A strong process for a weak policy? An analysis of stakeholder participation processes in French local climate plans

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Abstract

In the wake of the Aarhus Convention and the Agenda 21 principles, public participation is now widely considered by environmental policy makers as a must-do. However, its actual impacts on the environmental effectiveness of policies are still debated. This paper focuses on Local Climate Plans that were introduced a few years ago in France. It aims at answering the following questions: what kind of participatory practices take place in these planning processes? To what extent do they enhance the plan's effectiveness?

This paper relies on both quantitative data from a survey of policy officers in local authorities and qualitative data from nine case studies. To capture the way these processes contribute to strengthening the plans, the study investigates their impacts along three lines: the extent to which they managed, first, to build acceptance for change among stakeholders, second, to reveal technical and political alternatives, and, third, to establish a new local climate change policy. The results show that, overall, participation processes achieved some impacts that are not to be discarded, namely: raising awareness among stakeholders about climate change issues, establishing links between stakeholders to improve coherence in public policy (across scales and sectors) on climate change action, and starting to establish the perimeter of a local climate change policy community. However, participation processes, on the whole, did not seem able to achieve by themselves a change in stakeholders' behaviour or discourse, nor did they achieve to open up new, alternative policy options to tackle climate change and/or create a strong local climate change policy community able to establish a new norm for action.

The paper then discusses whether this lack of impact is due to the way these processes were designed – outlining factors that could strengthen them (topics and participants' selection, process design, etc.) – or to the nature of the policy itself.

Introduction: Bringing Climate Issues down to the Local Level – French Local Climate Plans

Local Climate Plans (*Plans Climat Energie Territoriaux*) were introduced in France in the 2000s as a policy to tackle climate change at the local level. The first wave of the Plans took place on a voluntary basis. It was then made compulsory for all local authorities over 50,000 inhabitants to design and implement such a Plan. The policy consists in an Action Plan that is formally adopted by the local elected representatives. It covers both climate change mitigation and adaptation, although the main focus of the majority of Plans is on retrofitting buildings and fuel efficiency in transport. The Plan can either cover the emissions the authority is accountable for (i.e. its own buildings and activities) or all the emissions coming from its territory. The elaboration of the Plan usually follows a set methodology, from a diagnosis of sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate-related vulnerabilities to the design of the Action Plan (ADEME, 2009).

Public and stakeholder participation is a key component of the design process of these Plans. This is not surprising as, even if climate change is a new topic for French local authorities, the way it is dealt with follows a more general evolution of local policies, namely the move from *government* towards *govern-*

ance, i.e. towards more collaborative policies based on participation and partnership (Pasquier Simoulin Weisben 2007). Moreover, under Non-Governmental Organisations pressure, and in the wake of the Aarhus Convention[1] and Rio Principles[2], public participation is now widely considered by environmental policy makers as a must-do.

A few authors have expressed doubts over the effectiveness of these Local Climate Change Plans. The main concern is that their ambitious goals (climate change mitigation and adaptation) are not clearly reflected in the type of actions presented in the Action Plans (Godinot 2011; Yalcin Lefèvre 2012), that are mainly small scale. Besides, the effectiveness of these Plans is also determined by both the stakeholders involved and the process used to design them (Goxe 2007). This leads to the following question: what does stakeholder and public participation (i.e. the process) do to the effectiveness of the Plans (i.e. the outcome)?

Objectives of this Paper

The objective of this paper is to analyse the participation processes implemented to design the French Local Climate Plans in order to understand what they do to the final policy. In other words: to what extent did the participation processes improve the Plans?

The focus of this paper is on the evaluation of specific participation processes. This paper does not aim at evaluating participation in general, as this is beyond the scope of our study. However, this paper can contribute to documenting the gap between expectations placed (and sometimes misplaced) in participation processes and the reality of the processes put in place.

Methodology

DEFINING PARTICIPATION

For the purpose of this study, participation has been defined in a very broad manner, as 'moments of exchange that are characterised by the pluralism of participants and that seek to find convergences between them' (Bouni et alii 2011: 8 – *our translation*). The definition thus encompasses both public and stakeholder participation.

METHODOLOGICAL STEPS

When trying to assess the environmental effectiveness of participation in climate policies, it is extremely difficult to directly translate participation outcomes into emission savings or reduced vulnerability. Impacts follow a more indirect line. Therefore, in order to answer our question, it was necessary to build a methodology able to capture these impacts.

The methodology adopted for this study can be described as follows:

- First, tracing potential impacts documented in the existing scientific literature and discussing them in exploratory case studies. The first phase of the study consisted of a review of the scientific literature on participatory processes in climate policies and environmental planning, as well as five exploratory case studies. Case study materials include documents produced by the local authorities, as well as semi-structured interviews with policy officers and one or two institutional stakeholders who followed the process closely (e.g. the local representative of the French Environment and Energy Management Agency). This material was then discussed with policy experts. This process resulted in designing a logical framework, to summarise the potential links between participatory processes and their impacts. It captures impacts that were expressed by policy officers, some of which are documented in the existing scientific literature, others that remain undocumented yet, or are still debated.
- Second, exploring the extent to which these potential causal relationships actually materialise. The second phase consisted of administrating a questionnaire to policy officers in charge of Local Climate Plans in local authorities, analysing its results and making four in-depth case studies.
  - The survey was made available online during a month. The questionnaire was made up of around 40 closed questions in four categories. First, respondents were asked to describe the context in which the design of the Plan took place (e.g. type of territory (urban, semi-rural, rural), sources of GHG emissions, previous environmental policies on their territory …). Second, they were asked some information about the Plan itself (e.g. when it was launched, if it was compulsory for the local authority to design such a Plan, how much time and money the authority invested in the design and implementation of the Plan …). Third, respondents were asked to describe the participation processes put in place to design the Plan (type of participatory tools used, length of the process, who was invited, who came …). Finally, they were asked their perception about both the effectiveness of the Plan itself, and that of the participation process. The questionnaire was filled in by 68 policy officers, out of a potential 450 local authorities that have to put in place Local Climate Plans. This amounts to a 15 % response rate, which is in keeping with rates for other questionnaires sent to these policy officers in the last years.
  - Four in-depth case studies were then carried out through semi-structured face-to-face or phone interviews (around ten per case study). Interviewees include policy officers in charge of the Plan, elected representatives and stakeholders having taken place in the participation process. These case studies were specifically selected from questionnaire respondents who had indicated that the participation processes led to high impact on one or several of the logical framework components, to investigate cases where impacts materialised. The

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, usually known as the Aarhus Convention. It was signed in 1998. Article 7 requires Parties to make 'appropriate practical and/or other provisions for the public to participate during the preparation of plans and programmes relating to the environment'.

2. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development that took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, Principle 10 reads 'environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens'.

questionnaire enabled us to gauge impacts that participation processes produced overall, regardless of participation tools used (public meetings, working groups, Internet consultation, etc.). Case studies enabled us to link more precisely impacts to features of the participation process and to trace impacts for the different types of stakeholders involved in the design of the policy.

Throughout the study, results from the questionnaire and the case studies were discussed with policy experts in charge of supervising Local Climate Plans at the ADEME.

LIMITS

The methodology described above has a few limits. First, it is clearly unable to capture long term impacts of participatory processes, albeit recent studies have shown that these can be clearly different from short term ones (Melé et alii 2012). However, the fact that these Plans are fairly recent did not allow for long term impacts to be captured.

Second, this methodology is mainly deductive as it defines potential impacts *ex ante* instead of trying to capture all potential impacts from case studies (Fourniau 2010). However, this was mitigated by exploratory case studies in the first phase, as well as policy experts consultation. Moreover, the potential impacts captured in the log frame are particularly strong hypotheses. It was therefore unlikely that our methodology led us to find the whole range of potential impacts we had defined in the log frame beforehand.

Finally, although a large diversity of policy officers responded to the questionnaire, they tend to belong more to structures that have put a Plan in place voluntarily, rather than after their implementation was made compulsory in 2010.

Literature Review

Literature in social sciences has widely explored the quality of participation processes, but much less their impacts (Rowe Frewer 2004, Larsena Gunnarsson-Östling 2009). When it comes to exploring impacts, the overwhelming majority of scientific literature relies on the hypothesis according to which there is a causal relationship between participation processes and environmental good, or, put another way, than environmental issues require participation to be solved (Van Den Hove 2000). For instance, Barbier and Larrue state that participation acts as a 'necessary corrective to the weight of administrative and economic logics […] that promotes the inclusion of social values supposedly more environmentally friendly and more geared towards to the long-term' (Barbier Larrue 2011: 68 – *our translation*).

However, some literature has emerged to question that relationship between participation processes and environmental good. It stresses that this relationship relies on the hypothesis according to which individuals are natural advocates of the environment and they will speak up for it when asked to take part in a decision-making process for a project that has potential negative impacts on the environment. This 'social demand' for more environmentally sound decisions is not however evident nor is documented in every participation process (La Branche 2009). It is therefore necessary to explore further the nature and extent of this relationship.

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

From existing literature and expert consultation, the three potential chains of impacts were defined as follows:

- Participation as a channel to build acceptance for change among stakeholders;
- Participation as a channel for the emergence of technical or political alternatives;
- Participation as a channel for the establishment of a local climate change policy.

These three chains of impacts are detailed in the logical framework in Figure 1, and in further details thereafter.

PARTICIPATION AS A CHANNEL TO BUILD ACCEPTANCE FOR CHANGE AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

The first potential chain of impacts outlined by the first phase of the study can be described as follows: participation can be a tool to build acceptance for change among stakeholders. In the realm of climate change policies, this means that participation can contribute to bring about the changes in behaviour and strategies that are necessary to emission savings.

This can work in two ways:

- First, after having taken part in a discussion about climate change policy, people become more likely to accept the negative externalities associated with this policy. For instance, this means accepting the visual impacts of a wind farm or accepting that they will have to pay money to retrofit their homes (examples include Oliver Renn's 'cooperative discourse' model, that is explicitly presented as a participatory method designed to smooth implantation processes for waste related units (Renn 2006)).
- Second, when participants become more aware of the issues at stake and are therefore more willing to act to tackle them (what we could call 'responsabilisation'). The core of the impact relies in the educational effect participation processes have on participants. The underlying logic behind this potential impact is that people will be more likely to accept a policy they understand and judge relevant and that they will be convinced that they need to change their behaviour when told that 'everyone has an important role to play in helping to protect the environment and improve measures to combat climate change' (Braun 2010: 781).

This expectation is for instance documented by Zetlaoui-Léger and alii. (in press), who show that over 70 % of the project managers of French eco-friendly neighbourhoods tend to perceive public participation processes as a one-way process, in which information is given to people about the environmental character of the projected development. For instance, actors in charge of social housing in French eco-friendly neighbourhoods tend to consider that providing information to people about how to use the eco-friendly features of their homes will be enough to make them use them well (Renauld 2012). However, raising awareness does not amount to changing behaviours or strategies. For instance, the information given to new comers in eco-neighbourhoods does not often translate in the adoption of a new behaviour, which ends up with buildings consuming more energy than was predicted (Renauld 2012). More criti-

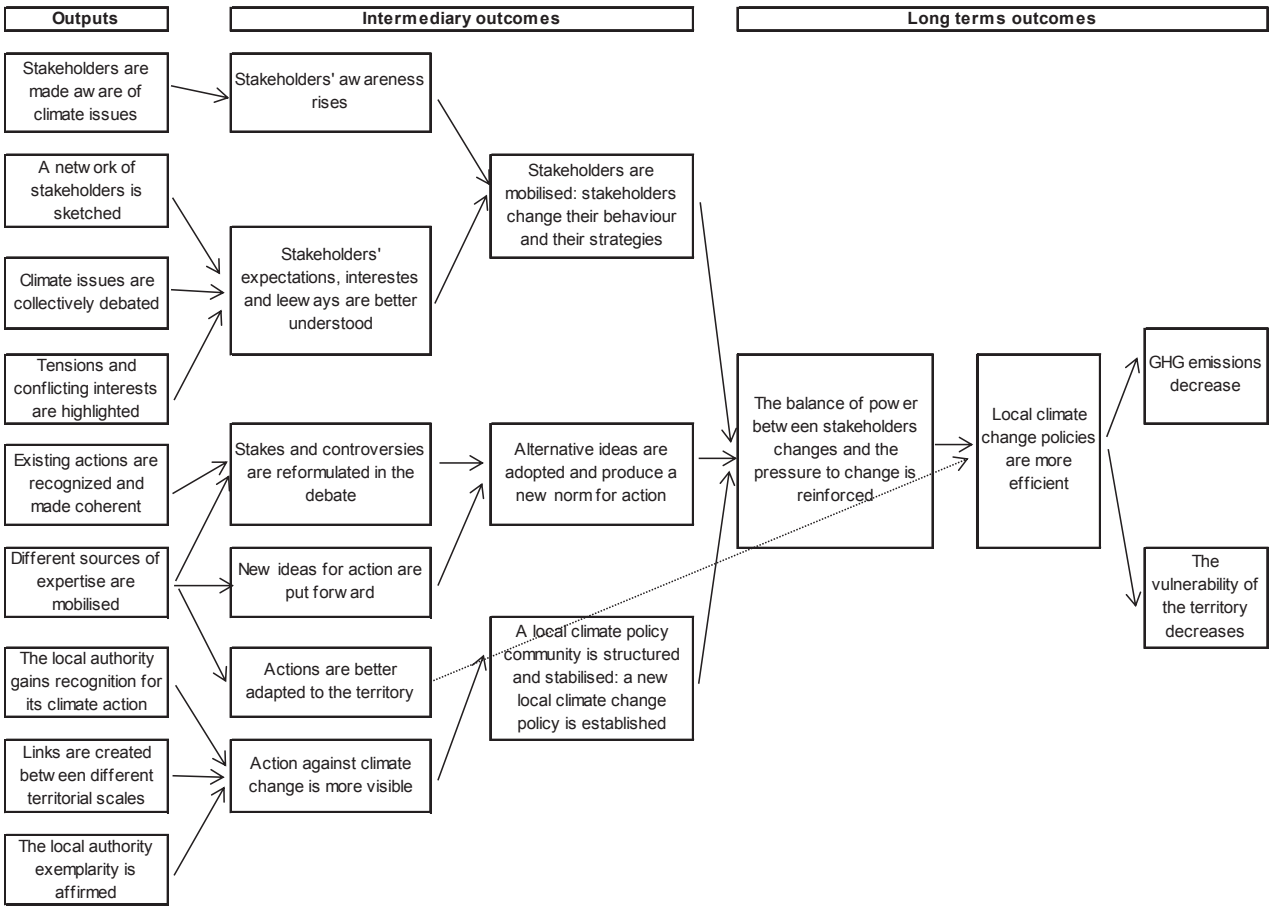

Figure 1. Public Participation Log Frame. Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

cal approaches have also stressed that conceiving participation as a mere educational exercise was a manner of depoliticizing the choices that need to be made (Sbaï et alii *in press*), and of shifting responsibility for change onto individuals (Rumpala 2008). Such analysis fits into a wider trend in public policy: that of governing through the 'responsabilisation' of individuals (Hache 2007, Martin 2010, Shove 2010).

PARTICIPATION AS A CHANNEL FOR THE EMERGENCE OF TECHNICAL OR POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES

The second chain of impacts that can be found in the literature revolves around the idea that participation processes can bring new ideas to projects and plans (Barthe 2002). These new ideas can be either technical or political.

On the technical side, participatory processes can generate innovation in socio-technical systems (Buclet and Salomon 2008) because they allow project managers to have access to lay knowledge or information they did not have (Nez 2009, Ryedale Flood Research Group 2008).

On the political side, participatory processes can lead participants to express alternatives to what is being discussed. We can define three types of alternatives, based on Peter Hall's three orders of change: first order change (changing the way existing policy tools are used), second order change (introducing new policy tools) and third order change (paradigm shift) (Hall 1993). Participatory processes tend to produce first order changes, but second and third order changes are more difficult to find in the literature. For instance, Cleaver (2001) shows that the participatory processes implemented by the World Bank in Africa in order to manage natural resources are strongly framed by technical and economic imperatives. They hardly ever allow people to discuss the underlying logics of economic development. However, it is difficult to generalise these findings, as other case studies show that third order changes can happen, especially in the medium to long term. For instance, Melé et alii (2012) showed that participation and conflicts around waste management units projects can gradually turn into a more general debate about waste prevention, provided project managers have the ability to learn from past conflicts.

PARTICIPATION AS A CHANNEL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

A third kind of approach investigates the extent to which participatory processes are able to create a policy community that is strong enough to establish a public policy on the medium to long term. As a matter of fact, political sciences have stressed that public policies are not defined and put in place by public authorities on their own, but they are the result of the collective action of both public and private actors that gather around a problem to define it and propose solutions to solve it. The number of these actors has being growing over the last decades, as policy is more and more designed in partnership (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007).

It is not certain that participation processes manage to build enough momentum to make sure that decisions taken actually happen. In this context, literature has discussed the ability of participatory processes to structure and strengthen this policy community after the initial participatory moment is over. In other words, to transform a *community of debate* into a *community of management* (Allain 2010). This is all the more important as, as was stressed above, climate change is a new topic for local authorities to deal with. It is not guaranteed that the local managing communities that are emerging to tackle climate change will be able to build on the momentum given by the participation process (Le Bourhis 2011). Previous studies have established that climate policies in six European countries (United-Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Finland, Portugal and Poland) struggle to maintain that momentum (Huitema et. alii 2011).

More critical authors have also outlined that environmental policies should go beyond establishing a network of stakeholders through participation, and need a steering actor. Laurent Mermet outlines that 'even under a barrage of collaborative environmental management language and procedures, achieving a directional change towards more environmentally sustainable social-ecological systems cannot rely solely on better coordination between stakeholders. It fundamentally depends on deliberate, strategic action for change by a minority of awareness raisers, activists and innovators, who must often confront other stakeholders that defend (passively or actively) a non-sustainable status quo or environmentally detrimental projects' (Mermet 2011: 6). In this approach, the dangers lie in the inability of participation to question existing power relations (Cooke Kothari 2001) and to establish a policy community able to steer public policy in another direction.

Results of the questionnaire and case studies

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Our first result confirms that participation has become the norm for the elaboration of Local Climate Plans. More than 80 % of policy officers stated that they used participatory tools, and more than half stated that they themselves originated the process.

Two main categories of participatory tools were used: first, working groups (steering committees, thematic workshops, etc.), second, information tools (public meetings, information campaigns, etc.). These are quite classical tools and they contrast with the high profile 'good practices' that are usually put forward by policy officers in France (online tools, citizen panels, etc.).

The objectives of these processes are threefold. The first objective is to generate new ideas (the item was quoted by 93 % of respondents). The second is to act collectively and take decisions: 71 % of respondents agreed with this objective, while only 42 % agreed with 'collect opinions'. This clearly points to an idea of developing partnerships, and not only consultation (Arnstein 1969). The third objective is to inform on climate change (69 %). However, 75 % of respondents stated more than 3 objectives and analysis shows no correlation between the objectives stated and the participatory tools used.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES MANAGE TO BUILD ACCEPTANCE FOR CHANGE?

69 % of respondents stated that 'informing on climate change issues' was one of their objectives for the participation process. Results from the questionnaire and case studies show that the participatory processes put in place by French local authorities to design their Local Climate Plans did manage to raise stakeholders' awareness about climate change but did not manage to make them change their strategy. The results are less clear for the general public.

As far as more institutional stakeholders are concerned, participatory processes have usually managed to raise awareness about climate change. The level of awareness was of course already high for a small number of stakeholders (especially institutional stakeholders already working on the issue or urban planning agencies), and these can be considered as the core of the local climate change policy community. But participatory processes managed to bring all stakeholders to a similar level and provide them with a common basic culture on climate change. For instance, one case study documented this effect for actors belonging to the agriculture field, and another one documented it for actors from the social and medical field.

It was more difficult however for participatory processes to reveal potential conflicts between stakeholders. In particular,

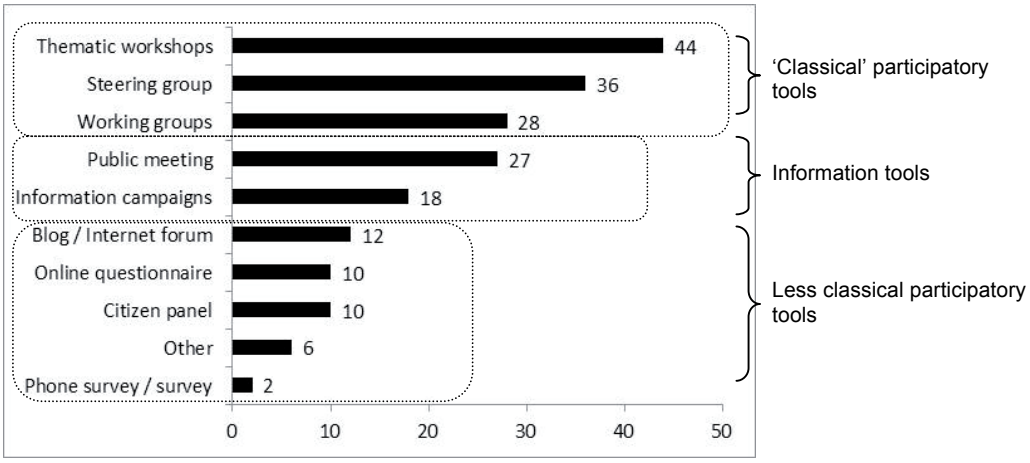

Figure 2. Participatory tools used for the design of the French Local Climate Plans (Base: 55 respondents). Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

Table 1. Participation Managed to …

Stakeholder group	Political stakeholders	Institutional stakeholders	Socio-economic stakeholders	Representation of special interests	Civil society
Original level of awareness about climate change issues	**Weak**	**Strong**	**Weak**	**Weak**	**Average**
… raise stakeholder's awareness about climate change	↗↗	↗	↗	↗	↗ / 0
… make stakeholders implement climate related actions	↗	↗/0	↗/0	↗/0	0
… change stakeholders discourse	0	0	0	0	0
… change stakeholders strategy	0	0	0	0	0

0	No effect	↗	Positive effect	↗↗	Strong positive effect

Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

Political stakeholders: elected representatives in charge of the Plan, other elected representatives.

Institutional stakeholders: local authority officers, state officers, energy information desk (Espace Info Energie), ADEME local representatives, local council for architecture and town planning, local energy saving agency, air quality monitoring agency, town planning agency.

Socio-economic stakeholders: shopkeepers, estate developers, urban planners, social landlords, craftsmen, architects, local press and medias, building managers, other local companies, construction companies, farmers, water treatment and waste management companies, transport companies, energy distributor, energy networks operators (energy, water, etc.).

Representation of special interests: labour union and employers' association, shopkeepers' union, trade unions, chambers of commerce, industry, agriculture.

Civil society: inhabitants, children and young people, citizens associations and district councils, environmental protection associations.

case studies outline that these processes have been explicitly framed to avoid foreseen conflicting issues, on the ground that they would bring discussions to a stall. For instance, issues like the refurbishment of houses (and therefore human settlements) in vulnerable forest areas or the implantation of photovoltaic farms on agricultural land were excluded from the debates. Therefore, it was more difficult for these processes to better understand and hierarchize what is acceptable by local stakeholders and what is not. Some local authorities, however, organised working groups in order to tackle a topic that they considered strategic and calling for a special focus. They subsequently achieved to identify obstacles related to reaching the objective. For instance, some working groups were set up to investigate the obstacles related to introducing more local food at school, or to making farmers produce energy on their farm.

For all stakeholder groups except one (the local elected representatives), the processes hardly managed to mobilise actors around the climate change issue, i.e. to have them put in place actions they would not have put in place otherwise. Local policy officers who answered the questionnaire stated that participation did not manage to change stakeholders' discourses or to lead to even more major changes in their strategy. The only category of stakeholders for which such an impact was documented is that of the local elected representatives. Case studies show that after local elected representatives took part in debates, or were invited to chair them, their discourse on climate change evolved. Listening to proposals coming from citizens gave the elected representatives a good insight into the kind of policy people may, or may not, be ready to accept. This had an impact on the level of involvement of the local authority on climate change. In some cases, actions that had been set aside in the past were finally approved by representatives and adopted as part of the Plan after the debates. For instance, in one of the case studies, a long time battle from one of the technical department to put environmental criteria in public tenders for buildings refurbishment was finally approved. In another case study, a local energy saving agency (*Espace Info Energie*) stated that it was easier for them to get elected representatives to agree to fund their work after they took part in the participation process.

As far as the general public is concerned, questionnaire results show that a little more than half of the local authorities put in place processes that were directly targeted at a wider audience, and that only 40 % of them said that the general public actually participated. Case studies' results show that a great variety of processes were put in place: public meetings, debates around a movie, conferences in local cafes, etc. How-

ever, these processes did not generally reach an important proportion of inhabitants. More importantly, they did not go further than giving information about climate change and the changes in behaviour that could lead to emission savings. Only one local authority (out of the nine case studies) framed the debate in order to explicitly obtain information about the obstacles that people perceived when trying to change their behaviour, and the way the local authority could ease these obstacles (this was achieved through a yearlong process that gathered a representative sample of the local population who tried to make changes in their everyday life and then exchanged about it. A White Paper was subsequently published). Overall, it is therefore impossible to gauge the extent to which participation led to behaviour change in the general public.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES MANAGE TO REVEAL TECHNICAL AND POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES?

93 % of respondents placed 'reveal new ideas' as the first objective for their participation process. Results from the questionnaire and the case studies show that participatory processes clearly managed to bring new information into the Plan, but hardly managed to bring about another way of seeing the climate change issue and therefore bring about a shift in the policy paradigm.

All respondents (bar one) stated that participation had contributed to bring new ideas to the Plan and that these new ideas were effective in terms of climate change mitigation and/or adaptation.

When looking more precisely at the type of information they refer to, results show that the main source of information are other institutional or political stakeholders. These brought information about already existing policies that had to be taken into account when designing the Plan, or existing climate related actions that could be integrated in the Action Plan. Another type of new ideas that participants brought to the processes were ideas on actions already put in place in other local authorities and that could be introduced in the area (collective composting, actions on fuel poverty, etc.). These are not new ideas *per se*, but they were new ideas for the territory, and participation processes helped them to circulate between territories.

In other words, the participatory processes could be considered as tools of policy transfer. Policy analysis has revealed for a long time that transfer could be central in policy design (Dolowitz March 2000). The way ideas, patterns and tools circulate from a territory (*model system*) to another (*client system*) is a real issue for the settlement of local planning (De Jong 2004). In our case studies, participation acts like a space that creates possibilities of policy transfer, even if this transfer of ideas never guarantees a transfer of institutions and policy. To this extent, participation can be seen as an efficient way to ensure coherence between public policies across territorial levels.

It is not clear however how local authorities chose to include or not these propositions in their final Action Plan. After the ideas were expressed and documented, the final stages of the Action Plan design were generally conducted within the local authority itself, with no feedback to participants as to whether, or how, their ideas had been taken on board. When the ideas put forward during the participation phase met those that policy officers wanted to implement, they were more likely to be included in the Plan.

Results also show that these participatory processes did not lead to third order change, i.e. a shift in paradigm in public policy. This can be due to the framing of these processes that was previously described (avoiding conflicts). This can also be due to the fact that these processes were clearly geared towards finding practical, easy-to-implement ideas, and not towards discussing more generic themes such as the relationship between, for instance, economic growth and carbon emissions.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES MANAGE TO ESTABLISH A NEW LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY?

Results from the questionnaire and case studies show that participatory processes clearly managed to improve mutual knowledge between stakeholders, and sometimes managed to create links between stakeholders that did not work together before. It is difficult to conclude regarding the establishment of a climate change community, as long terms impacts are not captured in this study.

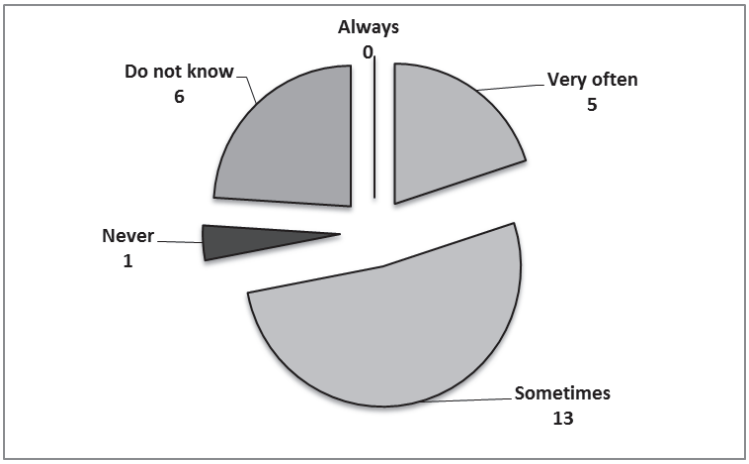

Figure 3. Would you say that the new ideas brought by the participants and that were included in the Local Climate Change Plans were effective in terms of climate change mitigation and/ or adaptation? (Base: 25 respondents.) Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

Table 2. Level of Information and Ideas Brought by Different Stakeholders Groups.

Stakeholder group	Political stakeholders	Institutional stakeholders	Socio-economic stakeholders	Representation of special interests (Unions, chamber of commerce …)	Civil society (including both associations and 'ordinary' citizens)
Brought information	**+++** Information on ongoing actions	**+++** Information on ongoing actions, and during the diagnosis	**+++** Information on ongoing actions	**++** Information on ongoing actions	**++** Information on ongoing actions
Brought new ideas	**++** Ideas for the action plan	**++** Ideas for the action plan	**+++** Ideas for the action plan	**+** Ideas for the action plan	**++** Ideas for the action plan
Their ideas were integrated	**++**	**++**	**++**	**++**	**++**

+++	All the time	**++**	Very often	**+**	Rather often
-	Rather rarely	**--**	Rarely	**---**	Never

Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

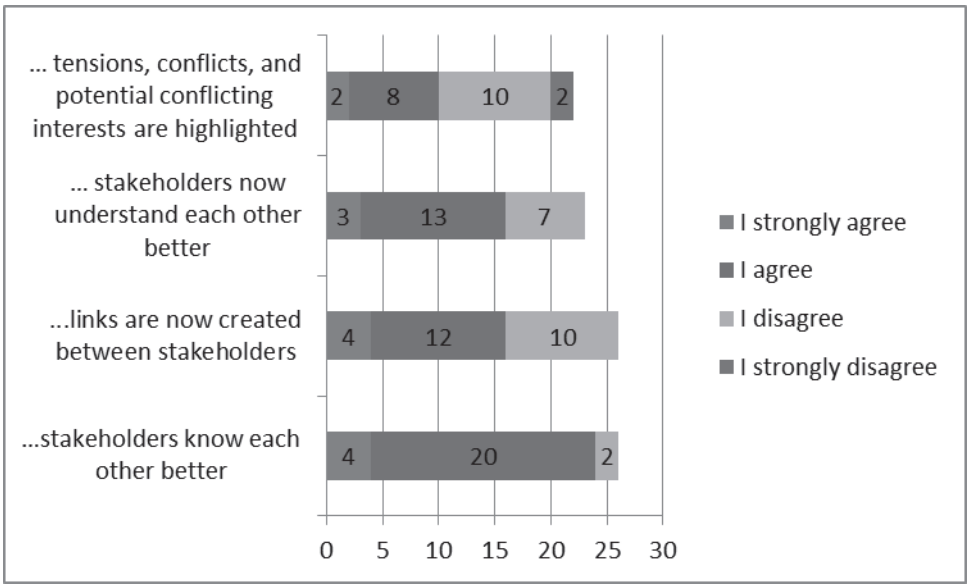

Figure 4. Would you say that, thanks to the participation process, … (Base: 26 respondents.) Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

All respondents (bar two) stated that participation has enabled stakeholders to better know each other. A majority of respondents also perceived that, thanks to the participation process, stakeholders now understood each other better, and that links are now created between stakeholders. However, respondents did not perceive that the process managed to highlight existing or potential tensions and conflicts between stakeholders.

Case studies show that actors who were not used to working together met each other during the participation process and started working together. For instance, in one of the case studies, the participation process enabled people working at a Community Health Centre to meet the local authority's energy specialist, and therefore to start working on a fuel poverty scheme. The participation process thus managed to enlarge the network of actors working on climate change at the local level. The types of organisations that took place in the participation processes are presented in Figure 5.

If participation processes managed to gather a local climate change community, they hardly managed to build momentum in policy, or, in other words, to transform the *community of debate* into a *community of management*. Respondents stated that the difficulty to mobilise stakeholders (across all groups) was the main obstacle they faced during their participation process. Case studies showed that after the Plan was adopted, it was difficult to keep stakeholders interested, even though Charters or Conventions were signed with them in an official way to make sure they stayed in the loop. Some local authorities shifted human resources as they moved on to different policy priorities

once the Plan was adopted. However, case studies also showed that participation processes contributed to improve the visibility of the Plan, and sometimes of the local authority itself. The extent to which this will contribute to establish local authorities as steering actors for local climate change policies will have to be looked into in the future.

Discussion

These results show that, overall, the participation processes studied here achieved some impacts that are not to be discarded. Namely: raising awareness among stakeholders about climate change issues, establishing links between stakeholders to improve coherence in public policy (across scales and sectors) on climate change action, and starting to establish the perimeter of a local climate change policy community. In a sense, these results show that participation processes achieved the first steps of the log frame outlined above.

However, participation processes captured by the questionnaire and the case studies, on the whole, did not seem able to achieve by themselves a change in stakeholder's behaviour or discourse, an opening up of new, alternative, policy options to tackle climate change and the creation of a strong local climate change policy community able to establish a new norm for action.

This brings the following question: is this result due to the potential of participation in general or to the way it was implemented in these specific processes?

The first part of the answer revolves around the discrepancy between the expectations placed in participation, compared to what it can achieve. Processes put in place with a view of achieving, through the participation process, the whole chain of impacts outlined above, failed to achieve these impacts. For instance, it should not be expected that the mere fact of providing information on climate change will trigger behaviour change. Shove (2010) has stressed that the policies that were developed in the last few years to engage people in behaviour change have consistently focused on the individuals, while being oblivious of all the other social factors that shape individual behaviours and upon which an individual *per se* cannot act. Our results point in the same direction, not so much for the general public, as they are relatively absent from participation processes in French Local Climate Plans, but for stakeholders in general. This line of thinking, however, remains a widely accepted view among local policy officers working on sustainable development. A first recommendation should be to clearly separate what belongs to awareness raising actions to what should be the core of the participation process to design the Plan. And a second recommendation should be to set achievable goals to these processes, and to design them around these goals, rather than mobilizing resources to try to achieve the unachievable.

Our second point is that, beyond the quality of the processes themselves, these results should be put in perspective with the context of the policy. Local Climate Change Plans have no stringency at the moment, and they are not considered

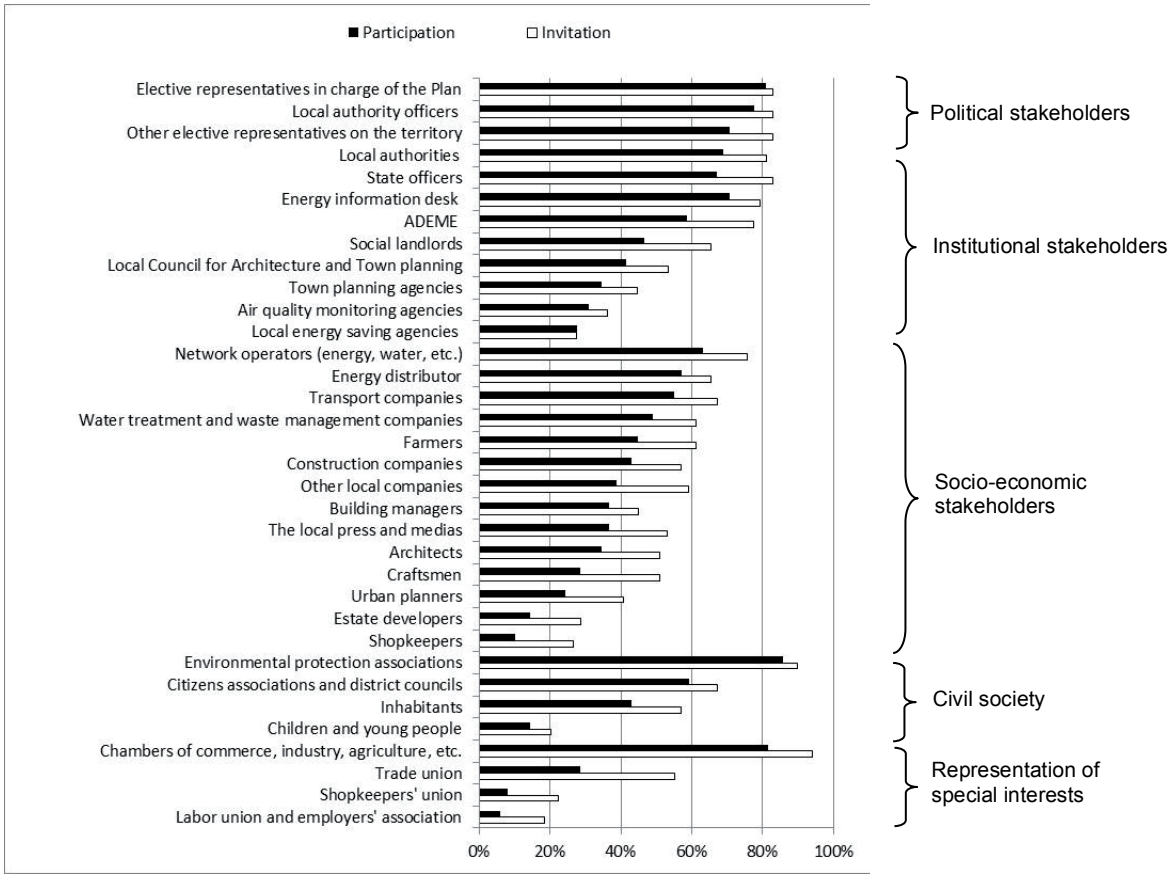

Figure 5. Overview of Participants. Source: Planète Publique, 2012.

by stakeholders as important policy documents that will bide them into acting against climate change. For that reason, participation here remains an exercise with no real stake. All participatory processes studied here, not matter the specifics of the participatory tool they used, seemed unable to make up for the lack of stringency of the policy they applied to. In this context, how should we use participation to improve the effectiveness of a non-stringent policy?

Our recommendation is that participatory processes should be tailored to the specifics of the policy they apply to. If the coordination role of these processes should still be enforced, one could imagine complementing the existing tools with a view to:

- Better document the extent to which stakeholders are willing to change their behaviour and their strategy, in order to identify areas in which the policy could be improved via a better coordination, and areas in which what is needed is negotiation, not coordination. This would amount to conceiving participation as part of a wider strategy to be put in place by the local authority (Bouni et alii 2011).
- Give more weight to actors who could steer the policy and redefine the norm of action, by developing specific tools to have them heard in the process.

These two propositions lead us to a wider analysis of the link between participation and policies. As we quoted earlier, Local French Climate Plans appear as 'weak policies': local actors do not consider them as a really meaningful and constraining guideline. In this case, participation could hardly be seen as a way to improve a policy that is not really taken into account by local stakeholders. However, the lack of impact of participation on policies does not only concern weak policies. The critical studies of participatory budgeting (Boulding and Wampler 2010) or of Environmental Assessments (Doelle and Sinclair 2006) show that participation is not a 'magic bullet'. Even when it is apparently a central element of the decision-making process within 'strong policies' (budgeting, land-planning), participatory processes need to clarify their stakes and their outcomes. In our case of weak policies, we propose to seriously consider this idea: to be efficient and have a real impact on the policy process, even well-established participation must permanently re-assert its goals and the constraints that it generates. Indeed, even if public participation creates opportunities for many actors, it seems important to assume that participatory settings remain a weak element of policy-process if they are not provided with legal and official powers. According to our analysis of Local French Climate Plans, we consider that juridical or financial constraints could reinforce participatory processes and consequently reinforce the whole process of environmental planning.

In other words, we argue that there are two main points of view about the current situation of participation within French Local Climate Plans. Firstly, one could consider that social learning, sustained by participation, will create a long-time process of policy reinforcement, which could reinforce progressively the centrality of participation for stakeholders (it becomes a central arena of high-stake debate). Secondly, one could argue that participatory processes must be 'reinforced' from now on, by awarding them financial resources (to rank priorities, to obtain public subsidies) or legal constraints (accountably of local decision-makers, local independent authorities of control and monitoring). The creation of stakes within participation could act on the whole policies: by attracting local stakeholders that find in participation a way of influencing local decision-making, participation could reinforce the collective expectations on French Local Climate Plans.

Yet, beyond this argument, our study reminds us that the effect of participation must be analysed according the specificity of the policy field is at stake. Without a deep understanding of the whole sub-system governance that leads this policy field (in our case, local climate policies), it seems impossible to analyse the concrete impact of participatory processes. Participation, even when the process is well-designed, never substitutes for politics. The impact and improvement of participatory processes must be defined according to the concrete struggles that characterize each policy field.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to analyse the extent to which participatory processes improved French Local Climate Plans. The results show that, overall, participation processes helped to establish a policy at the local level because they contributed to sketch what a local climate change community could look like, and started raising awareness in this community in meeting the challenges ahead. However, the participation processes hardly manage to create the momentum needed to go beyond practical, win-win solutions, and tackle the roots of the climate change problem.

More generally, our study enables us to conclude on the environmental effectiveness of stakeholders' participation in the context of a non-stringent policy. The positive impacts of participation documented here seem unable to make up for the lack of stringency of the policy. It is therefore necessary to complement them with other policy tools that are, on the whole, yet to be invented and tested in the French Local Climate Plans.

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