



Participation Processes

Description

Public participation processes include a wide range of mechanisms for involving or engaging with the public in decision-making. These processes can be initiated by external institutions or by the groups or communities themselves. Public participation can range from the passive (that is, people being told what has been decided or already has happened) to the interactive (that is, the public equally sharing in local decisions and determining how available resources are used). Although rare, public participation can also result from the public's self mobilisation. That is, people participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems: they might develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over resource use.

How and when the tool is used

Public participation includes 'popular' participation, or that designed to include as many people as possible, and 'stakeholder' participation, or that designed to include groups or individuals judged to have an interest in the matter under consideration. In tourism-related decision making, 'stakeholder' participation is more common, with local residents, tourism operators and other stakeholders having input into planning and management processes.

In tourism planning, public participation processes can be used for a variety of reasons:

- To increase the capacity of the tourism industry and / or enable community development by identifying tourism opportunities.
- To ensure that local communities do not lose ownership and control of local resources to investors from outside.
- To encourage cooperation and collaboration amongst stakeholders to achieve common goals such as tourism growth, environmental sustainability, or visitor limits.
- To obtain host community support for general strategies or specific actions and/ or to avoid community or stakeholder alienation.
- To achieve democratic or socially desirable outcomes such as self-determination or equitable distribution of costs and benefits.
- To enable important stakeholders to have a say, when factors like their socio-economic or political status may make that difficult.
- To satisfy legislative requirements, for instance under the [Resource Management Act](#) or the [Conservation Act](#).
- To meet information needs of decision makers who have incomplete information (e.g., about local concerns).

Some questions to ask when looking at the effectiveness of a participatory process include:

- How (and by whom) the participatory process was initiated
- Its form and evolution (including which stakeholders were involved)
- How issues and priorities were determined

The answers to these questions more often than not reflect the values and priorities of the stakeholder/s who initiated the process - and these values and priorities are likely to influence the outcomes. These processes occur in an environment where a requirement to consult is written into various pieces of legislation and the impetus to carry out any participative process is often simply to satisfy the legislative requirements rather than to include the public in any meaningful way in decision making.

Criticisms of participation processes in New Zealand have focused on issues arising from the questions above. Who participated, how they participated, and what influence (if any) they had on decisions? Sometimes agencies evaluate participative processes (usually consultation) they have conducted, for instance to review the extent to which they informed final decisions or to canvass participants views of the processes and the outcomes. Reviews also focus on the extent to which agencies met legislative requirements.



Application

The tourism industry on the whole only began to recognise the importance of participation in planning and management processes in the late 1980s. Since then, participation models used for tourism planning and decision making have proliferated.

Participatory tools that have been used in tourism-related planning and management in New Zealand and internationally include the following:

- **Consultation.** This is probably the most widely used (and misunderstood) participation mechanism and usually involves people being asked to comment on (or answer questions about) particular topics, documents, consent applications, and so on. Comments can be verbal or written (e.g., submissions) and people can comment individually or in group settings. External agencies usually define the consultation parameters (e.g., topics, participants, methods and timeframe). The process should be interactive and precede key decisions being made.
- **Collaboration**, or joint decision making among key stakeholders. This requires skilled facilitators to set ground rules and ensure ongoing participation and constructive dialogue by participants. Stakeholders may also require communication and conflict resolution skills.
- **Visitor and [Recreational Opportunity Spectrums](#)** 🌟. These enable local communities, developers, local and central government agencies and others to 'proactively plan' for visitors. They are relatively efficient and good for 'popular' participation. But they do not deal with conflict, are relatively 'top down' and are not decision making tools.
- **Community Tourism Action Plans and [Community Tourism Strategies](#)** 🌟. Early examples, often initiated by local government, focused on development and capacity building in tourism. They have been useful for developing tourism goals and translating these into action steps but outcomes may not be sustainable if the primary focus is growth.
- **Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).** This was originally used as a research tool in development projects and focuses on mobilising as many people within local communities as possible (a form of 'popular' participation). Today, it is increasingly used in developing countries as a form of participatory action research. Local communities conduct the research themselves, using flexible, innovative methods. It is suitable for planning and management, especially for smaller, rural communities hoping to develop tourism. It can assist in identifying important land use issues, impacts on local communities, and sustainability indicators (social and environmental).
- **Developing a shared vision ([community visioning](#))** 🌟. This involves identifying values and assets of a community, articulating its preferred vision and identifying and prioritising action strategies. Its effectiveness requires innovative ways to get people to participate. Often implementation is problematic.
- **Tourism Partnerships.** These are voluntary pooling of resources between two or more parties to accomplish collaborative goals. They work best when stakeholders agree on desired outcomes but need facilitative skills to sustain and nurture them.
- **Stakeholder interviews ([stakeholder analysis](#))** 🌟. These can be used as part of an iterative process for creating and implementing tourism strategies. This allows for strategies to be responsive to stakeholder views on tourism issues. They can be conducted at any time during the planning process.
- **Formal research mechanisms** such as surveys, focus groups and interviews ([focus groups and workshops](#)) 🌟. These are useful for 'consultative' rather than 'interactive' participation. They enable collection of information on people's opinions and levels of knowledge, usually for site specific planning or planning around certain issues.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) ([conflict resolutions](#))** 🌟. This broadly includes all negotiation assisted by an independent party and can be highly formalised or more unstructured. It is commonly used in environmental disputes and has also been used for non-court issues such as consent processes. It is only effective if participants are eventually willing to compromise.
- **Inventories of local resources.** These enable people to make informed decisions through charting land ownership and use trends, local history and demographics, housing stock, natural resources, and economic activities and trends. They are useful starting points, especially for small communities, to identify issues that may need to be addressed in planning and management.
- **Concept pyramids.** These present information visually and are used to describe goals and objectives for managing catchment areas and identifying indicators of catchment quality. They are used to identify potential improvements that could be made to the management of a catchment. Experience has shown that the mechanism has promise, especially as a practical tool for planning and



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management decisions for small groups of stakeholders. The process can provide a basis for integrating conflicting objectives into a plan.

- Other participatory processes that have been used in tourism planning and management include Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC), Objectives-Oriented Project Planning (ZOPP), SARAR, and Open Houses/Drop-in Centres.

There is no one ideal model of participation that can be applied across all tourism planning and management contexts. Instead, a participatory process should be tailored to each unique context, and the goals behind their use. Also, different stakeholders can be consulted in different ways within a single participatory process. Different contextual elements could include:

- stage and scale of tourism development and characteristics of local economy
- size and social and cultural profile of host communities, types of stakeholders and their knowledge of tourism issues
- variations in ecosystems and associated issues
- resources available for consultation/participation and different information needs of planners and managers
- different levels of management and planning issues (regional or site specific).

Issues to think about in planning and carrying out structured participation include the following:

- Conflict is nearly always present because of the complexity of the issues and the wide range of stakeholders. It therefore needs to be adequately acknowledged, addressed and managed. Most planning decisions retain within them inherent tensions and compromises.
- Tourism planning processes are predominantly issue oriented. They operate most effectively when issues are local and approached at an early stage in the planning process, before commitments are made and conflict arises.
- Conducting effective participation, including building stakeholder capacity to participate, may require a long time, and needs to be flexible and responsive to stakeholder needs.
- Stakeholders need timely, quality information (about eco systems, land use, tourist profiles, legal issues, zoning etc.) to participate effectively.
- Skilled facilitators are essential.
- Interests of stakeholders will be dynamic, fluid, and can change throughout the consultation/participation process.
- Community priorities may not actually reflect sustainable planning principles: they may be in favour of economic development over sustainable natural resource management.

Our evaluation

Public participation occurs at the macro and micro level in tourism planning, but these processes do not necessarily allow local communities and other stakeholders to influence tourism development on an on-going basis. For instance, at a micro level, stakeholder consultation is built into consent and concession processes, but these are focused on the effects of individual applications and do not enable people to adequately comment on the accumulated effects of tourism development. At a macro level, public participation processes are built into the development of tourism strategies, management plans and visioning exercises. However, the effectiveness of these sorts of planning processes often fall down at the implementation stage. As such, the influence of participants in shaping tourism development is limited.

Participatory approaches need to be linked to the full range of planning and management tools to ensure that public views and aspirations are actually translated into desired tourism development and land management.