

Participatory policy formation to address climate change

Eleftheria Vasileiadou, A Gandhi

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Institute for Environmental Studies, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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The aim of the paper is twofold: first, to identify how participatory processes of policy formation influence climate related policy in the European Union; second, to propose how participatory processes can help institutions address climate change.

Participatory methods for the inclusion of stakeholders in policy shaping have been increasing in the last decades, in the context of many social, economic and environmental issues.

Participation of stakeholders in policy shaping is a way to establish new networks among the players in a policy-making system, in order to enable and increase the flows of knowledge between these players, and to address environmental challenges, such as climate change, in innovative ways. Especially the participation of diverse stakeholders, representing different interests and perspectives is vital for the emergence of innovative solutions. For the European Union, participatory policy formulation is also a necessary requirement for regulatory impact assessment, which aims at good governance, addressing the reported democratic deficit in Brussels.

The study focuses on how influential are stakeholder consultations within the European Commission. More specifically it analyses the stakeholder consultations which inform climate change related policy in the European Union (EU). Starting thus from a descriptive analysis of how stakeholder consultations operate at the EU level, and how they address issues of climate change, the paper turns to prescriptive analysis and addresses the shortcomings and possible improvements of the role of such consultations. Thus, the questions that the paper addresses are:

How do participatory processes influence the formation of climate change related policy in the EU?

How can participatory policy formation help address climate change?

The analysis focuses on consultations within the DG Energy and DG Environment, whose explicit aim is to address issues related to climate change. The empirical work includes interviews, observation and document analysis, and is organized around five main topics: extent and degree of participation, role of scientific knowledge and scientists, integration of climate change, reflexivity, and impact on policies.

The preliminary results of the study indicate that there is ample room for improvement in the organization and role of these consultations.

1. Scientific knowledge played a minimal role in the design of the consultations, and the actual discussions themselves. Especially scientific knowledge on technical alternatives, economic feasibility, impacts on climate etc were absent from the discussions.
2. The participation in consultations was skewed, with very limited inclusion of actors from the civil society and NGOs. National governments and industry associations are the main stakeholders involved, and in most cases the only stakeholders involved. Figure 1. indicates the breakdown of the participants in different sectors, in the three stakeholder consultation forums of DG Energy (Berlin Forum, Amsterdam Forum, Florence Forum). These were the only stakeholder consultations that informed the Energy Policy for Europe (2007).
3. Separating topics according to the administrative and bureaucratic jurisdiction of each Directorate General in the European Commission inhibits the integration of interlinked issues in the consultation forums, ignoring thus the inherent complexity of climate change

- mitigation and adaptation aspects. This creates problems for mainstreaming climate change into sectoral policies.
4. These participatory processes play a minimal role in actual policy documents, such as the formulation of the Energy Communication 2007.

On a positive note, there are indications that stakeholder consultations are becoming increasingly with the establishment of new forums (such as the European Nuclear Energy Forum). Further, stakeholder consultations are treated as dynamic elements in the policy formation, and attempts are made for the stimulation of true dialogue within these Forums. A number of shortcomings are identified in how participatory processes took place, and suggestions are made on how they can help the European Commission as an institution address climate change. Specific types of participatory policy formation are suggested for the transformation of institutions, so that they can address climate change.