

# How to better represent different values in participatory approaches: A conference perspective

Carol Hunsberger and Wendy Kenyon\*

*Macaulay Institute, Scotland*

\* Macaulay Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen, AB15 8QH, Scotland.  
w.kenyon@macaulay.ac.uk

## Abstract

The paper reports on a workshop involving 120 participation experts that addressed the issue of representation and public participation in policy development. The H-form and action planning method used in the workshop is briefly reviewed followed by a discussion of positive issues related to representation suggested by participants. These included such issues as: multi-stakeholder processes becoming increasingly recognised and advocated; many examples of processes that have succeeded at eliciting the expression of many different values; and others. Negative issues related to representation were also requested. Responses included: the issue of hidden values in the process; shortcomings in process design and framing; and difficulties in finding and involving all relevant actors. The action plan to address shortcomings in representation in participatory processes focussed on four areas. First, developing methods to identify, develop and discuss values in participatory processes. Second, ensuring processes and facilitators values are minimised in designing and running the process. Third, getting the right people involved in the participatory process to identify and discuss values. Finally, ensuring that outputs from the participatory process are linked to policy making.

## 1. Introduction

It has been widely recognised within NGO (non government organisations) academic and policy circles that deliberation of science-based issues is no longer the exclusive realm of politicians and experts but requires new participatory structures for involving a wide range of actors and the public (e.g. Irwin and Wynn, 1996; Renn, 2002). In a complex society, traditional theories of democracy that suggest that elected representatives respond to their constituents' interests are now being challenged (e.g. Dryzek, 1990). Equally, notions of representation based purely on mathematical concepts appear flawed as the public is not a homogeneous group. Given such difficulties, issues such as who is represented currently in participatory processes and who is excluded, and the principles that should guide representation become pertinent. The need to understand multiple values and different perspectives in the development of policy has been exemplified by the controversy in Europe over the commercialisation of new technologies such as biotechnology using gene transfer (e.g. Durant *et al.* 1998; Tait, 2001).

The PATH project aimed to explore how different values and interests are best mapped and represented in science-based policy formulation, examining how better representation might be achieved bearing in mind different contexts and constraints and considering 'silent voices' such as children, social minorities, future generations and non-human animals (see e.g. O'Neill 2001).

The plenary workshop at the PATH conference was designed to feed into the PATH project's exploration of representation and to benefit from the knowledge and experience of the 120 delegates. This paper sets out the results of the H-form

and Action Planning (HAP) workshop held during the conference to examine the question: "how well are different values represented in participatory processes?"

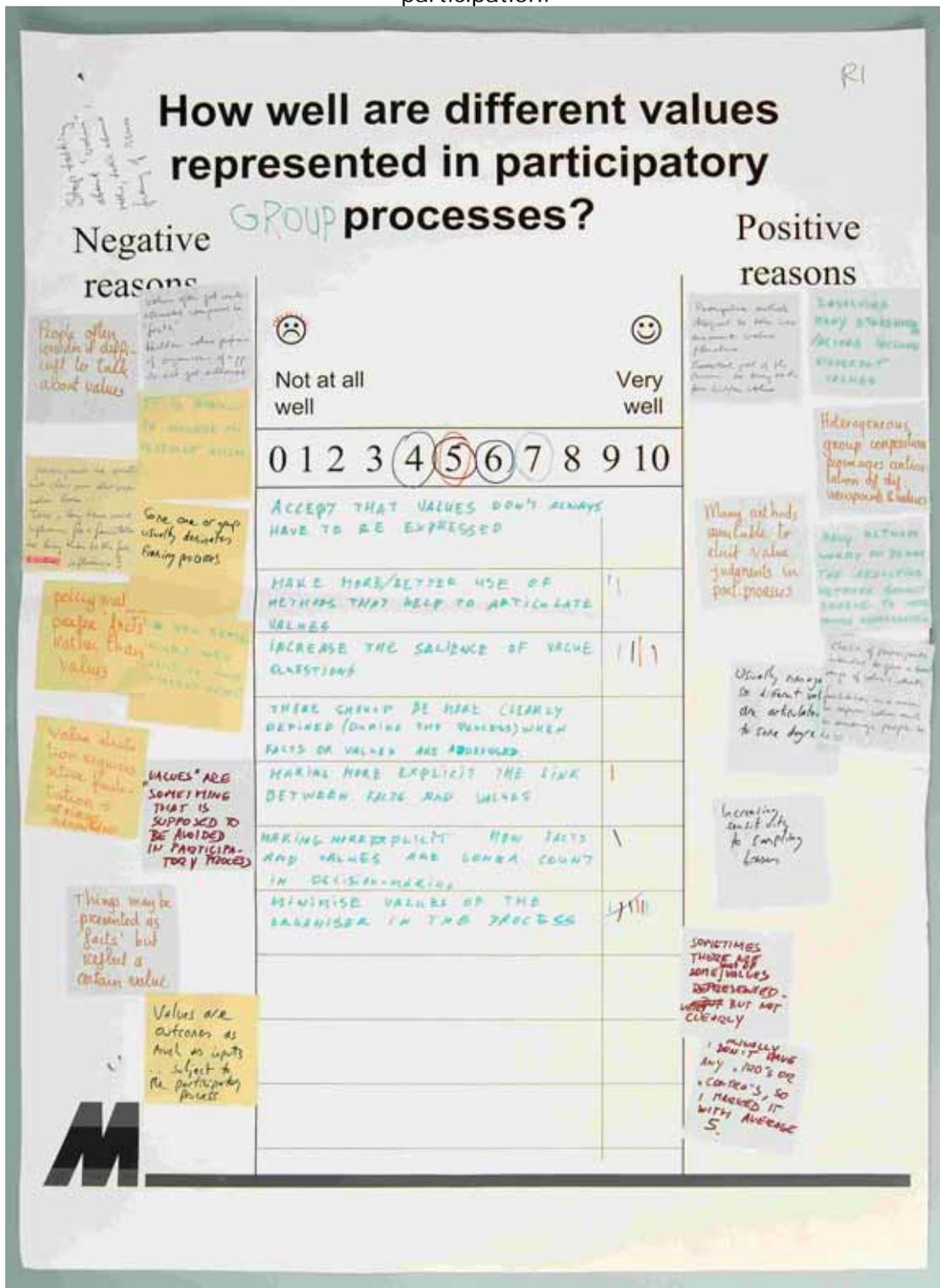
## **2. H-form and Action Planning (HAP) method**

The HAP method is discussed in detail in Kenyon and Hunsberger (2006, this proceeding) and involves the following 6 steps.

1. Individuals considering a question and providing a score;
2. Individuals writing positive and negative reasons for that score;
3. A group discussion focussing on the positive and negative points offered;
4. Individuals suggesting actions that could be taken to improve the score in future;
5. A group ranking of the suggested actions; and
6. Planning for each suggested action by examining such questions as: Why the action is important. Who should be responsible to do what to make it happen? When it should be done, etc.

The raw material from the HAP process can be found at <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/pathconference/index.html#output>. The follow up to the HAP process involves writing up the outputs and disseminating them to participants and policy-makers, and following up on action points. This paper is part of the follow-up process.

**Figure 1** - An example of a completed H-plan on representation and participation.



### 3. Results

Seven groups considered the question: "How well are different values represented in participatory processes?" There were 4 to 6 participants in each group. One additional group, the "saboteurs", chose to discuss issues of representation

without following the format of the H-form activity. They produced a set of notes which are discussed in a separate section below.

Each participant was asked to come up with a general score in response to the question and mark this on a scale from 0 to 10. For the 36 participants who did so, the range of initial scores was 1 to 8 with a mean, median and mode of 4.

### 3.1. Positive reasons

Participants were then asked to generate positive statements relating to their score i.e. why they did not give the lowest possible score. Their responses can be clustered into six common themes.

First, participants noted a trend of **increasing awareness of the importance of representing a range of values on the part of process organisers**. This is reflected in the intentions, and in more successful cases, the outcomes of participatory processes. In terms of intentions, process organisers usually *aim* to represent different groups, interests and values, and conduct some type of stakeholder analysis in an effort to achieve this. Combined with an increasing sensitivity to sampling biases, this provided cause for optimism about the ability of participatory processes to include a range of values through recruitment of a broad spectrum of participants. With respect to outcomes, some participants referred to cases where such processes have managed to move beyond demographic representation and include a wider range of values.

Second, participants reported **increasing levels of institutional support for broad participation**. This can be seen through policy makers who are conscious that representation is important, and that policies should recognise differences between different sectors of population, and should change over time to reflect new circumstances. Overall, some felt that an "opening up" strategy consistent with participatory approaches is becoming more accepted by some decision-makers.

Third, some participants were encouraged by the development and existence of **methods and tools for choosing participants and eliciting value judgements in participatory processes**. These reflect a better understanding of what value differences exist than was the case in the past. Methods that account for concerns about power are more likely to result in (multiple) values being (explicitly) represented. Similarly, processes that seek multiple outcomes or "open thinking" have a better chance of reflecting different views. Heterogeneous group composition encourages people to articulate different viewpoints, while independent facilitation can help people to express their values. Research into participatory process dynamics is supporting this methodological development and helping to increase representation.

Fourth, some delegates described **increasing involvement of (more diverse) interested people and groups**. Participants to participatory processes come from fairly varied constituencies, with major stakeholders and special interest groups usually being identified and invited to participate. Outside of formal groups, individuals who have a vested interest in the problem under discussion are usually the first to volunteer their participation. Some participants felt that although elite groups are influential, there is a limit to how much power they have in participatory processes and any subsequent policy development. Such comments also acknowledged a healthy variety of value structures among participants in participatory processes. Others noted that each individual participant represents a suite of values.

Fifth, several **advantages of participatory over non-participatory methods** were raised. These include public participation processes that:

- Are open and accepting for everyone (in principle);
- Give space to values and differences that otherwise would not be vocalised;
- Tend to focus on values as a form of citizen input (particularly broad ones);
- Allow individuals with different values to submit viewpoints to decision makers;
- Provide a good way to discuss and think about one's own values; and
- Provide a forum for experts and non-experts to discuss both technical and 'common sense' values.

Evidence that some participatory processes are successfully incorporating a range of values include that these processes often have surprise results, conversations between experts and lay public do happen, and sometimes consensus is reached among a wide base of actors.

Finally, some participants noted that **even some pitfalls of participatory processes can create opportunities for change**. In particular, antagonism can lead to political change, while exclusion from a process can serve to politicise people.

In summary, multi-stakeholder processes were described as becoming increasingly recognised and advocated, supported by examples of processes that have succeeded at eliciting the expression of many different values. Participants felt that this was a result of greater reflection about representing values on the part of process organisers, increased levels of institutional support, advances in methodological development and higher levels of participation in such processes.

### **3.2. Negative reasons**

Participants were asked to write down negative reasons for their score, i.e. why they did not give the highest possible score in response to the question "How well are different values represented in participatory processes?" Again, these responses can be grouped into themes. Some of the negative reasons represent shortcomings in applying concepts that were discussed in the positive points above.

First, many identified the problem of **hidden values in the process** that remained unaddressed. These could range from undue influence by a facilitator trying to elicit participants' values, to processes that are implemented for the purpose of legitimating an existing position. Some noted that 'participation' itself has an inherent set of values which can automatically close out some perspectives. Others stated that values should be seen as outcomes as much as inputs, and are therefore subject to the participatory process.

The problem of hidden values can be linked to **shortcomings in process design and framing**. Several participants commented that representation of values is rarely addressed systematically, in part due to a lack of tools and academic approaches. Others observed that framing is too narrowly done and does not involve the public, thereby restricting the overall value set from the beginning. In especially poor cases, process organisers may deliberately avoid including a diversity of participants or views in an attempt to reduce conflict and achieve a smooth process. Additionally, representation is not always seen as important in qualitative research with small sample sizes. Finally, informal processes may be better than formal ones at bringing out 'real' or 'strong' values.

Many points were raised regarding **difficulties in finding and involving all relevant actors**. The selection of participants tends to favour dominant

discourses (“usual suspects”), leaving marginalised and powerless groups under-represented. People from these groups may be excluded on purpose, overlooked (perhaps due to a lack of representative bodies), or unable to participate due to time, money or logistical constraints. As well, some people actively choose not to participate for a variety of reasons, which may include psychological or cultural factors. Even if these challenges are overcome and a demographically diverse group of participants is recruited, several stressed the point that simply including people from many different groups does not ensure that a wide range of values is represented. Currently no tools exist for selecting participants based on values, while representatives are not usually trained to represent values per se. Particular difficulties remain in representing future generations and non-humans. In short, qualitative representation (based on values and ethics) is not usually achieved.

Once the process is underway, there is **potential for certain participants to dominate**. There can be a tendency for the “loudest voices” to cause change, whether this is due to their power status or personality characteristics. Elites may be in a favourable position, having more prior knowledge and stronger support circles than less powerful participants, while stakeholders may be granted more importance than citizens. Typically, economic interests often prevail while environmental concerns are not prioritised or addressed. Well-organised groups can manipulate the process; at the same time, dominant personalities can squelch or influence those who are less bold. Certain views can be lost when a process focuses on individual needs rather than broader (moral) concerns.

The dominance of some participants can have the important consequence of **suppressing less socially acceptable views**, creating a situation where only those who do not challenge dominant discourses are ‘heard’. All of these forms of unequal value positioning create legitimacy problems. Similarly, several participants saw a fundamental tension between including a diversity of views and achieving consensus, which is often a stated aim of participatory processes. Grouping together or ‘simplifying’ values in an attempt to reach consensus can remove both their complexity and their context, resulting in confusion or loss of their original meaning. Likewise, aiming for a single outcome by voting can cut some values and voices out of the process.

Participants identified **confusion over what constitutes a ‘value’**. While many types of values exist (e.g. ethical, technical, epistemic, political), little work has been done on how to identify legitimate values in participatory processes. As well, the boundary between ‘facts’ and ‘values’ is often unclear. Some felt that certain points that are presented as ‘facts’ are value laden and as such should be discussed together with values. Others felt that rational arguments are often used to “cover” normative values.

One implication of this situation is that **normative values are often undervalued compared to rational arguments**, including by policy makers. Sometimes there is an expectation that participatory processes should avoid values entirely, or a perception that those who run the processes are not interested in values. This highlights an ideological difference which may not be reconcilable.

**Participants may be unclear (or not explicit) about their own values**, or find them difficult to express. Complicating this situation, participants may ‘belong to’ several roles at once, meaning that they cannot represent the range of values covering each role. Furthermore, **values can and do change**, even during a participatory process, and placing too much emphasis on participants’ starting positions can discount learning and evolution, and feed inappropriate information into policy development.

### 3.3 Saboteurs

As mentioned above, one group decided not to follow the format of the H-form activity. This group instead generated their own question on representation and explored it in a free-ranging discussion. In the end, they produced a set of notes addressing the question: "If we were to design a participatory process, we would design it in a way that 'ensures' that unequal values are represented. How?"

Some of the points they raised echoed those set out above. These include: recognising the difference between representation of values and representation of demographics; recognising that values are dynamically constructed, even during the process; recognising that consensus and representativeness are (often) not appropriate ways to frame participatory processes; and that participatory processes can have multiple outputs based on different value alignments. The 'saboteurs' also offered two unique points: that social and value mapping can play an important role in considering the context of values; and that participatory processes should be seen as a way of enlightening policy and decision processes rather than as a substitute for traditional representative democracy.

Although this group acted on their own initiative and addressed a new question, their outputs can be considered alongside those of the other groups. While their ideas were not translated into the action planning phase of the activity, a different system of advancing the suggested actions could have allowed for this.

### 3.4. Suggested actions

Following the discussion of the positive and negative points made by each participant, individuals were asked to reconsider their score. 28 (78%) participants' scores stayed the same, 3 increased and 5 decreased. The next task was for each individual to suggest an action that could be taken to improve the score in future. As with the positive and negative points, the actions suggested can be reduced into a number of themes.

One theme covered areas needing **further research and methodological development**. These included finding (better) ways to:

- Integrate quantitative representation and qualitative differences in values – in other words, representative and deliberative democracy;
- Improve stakeholder analysis and identification of "value groups";
- Develop tools to articulate values in order to recognise, expose and discuss values;
- Distinguish among the diversity of values and ensuring that all important values among the participants are expressed and taken into account; and
- Incorporate and bring together opposed values.

Another theme revolved around **clarifying the treatment of values** within participatory processes. In particular, participants recommended making the link between facts and values more explicit, and explaining when each will be addressed during the process. Other similar actions suggested that clarification of values already embedded in the science and technology under discussion, rather than leaving them implicit and undefended. Finally, showing participants how facts and values are going to count in decision making as a result of the process was seen to provide a crucial incentive for participation.

A third group of recommendations concerned **recruitment of participants**. Several stressed the need for careful demographic and stakeholder analysis in the early stages of process design in a way that makes a clear distinction between

representing different stakeholders and different values. Such an approach would mean viewing potential participants as complex citizens rather than as representatives of a single group. In this way participants would be selected on the basis of mentality (or outlook) as opposed to demographics. Other suggestions for improving recruitment included publishing a “Call for Values” when launching a process, increasing the incentives for participation, and making greater use of the “snowball” method to find relevant actors.

Other actions focused on the **framing and structure** of participatory processes. In order to minimise the values of the organiser in the process, it was suggested that framing should be done with public involvement, thus ensuring that the range of issues and values citizens feel strongly about are considered. Another suggestion was to extend the time frame and allocate more resources for participatory processes, while a third was to run different types of processes simultaneously on the same issues in order to represent different values.

Several actions were devoted to changing the **expectations and approaches** of process organisers. These included increasing the salience of value questions and accepting that values do not always have to be expressed. More specific suggestions were to use strategic chairing to encourage participants to think about the values that inform their decisions and not necessarily sticking to their initial positions, and involving citizens in the development of their own methods of “self-representation”, and not allowing any stakeholder to define whether a value is “good” or “bad”.

**Education and capacity building** formed the basis for a final set of actions. Among these was to provide education, logistical support and financial subsidies to allow ordinarily disenfranchised parties and individuals to participate. Respondents stressed the need to empower the powerless and provide equality of opportunity to all potential participants.

### **3.5. Comment Cards**

Participants were invited to write down any comments about the H-form during the activity. A few groups did so, with most comments focusing on different possible interpretations of the initial question. One group noted a difference in its members’ assumptions about what constitutes a “participation process”, with one member including “usual” democratic representation in the form of voting. Another two groups mentioned the complexity of the question, one saying that each of its key words had several possible interpretations, with subtleties that were likely lost in translation. Another group expressed concern that public participation focuses too much on the public as a source of values and too little on the public as a source of relevant knowledge, with the effect of obscuring the values already embedded in science, technology and policy.

### **3.6. Action Planning**

The previous section summarises all the suggested actions made by participants, but a smaller number were taken forward to action planning. Group members were asked to vote for the action they felt would be most effective in improving the representation of different values in participatory processes in future. Table 1 sets out the actions taken forward alongside the reason the group felt that action to be important.

**Table 1** – Actions and reasons taken forward to action planning

| <b>Suggested action</b>  | <b>Why is it important</b>   |
|--|--|
| Minimise values of the organiser/facilitator in the process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attempt to neutralise the process via employment of professional facilitator, thus providing balance OR</li> <li>- Make the values as explicit as possible and then pluralise and equalise all values OR act as a value leader or champion</li> <li>- Reach a dissensus</li> </ul> | Organisers have a tremendous influence on the process in general. Otherwise decisions get made on the basis of implicit value, which may or may not be representative of public opinion  |
| Method development for values expression (making them explicit). When the right people are there, do the right thing. Develop methodologies that challenge participants to express/discuss their ideas on the level of values.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of useful methods</li> <li>- Better combination of methods</li> <li>- Values are the basic/normative underlying assumptions which determine actions</li> <li>- Representation of values is useless when they are not visible in the process</li> </ul> |
| Ensure broad participation early in the process in order to define values and interests using many perspectives. Frame topic/issue with the public so that a range of issues and values can be considered as perceived by citizens (limited by regulatory and political stage issue) – but within those limits give the citizens as much range as possible.                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes values explicit</li> <li>- increases legitimacy</li> <li>- reveals gaps in disclosure</li> </ul> Narrowing of remit/ marginalisation of certain interest groups is a common problem – try to avoid cutting out certain values from the beginning      |
| Publish a “call for values” when funding participatory processes to develop better tools to articulate values in order to recognise and expose opposed views/ positions leading to better and more effective participatory processes   | Need to make a distinction between different stakeholders and different values within society  |
| Focus discussion on values and make them explicit.   | It helps to understand your own and other positions and to shift positions.  |
| Provide equality of opportunity to all participants, including disenfranchised/marginalised groups. (Requires education, logistical and financial support)   | Because it is democratic (right to be heard, justice, fairness)[accountability of policy work], instrumental (clear basis of conflict) substantive (improve decision quality and implementation).  |
| Getting the right people there. Choosing the right criteria for selecting participants.  | To avoid bias and block invisible values   |
| Improve representation if we link the outputs of the process to policy decisions.  | Knowing what comes out of the process  |

The suggested actions voted as being most effective by the groups indicate importance in 4 areas. First, developing methods to identify, develop and discuss values in participatory processes. Second, ensuring processes and facilitators values are minimised in designing and running the process. Next, getting the right people involved in the participatory process to identify and discuss values. Finally, to ensure that outputs from the participatory process are linked to policy making.

Due to implementation of the action planning at the conference (see Kenyon and Hunsberger, this proceeding, for details) just four suggested actions were taken forward to full action planning to explore not only what action is needed and why, but also who might be involved in implementation, how and when it might be

implemented, and finally how we will know when it is done. These are set out in Table 2.

**Table 2 – PATH action plan for representation and participation**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Action</b>        | Method development for values expression (making them explicit).<br>When the right people are there, do the right thing. Develop methodologies that challenge participants to express/ discuss their ideas on the level of values.   |
| <b>Why ?</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of useful methods</li> <li>- Better combination of methods</li> <li>- Values are the basic/normative underlying assumptions which determine actions</li> <li>- Representation of values is useless when they are not visible in the process</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Who?</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- STS (spell out) researchers</li> <li>- Added contributions for participants in participatory activities (process view)</li> <li>- It is context dependant though</li> </ul>   |
| <b>How?</b>          | More attention in the STS community for analysis tools<br>Underlying theories to build methods on  |
| <b>When?</b>         | Ongoing activity: all the time   |
| <b>Done?</b>         | When actors express they gained insights in values of themselves and other when methods are being applied<br>A plea for evaluation with participants   |
| <b>Action</b>        | Minimise values of the organiser/facilitator in the process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attempt to neutralise the process via employment of professional facilitator, thus providing balance OR</li> <li>- Make the values as explicit as possible and then pluralise and equalise all values OR act as a value leader or champion</li> <li>- Reach a dissensus</li> </ul> |
| <b>Why ?</b>         | Organisers have a tremendous influence on the process in general. Otherwise decisions get made on the basis of implicit value, which may or may not be representative of public opinion  |
| <b>Who? and How?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EU guidelines on minimum standards for participation requiring value statements (similar to ethics statements)</li> <li>- Researchers to promote transparency within their research design.</li> <li>- National agencies with global networks to promote 'explicitisation'.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>When?</b>         | NOW!   |
| <b>Done?</b>         | Decisions will be justified/made on the basis of value explicit PPP exercise.  |
| <b>Action</b>        | Provide equality of opportunity to all participants, including disenfranchised/marginalised groups. (Requires education, logistical and financial support)   |
| <b>Why ?</b>         | Because it is democratic (right to be heard, justice, fairness)[accountability of policy work], instrumental (clear basis of conflict) substantive (improve decision quality and implementation)   |
| <b>How?</b>          | To provide (objective!) information – accepted wisdom, results of research etc.<br>Provide logistical and financial support  |
| <b>Comments</b>      | Need to recognise issues of: gender; values and concerns; social types; knowledge – access to it and dominant forms disclose assumptions behind (scientific) knowledge – the public themselves; financial and logistical support; regard participation (power relations) process.  |
| <b>Action</b>        | Ensure broad participation early in the process in order to define values and interests using many perspectives.<br><br>Frame topic/issue with the public so that a range of issues and values can be considered as perceived by citizens (limited by regulatory and political stage issue – but within those limits give the citizens as much range as possible.                        |
| <b>Why ?</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes values explicit</li> <li>- increases legitimacy</li> <li>- reveals gaps in disclosure</li> </ul>  |

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
|              | Narrowing of remit/ marginalisation of certain interest groups is a common problem – try to avoid cutting out certain values from the beginning  |
| <b>Who?</b>  | We should all do this in our projects<br>Funders should ensure that we do<br>Increased support from funders to do scoping studies so stakeholders can get involved on research proposals |
| <b>How?</b>  | - Systematically gather input<br>- Choose the most appropriate methods of participation given input<br>- Evaluate the process  |
| <b>When?</b> | Early and all the way through  |
| <b>Done?</b> | When we have an evaluation based on input from all participants  |

These four action points address all of the areas prioritised by participants except ensuring that outputs from participatory processes are linked to policy-making. They suggest action by a range of actors and organisations at different points in a decision making process.

### 3.7. Conclusions

The scores given by participants during the HAP approach conducted at the PATH conference indicates that on average participants believe that participatory processes are currently not very good at representing different values. However, the breadth and depth of the positive issues raised relating to representation indicates that there are good ideas, methods and examples that can be used as lessons in other approaches. Further, the range of specific, achievable, realistic actions that were suggested during the workshop imply that although there is considerable work to be done in this area, improving representation in participatory processes is an achievable goal that researcher, practitioners, funders and policy-makers can work together to achieve.

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