

CASE STUDY

Public Participation in the Portuguese Coastal Zone

ABSTRACT:

Public participation is an important factor in ICZM projects and practice and can contribute the success of these initiatives. In the Atlantic region there are several ICZM and other cooperative projects that help to promote public participation in the region.

LOCATION:

Portugal, Algarve

KEYWORDS:

Governance, Stakeholder and Public Participation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Århus Convention (1998), people are guaranteed the right to public participation. In Integrated Coastal Management projects public participation is an important factor that contributes to the success of such initiatives. The public can put in local knowledge and expertise and its involvement ensures democracy and pluralism. Portugal used to have a strongly centralized government and this is still reflected by some of the troubles faced in public participation practices today. Portugal also takes part in many cooperative initiatives concerning ICM and public participation, for example projects in the Atlantic Sea region.

Now-a-days Public legal frameworks about land management in general, and Coastal Zone Management in particular, also include public participation at different levels. Alexandra Sena, a technic of the Algarve's Coordinating Commission of Regional Development, comments on public participation in the Portuguese coastal zone.

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Public Participation

Public participation in environmental issues is a very hot item in contemporary society. Green politicians often try to incorporate participatory methods because they believe that participatory practices can bring about social change and decrease the power of bureaucracies (Participatory Democracy, 2006). People have become more and more aware of problems concerning the environment, including climate change, natural disasters, loss of natural habitats and erosion. The news is saturated with shocking messages about the environment of our planet Earth and decisions made by politicians and bureaucrats concerning the environment can literally be a matter of life and death. Therefore it is in the interest of the public –tourists, NGOs, coastal inhabitants, etc. - to get educated, be aware and communicate their views on a public issue. Full stakeholder participation and therefore public participation is an important prerequisite for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. One of the main reasons is that the public can represent local interests and opinions and since they actually live in the area, they are able to provide first hand information about certain coastal issues.

Country

Portugal is a country located in the West and Southwest parts of the Iberian Peninsula in south Western Europe, and is the westernmost country in continental Europe. Portugal is bordered by Spain to the north and east and by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and south. In addition, Portugal includes two archipelagos in the Atlantic, Azores (Açores) and Madeira Islands. The population is 10,5 million (95 % of whom live in the continental part) and the capital is Lisbon. Population densities on the coast are relatively high and tourism is the most important industry.

Culture and Politics

Ever since the 12th century, Portugal has had a strong centralized government, especially during the dictatorship in the 20th century, which lasted until 1974. In 1986, Portugal joined the European Union and moved closer to other EU states politically and economically. Since the beginning of the nineties, public participation in the environment has become more and more important. Environmental groups try to play an important role but municipalities could show more effort in implementing participation. EIAs are used to increase public participation but there is a lack of transparency in this process. In the past, projects have been stopped and postponed and this has decreased public will for participation. Therefore, non-public stakeholders are much more important in the participation process and often have the chance to become more influential by using their money and the media. Habits and traditions might still reflect the past dictatorship and result in passive democracy, which limits public participation.¹

Legislation

There are no specific laws in Portugal concerning access to environmental information; however, Portugal's constitutional imperatives do ensure this right. The Portuguese Constitution does establish the right to public participation in administrative decisions and you can participate; after the implementations of Land Management instruments (1998) public can participate in the elaboration phase of projects and plans and not only when they are already defined. But this still is a rather weak form of public participation, that might include manipulation, informing and in the best-case consultation on Arnstein's ladder of participation. The Portuguese also have the right of access to justice in environmental matters and this right has especially been used in the past years by NGOs to prevent environmental damage.²

¹ Connor, Desmond M., *Public Participation in Western Europe, Current Status and Trends, Portugal*. June 1999. Retrieved 10-05-2006. <http://www.connor.bc.ca/ppeurope/portugal.html>

Portuguese law now defines ICM participation and European directives and regulations are transposed into the national legislation. The Algarve's Regional Coordination Commission- CCDR Algarve³ feels like ICM participation is supported mostly by the EU but also thinks that regional government is taking the necessary measures. Alexandra Sena of CCDR Algarve marks the consultation level on the participation ladder for both the Algarve region and Portugal as a country. This means that at least citizens have the opportunity to be informed and that public opinions are collected, Arnstein (who developed a theory about participation levels) calls it "a legitimate step towards full participation".⁴

ICM and Public Participation

Continental Portugal⁵ is divided into five NUTS II regions (North, Centre, Lisbon e Vale do Tejo, Alentejo and Algarve). The isles of Azores and Madeira are autonomous regions and have their own governmental organs: a regional assembly and government.

CCDR Algarve is the regional organisms of the Ministry of Environment, Territory and Regional Development, responsible for the administrative and financial implementation of the regional developments policies regarding issues such as: environment, management of the territory, nature and biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of the natural resources, land management urban re-qualification, regional strategic planning and support to the local municipalities and its associations, pursuing an integrated development of the regions. Who the stakeholders are in a project of course depends on the project, programme or policy concerned.

CCDR Algarve names the following stakeholders in their region: For example, public regional organs like CCDR, universities, municipalities and research institutes. Private stakeholders could be: hotel partner associations, individuals, consultants and companies. The public is generally considered a stakeholder and often gets involved through EIAs, a procedure that ensures that all knows the environmental implications of a project or plan before the project initiates. CCDR Algarve claims that the "concerned public" is pretty aware and that this awareness is usually created through the media and by public presentations. Besides that, environmental information is only available to the public at the Environment Ministry, certain regional institutions and at Municipalities or Associations involved in the process. CCDR Algarve feels like the public could be better informed about ICM though information campaigns in schools, television programmes and a better connection between the scientific community and public institutions.

Good practices concerning participation in ICM in Portugal are for example: Program TERRA CZM; an international partnership that included also Municipalities, the First International Conference on Coastal Conservation and Management in the Atlantic and Mediterranean; Tavira, April 2005, the Coastal Zone management Plans, Algarve sustainable development of indicators system, and the Mixed Coordination Commission for Algarve's Regional plans 2006. Bad practice often has to do with "the pressure for urbanization" and ambiguities in legislation.⁶

Another regional commission, CCDR-Centro is the organization that is a partner in the Coastal Practice Network (CoPraNet), which is a project that aims to set up a network of coastal stakeholders for the exchange of information and to support the interregional exchange of information on sustainable tourism, coastal erosion and beach management and is necessary to balance the socio-economic situation in the different coastal communities.⁷ Such a network, just like the ENCORA project are important initiatives for (public) participation because these projects enhance the involvement of stakeholders and public by implementing ICM for all stakeholders and share expert practical information with everyone. This results in educated stakeholders and high awareness that is an excellent prerequisite for public participation in the coastal region.

² Ibidem

³ Sena, Alexandra. ICM participation questionnaire CCDR Algarve Portugal. May 2006.

⁴ Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1969, (pp. 216-224).

⁵ Portugal information is discussed with Maria Ferreira, deputy head of the Policy and Projects Unit, EUCC

⁶ Sena, Alexandra. op. cit.

⁷ CoPraNet website: www.coastalpractice.net

Another project that strongly promotes public participation in the Portuguese coastal zone is the Programme of Integrated Management for the Ria de Aveiro, a European ICZM demonstration project (also TERRA CZM). The project area, which covers 600 km² and has a population of 400,000, is an important European nature conservation region. There is a strong need for an integrated approach to sustain the socio-economic development of the region and therefore a great emphasis is placed on the involvement of all (governmental) bodies: national, regional and local. Some of the goals of the project are: better availability of information for the users of the lagoon and improved cooperation and efficiency between the groups concerned.⁸

CCDR Algarve believes that there is a common future for the coastal zone in their region. Projects and partnerships carried out by the public sector like the ones stated above, are the main ways to support this common future.⁹ The case study shows that many good initiatives are taking place in Portugal and the legal framework is also readily available, especially because of the European Union. Since ICM is a relatively new strategy, there is still a long way to go and therefore it is no wonder that public participation is not at a very advanced level. One of the main improvements that should be made is in the availability of information to the public; this can happen more extensively and in several different ways. Once the public is readily informed they should move past the consultation stage and up the ladder of participation.

⁸ ICZM Demonstration Projects, last update September 2002. Retrieved May 11, 2006.
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/iczm/projects.htm>

⁹ Sena, A. op. cit.