

ECRR CONFERENCE JUNE 2008 - SESSION ON:

## KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES TO IMPLEMENT RIVER RESTORATION

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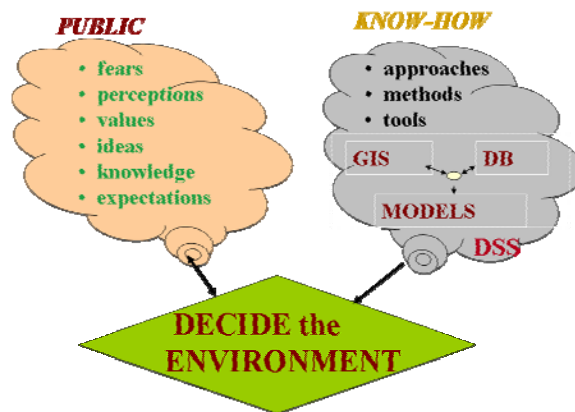
Co-Chairman: *still to be appointed*

### Rationale

River Restoration always involves diverging objectives, conflicting interests of different stakeholders, or actual conflicts amongst social groups or even nations. “Conflicts”, in this broad sense, do not concern only trans-boundary rivers: conflicts at the national and local scales, particularly from the perspective of local communities, involve perhaps a less visible dimension, but nevertheless occur in an incredibly high number of cases, covering most of a nation’s territory, and therefore they are very important: modifying the concessions for water withdrawal from a river including ecological minimum flow requirements, managing a multipurpose/multi-actor water reservoir or building a new one, or giving back space to rivers to reduce downstream flooding damages are simple examples of extremely frequent and often harsh conflicts.

A better way of making decisions is not an optional item, it rather looks as an unavoidable requisite to give a real content to the sustainability declarations. The “cost” of not improving/changing the way decisions are made is extremely high: public opposition, discontent, delays, additional economic costs, ineffectiveness, inefficiency, ..... In particular, planning is either impossible or useless because decisions made are then ignored. Without planning, no generalized restoration of our rivers can be achieved.

The needed improvement should be able to merge *participation* (the “cloud of the public”) with that of *rationality* (the “cloud of know-how”):



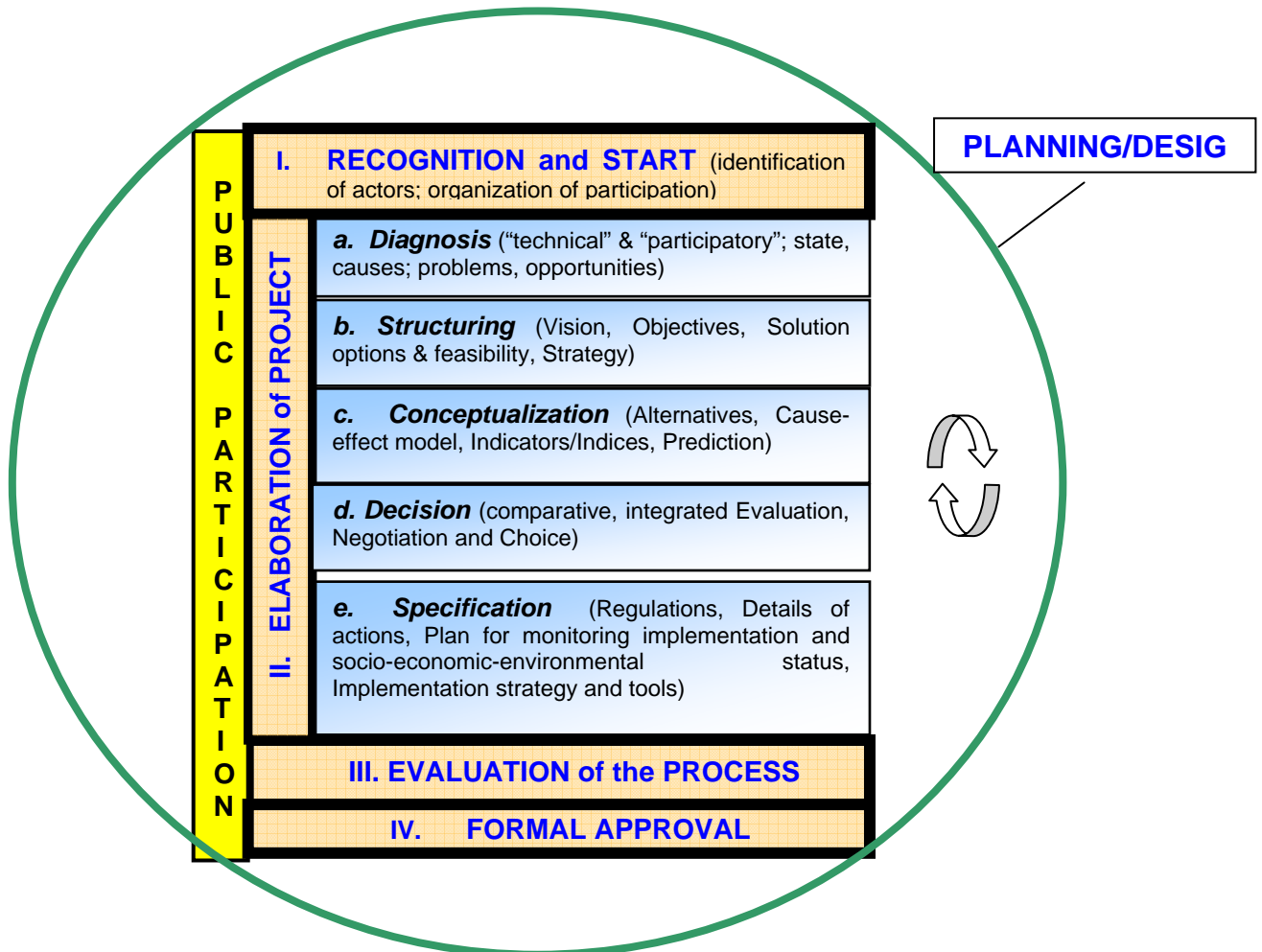
### Objective

Get insight in the key areas of weakness related to decision making in river restoration projects and plans, and share key ideas and relevant successful or failure experiences to face them.

**Arguments of the session**

NOTICE: The following section is intended to stimulate participants and to focus the issues we would like to discuss. Negative aspects (weaknesses) are therefore enlightened, but of course we are expecting also positive contributions that show how to overcome such difficulties.

A good RR project/plan should comply with the criteria for “good decision making in environmental problems”, which is unavoidably a participatory process. A typical scheme can look like this:



This scheme is however hardly applied in real practice. Key issues underlying this reality are:

- Typical weaknesses of “participation”, as inadequate institutional setting, absence of recognized power by formal Decision Makers (or fear to lose power); limitation to communication rather than true participation with scarce or no real use of feedback from people, scarce sharing of information, lack of “participatory culture”, etc.
- The link between the “rationality cloud” (know-how) and that of “participation” (the public) is still too weak and the two channels go far apart one from the other. In other words: **i)** DMs and the public tend not to rely sufficiently on a rational, well informed ground; and **ii)** system approach and tools (models, Decision Support Systems,...) are often not used in practice, while they are often used as a mere maquillage
- Mathematical models adopted to forecast future behaviour, particularly when ecosystems are involved, are too data-eager and, because of this, can hardly be applied reliably and within acceptable limits of time and money
- The evaluation framework is often unsatisfactory: there is no real integration amongst the typical, still separated, traditional approaches/techniques (Cost-Benefit Analysis,

Multicriteria Analysis, and the whole family of Environmental Impact Assessment items, including Strategic Impact Assessment etc.); there is no sufficient support from them to address conflicts and negotiation.

Finally, an open issue is how to measure the ecosystem status and how to judge whether it is good or not: should we confuse its value with that of the environmental services it provides (so relegating it to a servant of other purposes), or rather recognize it also deserves ...good conditions for its own sake?

Which indicators and indices are sensible and usable?

How can we forecast their change according to several alternative possible actions?

### **Organization of the session**

NOTICE: the organization will depend on the number and type of abstracts that will be submitted; in principle, we would like to maintain a 50-50 share between frontal presentations and structured discussion. Also a specific Workshop might be added.

Contributions (paper or poster presentations) will be selected according to the criterion of relevancy with regard to the above arguments and objectives, by focussing in particular on those which provide added value in terms of insight and in terms of solutions, specially when based on experiences.

- poster presentations (to be permanently exposed outside the session) are highly recommended so to maximise the time available for real, productive discussions during the session
- oral presentations will be selected and presented; allocated time to each one may be variable depending on its relevancy for the event
- questions will be raised after each presentation and answers registered on panels
- working groups will build on such a material to add information, express opinions and elicit value judgements on the arguments listed above
- a summarizing moment will pull together the outputs.