IMPROVING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING

Experience sharing based on Portuguese examples

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Motivation

Practice-driven research

- Dissemination of participatory governance initiatives across the country and internationally
- Willingness to confront our practical experience with the current state of knowledge concerning local participatory initiatives, particularly the commonly reported benefits, risks and critical success factors
Objectives

To share our experience gained through the participation on 3 collaborative local strategic planning initiatives, presenting the specific practices that have been put in place to enhance stakeholders’ engagement and avoid some of the reported risks of participatory processes.

To provide an evaluation of the methods used, envisioned to support future similar initiatives.
## Experience sharing

### Cases’ presentation

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Key practices applied for stakeholders’ engagement

- Diversified group
- Engagement in the whole planning cycle
- Clear definition of all stages
- External and independent team
- Facilitation techniques
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Key practices applied for stakeholders’ engagement

- Facilitation techniques
  - Clarification of concepts and objectives
  - Small groups
  - Techniques for cause-effect relationships
  - Consensus building techniques
  - Communication between sessions
Evaluation of the applied methods

Positive evaluation

• High level of participants’ agreement towards the quality of the group composition, the used techniques, the role of the external team and the achieved results, which led them to express their willingness to participate in similar future initiatives.
• Recognition that the initial goals were achieved: creating a diversified group to be involved in all stages of the participatory process contributing in an innovative manner for the local strategic plan.

Limitations

• The team did not directly control the feedback and communication between sessions with stakeholders.
• Some members’ absence in some of the sessions maybe due to the sessions’ length and amount.
Outcomes of the applied methods

Local strategic/action plans, built in a collective manner by the group, with which participants were highly identified.

Applications to funding from European Structural Funds, approved with a high classification and with corresponding financial allocation (more than six million euros).

Social learning by participants.
Conclusion

Key practices developed to improve stakeholders’ engagement in local strategic plans. These practices:

• were built, refined and improved through a learning process resulting from the accumulated experience gained by the authors as facilitators in 3 cases with different aims and scope;

• avoid the major risks of participatory process identified in the literature;
Conclusion

Key practices developed to improve stakeholders’ engagement in local strategic plans. These practices:

• were positively evaluated by promoters, participants and funds’ managing authorities as they successfully contribute to achieve the major goals of these participatory processes;

• produce important outputs (strategic plans and funding) for local development.
Conclusion

Although with the necessary adjustments (as there is no “one size fits all”), we hope our paper to be a valid framework and guideline for similar initiatives in the future and that this kind of participatory practices become more usual to develop local strategic plans.