

Enabling or Extractive? Collaborative evaluation of partnership working in Scotland

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Introduction

Central to this paper is the recognition of the complex and dynamic relationship between context, processes and outcomes within any project, process or policy. This is the principle, and consequently, the challenge that underpins the type of evaluation that I am promoting within this paper. This principle builds on calls (unpacked below) for holistic, qualitatively based, longitudinal evaluations that recognise any project or policy intervention is just one particular point in an ongoing set of governance relationships. This approach highlights the need to simultaneously consider the research context, the process and the outcomes and their complex inter-linkages. The paper outlines the methodological challenges in trying to respond to this call as well as providing some tentative results from the research. This paper itself is an example of the difficulty in giving context, process and outcome sufficient depth of analysis whilst providing a succinct overview of their connections in a way that illustrates why such integration is required.

A note on terminology: I am using the phrase ‘collaborative evaluation’ to highlight my standpoint on the evaluation process. The evaluation is not something undertaken in a detached manner whereby the results are handed to the client at the end of the analysis. However, the evaluation is not truly participatory, as the process is driven by specific research questions rather than by the needs of the participants. Rather I try to develop the evaluative research in an interactive, iterative manner that allows me to play the role of a ‘critical friend’ to the stakeholders with whom I am working – challenging them with alternative analyses of their practices and encouraging them to question their “taken for granted” assumptions about the ‘best’ way to proceed. This could be characterized as Ison *et al.*’s R2 position where the researcher facilitates learning rather than the R3 position of co-construction of knowledge in action, that a participatory action research project would aspire to.

Drivers for collaborative evaluation

The paper reports on two projects that use qualitative, formative evaluation methods applied over several months and building on existing research relationships built up during prior projects. The methodology is influenced by the shift away from traditional evaluation approaches (that take quantitative approaches and seek to prove cause and effect relationships by linking inputs to outputs and outcomes (see for example Weimer and Vining, 1992)), instead adopting new qualitative approaches to evaluation (see Patton, 1997). These approaches to evaluation highlight the importance of understanding

and analysing the perceptions and values of all those involved in the project being evaluated. They also recognise that evaluation itself is a value laden act that stimulates change and therefore has important ethical implications regarding who evaluates who and how this is done. These debates are further developed in the participatory evaluation literature that highlights the importance of negotiation and learning within the evaluation process, as well as making power relationships between client, participants and evaluators explicit.

I believe that evaluation can be profoundly sociological but rarely see the term used in sociological papers. The purpose of evaluation is to explore why certain outcomes were achieved, or not, in order to build a better understanding of the processes and systems. In practice many evaluations skirt the difficult issues of equity and legitimacy in favor of a focus on efficiency and effectiveness (High and Nemes, 2007). However, the philosophy of reflective analysis sits nicely with the sociological imagination whereby private troubles are made public and analysis is framed by the question – why is this so and how could it be otherwise (Wright Mills, 1959)? Therefore, it is perhaps suitable to take a sociological perspective on the act and outcomes of evaluatory research.

However, in my view, ‘evaluation’ is an application not a theoretical approach and requires an underpinning foundation that frames the purpose and focus of the evaluation. One set of influences can be found in the diverse and copious literature on participation and stakeholder involvement in policy and plan development. Another set of influences is found in the literatures on multi-level governance. These two literatures could be seen as merging in the developing body of work on deliberative democracy and deliberative policy analysis. Finally, the conceptual framework provided by the Institutional Development and Analysis approach (Ostrom, 1990) helps find these ideas together. This paper can only offer a thumbnail sketch of each of these approaches, each highly contested and always evolving. Other literatures, particularly those described as ‘soft systems’ or social learning, building on science and society literature (see Ison *et al.*, 2007 for a review) are also pertinent but are not utilized in this paper.

The focus on deliberative and inclusive processes is influenced by legislative and political drivers in the global arena, including the *Aarhus Convention* (1998) that makes public participation in environmental decision-making a statutory right. The literature on participation provides a number of theoretical explanations for the increased academic, policy and popular interest in consultative, deliberative and participatory processes. I find these helpfully synthesized in the work of (Fiorino 1990) who notes that involving the public and other kinds of stakeholders is often to achieve substantive, instrumental, and normative¹ outcomes. Much of the literature focuses on how to develop successful participation processes, rather than evaluating how the process of participation may be contributing to the desired outcomes (see Blackstock *et al.*, 2007 for details).

It is increasingly argued that western democracies are now characterised by multi-level governance. The term governance refers to the processes by which multiple

¹ These refer to (1) framing the problem; (2) getting agreement on the problem and metrics for its solution and (3) developing capacity for the first two goals in the future.

governmental, quasi-governmental, private and not-for-profit stakeholders interact to develop, agree and implement legislation, regulations and policies that (attempt to) govern spatial process and practices (Bache & Flinders, 2004). The phrase multi-level refers to the fact that these interactions can occur simultaneously at different resolutions – locally, regionally, nationally, within supra-national blocs and globally. Debates about the importance of the nation-state within governance given the influence of globalisation (see Rhodes 1996 and Jessop, 2006 for example) have stimulated an interest in how these multi-level processes and their impacts on society at these different levels. In particular, it has been argued that whilst MLG increases the ability for different interest groups to influence policy at multiple scales, it can result in decreased transparency in decision making, and therefore challenge the legitimacy and authority of policy makers (Rhodes 1996; Richards & Smith 2003).

The literature on deliberation arising from the theory of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984) has permeated the literature on policy analysis. Contributors such as Fischer (2003) and Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) illustrate how policy making, not just the policy itself, is increasingly recognised as an important aspect to scrutinize. They argue, building on other scholars of collaborative policy making, such as Innes and Booher (1997), that it is the wielding of discursive power as much as the structural inequalities that shape policy development processes. Thus, this literature highlights the need for discursive and deliberative processes to develop policy as well as critically examining how different outcomes are achieved through collaborative processes.

The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Ostrom 1990) highlights the importance of considering the ‘action arena’ (the context within which the institutional actors function including the biophysical and social characteristics); the ‘rules-in-use’ (the formal and informal policies, laws, codes and norms, which are constrained or enabled by actors’ individual competencies) and the ‘play-of-the-game’ (how actors behave). The different mechanisms that govern choices by actors are one aspect of the ‘rules-in-use’ and these are often distinguished into three categories: economic, legislative or voluntary. All three can be formal or informal; implemented or ignored; and can function at the operational, strategic or constitutional level (Cowie and Borrett, 2005).

Therefore these influences suggest the following issues underpin the process of reflecting on the policies and practices of interest. Firstly, who is involved in shaping and delivering policies and what is the motivation for their involvement? Secondly, what kind of stakeholder is involved, what is the relative power of the state versus non-state actors and at what level(s) do these actors pursue their goals? Thirdly, what are the discursive and deliberative processes and outcomes within the policy-making and implementing processes? And finally, how are the institutions developing and what is the balance of constituent parts?

Description of the processes being evaluated

Any evaluation needs to recognise the context of the project. The IAD framework helps by asking us to consider the arena being studied, the actors within it, the resources drawn upon, the rules of the game and then to observe how this game is played in practice. Therefore each process is described in terms of their policy objective, the structures put in place to deliver this, and the participants in the processes.

The first institution is the development of River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) in Scotland. RBMP is the vehicle for delivering the Water Framework Directive (WFD) as the plan will state the implementation mechanisms by which the objectives of the WFD can be achieved. The WFD establishes a new legal framework for the protection, improvement and sustainable use of surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater across Europe in order to: prevent deterioration and enhance status of aquatic ecosystems, including groundwater; promote sustainable water use; reduce pollution; and contribute to the mitigation of floods and droughts (Scottish Executive, 2001). The overall objective, to harmonise water policy across Europe, also frames the implementation of RBMP in a context of standardization between states. The directive and the transposing Scottish legislation also set out a rigid timetable and set of milestones requiring full compliance.

Although the science behind the environmental standards for achieving good status is still highly contested, many of these milestones have been focused on measuring, monitoring and understanding chemical, morphological and ecological parameters of water quality and quantity. The milestones regarding public participation and pursuit of sustainability are poorly integrated with the environmental aspects, and far more resource has been invested in environmental science than the social, economic and political implications of RBMP at a European, UK and Scottish level. As I have previously argued, the approach framing water resources very narrowly and the wider issues surrounding who uses water, in what ways and for what reasons are not being given sufficient attention (see Sherlock *et al.*, 2004).

Scotland has three river basins as show in Figure One – the Scotland basin, covering most of the nation-state; the Solway-Tweed basin, shared with England but delivered in partnership between Scottish and English authorities and finally, the Northumberland basin that just touches the Scottish Borders and is delivered solely by the English authority. The RBMPs have to be completed in a consultative draft form by December 22nd 2008 and final plans, having been approved by the Scottish Minister, deposited in Brussels by 22nd December 2009. The delivery mechanisms must be active by 2012, although in Scotland many of the regulatory instruments have already been implemented, and the objectives achieved by 2015².

The RBMPs are being developed by the competent authorities, in conjunction with responsible authorities and other selected stakeholders. A hierarchical approach to

² The process by which objectives are set and measured, and how derogations are given is complex and space does not allow me to explain the material in sufficient depth.

engagement has been established. In both the Solway-Tweed and the Scotland basin, advisory group have been set up at the sub-basin scale (two and eight accordingly) and each advisory group has an associated forum, that provides for engagement with interested parties who do not have access to the invitation only advisory groups. The Scotland sub-basin advisory groups report to the National advisory group whose remit is to set a national framework for the geographically based sub basin groups and ensure their regional perspectives are reflected in the final plan. (The integration mechanism for the Solway-Tweed sub-basins is unclear). These arrangements have been codified in guidance documents and follow the instructions set out in the Water Environment and Water Services Act, 2003.

The second institution is the development and implementation of the strategic plan for one of Scotland's two national parks. The Cairngorms were made a National Park in September 2003 because it was considered a unique and special place that requires careful management. The National Park (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out four key aims for the park: to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area; to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area; to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities. The conceptualization of a National Park is not to fence off and preserve a natural wilderness but to conserve a landscape shaped by human use and habitation and to provide an example of how such human-environment interaction can maintain and protect fragile and precious natural and cultural heritage. These objectives build on trends in thinking about sustainable development and spatial planning found throughout Europe.

The National Park legislation also states that the aims of the Park should be achieved in a collective and coordinated manner, overseen by a central body, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) (Cairngorms National Park Authority 2006). One of their statutory duties was to produce a National Park Plan. The first Cairngorms National Park Plan (hereafter the Plan) has been approved by the Minister and is currently being implemented. It was developed between 2003 and 2006 using an iterative process of consultations and drafting text, and the overall set of strategies and papers include a State of the Park report; the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the digest of consultation responses. The Plan consists of a vision for the Park in the future, a set of strategic objectives, a set of guiding principles and seven 'priorities for action' to be addressed in the next five years. Each priority for action has a set of actions to be undertaken and organizations to address these actions have been identified. Delivery groups for each priority have just been set up and the implementation stage will be officially launched in September 2007.

Both processes are examples of evolving institutions in which recent legislation is being interpreted and enacted in order to manage and conserve the natural resources. Water resource management and managing the Cairngorms region have histories pre-dating the current institutional arrangements. Both plans will involve delivery sanction based, incentive based and voluntary or persuasion based delivery mechanisms. Some of the

agencies tasked with delivery have statutory duties, others do not. Some have regulatory powers, others do not. Neither of the lead authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) for RBMP, or the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) directly own or control the land and water resources that they seek to conserve. Therefore the delivery of the institutions' objectives is via multiple individual resource owners and users with differing relationships to one another and to the authorities. RBMP is an example of European legislation applied throughout Scotland. The Cairngorms National Park is governed by Scottish legislation (although many European directives, including the WFD are being implemented within it) and is a regional level case study. Both legislative frameworks require plans to be developed and objectives to be achieved, and require public participation in these processes. Both processes are an example of how States or supra-States are attempting to order, shape and control complex interactions in space.

Methodology

As argued above, this research takes the view that evaluation is an active process of exchange and social learning. Both processes are dynamic, requiring a longitudinal approach that tries to capture change through time as well as, in the case of RBMP, differences in space. The approach is guided by the principles of critical reflection in order to encourage innovation and problem resolution. These principles suggest a strongly normative commitment to 'improving' things (Ife, 1996) which at times sits uncomfortably with the insights developed through a critical post-modernist lens which denies the existence of a 'grand narrative' and the modernist logic of visions and objectives.

The data is taken from both primary and secondary sources and has quantitative and qualitative elements. The analysis is strongly qualitative in that the emphasis is on trying to understand the emic reality of the participants in the process and recognize how and why the institutions are evolving as they are, and what might be the implications of this evolution. Such understandings are not amenable to statistical tests of cause and effect, but are more convincingly demonstrated through, borrowing the metaphor used by (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), weaving the intricate pieces of data derived insight into a rich tapestry, where the individual threads say little but the overall composition tells a powerful story.

The methodological design combines participant observation of meetings; content and discourse analysis of meeting minutes, papers, strategies and drafts of the final documents; and contact with individual participants to get their individual views. Participant observation is used to try to understand not only what was said by who, but how it was said, the non-verbal communication and the informal networking during the breaks, in order to make sense of how certain outcomes are achieved. Obviously, the interactions observed are only a tiny fraction of the interactions that shape the process and any interpretation of the data must bear this in mind. The published data provides an official and sanctioned record of what was agreed in meetings, and a record of the evolution in thinking as plans develop. The contact with participants is essential to help

interpret the interactions observed at the meetings as well as getting their individual perspectives on the process, their personal values and motivations for involvement in the process.

With regards to the RBMP process, resource constraints mean I am following four area advisory groups and their forums in the Scotland and Solway-Tweed basins and the National Advisory Group. Two are in the East of Scotland and two are in the West, two are predominantly rural areas and two have a combination of rural hinterland and urbanized estuary and coastline. All have mixed land uses and multiple pressures on the water resource. To date, I have attended 13 advisory group meetings and 3 forum meetings³ since permission to conduct the research was obtained in summer 2006 – this meant I missed the first round of meetings in June 2006. I have the majority of papers, presentations and minutes from all the AAG and NAG meetings and have copies of all draft and finalized guidance and discussion documents.

The responsible authority was unwilling for me to carry out interviews with members of the AAG and NAG due to concerns about demands on the time of stakeholders already complaining about consultation fatigue. The compromise was to allow me to administer a short questionnaire with closed and open questions twice during the plan development process. To date, 54 participants have returned questionnaires resulting in a 33% response rate. Data collection will continue with attendance at meetings and the collection of the supporting documentation until the final plan is produced in 2009, with the final questionnaire due to be implemented in early 2009. The research questions for the RBMP project concern who is involved in RBMP; what influence do they have on the process and outcome and does a collaborative approach create a more ‘successful’ plan than the old ‘command and control’ approach?

With regards to the Cairngorms process, participant observation has been more difficult to bound as the process has been more diffuse. I have attended 5 consultation meetings during the formal consultation process, 5 CNPA board meetings (open and closed) at which the Plan was discussed and amended, and 5 internal CNPA meetings and workshops at which the evolution of the Plan and its implementation have been discussed. These data were collected from April 2006 to April 2007. I have the majority of papers, minutes and presentations from board and forum meetings, although a number of more informal meetings and internal meetings are not minuted and therefore do not have any associated papers. I have copies of the various drafts the reports and plans.

I interviewed a set of stakeholders (three from the CNPA, three from responsible authorities with a statutory duty under the Act; and three stakeholders from the voluntary/private sector) in summer 2006 and have followed these up with a brief email questionnaire in April 2007. I also conducted a further six interviews with statutory and non-statutory consultees in April 2007 to increase my understanding of how different stakeholders viewed the plan and its development. In all cases, the sample was selected by me, but based on advice and at times contacts provided by the CNPA planning officer.

³ Due to clashes with other commitments, data for two of the forum events were gathered by colleagues from the Macaulay Institute.

The only non-response to date was to the email questionnaire as the individual had moved away. The research questions for the CNP Plan are: who has been involved in developing the plan and what influence have they had; what conflicts exist that have to be reconciled within the plan and how are these conflicts handled through a deliberative process?

In both cases, informal feedback has been given on a regular basis to the officers directly involved in running the plan development process. More formal feedback has been given to the Cairngorms participants in the form of a report on findings to date in August 2006 and I am scheduled to present an updated report at the CNPA open board meeting in October 2007. A presentation on findings to date was given to the River Basin coordinators in April 2006 and I am currently discussing when and how to provide feedback to the AAG/NAG participants. I feel it is important to do so soon to allow the participants to reflect on my views whilst they still have time to act on them if they so wish.

The data collection process highlights the pragmatic compromises made in the pursuit of real world research that is using real time sensitive policy processes. Both agencies have their own internal and external pressures, resource constraints and organizational structures and cultures that frame the activities. Both have pressing timetables for implementation and must comply with arduous reporting and auditing requirements that constrain when and how activities can be delivered. Both processes are being managed by external agencies to which I have no formal connection and over whom I have no power. Under such circumstances, it is understandable why some employees might see my research as an additional complication or even a threat to the delivery of the plan.

Results

The methodology has yielded a very large and very rich data set and this section will only report on a few of the key themes emerging from the initial analysis. This is partly due to time constraints, but mainly because the paper is focusing on the overall rationale for doing evaluation and how it might provide alternative insights into processes ongoing and into their futures. Therefore, the section will provide a flavour of the results regarding who is participating; as well as the contestation over the content of the plans themselves. Please note these are my personal, and therefore partial, interpretations of the data and these views are not necessarily endorsed or shared by the participants in the processes.

My analysis regarding who is participating suggests there may be a typology of stakeholder types involved in both processes and that these types exist in unequal relationships to one another. The stakeholders involved in both processes can be labeled as individuals employed to facilitate the planning process; individuals representing responsible authorities (those with statutory duties to be involved in developing and delivering the plan); individuals representing other government or quasi government agencies; individuals representing membership organizations; individuals representing themselves and individuals representing the 'public'. No individual member of the public is invited to join the AAG or NAG and it is very rare to find a citizen at the forum

events in the CNP. Overlying these divisions are the differences between those who are attending as part of their paid employment or in their own time; those who represent 'public' interests and those representing 'private' interests. For example, some of the membership organizations represent the economic interests of aquaculture producers whilst others represent members of the National Trust (a conservation charity).

Making the representation typology more complex is the fact that many individuals are central actors in more than one interest group, for example one person representing the economic development sector in an AAG is also the ex-chairman of the local farmers union and a significant landowner in their own right. Interestingly, many of the same individuals represent their organizations in both the CNPP process and the RBMP process. Comments they make at meetings indicate that this pattern is repeated across the contest institutional landscape in rural Scotland, giving these individuals tremendous access (if not necessarily power) to governance processes.

The overlap of categories plays out so that, in my judgment, statutory and non-statutory public agencies, who must respond to the same policy environment promoting coordination, efficiency and integration, form the closest relationships to the responsible authority, consisting of delicate and fragile networks of obligation and mutual dependence. Interest groups representing private interests have a more distant, but none-the-less effective, relationship with the responsible authorities, as the interest groups are able to mobilize discourses around economic growth and sustainable development that appeal to the politicians and the public. This is particularly important in Scotland given the change in government towards a more overtly productivist regime.

Those representing 'public' interests e.g. community development or environmental conservation tend to be one or two voices amongst groups of twenty or more at meetings and, due to personality issues, tend to be quiet and only speak in small group exercises. Their influence has been slightly more overt in the CNPP process. This may be due to the fact that the RBMP has been defined in very narrow environmental terms and is implemented by an organization that is seen as representing environmental interests, suggesting that there is less need to lobby for conservation. However, this does not mean the wider environmental issues (e.g. systems thinking, trade-offs between air, water and soil pollution) are necessarily well covered, as evidenced by content analysis and the questions being raised at the NAG by the environmental umbrella NGO. By contrast, the CNPP as a wide ranging plan that explicitly raised the challenge of systems thinking and sustainable development. Respondents suggest that this was a deliberate strategy to show the move away from the previous governance arrangements for the Cairngorms that were associated with particular battles over nature conservation issues. This has created room for more overt representation of 'wilderness' and 'environmental' values within the debate over sustainable development of the Park.

In both processes *to date* the influence of the citizen has been much less visible. Firstly, the RBMP process is still in progress and the main formal consultation processes are yet to come. There have been various consultations on draft guidance documents e.g. the Plan of Action setting out the RBMP timetable and principles of public participation; and

various consultations on the standards and assessment of water quality. The consultation report on the Plan of Action is not yet available but discussions with the staff suggest there has been limited input from the individuals who are not connected with the AAGs or their forums. Likewise, the three forum events attended as part of the methodology suggest that most attendees were attending in their capacity as representatives of organizations with an interest in water management e.g. canoeing bodies or local authority rangers. Those there as individuals in the main tended to be land owners, particularly farmers, who are concerned about the regulatory measures that may be enacted to mitigate diffuse pollution. This citizen participation has been weighed against the fact that members of the AAG and NAG are invited to comment on the drafts before they are released for public consultation, then are asked to comment as part of the consultation process and debate the outcomes of the consultation in future meetings. Additionally, there is a separate process of consultation on regulatory measures that will form the heart of the RBMP delivery mechanisms, involving a separate forum of 'national stakeholders', many of whom are also on the AAG or NAG; and none of whom are directly answerable to 'citizens'.

Within the CNPP process, there has been an ongoing engagement with 'partners' throughout the plan development, both formally through forums and informally through direct meetings between the planners and the individual partner organizations. Again, although the forums do not block attendance by individuals, most attendees are representing some wider constituency, such as a housing association, a local community council or a group of tourism providers. The informal meetings have all been with organizations, and most are government organizations with the private and local community interest served by the local chamber of commerce and the local association of community councils. More recently, explicit links have been made to the community planning process that is explicitly set up to respond to the public's needs when delivering services. The consultation on the CNPP received over 150 responses, of which half were from individuals (although the data does not say who or where they came from). The key difference to RBMP is the role of elected members as there are several elected members⁴ of local government on the CNPA Board who represent their constituents. Many board members play active roles in the forums as well as within specific Board workshops and therefore shaped the content and structure of the plan, as well as having ongoing scrutiny of the development of the plan during formal board meetings. These meetings are open to the public but these did not result in representations by the public on the process or the content of the Park Plan. Another point to highlight is the ongoing work that CNPA staff are doing with 'hard to reach' groups within the park and from the cities surrounding the park, ensuring that the voices of young people, for example, are fed into the consultation processes.

Therefore, both processes, in my view, have an implicit hierarchy of partners that favour public agencies and organized private interests over the 'un-organised' voices of citizens and voluntary agencies. This interpretation has been raised with the planners, challenging the discourse of 'partners' – who do you define as a partner? Why? – and

⁴ Ten Board members are councillors from the four councils with territory in the Park and five are directly elected by residents in the Park itself.

pointing out the dissonance between putting most effort into engaging the ‘usual suspects’ (see Sherlock *et al.*, 2004) when the most intractable problems in both the CNP and for RBMP will require private landowners and individual consumers to change their practices. In their defense, planners raised the reasonable objection that they were acting with limited time and limited resources and trying to identify ‘representative’ members of the public was very difficult. They genuinely felt they were providing opportunities to engage and could not be held responsible if citizens did not choose to use these opportunities. However, I feel my role is to highlight the latent power issues surrounding the framing and operationalisation of the planning processes that serve to obscure the relevance of the issues to citizens and subtly define them as external to the process of governance.

The other set of findings to summarize is the way in which the plans frame and prioritize different issues. Again, it has to be remembered that I am comparing planning processes at different stages, with very different objectives and different histories. However, both share a common challenge in how to move from the multiple, often conflicting interests being promoted by participants in the process towards a plan that provides an integrated, coherent and consensual view of the way forward. In both cases, the planning process has struggled with how to find a way *into* the interconnected and interwoven issues to be resolved and then how to *reconnect* these strands in the final plan.

The CNPP has been criticized by stakeholders in the consultation responses, and by participants in my interviews, for the double failing of being too generic and not targeted enough to specifics whilst still delivering in ‘silos’ and not being joined up across the priorities for actions and strategic objectives. In response, the chair of the CNPA board argued that “if everyone is grumbling then we must have got it about right.” The challenge in combining integration with delivery of specific actions on the ground continues to underpin the development of implementation processes.

The RBMP process has been dominated to date by very technical presentations on the definition and characterization of water quality and the specific reporting steps required by the EU – the traditional approach that divorces the bio-physical aspects of water management from its social, economic, political and cultural context (Ison *et al.*, 2007). These presentations reflect an approach that divides the water environment into different types of water body and also the causes of pollution into different pressures. These pressures are individually assigned to a single major industry sector. Therefore, until the last set of meetings, the process has been one of dividing up the environment and the causes of the problems. Stakeholders at meetings have consistently highlighted the interplay of actions by water users, the connectivity of water resources and the interaction of different pressures (e.g. the relationship between water quality, water quantity and ecology) but the methodology adopted (empirically data driven, defined by reporting requirements) has been unable to deliver this joined up approach. There are signs that this is coming over the next few months.

Within the CNPP process there have been ongoing examples of conflicting issues. One example is the issue of upland land management and how to frame the arguments

regarding managing the impacts of wild and farmed herbivores. This was of sufficient importance to become a priority for action but debates over what was causing the problem, how to manage it and what to call the action plan itself came up at every public consultation event I attended and at every board meeting from May to November 2006. Put crudely, the decision became which group of stakeholders, deer managers or farmers were going to be most amenable to negotiation, and the strong relationships between the CNPA and the Deer Commission may help explain why they were able to find a suitable compromise within the ‘deer’ community. However, other issues, namely transport and climate change, were also consistently raised during the consultation events but did not become priorities for actions. This may be in part due to the fact that there are no organized lobby groups for these issues. It was argued that these were cross cutting themes not separate priorities. However, it is a demonstration of how initial decision (in this instance the choice of priorities for actions) shape ongoing processes and make it more difficult to refocus in the future even when raised as priorities for participants.

This path dependency can also be seen in the RBMP process. Again, there are many interesting examples of conflict that could be developed, but the example I will use concerns the process of ‘objective setting’ and the requirement to place the objective of achieving good ecological status within an understanding of sustainable development. The survey results show that the respondents feel the most important criteria for judging a ‘good’ plan is a plan that can be implemented, and their main motivation for taking part is to ensure their interests are recognized in the final plan. Given that during meetings, stakeholders have highlighted how, for example, the interests of a farmer or developer creating diffuse pollution is directly contrary to a fish farmer using the receiving waters, this is going to be a major challenge to deliver.

Therefore, stakeholders have consistently asked for information on how objective setting and definitions of cost-effectiveness will be defined and applied. This information has been provided to the NAG and one AAG, albeit six months later than planned, but has done little to answer their substantive questions. Meanwhile the development of the plan continues, focusing on individual water bodies and individual pressures and without an overarching framework to bring them together. As both the stakeholders and I have raised, this is likely to cause major problems for integration between regions and between pressures. I have argued that this is a fundamental issue to resolve as, drawing on both empirical evidence from elsewhere and theory, I have argued that it is the politics of allocation, rather than technical definitions of water quality, that are most likely to undermine the delivery of RBMP. Therefore these issues require urgent attention. However, these delays in providing a methodology are beyond the control of the planning officers who feel they have no choice but to continue on their current pathway given the deadline for the draft plan.

What does this mean for governance?

As has been discussed in the literatures on spatial planning (Healey, 2004) and community planning (Cowell and Abrams, 2004) both the case study processes are driven by the objectives of inclusion and integration and these objectives are in tension with one another. This goes to the heart of the debates within the participation literature, as the

greater the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, the greater the number of issues and interests to be integrated. If the goals are often the source of contention (cf Checkland, 1981), then agreeing goals will only become more difficult as the complexity of goals and of interests increases. But more importantly from a critical sociological perspective, the more complex the web of multi-level governance relationships, the more opaque the transactions become and the more difficult it becomes to track influence over outcomes. The irony of how a process designed to increase the legitimacy and transparency of decision making through involving the public and other stakeholders can actually make decisions less transparent and accessible is one that has increasingly vexed proponents of governance. One of the roles for a critical sociologist is to make private troubles public, and so I am trying to emphasize to the planners how they are facing a common governance problem that can not be resolved by more technical data or holding a few more public meetings.

It illustrates the importance of having clear, understandable and demonstrated principles for developing and delivering the plans so that it becomes easier to recognize how and why decisions are taken. The findings also illustrate how stakeholders tend to have most influence on the structure at beginning of a process, when these principles and frameworks are set out, but because this stage tends to be dominated by technical information on legislation and policy and rarely relates to the individual citizen, this tends to be when many stakeholders are least able to understand the need for their input.

A further complication regarding the trade off between inclusion and integration is the demand for plans to be developed 'efficiently'. The efficiency aspect is underpinned by the unequal power relationships between central government (or Europe) who define, audit and reward practices and those doing the implementation who often have responsibility without true power or resources. The human response to this drive for efficiency appears to be to develop tacit practices and defend them as 'common sense' and/or required procedures in the manner of invented traditions, inadvertently increasing the dissonance between the rhetoric of involvement and the delivery of the plan.

The focus on efficiency is often used to undermine effective deliberation as processes are constantly rushed due to lack of time, communications and relationships are not given sufficient attention and the process goals are sacrificed in the pursuit of an output. The theory suggests that such trade offs are inefficient in the long-term, as they give an illusion of progress without resolving the fundamental conflicts at the heart of the plan. However, the evidence from both case studies suggest that all partners are concerned about the demand that inclusive processes are making on their staff and are struggling to manage to attend quarterly meetings, let alone meet the workload required between meetings. It could be argued that they demonstrate how tokenistic participation increases distrust, but alternatively it could be argued that the conditions required for communicative rationality may not exist in the congested institutional landscape of rural Scotland.

Furthermore, perhaps related to the drive for efficiency and surveillance by national or supra-national governments, is the focus on implementation. In direct contrast to the

emphasis on process outcomes within the literature on participation and deliberative democracy, the stakeholders in the case studies were focused on developing specific, targeted plans with quantifiable indicators and operational budgets. Although interviewees in the CNPP case study and questionnaire respondents from the RBMP saw process issues as important, their responses emphasized that it was producing a product and getting things done that really mattered. This could be interpreted as a proactive desire to make a difference and to illustrate good practice by showing how deliberation can actually lead to tangible improvements. However, as it co-exists with a set of challenges that have yet to be resolved through deliberation, I suggest it is more suggestive of the culture of instrumentalism common to UK public policy by which being seen to do things, not just be a ‘talking shop’ to repeat the phrase used in many meetings, is a fundamental driver for public agencies (Richards & Smith, 2003).

In short, my findings to date suggest that whilst the CNPP process has been more inclusive than the RBMP process to date, both are struggling with the breadth of issues to integrate within one plan. The RBMP process appears to be using the efficiency issue as a reason to take a narrow perspective on the purpose and content of the plan and they are very focused on producing a final output, mostly due to the threat of infraction proceedings if they miss the deadline. The CNPP process has also struggled to balance efficiency with inclusion and integration when facing a self imposed deadline to submit the plan in December 2006. Whilst this process has produced a final plan, the implementation challenge still remains. In both cases, the fundamental dispersed network characteristics of governance will make successful implementation more difficult. Those who believe that regulation is the best means of achieving outcomes will favour the chances of RBMP, as the CNPP has less statutory levers and relies more on voluntary and partnership approaches. However, those with faith in negotiated solutions may feel that the CNPP approach may achieve more sustainable outcomes in the long term.

What does this mean for evaluation?

Maintaining the tradition of conference paper as therapy, this section briefly considers some of my learning points gleaned from my experiences to date. The two issues concerning me are the issue of with whom I am collaborating and whether I am making a difference?

Evaluating a complex multi-level governance process complicates the notion of defining participants. Effectively, any one who has or will contribute to the planning process or be affected by the planning process could be included in the sample. Fundamental to my standpoint is the importance of including multiple perspectives on the process and the methodology highlights how I have tried to achieve this. However, I have no insight into non-participants’ viewpoints, and I have only a very shallow understanding of most participants’ views beyond the key informants with whom I interact more regularly. Collaboration implies building a relationship and it is difficult to do this with the majority of the participants using only periodic attendance at quarterly meetings and the occasional questionnaire or interview. As stated in the methodology section, formative

evaluation requires some input of time and energy from participants. This has to be viewed in the context of the comments on efficiency and consultation fatigue discussed above. It has been difficult to persuade participants that investing time and energy in engaging with me over and above engaging with the planning processes themselves, although once contact was established this became easier. It will be interesting to see how these relationships evolve once all participants have had access to my initial findings and whether they believe the process has utility.

The process of negotiation and access to the implementing staff is framed by individual personalities but mainly by the different organizational cultures. The CNPA is a new, small and spatially focused organization that promotes a culture of inclusion, transparency and partnership working. To date, their staff have been supportive of the evaluation process as they see it as part of their professional development and this has been supported and reinforced by the management and the board. SEPA on the other hand is a well established, national, regulatory organization that has a culture of technical competence, independence and efficiency where staff are encouraged to be professional, courteous but value-free and impartial. Although their staff have been helpful, it is clear that my approach fits less comfortably with the ethos of the organization and my views are challenging to the processes that the staff are asked to deliver. Some who share my standpoint may see me an ally, others more as an additional complication, although all recognize how my research is a good way to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and continual improvement required of public agencies by the Scottish Government.

It is important to highlight that negotiating access to both case studies involved acknowledging the tension between my objectives and their needs. Unlike the ideal of participatory evaluation whereby all those involved in the evaluation process collectively define the objectives and the methodology; and carry out the analysis, this is an evaluation carried out by me in collaboration with the participants. I have to achieve academic objectives, to critically deconstruct social processes, and publish peer reviewed academic papers to satisfy my particular part of the State apparatus that funds me. The agencies are not the only ones under pressures, as I am also required to achieve efficiency in my use of resources, deliver outcomes for regular audits, whilst working with stakeholders in an inclusive manner using integrated methodologies and interdisciplinary topics. However, the agencies need to demonstrate to their particular part of the State apparatus funding them that they are delivering ‘best’ practice. Self-evidently, these requirements are contradictory and require a delicate balancing act.

I find it difficult to maintain the appropriate balance required by any ethnographer getting under the skin of a process but remaining objective enough to say what needs saying despite personal loyalties to those with whom you are working. However carefully phrased, it is difficult to share my analysis with individuals who I know have made considerable sacrifices to deliver the planning processes to date and who are understandably disappointed by perceived criticisms of their practices. I am hopeful that these difficulties are to some degree mediated by a long term engagement. This for two reasons, firstly that the participants recognize that to some extent I do understand the context and the reasons for decisions, behaviours and silences. Therefore, whilst they

may not like my analysis, they can see that is a valid interpretation of events rather than a misinformed external perspective with no sympathy for the actual situation. Secondly, I hope that in small ways I can support those at the coal face of these challenges and demonstrate in practice my commitment to assisting, not sabotaging, the process.

However, the main way to build a rapport and trust is to demonstrate who the transaction costs involved in such a collaborative evaluation are outweighed by the benefits, i.e. the evaluation makes a positive difference. This is where I am least comfortable with my achievements to date. I was able to establish a fairly close and regular relationship with the CNPP staff during 2006 and gave regular feedback on the various drafts of the plan from my own knowledge as well as channeling feedback from stakeholders in the form of anonymised analysis from the meetings and interviews. Although I am not claiming to have been the only influence, it is clear that the final plan did reflect changes on many of the issues I had been concerned about and had argued needed attention. However, this active relationship needs rebuilding after the lull during the change in government and due to staff changes. Many of the challenges with regard to implementation still exist. I am not sure that highlighting how these are common throughout the literature on implementation deficit is going to be very helpful!

For academic reasons, I have elected to do a comparative approach to RBMP and therefore have traded off depth for breadth within this case study. Therefore I have several different individuals to form relationships with, many of whom are a long way from my location and often traveling themselves as part of their job. I have provided feedback to these individuals and I have noticed some subtle changes in the processes which reflect the issues I have been raising but I could not claim that these were due to my intervention. Indeed it is sign of the lack of close communication that I have not yet managed to ask if some changes were in any way promoted by my presentation in April! I was told that my input is considered very useful and that it was used within a two day team building event by the planners but don't have more information than these generic statements

In both cases, I am yet to build a relationship with the policy makers who are possibly the most important influence on future delivery of these plans.

More importantly, I am not sure that I am getting beyond first loop learning, or what Abram & Cowell (2001) call mimetic learning, whereby my ideas resonate with the participants but do not actually change how they think or how things are done. I am struggling to translate my academic analysis into concrete and useful solutions for their work. Therefore, I feel that we are yet to see the transformation that such an approach to evaluation is supposed to facilitate. This lack of emergent properties from the process may suggest that I am not even truly achieving the R2 position, let alone R3. Without facilitating positive change,, it is difficult to see how to offer the reciprocity that such an intervention, with all its transactions costs, seems to demand. These issues are fundamental to overcome in order to truly contribute to the new paradigm of participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Therefore, my own lack of time, conflicting priorities and difficulties encountered in trying to ‘walk the talk’ to some extent mirror the irreconcilable demands of governance identified in the section above. I fear this might mean that far from demonstrating the value of collaborative evaluation, I could be in danger of damaging this kind of research by raising expectations and failing to deliver.

Conclusion

This paper has galloped through two complex case studies, each with a very rich set of data that deserve much more nuanced discussion than has been possible to do in this paper. The overall message from the paper is that both case studies are quite different but seem to have common challenges. The RBMP process has a clear top down policy driver, albeit a policy that has tensions within its own objectives, and is being implemented using a strict and time limited structure agreed at the UK level and providing very little room for adaptation at the local level. The CNPP process has a national policy driver but had more latitude in its interpretation. The RBMP is being delivered by a well defined coalition of interests led by a regulatory agency which depends on its legal authority for its legitimacy. The CNPP is being delivered by a much looser, place based, set of coalitions led by an agency with statutory duties but one that self-identifies as an enabling body. However, because they are adopting a more cooperative than hierarchal approach, they must find an alternative basis for their claim to legitimacy. Both struggle to reconcile inclusion, integration, efficiency and delivery. This paper suggests that they may demonstrate the result of irreconcilable demands: - achieving difficult outcomes through consensus in context of decreased funding and distrust in the government agencies. Therefore, these early indications could be interpreted as examples of degenerative, rather than regenerative, democracy (Schneider and Ingram, 1997). It is difficult to tell whether there is learning taking place through ‘failing forward’ en route to regenerative democracy or the risk of increasing stakeholder disillusionment with ‘participatory processes’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). This reinforces the need for longitudinal evaluation that attempts to recognize the interaction between context, process and outcome.

This conclusion also illustrates how the analysis must go beyond a simple critique of practice and personality to expose the structures within which individuals and groups are acting. In other words, my analysis suggests not only possible solutions for the planners, their organizations, and the direct stakeholders involved but also the need to engage and question the policy makers who set up these processes. It is important to ‘study up’ and critique those making the policy not just those doing the work. The latter are often relatively powerless and able to recognize the problems but unable to resolve them. The purpose of this engagement at these multiple levels is to go beyond standard academic critique but to embrace the participatory action learning paradigm and to offer my services as a critical friend to advise what can be done and who might be able to do this. By demonstrating how these are lived exemplars of the tensions and contradictions underpinning deliberative democracy in modern western societies, I hope to give comfort to those struggling with these demands as well as drawing in solutions used by others in similar circumstances. And finally, using my sociological imagination to understand these case studies is continually challenging and improving my practice as a sociologist.

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