What Policy Actors Seek for: Reciprocal Misunderstanding of Objectives of Participatory Decision Making

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Abstract

The goal of this research is to explore different policy actors' attitudes towards participation in public decision making. The paper examines objectives of external participants' involvement and compares various participants' judgements on the process and results of participation. We screened operation of formal networks of participatory decision making at the Lithuanian Ministries of Health and Education & Science. The research revealed the willingness of decision makers to allow different stakeholders to contribute to the solution of problems of diverse character. The results of interviews manifested reciprocal miscommunication towards objectives and results of participatory decision making. Public administrators demonstrated their high willingness to acquire expertise, while external participants sought to present specific interests and got them implemented as well. However, it has to be admitted that decision makers are not committed to the results generated by stakeholders.

Keywords: interest representation, stakeholders, participatory framework, policy making

JEL Classification: D71, D73

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, voting is no longer a sufficient way for political engagement and more instruments are required in order to enhance the public participation ensuring an interactive decision making process. Participation, involvement and empowerment of the citizens in the decision making processes are extremely relevant when they are introduced in the political, economic and social contexts of young democratic states, such as Lithuania, that have limited experience in public engagement into political processes. Despite the willingness of public decision makers to recognize public needs and problems, raise public awareness and share information, some uncertainties that participatory instruments are designed for and applied in an incomplete manner could be a deteriorating factor for further interaction of policy actors. Accordingly, the permanent practical task for all policy making cycles is to decide to what extent public participation should be put into effect. Although the responsibility for the final policy design rests on policy makers, engagement of citizens could be realized in different forms: one-way relation with citizen when the officials produce and only deliver information for the use by citizens; a two-way relation when citizens provide feedback (consult); participation based on partnership when citizens play an active role in policy making (Haruta and Radu, 2010). Only the last form affords an input of citizens into policy shaping and decision making.

Decreasing cleavage between public decision makers and citizen, thus increasing citizen involvement, is regarded as interactive decision making (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; 2002; Klijn, 2003; Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005). It is considered to be the public decision making when interested parties are truly engaged in the development of policy proposals. Interactive decision making draws main advantages for policy making (Driessen et al., 2001; Pragere et al., 2008, Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005): serves to bring information about the stakeholder needs and stakeholders' values that add to existing knowledge; provides information about the present situation from different angles and outlines an actual and desirable state; helps to create new knowledge about possible alternatives and plausible solutions; contributes as consensual knowledge when adjusting different attitudes of policy actors; secures policy implementation via possessing new knowledge as its own pragmatic justification; serves to acquire knowledge stimulating stakeholders' learning process for future actions and interest representation. Those advantages foster a public decision making process to be managed in a transparent, equitable and rational manner.

Since the main policy outlining arena proceeds at the level of governmental organisations, policy governance operational level needs to be aligned to the demands of wider participation. Namely at this level, public opinions, aspirations concerning relevant problems, modes of their solutions and their relevance to wider needs are required.

A particular interest of this research is to examine objectives of external participants' involvement in policy making and to compare public administrators' and external participants' judgements on the process and results of participation. We screened only formal participatory instruments that were applied in 2007 and 2010 in Lithuanian Ministries of Health and Education and Science.

Participation through working groups, councils and commissions has a normative character and is usually formalized by ministerial decrees. The operation of such participatory structures was on our focus. The fact that other – informal – participatory instruments remained out of the scope of our research, could be considered as limitation of the research. But such delineation ensures that real functioning networks of participatory policy are researched and the active members are detected. Furthermore, when participation gains formal character, it means that those involved are considered to be experts and important stakeholders that could contribute to public decision making.

This research is a part of a wider research project which targeted on interest representation at institutions of public governance, making a comparative study of participatory groups in education and health sectors. Within this project a research based framework for participatory decision making was elaborated (published in Pitrenaite-Zileniene and Mikulskiene, 2012) and system dynamics model of participatory policy was proposed (published in Mikulskiene and Pitrenaite-Zileniene, 2013).

The research supports frameworks proposed by the authors in previous publications. The study is completed on the experiences of the particular institutions of the particular country. However, this research includes international domain of decision making because it proposes common issues of participatory public decision making: what motivates decision makers to establish formal participatory groups, what kinds of problems are solved involving external participants, what are expectations of participants and if they are met.

2. Substance of Participants' Engagement in Public Decision Making

Volumes of literature published in the area of public engagement into policy and decision making exhibit the growing interest in this field. Fishkin (2009) suggests participation together with deliberation and political equality to be the democratic values. As Klijn (2008) states, "private actors, social alignments and citizens each have important resources, as well as the power to obstruct policy interventions." Thus policy actors' interaction is prerequisite for problems to be resolved. The decision maker – citizen relations cover actions at each stage of the policy cycle, from policy design, to implementation and evaluation (OECD, 2001). We accept Creighton's (2005) argument that "public participation is the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into the governmental and corporate decision-making" (p. 31). For decision makers such process is led by striving for better decisions that are supported by the public. An introduction of the participatory element into the existing public decision making scheme requires two-way communication and interaction. Thus to proceed with public incorporation into public decision making processes, timely and careful recognition of stakeholders is needed.

The depth of public engagement into policy and public decision making is measured. That could range from sharing information to delegating the power of decision making as Edelenbos (2000) classifies:

- *Informing*. Politicians and administration inform interested actors about determined agenda for decisions. In this case those involved do not input in policy development and decisions;
- *Consulting*. Interested actors are involved in discussions on the development of policy. However politicians do not commit to the results of these discussions;
- *Advising*. The agenda is set by politicians and public administrators, but interested parties have an opportunity to raise problems and formulate solutions. Involved actors play a competent role in the development of policy and possible decisions. Politicians are considered to be committed to the results, but their final decision may deviate from proposed;
- *Co-producing*. A problem solving agenda is determined and solutions in it are searched together by politicians, public administrators, and interested actors. For final decisions politicians are committed to elaborated solutions after having tested possible outcomes in terms of pre-conditions.
- *Co-deciding*. Politicians with administrators grant the decision making to interested actors with civil servants providing an advising role. Politicians accept the outcomes and the results gain binding force.

Public administrators could have an attribute of urgency as being permanently pressed by external forces (politicians, EU regulations and others) to elaborate the context of their political promises and by other stakeholders to resolve constantly arising problems. When there is no substantial interaction between politicians, public administrators and citizens, decision making on resolution of public problems could be protracted due to the resistance of various actors (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005) or if the decision is made eliminating citizens, the implementation of such decision could face resistance.

Participatory public decision making has a number of virtues. Participation of the public and other stakeholders, as a method of public policy making, is a very important

component of democracy, which determines the institutional model of governance based on cooperation (Munro et al., 2008). This paradigm is grounded on the specific principle of knowledge management: knowledge needed for decision making is created when decision makers cooperate. If the achievements of knowledge management science (Nonaka and Nishiguchi, 2001; Lee and Ahn, 2005; Berkes, 2009) with endeavours of interactive policy making (Driessen et al., 2001) are matched, the most significant advantages of participatory public decision making emerge.

As Koppenjan and Klijn (2004) argue "go-alone strategies and hierarchical policy processes often lead to poor and one-dimensional solutions". Moreover, when citizens cannot impact policy outputs, "the expectation is that they will turn away from government and politics". By involving citizens, policy development acquires democratic legitimacy. But participation per se is not a value. It becomes a value when it is introduced into public decision making in the manner of matching goals and forms of participation with transparency of policy processes and opening of government to wider participation.

3. Methodology

We explored formal networks of participatory policy that were formed during operation of temporary participatory groups in 2007 and 2010 in Lithuania's Ministries of Health, and Education and Science. Such groups were established by decrees of the corresponding Ministers for various specific purposes. 328 ministerial decrees were analysed. These documents were used to obtain data on: who were involved (names of officially nominated participants), what institutions the participants represent (their affiliations), what goals are set for each participatory group and what operation periods are set for the groups (deadlines for presentation of the results).

Alongside with the document analysis, 26 semi-structured interviews with public administrators from the Ministries, PAs for short, (15 interviews) and external participants, EPs for short, (11 interviews) were conducted (Table 1). The names of interviewees were collected from the qualitative data. We attempted to interview participants from different organizations, including both organizers of participatory groups and those invited to participate, in order to have a possibility to compare their expectations and satisfaction with the participation process and participation results.

Table 1. Number and affiliations of interviewees

Policy sector	Number of interviewees	
	Public administrators (PAs)	**External participants (EPs)**
Education and science	**9** from the Ministry of Education and Science (2 vice-ministers, 2 heads of departments, 4 heads of divisions, 1 senior specialist)	**4** (1 expert, 1 vice-rector, 1 head of department, 1 counsellor of association)
Healthcare	**6** from the Ministry of Health (5 heads of divisions, 1 deputy head of department)	**7** (1 expert, 2 directors general of medical institutions, 2 presidents of associations, 1 member of the council of NGOs coalition, 1 deputy director of an enterprise)
Total	**15**	**11**
	26	

The main areas of interest for interviews included involvement of participants, the participation process, and participants' satisfaction.

The comparative analysis of the qualitative data was performed with the purpose to identify coherences and contradictions in attitudes and experiences of public administrators and external participants.

4. Findings

4.1. Extent of application of formal participatory instruments at the Ministry of Education and Science and at the Ministry of Health

No regulation exists to govern establishment of working groups or other temporary structures serving for public engagement. However, most of public administration institutions apply common practice to communicate with external stakeholders – they employ participatory groups when the participation has to be formalized.

The Ministry of Education and Science. In total, 162 temporary participatory structures (94 working groups, 52 commissions and 15 periodically re-elected councils) were established at the Ministry of Education and Science during 2007 and 2010. These structures employed 985 participants. They were involved 1743 times, which means that 758 cases involved the same actors. A significantly greater number of participatory groups were formed in 2007 than in 2010.

The substantial reduction in the number of working groups in 2010 cannot be explained only by statistical data. On the one hand, it could indicate a decrease in the number of the problems to be solved in cooperation with stakeholders. On the other hand, it could be a signal that the decision making culture of the Ministry has changed, and that decisions are now being made in closed or informal groups. Also, a possible reason could be the fact that internal organizational resources are exploited more intensively. However, there are no obvious indications that public interest in education and science policy has diminished, or there are no challenges or problems to be tackled in this sector.

Analysis of quantitative data on the affiliations of involved actors revealed that more than 55 per cent of participants are public administrators, the majority of which are employees of the Ministry of Education and Science, representatives of institutions under the ministry and several participants from other ministries. External participants, or individuals representing certain interests, make only about 40 per cent of all involved. The same proportions are observed both in 2007 and 2010. The second biggest group of participants is the group of representatives of higher education and research institutions, which make 36 per cent of all external participants. However, the participatory groups targeted exclusively at higher education and science made only one third of all participatory groups. This fact suggests the presumption that participants from universities and other science institutions were invited not to represent their interests in the participatory groups, but as experts having knowledge in particular fields. Interestingly, the ratio of participating public administrators and external participants is independent on the research period.

The Ministry of Health. In total, 173 temporary working groups (data of other participatory structures including commissions and councils were not collected) were established at the Ministry of Health during 2007 and 2010. The groups employed 1005 participants who were involved into participatory policy making 1764 times.

Similarly to at the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health established almost twice as less participatory groups in 2010 as in 2007.

The Ministry of Health, similarly to the Ministry of Education and Science, employed a number of public administrators in the working groups. 54 per cent and 59 per cent of all participants were representatives of government organizations in 2007 and 2010 respectively, including employees of the Ministry of Health, other public administration institutions and several participants from other ministries. Inclusion of institutions that decide on financing, providing advisory services and control, which all are parties of public administration, to this number boosts domination of public administrators in participatory groups to 62 per cent or more. The remaining 38 per cent of seats in working groups were left to external participants, representing individual interest subjects.

The second biggest group of participants, which participated in 15-20 per cent of cases, were hospitals and clinics representing individual. Representatives of higher education and science made 6 per cent of the participation facts. Social groups representing individuals (such as doctors, nurses, patients, and pharmacists) were also invited in 6 per cent of the cases. It is worth mentioning that some of the representatives of hospitals or universities have double affiliations – they work as doctors and as scientists at the same time. In some cases we find them representing a hospital whereas in other cases they are identified as researchers. Thus, data on representation of hospitals and data on representation of science institutions overlap.

4.2. Motivation to invite external stakeholders and external stakeholders' motivation of being engaged

What are the purposes of participatory groups?

All the interviewees pointed out engagement of stakeholders into decision making processes as an essential condition in shaping policies of education and science and health. They put stress on the necessity to establish participatory groups firstly because ministries have to hear stakeholders' opinions, collect information on confronting interests, share information about trends in education, science and health policies and subsequently search for the best solutions and agreements together with stakeholders. However, the interviews also revealed certain contradictions that demonstrate some ambiguity of the introduction of participatory groups into ministerial structures. Employees of the ministries noted 7 main goals that participatory groups could help them with:

- Consulting;
- Problem solution;
- Search for compromise;
- Collection of evidences;
- Dissemination of information;
- Sharing of political responsibility;
- Fulfilment of administrative functions.

It is worth mentioning that the interviewed PAs, especially those from the Ministry of Education and Science, emphasized the role of informal communication while talking about relationships with stakeholders. In indefinite situations or when they lack knowledge, PAs give preference to informal discussions with stakeholders rather than to the establishment of formal participatory groups for specific problem solution.

Why are external stakeholders invited?

The interviewed PAs mentioned several motives for the introduction of external stakeholders into participatory groups (Table 2). One of the most frequent motives is identification of the symptoms of confrontation of interests. In such cases, participatory groups serve as an arena for presentation and defence of opinions and attitudes. The interviewed external participants agreed that they initiate formation of participatory groups themselves when conflicting interests emerge. Also, public administrators frequently use participatory groups as a platform to obtain support from other sectors. For this purpose, recognized social partners are typically engaged. PAs acknowledge that external participants are also invited because of legal regulations that require agreeing some decisions with stakeholders. Moreover, when political trends change, the problems to be solved may transform too and induce changes in external participants subsequently.

Table 2. Motives to engage external stakeholders

Motive	Quotations
Confrontation of interests is recognized	When there are lots of stakeholders, it is necessary to establish a participatory group for building understanding and presentation of attitudes (PA-7).
	After an informal meeting we face rising hostility. Then the need to establish a participatory group has to be considered (PA-7).
When support from other sectors is needed	We search for such social partners that we know from previous projects (PA-16).
Legal obligation to agree with stakeholders	What makes us work with all the groups of interests? The law. Also, the practice forces to see the entire arena of interests (PA-12).
Political provisions	The composition of participatory groups depends on the dominating political party (PA-1).

PAs, especially from the Ministry of Education and Science, admitted to giving their priority not to the formally established temporary participatory groups, but to informal communication and permanent representative structures such as committees, councils etc. They noticed that some stakeholders, mostly those from private enterprises, act more actively in informal participatory groups, because such groups are more productive: "we identify, discuss and attack problems" (PA-1). In other cases, when participation processes are formalized, it is hard to involve business representatives, as the collected quantitative data illustrate (small number of participation facts).

What motivates external participants to be involved?

The interviewed external participants usually mentioned several reasons why they are willing to be involved in participatory groups (Table 3). However representatives of diverse professions and/or social groups or organizations stressed different motives of participation. Members of associations and institutions identified the need to represent their institution and introduce and defend its interests as the main reason of engagement into participatory groups. Scientists and experts, however, have other reasons to participate, including the will to grasp the latest news, to apply their knowledge in practice and fulfil their social obligations. On the other hand, they claim that scientists and experts should not dominate in participatory groups, because it is essential to involve those who face the problems in practice and can be affected by the adopted solutions. Both experts and representatives of institutions mentioned their willingness to communicate and cooperate as an important motive, because the contacts they establish in participatory groups could be useful in the future.

Table 3. Motivation of external participants

Motives	Quotations
To keep the balance of interest groups	The balance between experts and representatives of other social groups has to be maintained (EP-8). The tendency how institutions join associations in order to represent one group of interests can be traced (EP-18).
Striving for knowledge application in practice	The Ministry is unable to have such kind of knowledge, thus scientists provide it with very decent support (EP-9). Experts participate because of altruism, because of the ambitions to apply theories in practice, improve systems, and introduce more rationality to the field (EP-18).
To collect topical information	Political decision that the majority of bills has to be approved not by the entire government, but by a single minister was made. In such way, ministers may choose not to coordinate their decisions with stakeholders. Thus, involvement in participatory groups can help us to remain informed (EP-11).
To represent the interest	I have never participated to defend interests of my institution, but I act as the leader of our association. Therefore I represent interests of all members of the association (EP-20). We strive for research based knowledge and for the interests of service providers (EP-22).
Striving to solve problems jointly	I have positive impressions from the participatory group at the Ministry of Health because the majority of members were positively minded and result oriented. The group was not randomly gathered...(EP-21). If I join a participatory group, I hope to tackle some public issue (EP-22).
Willingness to communicate and cooperate	In participatory groups, we establish new contacts, which could be useful in future activities. Professionals from different areas participate. Later they can serve as consultants for us, o we could involve them into our structures. This way information is also shared (EP-11).

4.3. The participants' judgements on the process and results of participation

The interviewees from both groups (PAs and EPs) introduced conflicting evaluations of both the process and the results of participation (Tables 4 and 5). They exposed contentment with possibilities to gain new knowledge and opportunities of personal growth on the one hand, and disappointment with the moments when mechanisms of social partnership completely failed on the other hand.

PAs and EPs conveyed reciprocal criticism concerning the processes of engagement and participation. The participants welcomed sharing of information and possibilities to make acquaintances and gain new knowledge as a very positive outcome of the processes. However, both PAs and EPs were concerned about the quality of participation in some cases. PAs noticed that ESs sometimes care only about fulfilling individual interests but not about finding the best solution for the public. Also, PAs object operation of some participatory groups when external stakeholders are passive in various stages of participation: it is hard to convince them to participate, or they fail to complete their tasks properly and contribute to the results. Meanwhile, interviewed external participants blamed PAs for their passiveness in dealing with problems, criticized them for unwillingness to cooperate with external stakeholders and to learn their opinions and aspirations. Such interviewees recalled participation in groups that worked in vain or were formed, as they felt, to achieve non-transparent political aims.

Table 4. Participants' evaluation of the process of participation

Reciprocation	Quotations
Concern about the quality of the process	When is social partnership going to become a commonplace? I think, it will take 7 or 10 years if something is being done about the matter. Nothing will change until the culture of social partnership develops (EP-20).
	All participants frequently remain discontented with outcomes. Even special Act has been passed to make a compromise. That's because not all aspirations were fulfilled (PA-5).
Significance of each member's input	Not everything and not always is beneficial. A plenty depends on personalities and on what is being represented. External participants? They are not interested, they do not participate, or they simply observe (PA-13).
	Each participatory group includes several members who have little or no interest to change or develop something. Rigidness, stagnation, and attachment to current practice are very firm in some institutions (EP-21).
Aimless participation	There were participatory groups established for very long terms. Sometimes even deadlines for presentation of the results were not set. Such groups worked only to make an illusion that stakeholders "were participating". But it was obvious in advance that no result was going to be achieved (EP-20).
	We join, but what is being created is put deep into a drawer and nobody needs it anymore, and nobody sees it (EP-21).
Benefit of communication	They are active everywhere, we meet them at workshops, seminars, other events. They ask questions and suggest proposals via internet. We are lucky to working with them, they arrive determined for serious work (PA-3).
Politicians' and leader' influence	There is a constant dialogue with labour unions. However, participatory groups involve delegated persons, but not the leaders. When decision of the participatory group arrives at leaders, they remove all achievements of the group (PA-6).
	We listen to opinions; still the final decision is upon the minister, in one or another way (PA-16).
Personal improvement	The outcomes are also that you gain a vast of knowledge and expand your horizons (EP-19).

Among de-motivating factors, the interviewees mentioned influence of politicians and leaders. The interviewees recalled numerous cases when agreements achieved by participatory groups were later amended by politicians or leaders. In such situations, the participants felt their work was underestimated. The problem of changing group agreements was especially emphasized when the interviewees evaluated results of participation. Both external participants and public administrators admitted that final results (decisions to be implemented) could completely differ from the outputs that were developed by participatory groups. Also, PAs were concerned about incompleteness of formal procedures of agreement with other ministries while EPs complained about unwillingness of politicians to implement agreements made by the participants. Therefore, the external participants are often uncertain as to whether politicians are committed to take into account proposals of participatory groups, or the groups are formed only to create an illusion of cooperation with the public. Therefore some of the interviewees feel disappointed about such imitation of cooperation, and about the time and efforts wasted on participation in vain. Unlike EPs, PAs are more positive about the results of participation. Although employees of the ministries often agree that participatory groups vastly enhance the workload, results of the participation and decision implementation meet less criticism. Such imbalance in the opinions of EPs' and PAs' towards the same aspects of participation could be explained by differences in experiences and perceptions. The employees of the ministries understand the processes of policy making and the positioning of participatory groups in the processes better and from

diverse positions. Meanwhile, the external participants have more expectations than the actual participation may grant.

Table 5. Participants' evaluation of the results of participation

Reciprocation	Quotations
Transformation of agreements	Faulty practices develop when ministries amend agreements made in participatory groups without reasonable explanations. Therefore we are forced to implement requirements of the third party, which even should not be much concerned... (PA-5). The document developed by the participatory group was completely changed, progressive ideas turned into threats for teachers. But the group cannot influence further development of the document (EP-8).
Commitment to implement the results	Are politicians committed to pay respect to the outputs of participatory groups? Depends on what times we talk about... (PA-19). In my opinion we are unique in terms of what we create...; then we put this created document into a drawer; five years later, someone remembers and tries to restore the idea. It's all the same again... (EP-21).
Striving for fundamental change	Social partnership is not establishment of participatory groups; trust and respect are substantial. If you trust and respect your partners, then you endeavour to act and share ideas with partners, even when interests differ (EP-20).
Ratio of inputs and results	Participatory groups are a positive matter, but the workload increases. If we were not overloaded, the meetings would be more efficient (PA-6). Tremendous tasks have been completed, but not all of them reach the final. Good ideas fail to contribute to a common result – a kind of a mixture is usually developed, which frequently fails to work (EP-21).
Publishing of results	We would appreciate if an audio or video record of a discussion on an important issue was given to the public. It is crucial for everybody to learn about what ideas were presented and what discussions were held. Otherwise, it seems as if during the meeting, we all were silent and no ideas came up (EP-21).

It is important to emphasize that a severe reciprocal criticism came from PAs and EPs from the Ministry of Health. Meanwhile, the interviewees from the Ministry of Education and Science criticized the other party less fiercely; comments were more moderate and oriented more towards improvement and less towards blaming. Such discrepancy could be caused by the fact that more socially and financially intensive interests are present at the Ministry of Health than at the Ministry of Education and Science.

4.4. Contradictory attitudes of public administrators and external participants towards participation

Interviews revealed contradictory opinions of PAs' and EPs' and experiences at different stages of the participation process.

The most prominent contradictions between the participants in the **education and science policy** arena were identified in motives of stakeholders' involvement, demands for cooperation, choice of instruments of involvement, combining of interests, outcomes of participatory groups and implementation of the outcomes:

- PAs and EPs perceive the *content of participation* differently. PAs stressed that participation serves for communication of new ideas to the public and is needed to find public support to novelties. EPs' attitudes towards participation in policy making were based on the belief that participation means a two way communication. In their opinion,

stakeholders have to be involved at the early stages of problem solution and not when draft decisions are already prepared.

- Because experiences of cooperation are not always positive, both parties of interviewees demonstrated a *reciprocal distrust*. PAs stated that EPs usually have negative attitudes towards all activities of the government, they are passive, hardly ever agree to compromise, and often are focused on individual but not public interests. Meanwhile EPs criticized PAs for lacking integrated attitudes towards the problems, focus on narrow issues of the Ministry and lack of goodwill in the ministries.

- There were differences in perceptions of the *mission of participatory groups*. PAs were willing to involve those who they were familiar with and who they trusted. Participatory groups often were valued as an arena for expertise and collection of research based evidences for decisions. PAs objected legal obligations to coordinate their future actions with particular stakeholders whereas attitudes of EPs towards the mission of participatory groups were based on believe that such groups should be used as an interest matching instrument to a greater extent.

- There was a *gap between actual commitments* of the Ministry *and expectations* of those involved as to the *results of participatory groups*. For PAs, it was natural that the Ministry was not committed to implement everything that was produced in participatory groups. Participatory groups were needed to discover a variety of opinions, and the groups developed only draft decisions. However, EPs who were working in such groups expected that public administrators and politicians would consider recommendations agreed by the participants and would not issue regulations that are totally different from such agreements.

- PAs and EPs were in reciprocal disagreement about the *follow-up*. PAs customarily took that the work of the participatory group is completed with the preparation of documents that are specified in the minister's decree. They did not inform or involve members of the group into the follow-up processes. EPs, on the other hand, expected to be engaged in further processes until the Act was issued. EPs were disappointed that they were not informed about issuance of such Act, nor they were provided with information about the amendments that were made to the documents that were developed by the participatory group.

Similar contradictions emerged between the participants in the **health policy** arena. But in the heath policy also incorporate misunderstandings that have not been noticed in the field of education and science. The interviews with participants in health policy making came up with the following contradictions:

- As in the field of education and science, there were differences in perceptions of the *mission of participatory groups*. PAs claimed that participatory groups were needed to learn the diversity of opinions and to solve diverse political issues. But EPs claim that in many cases, participatory groups were used only to imitate participation and they are convinced that "the results have been known before the participatory group started working" (EP-20). Thus in EPs' opinion, participatory groups often failed to work for the mission they were supposed to.

- The interviews also revealed *different status of participants*. PAs acknowledged that the priorities in choices of the members of participatory groups or other structures of participation were set in advance. Meanwhile EPs expected equal possibilities to participate and equal treatment if involved. However, EPs who were in the opposition of current initiatives of the ministry, or were not well recognized by PAs, or were representatives of insufficiently powerful and influential institutions were marginalized,

ignored or not involved at all. On the other hand, the participating external experts did not mention anything about unequally treated participants.

- In association with the diversified statuses of the participants, differences in perceptions how *interests were coordinated* were observed. PAs stated that they were searching for compromises and attempting to get more opinions from different perspectives. However in EPs' opinion, everything depended on the status of the participants – powerful, well developed and recognized interests had the priority over the less expressed ones.

- PAs and EPs demonstrated different *demands for information* during participation processes. PAs needed minutes of the meetings of participatory groups in order to have evidences about the achieved agreements. Such minutes could serve in cases of conflicts between the participants. Meanwhile EPs complained that the minutes were not introduced to the members of the group. EPs were willing to get the minutes to be informed about "what was told, what decisions were made, what ideas were presented, and if they are further discussed" (EP-20).

- Reciprocal misunderstanding of the *results of participation*. EPs that represented specific interests were unhappy that their proposals were rejected and stricken from the Acts. They were disappointed that the Ministry treated the results of the participatory group at their own discretion. EPs remembered numerous facts when the outcomes of participatory groups differed from the passed laws without the participants being informed. However, attitudes of PAs towards the results of participation are different from those of EPs. For PAs transformations of the results of participatory groups were a matter of routine. On the other hand, PAs claim that in some fields of health policy where interests are sound, they communicate every change of the results of the participatory group and "put all possible efforts to escape situations where the document suddenly changes" (PA-13). Thus it could be concluded that diverse practices of work with stakeholders apply in different areas of ministerial responsibility.

5. Conclusions

Extensive participation of scientists in participatory groups demonstrates willingness of the ministries to gain objective evidences for further solutions. Therefore, research based decision making processes are elaborated at the operational level of policy making.

Analyzing how often participants were introduced into participatory groups, some relevant differences between praxis of both ministries were identified. At the Ministry of Education and Science, participation of external participants was fragmented and random as the majority of participants were involved only once. In policy making networks, such participants would be in peripheral. Meanwhile, at the Ministry of Health, external participants are better integrated and more often involved, what indicates developing partnerships.

The composition of participatory groups reflects attitudes of employees of ministries towards interest representation, because nobody except for public administrators decides whom to employ in a participatory group. Therefore, when they invite scientists to participatory groups, policy makers and public administrators usually seek for expert opinion and consultancy. However, such kind of participation does not in general serve for the purposes of interest representation and balancing of stakes. Therefore, interest representation has become a peripheral principle for the composition of participatory

groups. This limitation is obvious at the Ministry of Education and Science. Meanwhile, at the Ministry of Health, although such tendency is noticeable, it is considerably less expressed and stakeholders are better represented.

Both public administrators and external participants have specific attitudes towards what roles stakeholders play in policy making. Employees of the Ministries affirm that external participants play an important role not only via formal participatory groups, but also on basis informal communication. However, external participants oppose such propositions claiming that they are rarely involved, that public administrators avoid contacting them or even conceal important information. Such antagonism is more expressed in the health sector than in the education and science policy arena. More antagonism is expressed to a greater extent in the participatory groups where the private interest is more obvious and powerful (i.e. pharmacy policy), and less sensed in groups that focus on public problems (i.e. public health policy).

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