



Citizen engagement # 2.

➤ Policy Brief

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATION

The conceptualization of InnWater citizen engagement differentiates between stakeholder and citizen engagement [1]. At times, it seems that the expressions “citizen engagement” and “public participation” are used in a commutable way by the water community, mainly because both processes have the same goal: to increase collaboration between citizens and government so as to improve public services and policy programmes. However, there is a distinction between the two concepts as engagement requires an active, intentional dialogue between residents and public decision-makers often initiated in a top-down process by the government, whereas participation is more often a bottom-up approach initiated by the interest groups.

Some of the main challenges with citizen engagement are:

- To identify what is most important for the citizens to motivate them to engage,
- To offer the information in a comprehensive way, facilitating the ground to make well-founded decisions.

The overall objective of InnWater Policy Brief is to highlight how InnWater solutions can support water related policies implementation and formulate recommendations for their update. This document presents the highlights of the full version of the Policy Brief #2.

Three Policy Briefs will be delivered over the course of the project with different focuses:

- #1 Water governance challenges overview, Europe at a fork in the River A changing water context, with a general approach to set the water governance scene.
- #2 Effective citizen engagement strategies, addressing international policies (this one).
- #3 Synthesis of policy relevant learnings from the all the project's results, focussing on European water related policies.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level is the Water Framework Directive [2]. It establishes a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. Article 14 states that the success of this Directive relies on close cooperation and coherent action at Community, Member State, and local level as well as on information, consultation, and involvement of the public, including users.

This can be illustrated by the World Bank’s accountability framework which distinguishes between the long route of accountability and the short route (Figure 1). Accountability is viewed as the democratic principle whereby elected officials and those in charge of providing access to water account for their actions and answer to those they serve [3].

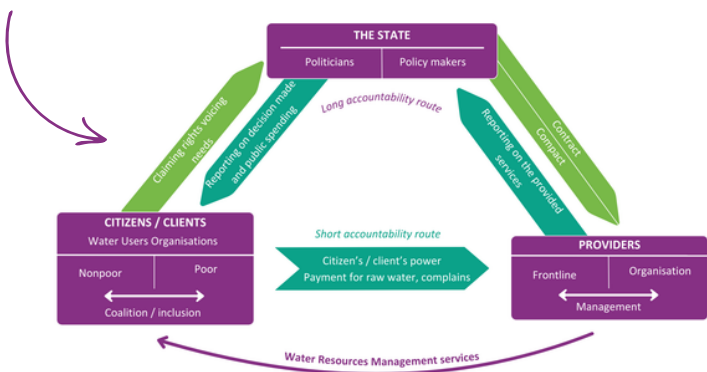


Figure 1 : Graphic representation of the accountability triangle

Box #1
Definition of concepts

Citizen engagement
Processes aimed at decision making, as well as agenda setting and policy making that base their activities on the consultation and involvement of individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations.

Public participation
All processes in which any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media, or the private sector, can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery.

The **OECD Principles on Water Governance** set the standards for more effective, efficient, and inclusive design and implementation of water policies and address issues of trust and inclusion.

Principle 10 speaks of the importance of **paying special attention to underrepresented categories, including but not limited to youth, the poor, women, indigenous people, and domestic users**, and Principle 11 highlights the need of **promoting non-discriminatory participation in decision making across people, especially vulnerable groups and people living in remote areas**. The enhanced Water governance Assessment Framework developed by the InnWater project further emphasizes the importance of integrated strategies and local empowerment and the engagement of vulnerable categories as main building blocks for sustainability and resilience.



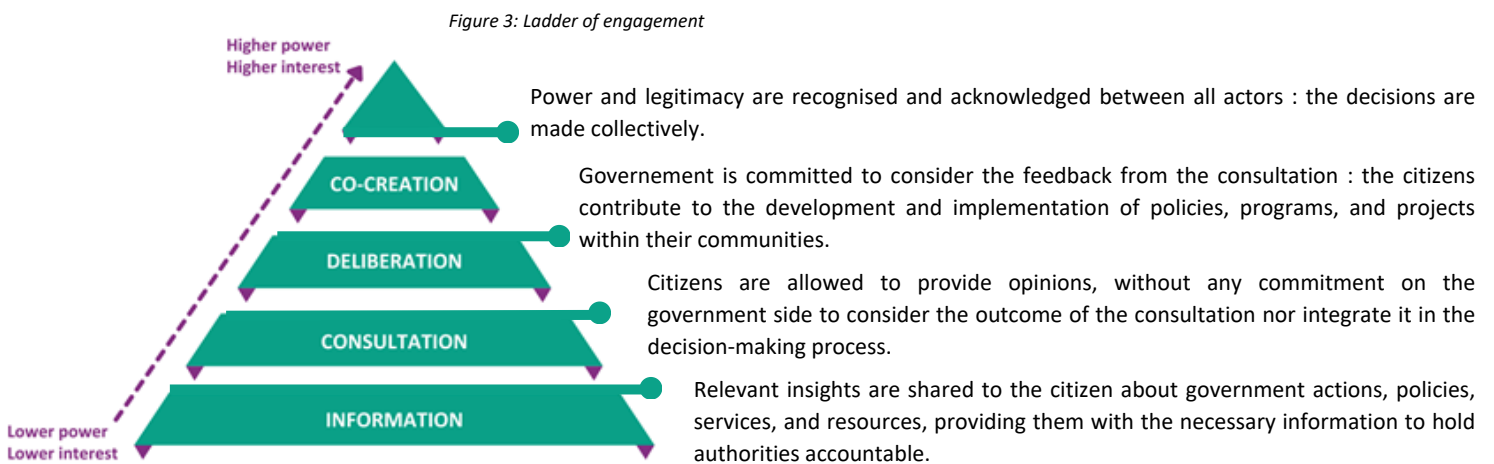
Figure 2 : Enhanced governance framework with building blocks promoting citizen engagement.

Trust and engagement are of particular importance [4]. Successful policy making demands existence of continuity and public trust to nourish this continuity. Trust has also been identified by the OECD as a prerequisite to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs).

As the SDGs represent a major systemic change, achieving them requires support and participation from citizens and other stakeholders at local, national and global levels. **Communication** is also important to raise awareness, build trust by demonstrating value, and inspire solidarity, and collective action.

INN WATER ROAD MAP

InnWater has delivered a road map to citizen engagement at the local level. It outlines a step-by-step process for citizen engagement building **on the framework of the ladder of citizen participation where engagement is linked to citizen control and power in relation to decision-making** [4]. (Figure 3).



A citizen engagement process is composed of a combination of tools and methods from the different levels of participation depending on the local context and the objectives of the process. In the InnWater project, the citizen engagement methodology builds on answering the questions : why, what for, who and how to involve citizens in local water planning and decision making.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

InnWater work on citizen engagement points at a full spectrum of issues that have policy implications at different levels and reinforce that a **nexus approach** is recommended as stakeholders from other sectors play a key role in relation to water governance. Citizen engagement is highly context-dependent and therefore it is important to fit **'policies to places'** for their successful application.

Gender equality and social inclusion should be at the heart of citizen engagement too, with special effort targeted towards underrepresented categories such as women and the youth, but also marginalised and vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

EU LEVEL

The WFD as the primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level, is not only dealing with water as an essential resource for human consumption but also considers its pivotal role in maintaining environmental health, sustaining food production, and powering energy generation. To this end it is recommended that:

- **Decisions** at EU level including these concerning **environmental health, food production and energy** generation must address **water resources as well**.
- **Farmers and landowners** are focal groups of citizens and important stakeholders of the socio-political helix. This requires that all decisions involving farmers and landowners, such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, should also consider the repercussions on water resources.
- Water is a vital resource for achieving the Green Deal targets. Efforts that address **water-related climate challenges and ecosystem degradation** should therefore be **highlighted and communicated widely** to raise awareness and foster cross-sector collaboration.

NATIONAL LEGISLATION

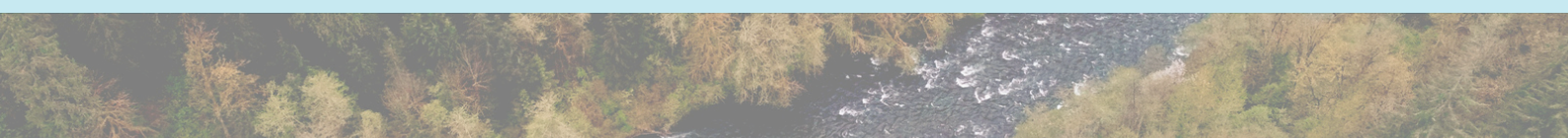
The enhanced water governance framework of InnWater establishes engagement of vulnerable categories as well as integrated strategies and local empowerment as important aspects for sustainability and resilience. Political will and leadership at the national level would help to drive **inclusive processes**:

- National legislation recognises the **importance of community involvement** in water and land management efforts, to enable structured and inclusive citizen engagement.
- An institution with a clear mandate that focusses on **both the natural environment and the surrounding socio-economic context** and with sufficient funding allocated to sustain engagement processes, including logistical expenses.
- Free and open **access to information** including objective and reliable data provided by independent and trustworthy experts. Employment of **digital communication** tools for continuity, dissemination and outreach.

LOCAL LEVEL

Citizen engagement is only successful when applied within the local context, ensuring that projects are **inclusive and accessible** to all members of the community. This is critical for fostering a strong sense of **ownership and responsibility**. Recommendations include:

- Adapting the engagement processes to the local context in terms of language, culture, and socio-political idiosyncrasies and tailor awareness raising initiatives to generate interest of citizens to become involved. Clear information on how citizen engagement will be used in the decision-making process and the implementation activities.
- Identifying key stakeholders and involve affected parties when initiating the process, establishing a balance between autonomy and elected representative entities to ensure completion of the citizen engagement process. Also eliminating barriers to engagement and participation for all vulnerable groups which could open doors to new partnerships and help to motivate political commitment and foster leadership for social inclusion.
- Use necessary tools and procedures to deal with conflict of interest and avoid "capture" of certain groups and lobbies.



Box #2

ERSAR's regulatory model and citizen engagement

ERSAR is the regulator of the water and waste services and the competent authority for drinking water quality in Portugal. ERSAR's regulatory model is based on levelling the asymmetries of information between operators and consumers by collecting, validating and treating a set of information and making it available to any interested party in a way that is intelligible and understandable.

By making information publicly available and transparent, ERSAR contributes for stakeholders' engagement and knowledge to empower them to demand for better and more efficient services. Anyone can access this information in different formats: written reports, online information, infographics, mobile app, excel files, awareness booklets, among other.





ERSAR receives every complaint primary placed on the complaints book of the operator. When receiving these complaints, ERSAR checks initially how the operator has handled the complaint and confirms with the consumer if the solution was the one referred by the operator. Then, ERSAR issues an opinion on each individual complaint, sending it both to the operator and the consumer and asking the operator to adapt its procedure to that opinion.

ERSAR also follows the best practices regarding public consultation in each decision, regulation and recommendation. After finalising the technical documents, it is mandatory for ERSAR to perform a public consultation where anyone is allowed and invited to participate. In the end of the public consultation, ERSAR analyses every opinion received and issues a final analysis report, identifying areas that have been incorporated in the new version of the document.

Realisation

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About InnWater

InnWater aims to foster sustainable multi-level and cross sector water governance through social innovation. To this end, InnWater is developing a set of tools and services adapted to local needs for the benefit of water stakeholders, including a governance assessment matrix, guidance for stakeholders' engagement, as well as simulations linking water resources management and economic activities. To achieve its goals, InnWater engages with pilot site communities, co-developing tools to address specific water challenges like pricing policies, water quality, and infrastructure investment.



- Pilot Site #1: France, La Réunion Island
Economic focus
- Pilot Site #2: Italy, Middle Brenta Basin
Ecosystem services & Drinking water sector focuses
- Pilot Site #3: Spain, Figueres
Water scarcity focus
- Pilot Site #4: United Kingdom, West Country

Figure 4 : InnWater pilot sites maps

InnWater is coordinated by the International Office for Water and run from 2023 to 2026.

References

- [1] Elelman, R, (2023): Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century, Deliverable D3.1, Public, EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 10108651
- [2] DIRECTIVE 2000/60/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy
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- [4] Díaz-Pont, J., Jaraiseh, A. (2024): The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums #V1. D3.2, Public EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512