

Participatory Monitoring in Loosdrecht

In partnership with the OECD Studies on Water: Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance

An innovation provided by

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Organisation: Waterschap Amstel, Gooi en Vecht (Amstel, Gooi en Vecht Water board)

Country: Netherlands

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type:

Launched in: 2011

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

A participatory monitoring network was set up by the regional water authority with the support of Deltares, a Dutch independent institute for applied research in the field of water, to encourage stakeholders to contribute by allowing additional measuring devices to be set up on their properties and permitting the manual measurement of surface water level and groundwater level with the aim of restoring trust and confidence of the citizens.

The network contributed to a strong improvement of communication between stakeholders such as farmers, recreational entrepreneurs and other citizens on the one hand, and the regional water authorities on the other hand, and a shared understanding among all regarding the management of the water system. There has also been less resistance among stakeholders against flexible water levels.

Why the innovation was developed

- In 2008, the Dutch water authority of Amstel, Gooi en Vecht, an important recreational region in the centre of the Netherlands, faced a trust crisis with local citizens following the introduction of new water level regulation (i.e. flexible surface water level management instead of a fixed water level).
 - This resulted in distorted communication and several lawsuits between the regional water authority and inhabitants who were worried about navigability capacity and the risk of flooding.
 - In the recreational area of Loosdrecht, the water board decided to apply flexible water level management: the water level determined by rainfall and evapotranspiration between predefined limits. The water manager wanted data on the actual consequences of the new water regime. The new water regime caused citizens to worry about the wooden foundations of their houses and for possible limitations to water recreation.
 - Coupled with their dissatisfaction with the decision-making process and communication, the new water regime led to lawsuits against the water manager by private citizens, interest groups and the municipality.
 - After the decision of the judge (in favour of the water manager), we felt the best way to get mutually trusted data and at the same time restore the communication between the citizens and the water manager, was for them to measure the actual water levels together and talk about these measurements, hence, the program to monitor the water levels together was created.
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- Governments
 - Water institutions
 - Civil society
 - Science, academia and research centres
 - Agricultural sector
 - Business

Results

Efficiency

- Broader economic development (e.g. coherence with other sectors, co-operation across projects): Several sectors were involved in the process: agricultural, small-business, governmental etc. Greater coherence between sectors could lead to better economic development, such as better land use.
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Effectiveness

- Sustainability/resilience: due to the collaborative nature of the process, one outcome has been the obtaining of transparency in data and measurements. Long term transparency between stakeholders promotes sustainability in solutions as trust and voice are important assets for both parties in holding each other accountable (e.g. : measurements of participants can be evidence for objections to future decisions on the water level).
 - Capacity-development: Increased insight on hydrological and geotechnical processes and changes.
 - The participatory network yielded useful additional data to the results of the already existing monitoring network, citizens measured actively and correctly, and citizens and water managers discussed jointly observed phenomena, like the effects of rain and wind.
 - The water manager was then able to listen and communicate more. Citizens showed better understanding of the advantages of flexible water level regime: less inflow of poor quality water and less pumping out of water. The citizens eventually came to express more trust in the water manager.
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Service quality

Responsiveness:

- Acceptability/ownership of stakeholders involved: Significant expansion of the initial monitoring network. By including the local inhabitants in the design of the monitoring of the water levels as well as participating in measuring these levels themselves, data and model results were jointly (by stakeholders, waterboard staff and researchers) compared and discussed in four meetings in two years.
- Strong improvement of communication between stakeholders and water board. The participating citizens and waterboard staff were interviewed right after the first year in which the monitoring was intensive and half-way the second year in which the monitoring and especially the discussion was much less intensive.
- Increased trust between the water board and the participants. The monitoring by citizens contributed to more understanding of the natural system by the citizens as well as the water managers and the researchers and also contributed to growth in mutual trust. Less resistance by the stakeholders against flexible water levels

Development

Design

Guided by Deltares, the water board of 'Waterschap Amstel, Gooi en Vecht' set up an innovative participatory monitoring network (2011-2012) in which stakeholders were invited to participate by allowing additional monitoring devices on their property and by manually measuring the surface water level and groundwater level themselves.

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- During a "kitchen table" meeting we consulted the citizens about their worries, what should be monitored and how, and whether they were willing to participate in the monitoring. Together with the participating citizens, we determined the best location for the measurement instruments.
 - After a contractor had installed the instruments, we had an instruction meeting with the participants on how to do the actual measuring and when and how to send in the data. Twice during the one-year period of measurements, we had a meetings with participating citizens and the water manager to discuss the measurements
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Challenges and solutions

- During the second year of the program in 2012, the discussions were less intensive, one of the factors appears to be flaws in the practical implementation of data gathering (e.g. sms rates not repaid).
- During the second year of the program in 2012, the discussions were less intensive, this seems to be the result of the water manager taking the lead of participatory program (before Deltares did this).
- The interest for the program decreased (only 35 % of measurements continued), and trust in the water manager significantly reduced after the first year due to lack of communication between water manager and participants, that their data is not needed or used, and more weather extremes affecting predefined water limits.
- To overcome the aforementioned challenges, a follow up was necessary. This yielded more understanding of the natural system and also growth in mutual trust.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Evaluation of participatory programs and projects is necessary to assess whether these objectives are being achieved and to identify how participatory programs and projects can be improved.
 - Intermediary outcome evaluation has been given less attention than other forms of evaluation but can identify some real achievements and side benefits that emerge through participation, such as interaction, network development and trust. The specific type of participation showed here is participative monitoring: the repetitive conductance of measurements by citizens.
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Conditions for success

- Participatory monitoring works in two directions: both participants and authorities make an effort and profit from the measurements.
 - Monitored parameters are relevant and attainable for participants.
 - Local knowledge of the system is taken up in design and analyses.
 - Design of the monitoring network suits participants' needs and possibilities, and is consistent with the monitoring goals.
 - Participants perceive that their observations are helpful for responsible authorities.
 - Complementary data are distributed to participants increase their understanding of the (water) system.
 - Easy access to authorities is enabled for clarification of observations and assistance in case of hindrances.
 - Sufficient reliability of measurements made by participants is ensured.
 - Monitoring equipment is robust and novel techniques are applied.
 - Data storage, transfer, and presentation are facilitated with novel techniques. Participatory monitoring requires dedicated, long term continuation and maintenance of the above points.
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Other information

Each project on participatory monitoring has its own unique set of context specific factors which influences the outcome of the process. However, Deltares has a methodology and identified several key ingredients for successful Participatory Monitoring processes.

Deltares has become an expert on participatory monitoring and its' best practices, including both the governance and technical aspects.

It is of great importance that these aspects of participatory monitoring are well-thought through in advance. Otherwise, monitoring results may not be suitable for the research or effect study, and the involvement of stakeholders will be limited and unsatisfactory.