolt on to or lean against the otherwise unchanged structure of the local authority. Every step up the ladder towards genuine citizen empowerment requires an equivalent change in mainstream practices" (1995: 109). All scholars agree that establishing effective citizen participation requires "the transformation of structures that inhibit collective decision-making" (Kearns 1995: 171).

Contrary to that, Judith Innes has found evidence in some of her case studies that the process of mobilising the stakeholders to an issue was sufficient in itself to then develop the political clout to force through the conclusions of the participatory process "even without support from high elected officials" (Innes 1996a: 468) and without any binding mandate. While this possibility of a conflictive strategy always remains, it looks more like a lucky escape from a situation to be avoided in the first place.

Examples of cases which have been more directly linked with decision-making processes, come from the literature on conflict mediation (Susskind and Cruikshank 1987, Moore 1987, Carpenter and Kennedy 1991, Zilleßen 1998). It is under the weight of high financial (or other) stakes of parties to a multi-party dispute, that the fair and competent exploration of contested issues unfolds its full potential under the strict guidance of a skilled mediator between parties otherwise unable to communicate (Baughman 1995, Nothdurft 1995). As Baughman (1995: 264) has pointed out, parties to a mediation exercise (should and usually do) participate in "full awareness of their best alternative to a negotiated agreement".

#### **4.4.3 Stakeholder dialogues for management**

The advantage of stakeholder dialogues for management is, that they usually come in after a policy decision has been taken. They are by definition the policy implementation or at least part of the implementation. Stakeholder dialogues for management have been successfully used in catchment and watershed management, forest management, water management, integrated pest management, wildlife management, farmers research groups and micro-finance delivery (Pretty and Ward 2001). The exception are feasibility and pilot studies which explore the potential of

stakeholder dialogues for natural resource management in a specific country, region or nature park. These later ones may once more fall into the trap of raising local people's expectations without then delivering results (see Averbeck 2006 in this book).

The major challenge of stakeholder dialogues for management is to get the right people involved and committed and to secure the resources to sustain such a process. Once this is achieved, there remain much lesser problems. In his review of group-based programmes and initiatives for biodiversity enhancement from industrialised and developing countries, which produced favourable outcomes, Pretty (2002) points towards the following three limitations with regards to the implementation of the evaluated schemes. First of all, the positive effects for biodiversity were often rather small in scope, sometimes limited to the individual farm area. Second, the participation of local people was in several cases not sufficient. This was the case where the programme was voluntary, the incentives not high enough or the infrastructure of spreading information not effective enough. Finally, the implementation was in some cases directly linked to a subsidy scheme, the termination of which threatened the sustainability of the programme.

#### **4.4.4 Criteria for success**

The review of literature on case study findings for all three types of stakeholder dialogue has shown that while stakeholder dialogues for science and for policy-making share the problem of producing any changes on the ground, stakeholder dialogues for management may produce changes that are too negligible to matter. These observations from evaluation studies help us to define conditions for the success of stakeholder dialogues. On the basis of her fourteen case studies, Judith Innes (1996) has come up with three conditions for the success of stakeholder dialogues for policy-making:

- a pressing need to come to an agreement / high incentive to participate (i.e. high costs of delay / inaction / imposed solution);
- deliberative process must lead to a clearly defined product (i.e. agreed problem definitions, legislation, clear targets and timetables);
- substantial elements of this product must be formally adopted by the relevant formal political authority.

It is important to note that stakeholder dialogues are mostly carried out without a formal mandate by the elected governmental authorities, they are therefore 'informal' processes outside the sphere of the formal institutions

of government. O'Riordan (1998a: 1) not only argues that the formal structures of governance should be "widening their scope for sharing power". He also reminds us that formal and informal institutions are interdependent, and therefore a process of co-evolution of formal and informal governance is required. He argues that the proponents of participatory forms of decision-making are well advised to remain sensitive to the issue of accountability that, according to him, only elected representatives can offer, and the need for transparency of their proceedings. Otherwise, he argues, participatory decision-making processes might in their ignorance reduce the scope for democratic decision-making instead of widening it. I think, O'Riordan rightly criticises the fanatic enthusiasm of many proponents of participatory tools who remain unaware of the consequences of their actions with regards to issues of power and democratic accountability. Nevertheless, without an inroads into formal government structures, stakeholder dialogues are bound to remain ineffective with regards to achieving a policy impact. One practical implication of this is that the organisers of stakeholder dialogues should contact the respective governmental authority as early as possible and foster their support and active involvement. This may enhance the chances for later implementation of the outcome.

## **4.5 Conclusions**

As the popularity of stakeholder dialogues rises, so does the need for evaluation and shared quality standards. The literature on evaluating stakeholder dialogue is growing, but no common standards and criteria for the evaluation have arisen yet. Theory-based evaluations are most often grounded in the Habermasian ideal speech situation and highlight the need for fair and competent proceedings. More recently, efficiency and legitimacy have been added to the list of theory-based evaluation criteria. Stakeholder-based evaluations develop criteria and indicators of success jointly with those with a stake in the participatory process. They are based upon a joint learning process of researcher and stakeholders. Theory-based and stakeholder-based evaluations are not mutually exclusive. In fact, a combination of both may deliver best results as theory-based criteria allow a comparison of many cases and stakeholder-based criteria do justice to the objectives as defined by those involved in the process. This would also help to bridge the gap that divides the theory-based evaluation literature from the stakeholder-based evaluation literature.

The lack of implementation of the outcomes of stakeholder dialogues for science and stakeholder dialogue for policy-making has been identified as the most common failure of stakeholder dialogues. As the user-based evaluation criteria have highlighted, stakeholder dialogues do have a tendency of raising the expectation that something will be done as a result of the process. If nothing happens, stakeholders may be frustrated and unwilling to participate in future stakeholder dialogues. Therefore, the lack of implementation in stakeholder dialogues for science and for policy-making is a serious issue that requires attention. The practice of stakeholder dialogues needs to pay a lot more attention to the power relations between formal structures of government and informal stakeholder dialogues. The interface needs to be improved. Mechanisms need to be explored which provide easier inroads for the outcomes of stakeholder dialogue into the formal decision-making structures of government. A pressing need to come to an agreement, a clearly defined product as outcome and a governmental commitment to formally decide about the adoption of this product are three key conditions for the success of stakeholder dialogues.

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