Stakeholder participation in development research

Add on or essential?

Robert Lukesch

Keynote for the eponymous workshop
Organised by ÖFSE and IIASA on June 24, 2019 in Vienna

Stakeholder? Participation? Development? Research?

When research deals with development, it deals with people and interests.

When dealing with people and interests, stakeholder participation is kind of inevitable, the question is in which way that may happen.

Thus the answer to the rhetorical question which serves as the header of this workshop is always

YES

(For you CAN NOT NOT involve them)

The challenge however lies in the

HOW

Risks of failed involvement of stakeholders

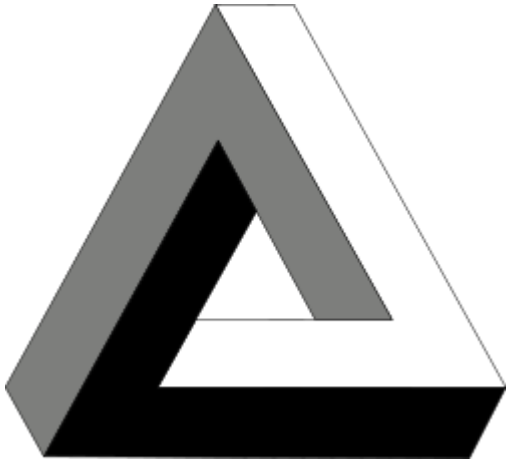
A haunting example:

Finlayson & McCay in Berkes/Folke/Colding (1998):

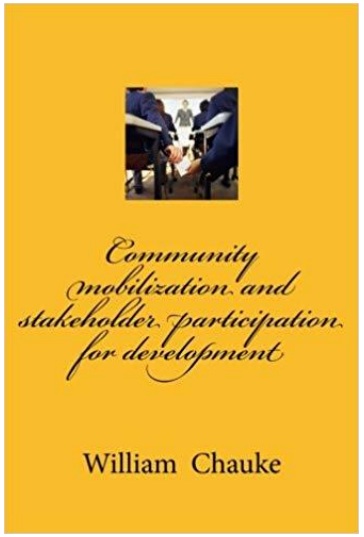
Crossing the Threshold of Ecosystem Resilience: The Commercial Extinction of Northern Cod

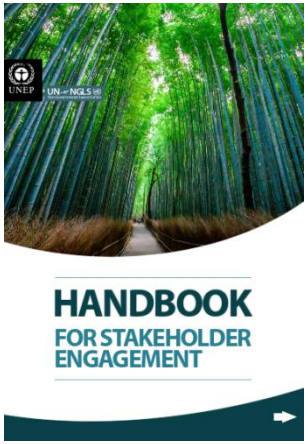
→ The main risks lie in the disconnect or twisted relationship between

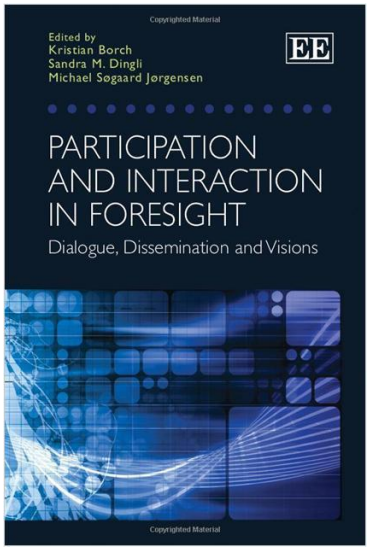
- Local stakeholders
- Scientists and
- Policy makers

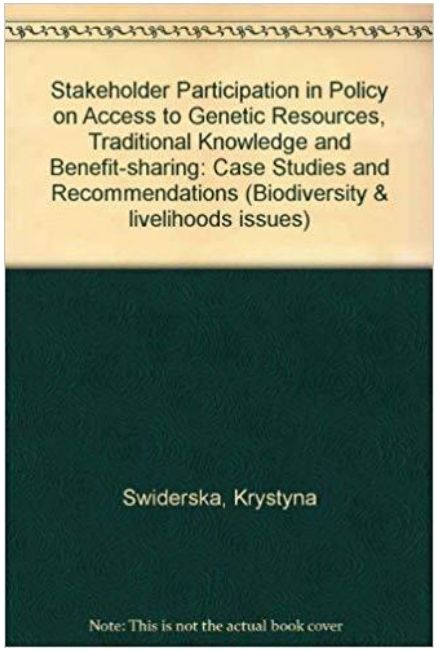


The current state of debate









Stakeholders and Actors

In order to clarify my use of terms:

Stakeholder is someone representing a collective interest. This interest can be embodied by an organization or movement, but also by a group of people who share similar features, needs or interests. Being stakeholder is a role tied to a physical person.

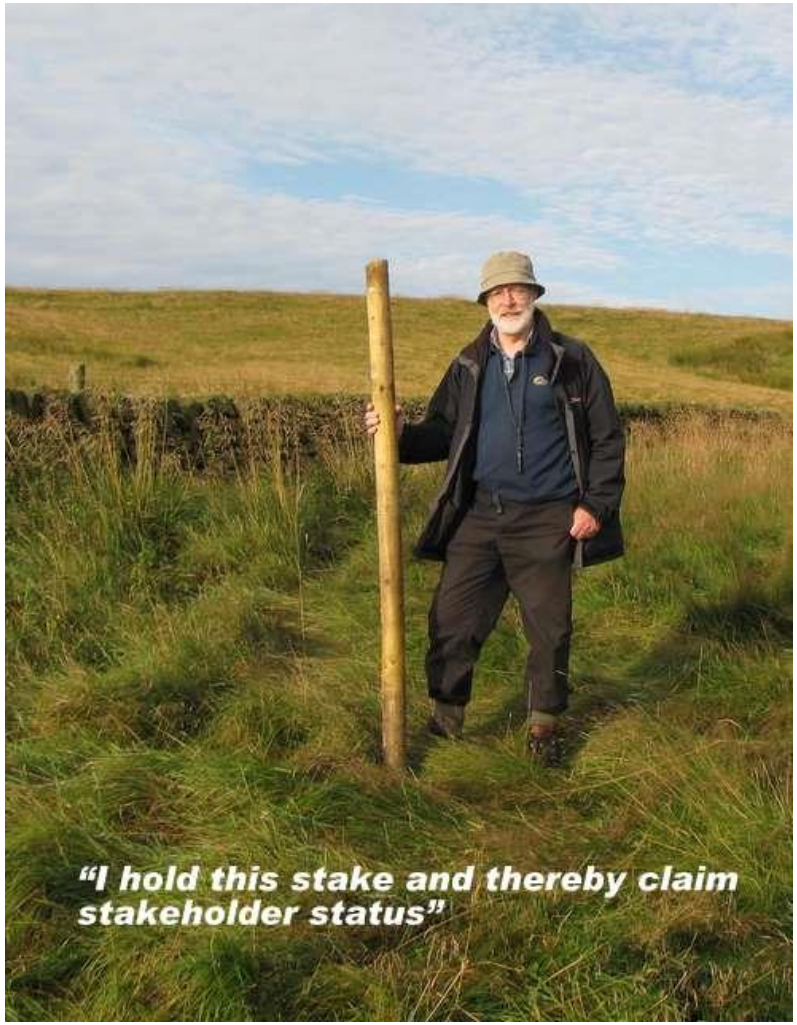
Actor is a physical person who is part of a process (a consultative or decision process, a workshop, conference or information event…). An actor may represent nobody but him- or herself, but also an organization or group of people – in which case s/he becomes being a stakeholder.

In community development research, down at village or neighborhood level, we deal with local actors. They stand for themselves.

In research dealing with larger systems (regional development, governance issues) we rather deal with stakeholders, as a means to reduce complexity. They stand for the group of interests from which they have been (actively) nominated or have been (passively) picked by researchers.

Rationale and purpose

- Produce better outcomes and decisions (if the research process is linked to an ensuing decision process, it is crucial to let everybody know about it!)
- Increase public understanding for the relevant issues and garner support for agencies and their decisions (policies, programs, laws, regulations…)
- Bring to light important knowledge about natural resources and local culture
- Reduce or resolve conflicts between stakeholders
- Create new relationships between stakeholders



Stakeholders' interests can be monetary, professional, personal, cultural +++++

„Stakeholder is anybody who wants to be"

Kind of knowledge

- Knowing more about needs and values of stakeholders
- Understanding the system-specific perspectives and languages of stakeholders
- Strong interest in creating and enhancing networks
- Obtaining more robust data from issue-specific experts

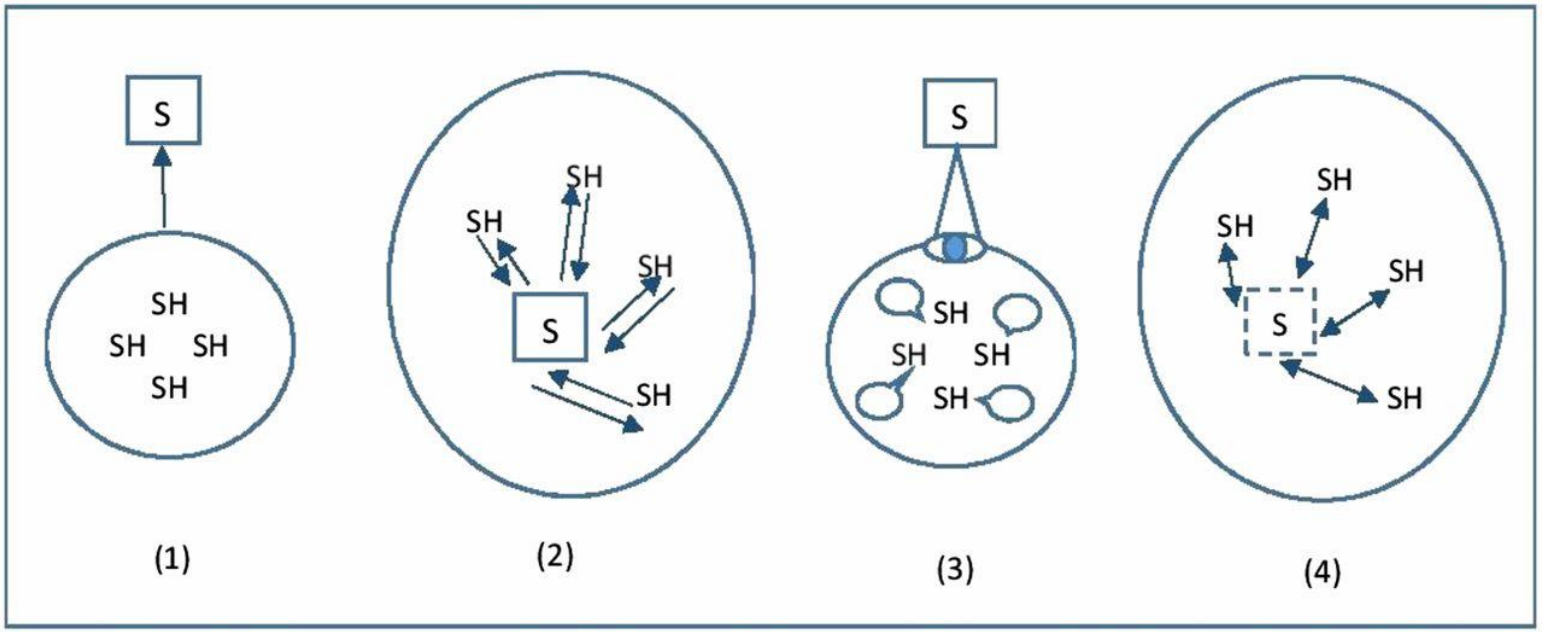
Typology of researchers betting on stakeholder involvement

Mielke et al. (2016): *Stakeholder involvement in sustainability science*

- The technocratic type wants to receive a broader set of issue-specific, objective and falsifiable information (to inform but not influence policy makers);
- The neoliberal-rational type wants to actively promote his/her research by channeling it into politics by means of stakeholder involvement (in a kind of bargaining situation);
- The functionalist type perceives him/herself as a distant observer of representatives of different societal subsystems (with the intent to trigger learning);
- The democratic type wants to create 'socially robust knowledge' through facilitating a dialogue (with the intent to promote societal transformation).

The scientist‘s role

Mielke et al. 2017: *Ideals, practices and future prospects of stakeholder involvement in sustainability science*



1. The scientist leads the research process, stakeholders provide knowledge
2. The scientist is a stakeholder himself and bargains for his/her interests
3. The scientist observes from an external position to analyze the perspectives of stakeholders
4. The scientist facilitates a cooperative dialogue with affected stakeholders to create trust

Design principles

(Boaz et al. (2018): *How to engage stakeholders in research: design principles to support improvement*

- Clarify the objectives of stakeholder engagement and embed it in a framework or model of research use
- Identify the necessary resources
- Analyze and make hypotheses on the respective roles of stakeholders (stakeholder mapping) and recognize stakeholder identification as an ongoing process
- Foster shared commitment to stakeholder engagement in the research team and among the organizations/groups represented by the stakeholders
- Planning thoroughly and building in flexibility
- Gather all the potential inputs from stakeholders (instead of preemptive filtering)

Features and Process Elements

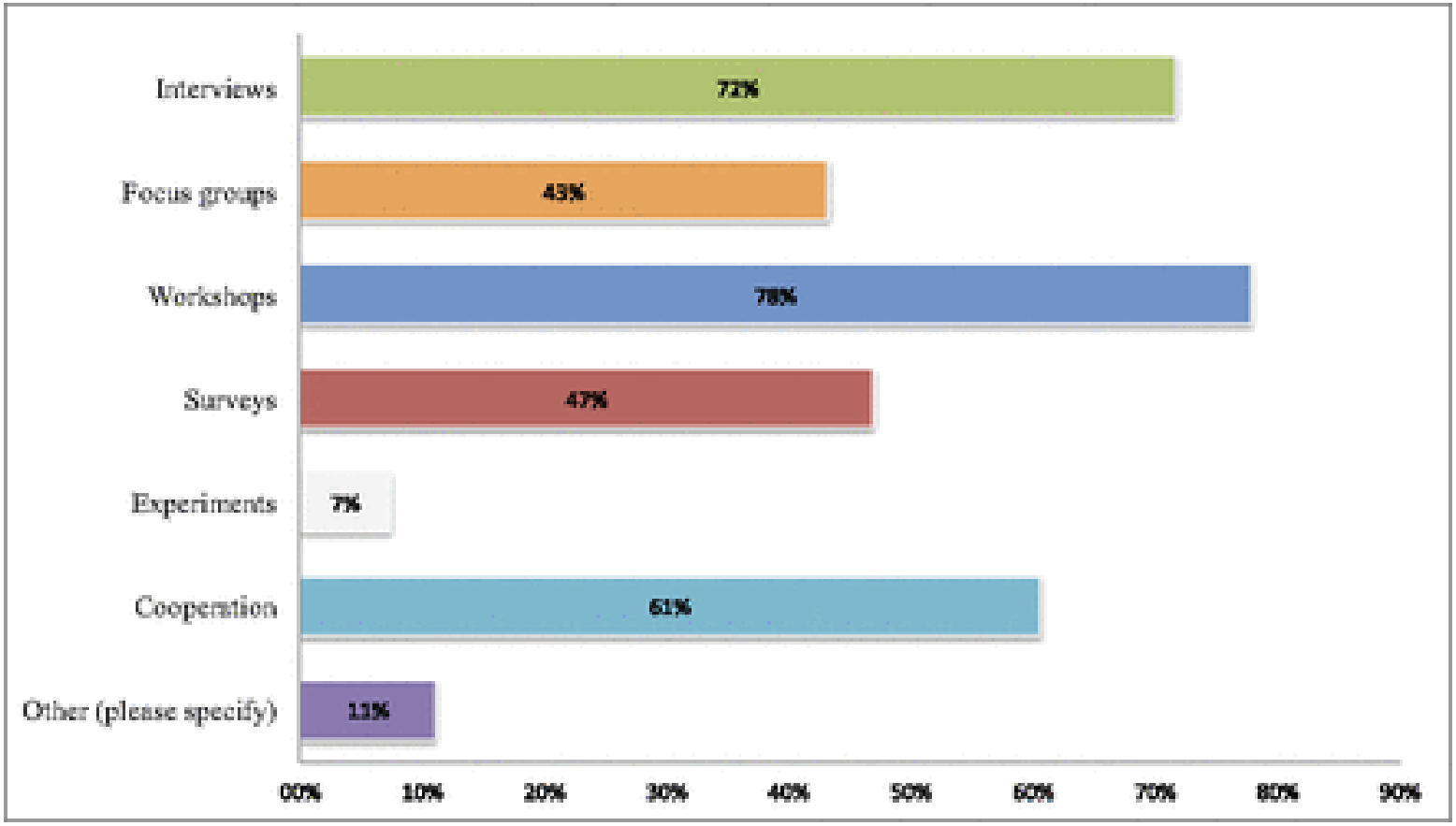
US NOAA (2015): *Introduction to Stakeholder Participation*

- Active participant involvement
  - Opportunity for involvement
  - Early involvement
  - Motivated participants
  - Influence over the final decision (in case the research is linked to an ensuing decision)
- Decision based on complete information
  - Best available information exchange
  - Constructive dialogue
  - Adequate analysis
- Fair decision-making
  - Transparency
  - Representative participation
- Efficient administration
  - Cost-effective
  - Accessible
  - Limited influence of sponsors
- Positive participant interaction
  - Favorable social conditions
  - Constructive personal behavior
  - Social learning

Methods

(Mielke et al. 2017)

Answers to the question: „I involve stakeholders mostly through...“



@ Cooperation: in the sense of actively collaborating with stakeholders in projects (this is most widespread among consultants and universities than among research institutes).

Challenges

- Fake stakeholder involvement (fig-leaf, red herring or con job)
- Finding the right stakeholders (not always are the desired stakeholders available, and their proxies not the desired ones)
- Wrong expectations about performance and behavior of stakeholders
- Babylonian confusion between the different languages (and world views) of stakeholders, scientists, policy makers….
- Trade-off between scientific efficiency and performance criteria on one side and thorough process of stakeholder participation on the other
- Struggling with the objectivity imperative
- Scientists are seldomly familiar with socio-techniques
- Science-policy interface is mostly weaker than expected ("why haven't our recommendations been implemented?")
- Mismatches in what stakeholders give and get back

Needs

- More funding
- More academic literature (illustrative practices) on stakeholder involvement
- Longer projects
- Emphasis on tools and methods (training!)
- Networks of practitioners

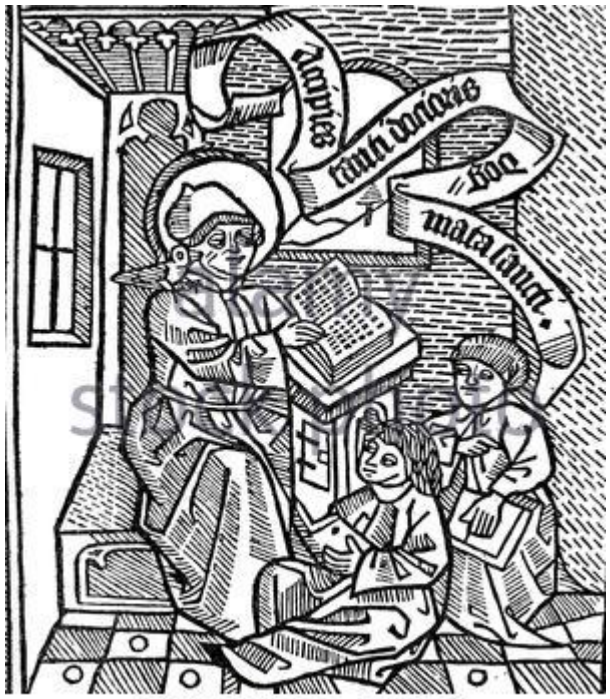
So far about the current literature on stakeholder participation in research....

...and now some personal considerations...

The crux lies in the underlying paradigms

What we call **SCIENCE** today is a confluence of

1. Scholastic teaching “ex cathedra”



Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
with two of his disciples

The cathedra of
Galileo Galilei
(1564-1641)

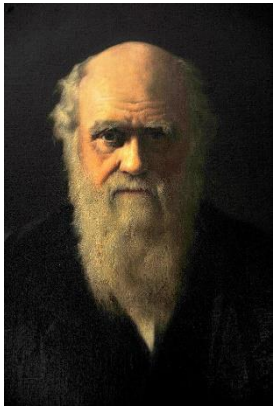
and

Teatro anatomico in
Padova (1637)

The crux lies in the underlying paradigms

…..and….

2. The specimen-collecting explorer



Charles Darwin and three of his finches

Margaret Mead recording Balinese folks and traditions

The crux lies in the underlying paradigms

…..and also….

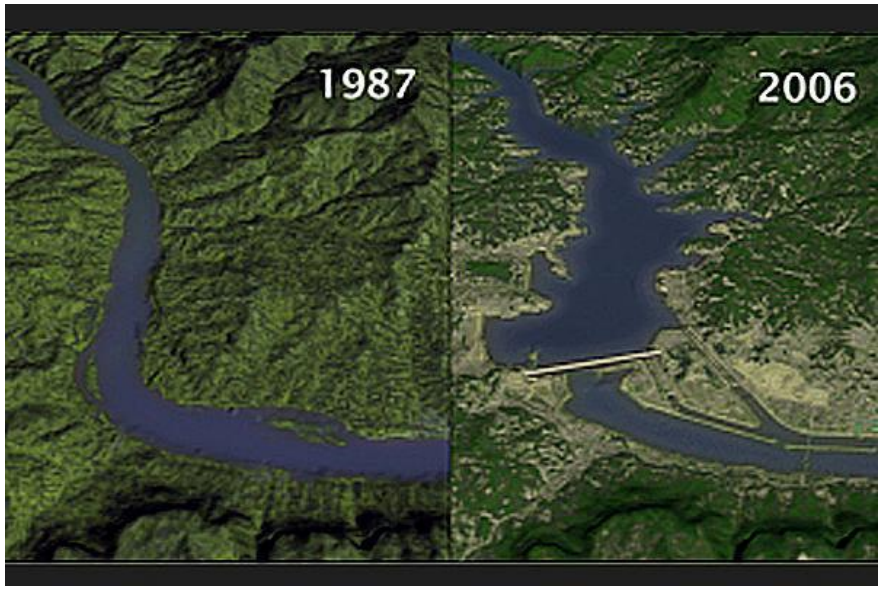
3. The supremacy and redemptive mission of European/Christian aka Western civilization

Colonial-times phrenology in the context of the Rwandan genocide

White old farmer praising the blessings of an endless stream of green revolutions

The crux lies in the underlying paradigms

(Not only) in developing countries, **SCIENCE** has come along with **ENFORCED MODERNISATION** and all the **authoritative AND authoritarian connotations** which that implies



The three gorges dam (Yangtze River, China)

Local development planning in India

Don't get me wrong....

Science and research are indispensable for our truth-finding and solution-oriented endeavours.

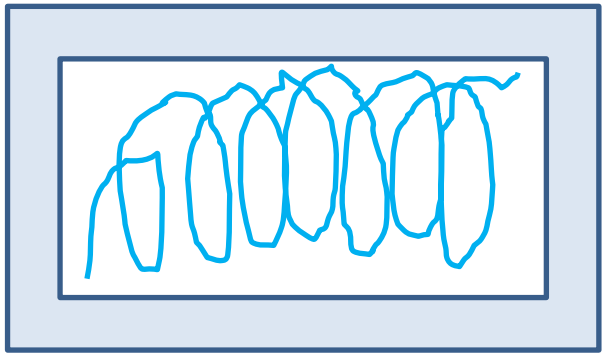
But they have long lost their innocence.

Therefore, acting to the best of our knowledge is not enough. There is a permanent need to show the potential usefulness of development research in terms of

- **the wellbeing of communities concernced**
- **a sustainable and peaceful future of humanity**

Once we have made that sufficiently clear, let us focus on the nitty-gritty, which I'd like to summarize under three items:

- **Context**
- **Setting**
- **Process**

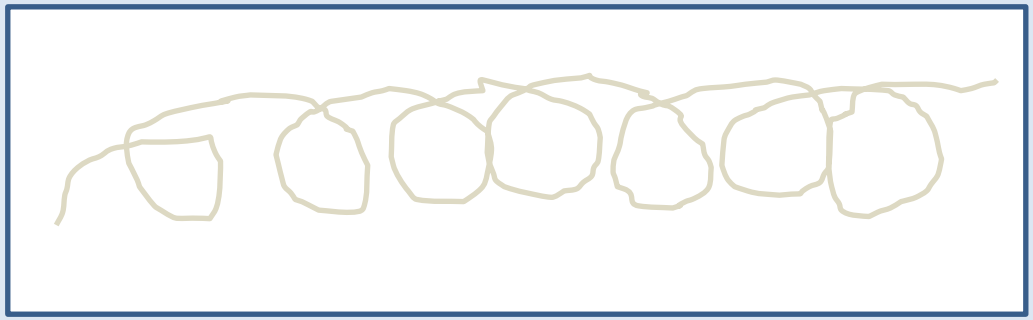


Things to be considered (1)

1. The context and boundaries of relevance

History, status and prevailing patterns of governance in the country and the specific sector/thematic field

Final purpose and other possible utilisation of the outcomes of the study

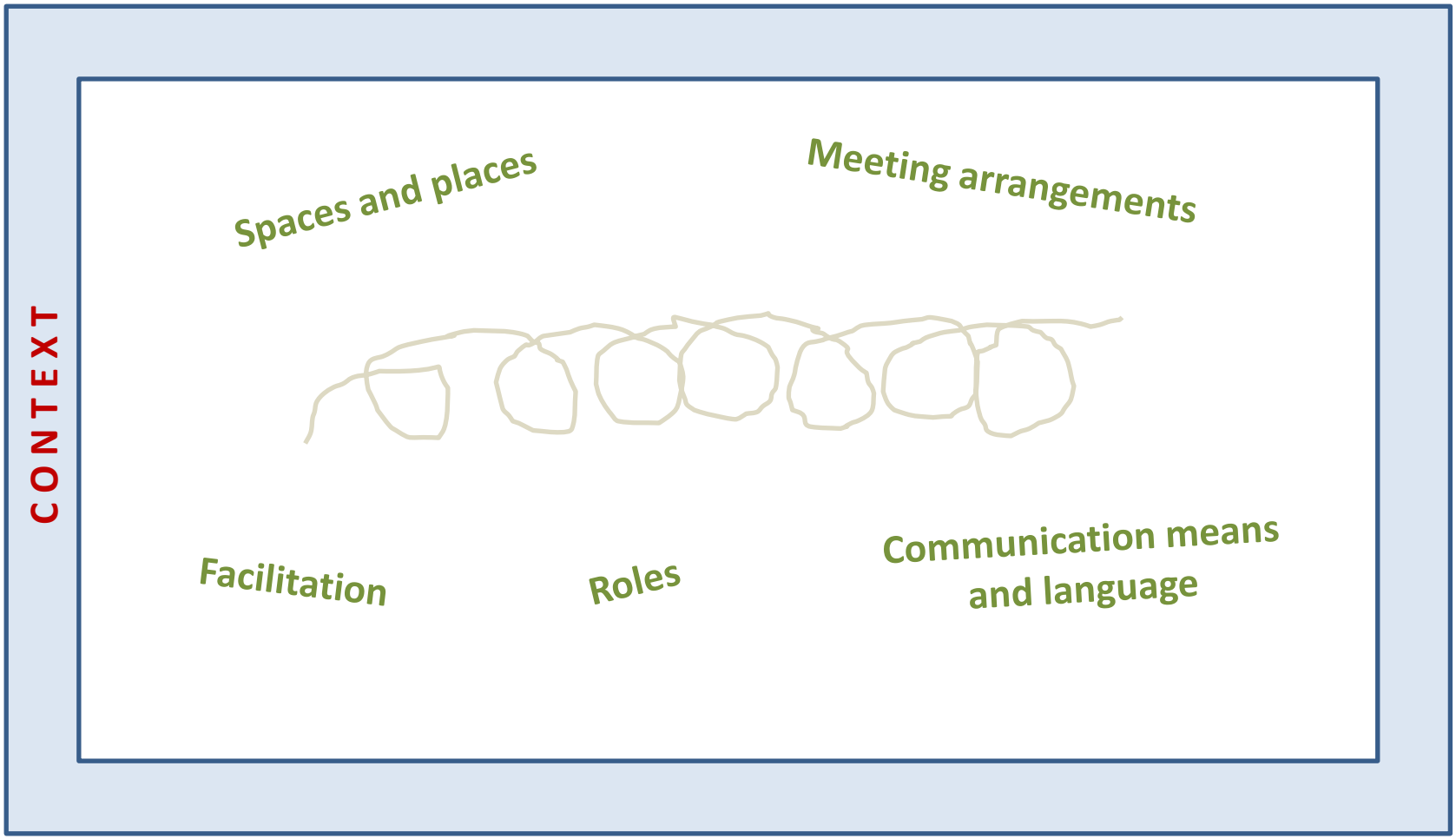


Cultural norms and traditions to be respected

Distribution of powers, possible winners or losers

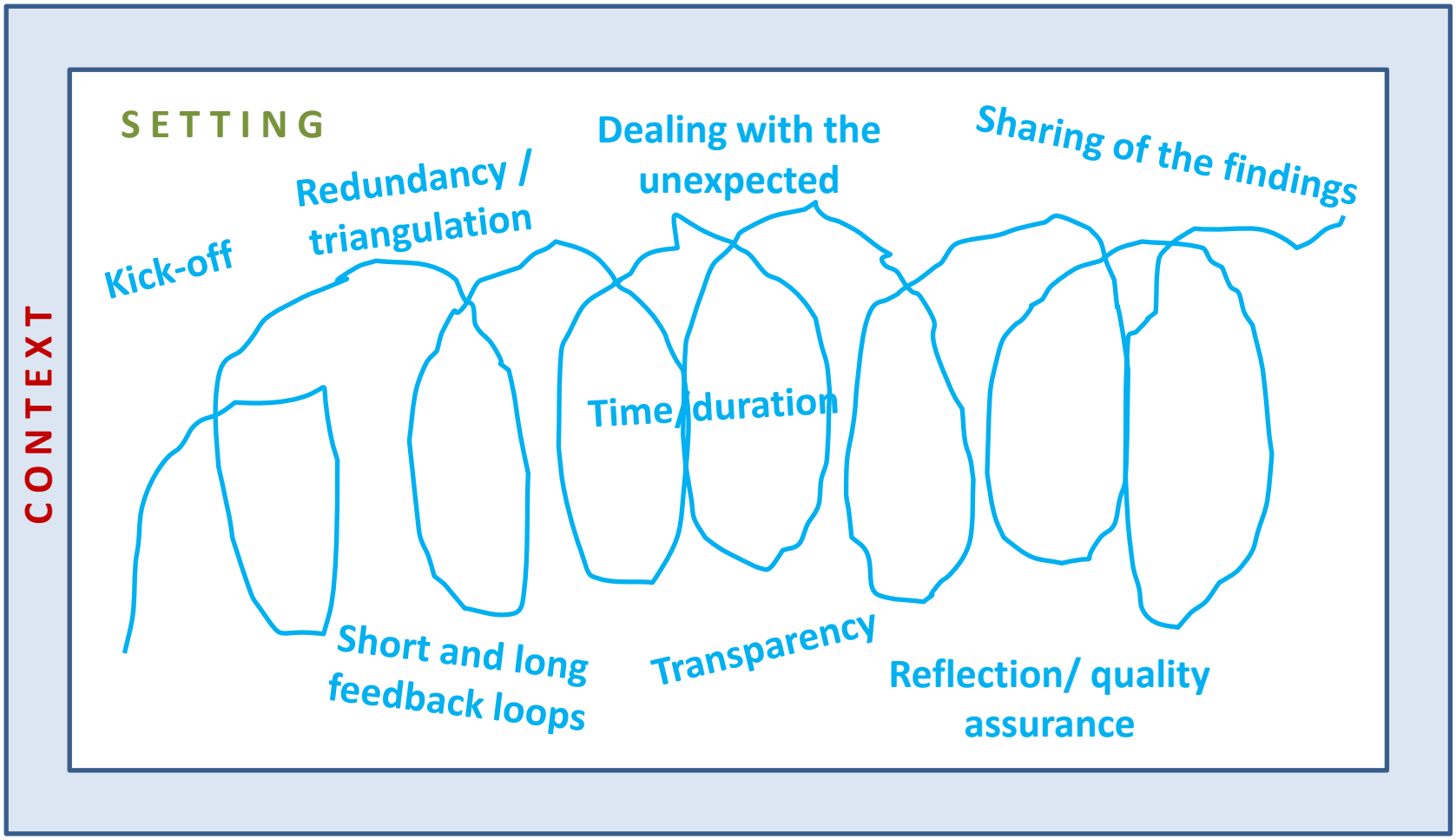
Things to be considered (2)

2. The setting and intervention architecture

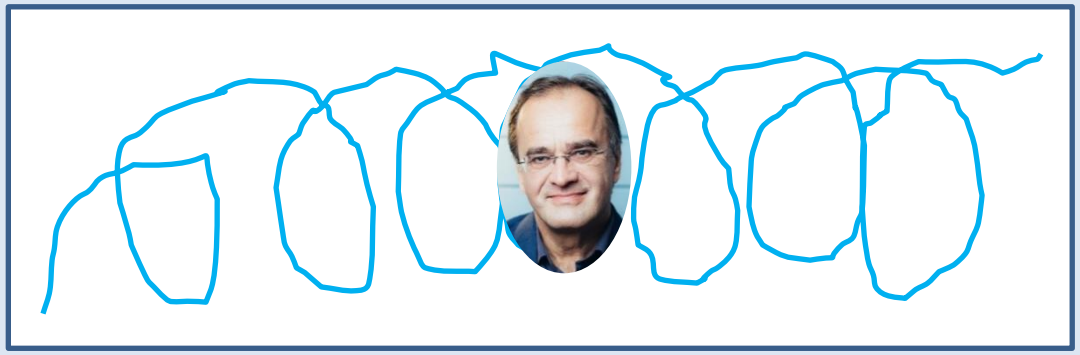


Things to be considered (3)

3. The process



Good luck!



lukesch@oear.at

Current research projects with stakeholder involvement:

SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas)

ZEAFOLU (Zero Emissions from Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use)