Reconceptualizing Participation for Sustainable Rural Development: Towards a Negotiation Approach

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ABSTRACT

In many popular intervention methodologies aimed at stimulating sustainable rural development (in the widest possible sense) the idea of ‘participation’ is a leading principle. This article will demonstrate that the process in which actors are supposed to participate is often thought of as being a process of planning, decision-making and/or social learning. It will be argued that such an operationalization of development processes is based on inconsistent theoretical assumptions, and can easily lead to unproductive development interventions due to an inability to handle conflicts. As an alternative it is proposed to use negotiation theory as a basis for organizing participatory development efforts. The implications of such a shift in thinking about participation are far-reaching: it requires new modes of analysis, and different roles, tasks and skills for facilitators of participatory processes.

INTRODUCTION

In discourses around sustainable rural development, ‘participation’ has become a widely advocated methodological principle for intervention practice, and a range of participatory methodologies, methods and techniques have been proposed in order to operationalize it. In this article, I argue that despite the fact that important differences exist among the various methodologies, they have in common that they primarily perceive the process in which actors supposedly participate as a process of planning, decision-making and/or social learning. Some of the theoretical foundations of this mode of operationalizing development processes will be discussed; in doing so, a number of conceptual and methodological problems and inconsistencies in the current participation discourse will be highlighted. With reference to several empirical experiences, I suggest that negotiation theory may form a more appropriate basis for organizing participatory development efforts, as it provides a better language for dealing with the conflicts.

1. See, for example, Chambers (1994a, 1994b); Engel (1995); Fals Borda (1998a); Jiggins and de Zeeuw (1992); Okali et al. (1994); Pretty et al. (1995); Rahman (1993); Röling (1994, 1996); Scoones and Thompson (1994); van Veldhuizen et al. (1997).

that emerge within participatory processes. A number of practical implications of adopting a negotiation approach are then elaborated, especially with regard to the tasks and role of facilitators in participatory processes. Finally, the potential and limitations of the approach in different types of conflict situations are discussed.

DIFFERENCES IN PROBLEM ORIENTEDNESS, ASPIRATIONS AND JUSTIFICATION

Each participatory approach is deemed suitable for a specific type of problem situation, in relation to which it aims to generate certain contributions. In part, this explains why so many methodologies and approaches exist, each with its own acronym, abbreviation or (marketing) label. Let me briefly illustrate this differential issue and goal-orientedness in relation to a number of well-known methodologies.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA, see Chambers, 1994a, 1994b) and Participatory Action Research (PAR, see Fals Borda, 1998a; Rahman, 1993) are probably the most widely-known examples; they typically provide modes for making a community-based situational analysis as a basis for further local action, problem solving and/or project identification. Clearly, a methodology like Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS, see Engel, 1995) is geared to something more specific, namely to diagnose the functioning of inter-institutional (knowledge) networks, with the aim of identifying opportunities and improving the innovative capacity of the network. Platforms for the (co-)management of collective natural resources (Pinkerton, 1994; Roëling, 1994; Steins and Edwards, 1999), on the other hand, are typically directed towards overcoming another type of problem situation, namely the unsustainable use of resources like fisheries, grazing lands or water, in connection with the existence of social dilemmas (Hardin, 1968; Messick and Brewer, 1983). Finally, Participatory Technology Development (PTD, see Jiggins and de Zeeuw, 1992) and Farmer Participatory Research (FPR, Okali et al., 1994) are considered to be particularly suitable for solving socio-technical problems in the development of low external-input, sustainable agriculture (LEISA) systems.

It is important to differentiate between the perspectives of those who have developed these approaches, and those who use them in the field. Field-workers may well use particular methodologies in problem situations for which they were never intended. Similarly, practitioners often have different (or additional) institutional and/or personal aspirations in using (elements of) certain methodologies and discourses (see, for example, van Arkel and Versteeg, 1997). References to ‘participation’ may, for example, serve merely to create an organizational image that is beneficial for purposes of attracting funds and/or securing institutional survival (Pacheco, 2000). Moreover, even if the interest in participation is genuine, the rationale for using
participatory methodologies can vary considerably. In discourses on participation, a variety of arguments are used to advocate the need for a participatory approach in intervention processes (see for example Webler and Renn, 1995). Some arguments are typically instrumental in nature, and boil down to the wish to gain access to relevant information, networks or target groups (Brinkerhoff and Ingle, 1989; van Dusseldorp, 1990; Geurts and Mayer, 1996). Some instrumental modes of reasoning have more theoretical undertones such as the idea that people never change without motivation or ‘involvement’ of some kind or another (van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). Another set of arguments is ideological/normative in nature, such as the conviction that actors have a wish, moral right and/or duty to participate in an effort to change their own situation (Rahman, 1993; Rousseau, 1968). Finally, political concerns may be used to justify a participatory approach, such as the wish to emancipate and empower particular groups in society (Friedman, 1992; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Rahman, 1993). The underlying rationale for using a participatory methodology may vary from context to context, and may significantly affect the way methodologies are used. Nelson and Wright (1995) differentiate between the use of (the same) participatory methods and techniques as a means (when goals are fixed and externally imposed; that is, when instrumental arguments prevail) or as an end (when the process is used to ‘empower’ participants so that they can determine their own future; that is, when political and ideological arguments prevail).

COMMON PERCEPTIONS ON THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATORY CHANGE PROCESSES

Despite important differences in problem-orientedness, aspirations and justification (both in theory and practice), the similarities between different participatory methodologies are probably just as significant. All approaches mentioned, for example, recognize and emphasize the existence of different stakeholders in a problem situation, and many of the methods and techniques proposed and used are rather similar (see Pretty et al., 1995; van Veldhuizen et al., 1997). Most importantly, they tend to rest on similar conceptual ideas as to how social change comes about, which — amongst many other things — leads them to use a mixture of planning, decision-making and social learning models as organizing principle for participatory trajectories.

2. In some cases there is little rationale at all, for example where practitioners use methods as a blueprint without properly understanding what they are doing and why.
3. One could argue that — at a higher level of abstraction — the use of participatory approaches always has instrumental connotations; after all the wish to ‘empower’ people is a goal that is usually set by some in order to affect the position of others.
Change as the Result of Planning and Decision-making

Models of planning and decision-making are closely related, and typically include such activities (for some ‘phases’) as situation analysis, problem identification, goal formulation, selection of alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, implementation and evaluation (see, for example: CIMMYT, 1988; van Dusseldorp, 1990; Farrington and Martin, 1987). In essence, these models propose that change comes about (or should come about) through these kinds of activities. Even if blueprint planning has been abandoned by many, this has not rendered the models obsolete. Process planning may have changed the rhythm and order of planning activities (Brinkerhoff and Ingle, 1989), but has not fundamentally altered the model itself. The way participatory methodologies are described and used, and the participatory discourse at large, still reflect this mode of thinking in various ways.

The Phasing of Participatory Trajectories

Several participatory methodologies draw on planning and decision-making models in the sense that they are clearly positioned in terms of the models’ activities or ‘phases’. In many ways, PRA can be seen as a mode of prolonged participatory situation and problem analysis — that is, as an early activity within planning processes. Even if Chambers stresses the importance of data collection and analysis as an empowering process in itself, and does not claim that PRA should be seen as the first step in a formal planning process, he does see it as the beginning of something, as ‘the start of a process’ in which people have ‘enhanced knowledge and competence, an ability to make demands, and to sustain action’ (Chambers, 1994b: 1266). Others are more explicit about the type of process that should be started by PRA, and even consider the drawing up of a ‘Village Resource Management Plan’ as a final step of PRA (PID, 1989). In view of the widespread use of PRA as a method for project identification (see, for example, van Arkel and Versteeg, 1997; PID, 1989; Shah, 1994) it seems that this last translation of PRA is dominant in actual practice.

In many ways RAAKS resembles PRA in terms of its relation to planning models. RAAKS consists of two elaborate phases of situation analysis (‘problem definition and system identification’ and ‘constraint and opportunity analysis’) followed by a stage of ‘policy articulation/intervention planning’. Again, we recognize — albeit roughly — the activities that constitute a planning process. Finally, even if the idea of platforms for the (co-)management of collective natural resources (Pinkerton, 1994; Röling, 1994; Steins and Edwards, 1999) has not been operationalized in a clearly-articulated methodology, the term ‘management’ is in fact commonly equated with ‘decision-making’ (Davis and Olson, 1985). Not surprisingly,
therefore, studies in this field tend to focus on decision-making structures and institutions (see, for example, Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 1990). Thus, here too the decision-making model is prominent.

**Distinguishing Forms and Levels of Participation**

The significance of planning and decision-making models in thinking about participation is also reflected in widely-used typologies of participation. Pretty (1994) for example, distinguishes between ‘passive participation’, ‘participation in information giving’, ‘participation by consultation’, ‘participation for material incentives’, ‘functional participation’, ‘interactive participation’ and ‘self-mobilization’. A closer investigation of the corresponding descriptions (ibid.: 41) suggests that this classification is largely based on two dimensions, namely: (a) the distribution of decision-making authority between participants and interventionists in relation to (b) different key functions in development planning, such as situation analysis, problem identification, goal setting, and implementation. Other authors (Biggs, 1989; Paul, 1986, referred to in Okali et al., 1994: 48–9) also use the level of involvement in decision-making as a basis for classifying different types of participation. Thus, we see that decision-making and planning models are considered to be of key importance when talking about (different modes and levels of) participation.

**Ranking as a Decision-making Tool**

Different forms of ranking are presented as important tools within participatory methodologies (Chambers, 1994b; Jiggins and de Zeeuw, 1992; PID, 1989; Pretty et al., 1995; Shah, 1994). While some authors (including Chambers, 1994b; Jiggins and de Zeeuw, 1992) present ranking mainly as an instrument for getting a better understanding of a situation — for example, through wealth ranking and preference ranking — others stress its importance as a way of identifying the most important problems, and selecting the most feasible opportunities for solving them (PID, 1989). In this latter mode of application, ranking becomes merely a tool (or voting procedure) for taking ‘democratic’ community decisions about future action strategies and projects. In the actual practice of participatory projects we see that this last mode of ranking often plays a crucial role, for example for directing community action, intervention projects, ‘on-farm experiments’, after the initial stages of situation and problem analysis (Khamis, 1998; Zuñiga Valerin, 1998). The significance of tools for ‘participatory decision-making’ underlines the salience of decision-making models in participatory processes.
Change as the Result of Social Learning

In the participation discourse, learning processes are referred to even more often and more explicitly than planning and decision-making models. Most of the references are to forms of collective (rather than individual) learning, whereby different community members or stakeholders generate new knowledge, skills, confidence, resources, insight and perspectives on which action can be based. Although various conceptual ‘models’ of learning exist, the most widely referred to is Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning. Kolb introduces the idea of a learning cycle with stages of ‘concrete experience’, ‘reflective observation’, ‘abstract conceptualization’ and ‘active experimentation’. With the exception of PTD, however (see van Veldhuizen et al., 1997: 11), these ‘phases’ are not used as an organizing principle for structuring participatory processes as explicitly as the decision-making model. Nonetheless, participatory methodologies have various additional characteristics which express the strong belief in learning as a prerequisite for (if not origin of) change.

The Primacy of Joint Situation and Problem Analysis

Even if participatory methodologies have a clear affiliation with planning and decision-making models, many methodologies only cover a limited range of planning tasks or ‘phases’. That is; the methodologies tend to be geared towards joint situation and problem analysis. This is reflected, for example, in the nature of the majority of tools and/or ‘windows’ provided by RAAKS (Engel, 1995), PRA (Chambers, 1994b; Shah, 1994) and training guides on participatory learning and action (Pretty et al., 1995; van Veldhuizen et al., 1997). Hence, it seems to be implicitly assumed that stakeholders and interventionists are in need of a better, or a more widely-shared understanding of the situation, which in turn can be acquired through social learning. Apparently, lack of collective knowledge and skills are seen as key obstacles to comprehensive change and development in situations where participatory methodologies are deemed applicable.

The Emphasis on Communication and Communicative Action

In addition to tools for situation analysis, techniques which improve human communication receive a great deal of attention in discourses on participation.

4. See, for example, Bawden (1994); Berkes and Folke (1998); Engel (1995); Holling (1985); Ostrom (1990); Pretty and Chambers (1994); Pretty et al. (1995); Röling and Wagemakers (1998); van Veldhuizen et al. (1997).
The selection of participants

Especially in participatory discourses and practices around typically collective problems, there seems to exist an (often implicit) belief that it is important for (representatives of) all relevant stakeholders to participate in one way or another. The underlying argument here seems to be that progress can be made only when all key players reach a shared understanding. Thus, the boundaries of platforms should be such that all those affected are incorporated (Maarleveld and Dangbégnon, 1998; Thrupp et al., 1994). This inclusive approach (which also exists in RAAKS, see Engel, 1995: 199) is closely connected with the idea that through communicative action and improved communication.

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5. Such as natural resource management and network co-ordination; see Bawden (1994); Berkes and Folke (1998); Daniels and Walker (1996); Engel (1995); Ostrom (1990); Röling (1994).
learning, conflicts of interest between different parties should and can be overcome. In order to overcome such problems, higher ‘levels’ of learning are usually considered necessary. It is not sufficient for stakeholders to improve present routines (single loop learning); they need to significantly alter and challenge the assumptions and boundaries which underlie their practices (double loop learning), or even change the way they organize or think about the learning process itself (triple loop learning) (Argyris and Schön, 1996; Wijnhoven, 1995).

CONCEPTUAL SHORTCOMINGS OF THE DOMINANT MODELS

At the conceptual level, a key problem with participatory discourses lies in the way authors deal with social conflict and struggle over resources in change processes (see also Mosse, 1995; Scoones and Thompson, 1994). Over the last decade, many studies have shown convincingly that conflicts and struggles over resources and images play an important role in the day-to-day practice of social life, including (participatory) development projects (Arce, 1993; Long, 1989; Villareal, 1994). Even if such studies have a bias towards identifying conflict and struggle rather than signalling consensus and co-operation (Schrijvers, 1992), Long and van der Ploeg (1989) rightly conclude that there is a large divide between the formal representation of development projects (in terms of the language and phases of conventional planning) and the way they evolve in practice. Thus, they argue (ibid.: 228) that ‘the concept of intervention needs deconstructing so that we recognise it for what it fundamentally is, namely, an ongoing, socially-constructed and negotiated process, not simply the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes’. Or as Crehan and von Oppen (1988: 113) put it: ‘[a] development project should be seen not simply in terms of its goals and their achievement or non-achievement, but rather as a social event, an arena of struggle between different groups with different interests’.

As we have seen, the designers of participatory methodologies have responded to these types of observations in three closely related ways. First, they have resorted to more flexible and process-oriented modes of planning (that is, organizing planning as a learning process), without abandoning the planning idea altogether. Second, inspired by Habermas’s idea of communicative action, they have proposed that the management of conflicts and struggle over resources can best be assisted by organizing a process of social learning. Third, in addition to these two ‘learning model’ solutions, they have incorporated some language from negotiation discourses. In relation to platforms for natural resource management, for example, some authors use the term ‘negotiation’ instead of ‘decision-making’ or ‘learning’ (for example, Daniels and Walker, 1996; Röling, 1994, 1996). In the context of agricultural knowledge and technology issues, Scoones and Thompson (1994) emphasize the importance of negotiation processes. Engel (1995) speaks of
‘negotiations’ when discussing the final stages of RAAKS. Similarly, the terms ‘stakeholders’ and ‘stakeholder analysis’ have become increasingly popular (ODA, 1995); these terms too can be traced back to negotiation literature.

In some ways, however, these ‘solutions’ remain rather problematic. First of all, the rationale for advocating a social learning approach based on the idea of communicative action is debatable. In a typical situation of natural resource over-exploitation, for example, the argument for social learning boils down to the following: (1) there is a problem because people do not act in a communicatively rational manner (in the collective interest), but act in a strategic mode (following self-interest); (2) as a solution, they must engage in a process of communicative action (facilitated by a third party), so that they can act in a communicatively rational manner in the future.

The difficulty here is that the solution proposed is in fact a negation of the problem. It is a bit like arguing that ‘people are not healthy because they do not eat healthy food, so they must eat more healthy food, in order for them to become healthy’. What is lacking in such ‘wishful thinking’ statements is an analysis as to why it is that, in a given situation, people act in a mode which is deemed undesirable by policy makers. In the case of resource use, the implicit assumption is that people cannot behave in a communicatively rational way, mainly because there is no one to organize and facilitate such a process. Although this may play a role, it is unlikely to be the main factor. The use of natural resources like land and water is often a critical element in the livelihood strategies and opportunities of different actors (Manzungu and van der Zaag, 1996). Given the increased scarcity of these resources, conflicts of interests and differential opportunities to defend such interests are the rule rather than the exception (see, for example, Gronov, 1995; Manzungu and van der Zaag, 1996; Mosse, 1995). In such cases, the problem is unlikely be to the lack of an external facilitator, but rather the fact that some actors, for a variety of reasons, are simply not willing or able to take a serious part in communicative platform processes. This may be true not only in cases of natural resource management, but also in relation to technology and community development processes (see also Eyben and Ladbury, 1995).

Secondly, the celebration of communicative action as a key ingredient in social learning processes becomes questionable in view of some conceptual difficulties related to Habermas’s separation between communicative and strategic action. Elsewhere (Leeuwis, 1993: 98, 347–86; Leeuwis, 1995), I have shown that the occurrence and outcomes of interactions that in themselves might well be termed ‘communicative action’, can only be adequately understood if one recognizes that they are at the same time strategic actions vis-à-vis other communities of actors. Whether or not actions are strategic or communicative seems to depend on where one draws the boundaries between communities of actors in time and space, which considerably blurs the distinction. This also calls into question a related assumption which underlies the social learning model, namely that the motor for future societal progress is consensus and shared understanding. Evidence shows
that this is only partly true since effective consensus among some (that is, consensus that leads a specific set of actors to generate tangible 'progress') is frequently based on conflict and competition with others (see Case 1, below).

Thirdly, both decision-making and social learning models see cognitive change as the prime prerequisite for behavioural change and conflict resolution. Participatory methodologies are mainly geared towards changing cognition, assuming that this will lead to changes in social practice. Thus, even if authors on participation are inspired by constructivism (Fals Borda, 1998b; Pretty, 1994; Röling, 1996), they seem to disregard one of its major insights, namely that differences in (or conflicts of) perception are not just cultural or accidental, but are intricately intertwined with social interests and practices (Callon et al., 1986). In other words, social practices and interests shape perceptions as much as the other way around (Aarts, 1998). By focusing on cognitive processes as an entry point for inducing change, advocates of participatory methodologies tend to disregard a range of other strategies or ‘policy instruments’ (van Woerkum, 1990) which may help to change practices, interests and, eventually, perceptions in the context of conflict resolution.

Fourthly, apart from theoretical problems, there are considerable practical problems in creating the conditions for communicative action — ‘an ideal speech situation’ (see Habermas, 1970a, 1970b, 1981). Even if one succeeds in bringing together all relevant stakeholders in, for example, a platform for social learning (no small achievement in itself), it will not be easy to make actors set aside their conflicting personal and/or institutional interests during the process. Assuming for a moment that the actors involved could abstract temporarily from their strategic interests and power positions, they will usually have differential resources at their disposal (in the form of knowledge, access to certain sources, and so on) which they can use to make and criticize certain validity claims concerning truth, normative rightness and authenticity (see Habermas, 1981). Thus, even if the opportunities to speak out are equal, the possibilities to make claims and criticize them are not. In all, it is extremely difficult — if not impossible — to ban power processes from participatory intervention.

Fifthly, the sporadic references to negotiation discourses remain in many ways ‘lip-service’. Literature on negotiation processes suggests that negotiations have their own dynamics and characteristics, and can be facilitated in various ways (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Mastenbroek, 1997; Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). However, participatory methodologies tend not to provide distinct activities, phases or tools that are based on this body of literature and are geared towards enhancing negotiation processes. Instead, as we have seen, the emphasis is mainly on improving communication during joint situation analysis activities, with the expectation that this will somehow contribute to resolving conflicts. This rather hesitant incorporation of negotiation literature into participatory discourses and methodologies is
probably related to theoretical and ideological incompatibilities. If one wishes to facilitate negotiations, one accepts in principle that people act in what Habermas would label a strategically rational manner. This goes against the dominant views within participation discourses that strategic action is (part of) the problem, and not the solution.

PRACTICAL SHORTCOMINGS OF THE DOMINANT MODELS

An important question is whether or not these conceptual problems necessitate a different methodological approach towards participatory processes, and if so, what adaptations are necessary. In other words, is there anything wrong with the practical use of planning, decision-making and social learning models as organizing principles for participatory trajectories? Clearly, little would be wrong if the application of participatory approaches was successful in terms of inducing development and societal problem-solving. However, regardless of the exact criteria one uses to assess ‘success’ or ‘failure’, it is clear that many participatory processes are far from smooth, and quite often produce disappointing results for those that initiate or participate in them (Dangbégnon, 1998; Eyben and Ladbury, 1995; Khamis, 1998; Leeuwis, 1995; Mosse, 1995; Wagemans and Boerma, 1998; Zuñiga Valerin, 1998).

Six Cases on Participation and Conflict

The cases presented below have not been deliberately selected; they represent participatory trajectories that I have more or less ‘bumped into’ during my own research and student supervision. However, they do give some examples of frictions in participatory processes; I would argue that these are somehow related to the limited capacity of current participatory methods to deal practically with conflict situations.

Case 1: Conflict, Unproductive Consensus and Fruitful Competition (Leeuwis, 1995)

A group of glasshouse horticulturists in the Netherlands manages to arrange a national subsidy in order to build a computer programme for electronic data exchange and enterprise comparisons. A condition for getting the subsidy is that the programme must cater for the needs of all fruit/vegetable growers. Thus, a large range of growers, representing different crops and regions, become involved in the design process. Great diversity is apparent in the information needs of different growers, the only common denominator being that they are all to some degree interested in exchanging glasshouse climatic data. In fact, the growers are much more interested in exchanging a range of production data, which differ considerably from crop
to crop. As a compromise, it is nevertheless agreed to focus on exchanging climatic data. However, as a result of dissatisfaction with the compromise, struggles over money, the slowness of the process and lack of progress, a number of conflicts emerge and several growers drop out. Among them is a small group of cucumber growers who start a competing initiative. In a very short period of time this group develops a programme that caters very well for cucumber growers’ needs, and which is later adapted in order to cater for the needs of other growers as well. For a few years, the two computer packages compete on the market. Eventually the two packages are integrated again within a third initiative, which builds on the lessons learned in both projects.

What we see in this case is essentially that the diversity of interests among the stakeholders — the result of an inclusive approach in the selection of participants — becomes an obstacle to reaching productive consensus in the context of the available experience, budget and technological opportunities. It is only when a range of growers is excluded, causing two rival groups of growers to compete, that learning is accelerated and an appropriate technology is developed, which eventually caters for the needs of all.

**Case 2: Reinforcing Conflict through Public Decision-making (Zuñiga Valerín, 1998)**

Zuñiga describes how, in the San Bosco community in Costa Rica, ranking techniques are used during group meetings in order to identify and prioritize general and agricultural community problems. She also describes how institutional interests and mandates, as well as conflicts within the community, have a bearing on which of the priority problems are actually dealt with, and how. Typically, decisions on activities are voted for by hand-raising during group meetings. This leads to considerable tensions, as the San Bosco community consists of two sub-communities, divided by a river and — to some extent — by family lines. Due to variations in infrastructure, the two sub-communities have different needs and priorities, which are defended by the respective community leaders. Both leaders engage in lobbying in order to influence the outcome of the voting during group meetings, putting some community members in a difficult position. The responsible field worker knows about the political struggle, but admits he does not know how to deal with it, other than by encouraging everyone to express their view, and eventually following the majority vote. As a result, one sub-community tends to feel discriminated against in the participatory process.

In this case we see an emphasis on ‘democratic’ decision-making by means of ranking during public group meetings. Although the different actors seem to be aware of each others’ views and positions, the open group meetings provide limited opportunities for the kind of ‘give and take’ that is necessary for settling the disputes. The presence of an audience is not a conducive environment for leaders to give in or strike deals; rather it is an opportunity to show strength and reinforce one’s position as a leader.
Case 3: Lack of Manoeuvring Space, Institutional Mandate and Capacity to Resolve Conflict (sources: interviews with Ministry of Agriculture staff, Manicaland, Zimbabwe; Mutimukuru, 2000)

In the context of a wider land-use planning effort, the members of Chitora ward in Manicaland, Zimbabwe decide during a village meeting that they are interested in establishing a communal grazing scheme. Subsequently, the Ministry of Agriculture develops a plan (in a rather top-down mode), and manages to find a donor willing to provide the necessary funding. All parties agree that the donor will provide the material for fences, while the community will deliver the necessary labour in order to construct the fences. However, the plan implies that some farmers (including a traditional leader) will have to move their stone-built homes to other areas, but the donor refuses to pay compensation to those who have to leave. Also, members of neighbouring communities object to the scheme, as it will limit their access to grazing land and water. Over time, competence conflicts emerge between (and within) traditional authority structures, and the newly introduced Grazing Scheme Management Committee. These (and several other) conflicts are not resolved during village meetings that are initiated occasionally by Ministry of Agriculture staff. At first, some community members start to build the fences in the context of a ‘food for work’ drought relief programme, but as soon as this — initially unanticipated programme — comes to an end, nobody turns up any more. Several attempts to revive and adapt the project during further village meetings prove short-lived (Mutimukuru, 2000), and eventually the grazing scheme is ‘given up’ by the donor and the Ministry of Agriculture and never completed.

This case demonstrates, first of all, the risks of developing plans in isolation from relevant stakeholders. The Ministry of Agriculture initially operates in a top-down manner, a mode of behaviour encouraged by formal land-use planning guidelines and procedures, which at a later stage also limit the space for settling the problems that emerge. It is interesting to note, however, that conflicts similar to those described here also emerge in relation to much more ‘bottom-up’ community initiatives and plans in Zimbabwe (see, for example, Shambare, 2000), which suggests that significant plans are unlikely to be free of conflict, regardless of their precise history and origin. Furthermore, this case resembles the previous one in that the participatory methods applied for community participation (plenary village meetings) do not allow for a process of ‘give and take’, so that shared agreements on what should happen in order to resolve the conflicts never emerge. An additional dimension here is that the main driving forces behind the project, lack the capacity, willingness and/or mandate to take responsibility for solving the conflicts that emerge. No credible mediator emerges from the local community (partly because the local leaders themselves are involved in the various conflicts), while the Ministry of Agriculture and the donor tend to perceive their role primarily as giving technical advice and providing funds, and are not willing or able to organize an intensive
conflict resolution process. Thus, a vacuum exists at the level of process leadership.

Case 4: Neglecting Lingering Conflicts around Technical Solutions (Khamis, 1998)

Khamis describes how, through a group ranking exercise, a farmer research group in Zanzibar identifies reduced soil fertility as a high priority problem. The group agrees to conduct on-farm experiments with agro-forestry and green manuring. In both cases, (planting materials of) trees are used in combination with cassava. These are long-term experiments; it takes a long time before farmers can conclude whether the technologies work, to the detriment of enthusiasm within the research group (Khamis, 1998). However, even after the technologies have proved themselves, relatively few farmers are willing to use them. This appears to be related to the land tenure system in Zanzibar. Before 1964 most of the land in Zanzibar was owned by Arabs; after the revolution, land was officially confiscated and re-distributed by the government but, informally, the Islamic laws and habits of heritage and land-tenure are still respected (Khamis, 1998; Wipfler et al., 1998). A lot of land is thus considered to have been borrowed from neighbours, or to belong to absentee Arab landlords and their local representatives. Some of the rules actually prohibit the permanent and/or temporary planting of trees on borrowed land. Moreover, this dual legal system causes a certain degree of land-insecurity, which discourages farmers from making semi-permanent investments. In fact, the planting of trees increases insecurity, as sanctions may have to be faced.

This case-study shows how particular technical solutions can only be applied if new social arrangements are made between actors with diverging interests to support the technology (see also Leeuwis and Remmers, 1999). In this case, the use of agro-forestry and green manuring on borrowed land would require a new arrangement between formal and informal landowners, their local representatives, and farmers concerning the use of trees or planting materials of trees. However, this need (or ‘hidden conflict’) was not seriously tackled within the context of the participatory project, as it was defined as being outside the project’s scope and mandate.

Case 5: Conflict Resolutions without Proper Follow-up (Bolding et al., 1996)

Bolding et al. (1996) describe a situation where farmers in Zimbabwe’s Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme have a conflict over water rights with upstream farmers, who extract water through self-made weirs. The Nyanyadzi farmers regard the upstream farmers as squatters who illegally reduce their water supply, and they repeatedly organize raids in which they destroy the weirs of the upstream farmers. The upstream farmers simply reconstruct them time and time again, and increasingly manage to get formally-recognized water rights. A district administrator acts as a mediator on several occasions. Through bilateral and group meetings with community representatives he
eventually negotiates a water-sharing arrangement between the farmers in the Nyanyadzi scheme and several upstream communities of water users. However, the solution proves short-lived. Technically speaking, the arrangement does not work well, and there are no viable organizational mechanisms to control and enforce the deal. Moreover, it becomes clear in retrospect that the water shortages in Nyanyadzi are to a considerable degree related to water extraction by farmers from tributaries of the Nyanyadzi river, who do not take part in the deal (Bolding, pers. comm.).

What we see here is that a conflict reaches a climax, after which a deal is secured under the supervision of a mediator. However, it appears that no adequate follow-up arrangements have been incorporated in the agreement on how to enforce it, and on how to deal with unforeseen developments, unanticipated inter-dependencies and newly emerging information.

**Case 6: A Lack of Government Pressure and Authority in Conflict Resolution (Dangbégnon, 1998)**

Dangbégnon describes the dynamics of a long-standing conflict between groups of fishermen who derive their livelihood from fishing in Aheme lake, Benin. The groups of fishermen differ in terms of their lineage, cultural identity, geographic location, the marine-ecological zones of the lake in which they fish, the fishing techniques they use, and the governmental jurisdiction under which they reside. Over time, different initiatives emerge which are formally aimed at bringing about a more sustainable management of the severely over-fished lake. Most of these initiatives include the erection of organizational platforms, which typically exclude one or more of the major stakeholders, and are geared towards preserving the interests of particular coalitions. In this context, the conflict sharpens and continues. Eventually, the national government becomes involved, and organizes a ‘Journée de Réflexion’ in which the various communities, groups, organizations and administrative units are invited to participate. During the meeting, the government more or less imposes certain measures (including the banning of several fishing techniques), and encourages the stakeholders to suggest alternative modes of use. A monitoring committee (Comité de Suivi) is established to control and enforce the new regulations. Initially, a number of semi-permanent ‘Xha’ and ‘Akaja’ fishing constructions are removed, but a number of fishermen from various communities subsequently illegally reconstruct them. Due to differential policies in different jurisdictions — associated with electoral concerns — some fishermen face sanctions, and others not. Eventually, this leads to a total breakdown of the ‘agreement’.

In this case, due mainly to the administrative complexity of the situation, different groups of fishermen have considerable space to frustrate joint regulation. The central government is relatively weak, with very limited means to consistently enforce regulations, or to put pressure on the stakeholders to work seriously towards an agreement.
TOWARDS A NEGOTIATION APPROACH

The case-studies above suggest clearly — in line with findings by others, such as Long and Long (1992), Nelson and Wright (1995) — that conflict is never far away from participatory development trajectories, regardless of their specific purpose (resource management, community development, technology design, or whatever). In some cases, conflict gives rise to participatory intervention, while in other cases conflicts emerge during the process and/or affect it negatively or positively. Also, it is clear that such conflicts tend to go along with three broad types of frictions in the participatory process: (a) difficulties in maintaining an agreement or compromise after it has been secured; (b) problems in securing an agreement; and (c) failure to tackle the most significant problems in the first place. The cases present little evidence that the stakeholders’ lack of knowledge and understanding of each others’ perspectives (that is, sub-optimal learning and communication) is either the central ‘cause’ of these frictions, or the key to overcoming them. Rather, the cases suggest that stakeholders are unable and/or unwilling to take other actors’ viewpoints and interests seriously. This can be seen in a variety of circumstances, such as the inclusive selection of participants, the superficial decision-making methods used, the lack of institutional space provided, insufficient leadership in conflict resolution, the absence of follow-up arrangements, and the non-availability of external pressures.

Of course one could argue that the above case-studies are simply examples of bad participatory practice (Jiggins, personal comment), and that the frictions identified could have been prevented by better ex-ante situational analysis, the offering of ‘give and take’ opportunities ‘behind the scenes’ in community decision-making, the provision of responsible leadership in conflict resolution, proper follow-up arrangements and adequate use of external pressures. However, this would be too easy an argument. The point is that these types of ‘improvements’ are not included in either the mainstream discourse on participation, or in popular training manuals for facilitators of participatory processes (Pretty et al., 1995; van Veldhuizen et al., 1997). Thus, social learning and decision-making models provide an insufficient basis for organizing viable participatory processes in practice, in that they tend to fail to resolve conflicts. This practical conclusion is in line with the conceptual difficulties outlined earlier.

The solution is simple, but so far largely overlooked in view of normative and conceptual ‘hang-ups’ regarding the value of strategic versus communicative action. If in practice participatory projects emerge as ‘arenas of struggle’, and if stakeholders tend to act strategically, rather than communicatively, then why not base methodological approaches on these assumptions? That is: why not organize participatory trajectories as negotiation processes, in order to be better able to deal with conflict situations? An objection may be that this helps only to further legitimize strategic action in a world that already suffers by actors pursuing their own self-interest.
However, it must be emphasized that negotiation and social learning are by no means mutually exclusive; communicative and strategic action are in many ways two sides of the same coin. In fact, adopting a negotiation approach is probably the best strategy to encourage social learning — an argument supported by insights from social psychology. Here it has been shown that people tend to act out of self-interest not because they do not care about others, but because they lack trustworthy institutions, arrangements and/or information which allow them to choose co-operative options (Baron et al., 1992: Ch. 7; Messick and Brewer, 1983). In other words, the space for social learning and co-operation depends on all sorts of pre-conditions and institutions which have to be created — that is, strategically negotiated — in advance (see also Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 1990).

We need to develop an approach towards participation that does not negate — conceptually and methodologically — the significance of strategic action and conflicts of interest, by somehow rendering them ‘normatively undesirable’. Rather, we need an approach that starts from the assumption that actors are likely to act strategically in relation to existing and emerging conflicts of interests, and then finds ways of using this to solve societal problems. For the purpose of developing such an approach, we will now explore the ways in which negotiation theory can help to direct participatory trajectories, as an alternative to the prevailing planning, decision-making and social learning models.

**Practical Implications of Adopting a Negotiation Perspective**

Looking at participatory processes as negotiation processes gives us a number of opportunities for adapting current methodologies with a view to improving their capacity to deal with the conflicts that will always emerge whenever meaningful change of the status quo is striven for. Negotiation processes can be divided into two broad categories. The first might be described as ‘distributive’: the various stakeholders hold on to their own perceptions and positions, and basically use negotiations to divide the cake (or the pain). The gains of one party then represent the losses of another. According to Aarts (1998), such compromises tend to be relatively unstable, since the ‘source’ of conflict remains intact. A second type of negotiation process can be labelled ‘integrative’. In such processes the stakeholders develop new (and often wider) problem definitions and perceptions on the basis of a creative collective learning process, resulting in the identification of so-called ‘win–win’ solutions. This latter type of negotiation process coincides with the aspirations usually associated with participatory intervention. Building on elements of negotiation literature (Huguenin, 1994; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987; van der Veen and Glasbergen, 1992) a number of tasks have been identified by van Meegeren and Leeuwis (1999) in order to facilitate integrative negotiations:
Tasks in Integrative Negotiation Processes (derived from van Meegeren and Leeuwis, 1999)

Task 1: Preparation
- exploratory analysis of conflicts, problems, relations, practices, etc. in historical perspective;
- selecting participants;
- securing participation by stakeholders;
- establishing relations with the wider policy environment;

Task 2: Agreeing upon a process design and process protocol
- creating an agreed-upon code of conduct and provisional agenda;
- reaching agreement about procedures, methodologies, etc.;
- process management and maintenance of process agreements;
- securing new process agreements as the process unfolds.

Task 3: Joint exploration and situation analysis
- group formation;
- exchanging perspectives, interests, goals;
- analysing problems and interrelations;
- integration of visions into new problem definitions;
- preliminary identification of alternative solutions and ‘win–win’ strategies;
- identification of gaps in knowledge and insight.

Task 4: Joint fact-finding
- developing and implementing action-plans to fill knowledge gaps.

Task 5: Forging agreement
- manoeuvre: clarifying positions, making claims, use of pressure to secure concessions, create and resolve impasses;
- securing agreement on a coherent package of measures and action plans.

Task 6: Communication of representatives with constituencies
- transferring the learning process;
- ‘ratification’ of agreement by constituencies.

Task 7: Monitoring implementation
- implementing the agreements made;
- monitoring progress;
- creating contexts of re-negotiation.

Some of these tasks are especially important during the early stages of a negotiation process, whereas others become important as the process progresses. However, all tasks remain relevant throughout the process as much repetition is likely to occur. Thus, the overview of tasks should not be interpreted as ‘stages’ or ‘phases’. In principle, all parties involved bear responsibility for (the distribution of) these tasks, but early in the participatory process the initiators have a special responsibility.

For each of these (sub-)tasks, many concrete recommendations can be made on the basis of previous experiences as described in various studies.
studies which add to ‘conventional’ literature on participation. Authors like de Bruin and ten Heuvelhof (1998), Fisher and Ury (1981), Mastenbroek (1997), Susskind and Cruikshank (1987), and van der Veen and Glasbergen (1992), for example, develop a number of simple but crucial guidelines for facilitating negotiations which relate to the tasks listed above, including:

- make a preliminary conflict assessment before starting a participatory trajectory (related to task 1);
- invite/select stakeholders on the basis of their feelings of interdependency (task 1);
- if possible, select representatives who have experienced earlier conflicts in a less personal manner (task 1);
- enhance feelings of interdependency by introducing external pressures (tasks 1 and 5);
- make sure the agenda for negotiation is sufficiently open to be able to strike package deals (task 2);
- give participants the right to withdraw from earlier proposals (task 2);
- ensure that representatives have a clear and sufficiently wide mandate (task 2);
- strive at jointly endorsed discussion procedures, as a ‘power-base’ for facilitators and/or mediators (task 2);
- allow participants to ‘let off steam’ at an early stage (task 3);
- distinguish between substantive and relational conflicts, and deal with the relational problems first (related to task 3);
- ensure sufficient content input from outside sources by means of learning tools and/or external experts (task 3);
- explore alternative problem definitions in order to help identify possible ‘win–win’ solutions (task 3);
- make people talk in terms of interests and fears, not in terms of positions and ‘facts’ (tasks 3 and 5);
- stimulate joint fact-finding as a way of developing a common knowledge base and relationships of trust (task 4);
- make people talk in terms of new alternative proposals rather than in terms of their positions vis-à-vis existing proposals (task 5);
- explore package deals in which different problems and solutions are integrated (task 5);
- involve trusted outsiders for supervising the fulfilment of agreements (tasks 5 and 7);
- organize interactions between representatives and constituencies as a negotiation process in itself (task 6);
- make sure that compromises are presented to constituencies by their own representatives (task 6);
- arrive at clear procedures for monitoring progress, and for re-opening negotiations (task 7).
It is probably fair to say that the guidelines listed above are culturally biased, and need to be adapted to different ‘negotiation cultures’. This is not the place to elaborate on these practicalities, however; suffice to say that negotiation literature gives access to a range of tools and guidelines that have so far been largely overlooked in participatory discourses.

Redefining the Role of the Facilitator

As we have seen, starting from a negotiation model considerably alters the tasks of a facilitator in a participatory process. Although the facilitation of communication and social learning remains an important point of attention (for instance in tasks 3 and 4), these activities are now embedded within a wider negotiation setting which goes along with new tasks and tools. It is important to realize that this has far-reaching implications for the overall role of the facilitator. In traditional participation literature the facilitator tends to be portrayed as a fairly neutral figure whose prime concern is to enhance communication and learning. However, in a context of negotiation it becomes more evident that a facilitator needs to have an active strategy, resources and a power-base in order to forge sustainable agreements. For example, a facilitator may at a certain point have to strategically select participants and exclude others, put pressure on certain stakeholders, and/or impose sanctions if actors do not follow the agreed rules of conduct, etc. In order to achieve this, the facilitator needs — in addition to the power-base provided by the agreed rules of conduct — a certain amount of status, credibility, charisma, influence and trustworthiness. Thus, the selection of facilitators may require a lot more attention than in the past. The facilitation of negotiations is not a task that can easily be left to relatively junior project staff who have been on one or two communication courses. Apart from a certain amount of ‘leverage’, a facilitator will have to possess the necessary insights and capabilities regarding social interactions, the shaping of negotiations and the organization of learning processes.

The Status of Facilitation Tasks and Guidelines

The proposed tasks and the guidelines associated with them are based on the idea that a participatory process can be organized along the lines of a negotiation process, in which special attention is paid to the facilitation of joint learning. In many cases there will in fact be multiple parallel learning and negotiation trajectories taking place at more or less the same time.

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6. A more detailed discussion and overview of such guidelines can be found in van Meegeren and Leeuwis (1999).
Within negotiations there are usually a number of issues at stake, and new paths can continually be added, for example by means of joint fact-finding. One can also speak of negotiations on various fronts: between the different parties, but also between representatives and their constituencies, or between the negotiation partners and third parties. The complexities involved demand a flexible and creative mode of facilitation. The interactions within negotiation processes can have all kinds of unintended consequences and can also be influenced by chance or unanticipated events and developments in the external environment. Within integrative negotiations especially, all kinds of new directions can open up, necessitating adjustments of the chosen trajectory. The planning scope for participatory processes is therefore limited. It would be a mistake to approach the proposed tasks and guidelines as a 'step-by-step' plan that has to be closely adhered to in order to achieve success. Rather, the guidelines should be treated as an incomplete collection of methodological tips relevant to tasks that are of importance within negotiation processes. A creative, selective and purposeful application of such tips will increase the chances of a productive learning and negotiation process, but will not be a guarantee for success. The course of human interactions is too capricious and unpredictable for that.

The Relevance of the Negotiation Approach to Different Conflict Situations

If adopting a negotiation approach helps to generate new practical guidelines for organizing participatory processes, this raises the question of which types of (conflict) situations might benefit from such an approach. The following will demonstrate that negotiation theory enables us to better understand when and where participatory approaches may be productive.

Negotiation theory suggests that three fundamental conditions must be met before serious negotiations can take place (Aarts, 1998; Mastenbroek, 1997): (a) there must be a divergence of interests; (b) stakeholders must feel mutually interdependent in solving a problematic situation; (c) the key players must be able to communicate with each other. How do these apply to the context of rural development?

Divergence of Interests

We have seen that conflicts of interests are likely to emerge wherever people strive for meaningful change. These conflicts can differ greatly in terms of the type of interests at stake, historical roots, the number of actors involved, complexity, cultural setting, salience, intensity, etc. To deal with these specific characteristics, each conflict situation will require a tailor-made mode of organizing and facilitating the negotiation process. In general
terms, in the context of rural development, the ‘divergence of interests’ criterion for applying the negotiation approach is likely to be present.

**Mutual Interdependence**

If key stakeholders do not believe that they need each other in order to arrive at an acceptable solution to their respective problems, a negotiation approach does not make sense. There are many settings in which one actor feels dependent on another for solving what it perceives to be a problem, while the other party does not see the problem as being its concern, and thus feels no pressure to talk seriously, let alone negotiate, about the issue: one might think, for instance, of a farmer community in West Africa dealing with the European agro-industry over food market distortion. Similarly, resource-rich stakeholders, particularly, may feel that they can best defend their interests through means other than negotiation, for example by litigation, lobbying, violence, and so on. Here it is important to recognize that conflicts are dynamic and evolving. In the early stages, stakeholders tend to explore their opportunities to ‘win’ the battle with whatever means they have available. During this phase of exploring 'Best Alternatives To Negotiated Agreement' (BATNA; see Fisher and Ury, 1981), conflicts often reach a climax, with relations between the opposing parties deteriorating. Where both parties have considerable resources at their disposal, however, stakeholders will eventually realize that fighting does not lead to a satisfactory solution for either party, and that the only way forward is to restore relations, and negotiate a solution (Aarts, 1998).

An important lesson to be derived from this, is that an inclusive participatory approach (that is, one that brings all relevant stakeholders together) only makes sense during the ‘final’ stages of a conflict cycle. Where the key stakeholders do not (yet) perceive a mutual interdependence, interventions may more usefully focus on developing or enhancing such a perception. This may be achieved, for example, by strengthening the position of particular (coalitions of) actors vis-à-vis other stakeholders, or with the help of conventional policy instruments such as new regulations, ‘carrots and sticks’ and/or strategic communication campaigns.

There may thus be many situations in which an inclusive participatory negotiation trajectory is not (yet) an option, as key actors do not feel mutually interdependent. However, policy-makers and interventionists can employ various strategies to change this situation, including setting up negotiations between a sub-set of relevant actors who do already feel interdependent. By focusing on feelings of mutual inter-dependence, a negotiation approach helps to identify appropriate boundaries for participatory trajectories (see also Leeuwis, 1995). A related implication is that a participatory trajectory cannot be established out of the blue; in order to assess promising boundaries of participatory activities a thorough understanding
of the socio-historical context is required. If such understanding is lacking, various modes of exploratory research and conflict assessment can be employed before decisions are made about the eventual set-up of participatory intervention (Leeuwis, 1993; ODA, 1995).

**Ability to Communicate**

The ability of relevant stakeholders to communicate with each other can be hampered in various ways. Most obviously, physical distance may form an obstacle. In our globalized society, relevant stakeholders may well be spread across the world (as in our earlier example of the food market), which may hamper the intensive forms of communication that are needed in a negotiation process. Effective communication may also be adversely affected by institutional and organizational difficulties. In other words, stakeholders must somehow be organized in order to be represented, and to allow effective communication between representatives and their constituencies during the negotiation process. In the case of the international food market this again poses problems, for example with respect to the position of consumers of agricultural products. Finally, there may exist deep cultural and historical divides between relevant stakeholders that make communication impossible, for example in conflicts between different castes, ethnic groups or religious communities. In such situations, too, direct negotiations may not be viable.

Where such barriers to communication exist, a participatory (negotiation) approach is not a real option, and other forms of intervention may be more appropriate, such as those aimed at containing conflict, and/or reducing its negative consequences. At the same time, efforts can be directed towards creating better conditions for communication and thus for negotiation. Such efforts may take years or even decades, but can pay off eventually, as demonstrated, for example, by the negotiations that are currently taking place in Northern Ireland and the Middle East.

It is thus difficult to arrive at a ‘clear-cut’ typology of conflicts in which a negotiation approach towards participation may be a helpful strategy. The number of variables that one would need to construct such a typology is vast, while conflicts themselves are dynamic, their characteristics changing over time. However, it is possible to identify some fundamental conditions that must be met before one can adopt a participatory (negotiation) approach. Each (potential) conflict situation will have to be carefully analysed in terms of these conditions before an appropriate strategy can be decided upon.

**CONCLUSION**

This article has demonstrated that current participatory approaches and methodologies are based primarily on theories regarding planning, decision-making and/or social learning, which causes them to be blind to conflict as
an inherent component (and at times a positive force) in sustainable rural development processes. Conflicts, social struggle and strategic action are either overlooked completely, or denied (that is, rendered undesirable) on theoretical and normative grounds. I have argued that such modes of thinking suffer from several conceptual shortcomings and inconsistencies, such as cognitive bias, an only partial incorporation of constructivist ideas and an untenable (Habermassian) separation between communicative and strategic forms of action. At the practical level, a number of case-studies do indeed suggest that participatory intervention is rarely conflict-free, and often suffers from an inability to handle pre-existing and/or emerging conflicts. Hence, practitioners need to find a better language to anticipate and make use of the dynamics of conflict. As a solution, I propose that the organization of participatory trajectories should first and foremost be inspired by theories of negotiation and conflict management. A first exploration of the negotiation literature indicates that such an approach can bring a range of useful guidelines and insights to the current discourse on participation. Although social learning remains an important concern within a negotiation approach to participation, it is argued that effective social learning is unlikely to happen if it is not embedded in a well ‘managed’ negotiation process. At the same time, effective negotiation is impossible without a properly facilitated learning process. Furthermore, a negotiation approach towards participation requires new roles, tasks, skills and social status for facilitators of participatory processes. It is important to note, however, that this approach only makes sense in situations where the fundamental conditions for negotiation are met. In order to assess this, new modes of analysis preceding and during participatory trajectories are also necessary.

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Reconceptualizing Participation for Sustainable Rural Development


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