



## Sustainability: platforms to facilitate deliberative policy learning

Expert workshop organized by Dr. Martin Kowarsch and Prof. Claudia Pahl-Wostl

**Date:** 5-6 September 2018; **Location:** Berlin (Schwanenwerder), Germany. The workshop was **funded** by the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC).

### Background: Reflecting on multi-stakeholder platforms and social learning processes

Having adopted the ambitious Paris Agreement and the sustainable development goals, the international community is facing various challenges concerning their realization, including, e.g., high uncertainty regarding policy implications, conflicting values and worldviews, implementation barriers, elitism, and populist movements. How can democracies determine appropriate policies for sustainability in this context? Against technocratic over-confidence in expertise, or over-emphasis on mere politics and proceduralism, the hypothesis at stake is that a substantive learning process is possible and necessary, i.e. learning among different actors involved at the science-policy-society interface about alternative future policy pathways and their various, societally relevant practical implications. As assumed, such “policy learning” can be facilitated by well-designed multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms which bring together different perspectives and which are informed by integrated scientific assessment. The aim is to collaboratively explore the specific practical implications of alternative future policy pathways. Facilitating this direct exchange of policy arguments in terms of a deliberation process may, on a longer-term basis, lead to learning including revisions of one’s own policy beliefs and even deep core beliefs. Through such deliberation-based learning processes about the diverse, socially relevant ramifications of policy alternatives, the different stakeholders and experts may at least gain a clearer understanding of areas of policy overlap and disagreement, and may be urged to clarify, better justify, and perhaps reconsider their own standpoints and narratives. In the end, more successful adaptive management could be achieved regarding sustainable development. Perhaps, well-organized deliberation processes can help counter populism on the longer term.

### Focus of the workshop

The **guiding question** for this workshop was: Under which conditions – including power constellations and political contexts – can science-informed, deliberative multi-stakeholder platforms promote substantive policy learning (even in case of hardened positions)? And how to achieve long-term institutionalization of such processes? A particular focus was on environmental policy issues.

The major goal was to jointly – in a critical, but also constructive and practically informative manner – reflect on the (learning and democratic) prospects as well as the limitations, problems and challenges of these platforms. This was based on a review of the current literature and recent debates in this field in order to take stock of what we already know about these platforms.

This interdisciplinary workshop brought together experts from various fields: (1) political and learning theory; (2) related applied and empirical research; (3) and organizers of learning platforms.

## Participants



	First name	Surname	Organization	Notes
1	Hallie	Eakin	Arizona State University	
2	Dannica	Fleuss	Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg	5 Sep only
3	Patricia	Gober	Arizona State University	
4	Blane	Harvey	McGill University	
5	Dave	Huitema	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	
6	Martin	Kowarsch	Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons ar	Organizer
7	Maria	Máñez Costa	Climate Service Center Germany (HZG)	
8	Jens	Newig	Leuphana Universität Lüneburg	
9	Claudia	Pahl-Wostl	Univ. of Osnabrück	Organizer
10	Katja	Treichel	Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform	
11	Joanne	Vinke-de Kruijf	University of Twente	
12	Christopher	Weible	University of Colorado Denver	
13	Markus	Dressel	Univ. of Hannover	Guest
14	Larissa	Koch	Univ. of Osnabrück	Guest
15	Dominic	Lenzi	Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons ar	Guest

## Program:

### Wed, 5 Sep

- 09:00–09:50h **Introduction**
  - Welcome; round of introduction; input by M. **Kowarsch** and C. **Pahl-Wostl** on the motivation for this workshop; brief discussion
- 09:50–11:00h **Session I** (inputs à 10min)
  - Inputs by C. **Weible** and J. **Newig**
  - 5 min questions of understanding after each presentation
  - 40min discussion
- 11:00–11:20h *tea/coffee break*
- 11:20–12:30h **Session II** (inputs à 10min)
  - Inputs by B. **Harvey** and J. **Vinke-de Kruijf**
  - 5 min questions of understanding after each presentation
  - 40min discussion
- 12:30–13:30h *lunch break*
- 13:30–14:40h **Session III** (inputs à 10min)
  - Inputs by P. **Gober** and H. **Eakin**
  - 5 min questions of understanding after each presentation
  - 40min discussion
- 14:40–15:00h *tea/coffee break*
- 15:00–16:10h **Session IV** (inputs à 10min)
  - Inputs by M. **Máñez Costa** and K. **Treichel**
  - 5 min questions of understanding after each presentation
  - 40min discussion
- 16:10–16:20h *short break*
- 16:20–17:30h **Session V** (inputs à 10min)
  - Inputs by D. **Huitema** and D. **Fleuss**
  - 5 min questions of understanding after each presentation
  - 40min discussion
- 17:30–18:00h **Wrap up (day 1)**, *followed by break*
- 19:00h *joint dinner (BBQ)*

### Thu, 6 Sep

- 09:00–12:15h **Session VI: the way forward**
  - Synthesis and next steps (input and moderation by C. **Pahl-Wostl**)
  - Breakout groups, and presentation of results; *tea/coffee break: 10:45h*
- 12:15–13:15h *lunch break*
- 13:15–14:45h **Session VII: joint projects?**
  - Plenary discussion
- 14:45–15:00h **Feedback round**, *end of workshop.*

## Workshop discussions and results

In the first two sessions, discussions focused on the better understanding of key factors and conditions enabling (policy) learning and deliberation – and its uptake in policy processes. The research presented was based on literature reviews, meta-analysis and action learning. The talks in the afternoon presented several relevant case studies and lessons learned, while the last session broadened the scope of our discussions towards the (still limited) quality of the existing literature on learning, and the embeddedness of facilitated learning processes in the broader policy and governance contexts. Then, the group drew conclusions and developed two promising ideas for joint paper projects to advance the research in this field: (1) one paper project on analyzing the various conceptual frameworks and theoretical approaches used in the learning literature, and how they are actually employed; (2) and one paper project to develop “a diagnosis tool” to more systematically and consistently analyze learning platforms, while taking into account their contexts and diversity.

Selected insights gained and interesting questions raised by participants during this workshop include:

- The problem of **unclear, multiple or lacking definitions** of key concepts still remains. Often there is a **lack of transparency** of both concepts and analytical approaches, and we still lack a clear understanding of many crucial aspects of learning processes and outcomes in the policy arena. However, there are recent efforts to provide more robust knowledge through meta-analyses and literature reviews that were highly appreciated by workshop participants.
- Surprising results from meta-analysis and literature review concerning the **conditions and factors fostering policy learning** include, e.g.: the higher the value conflict at stake, the higher is the likelihood of learning taking place. But power asymmetries may sometimes hinder social learning, and thus the question of fair participation procedures – including stakeholder selection – becomes crucial again. Moreover, it remains unclear how learning about deep core beliefs and ethical values can actually be facilitated in cases where conflicting values cause problematic polarization and divide. Besides duration and cooperativeness, another key factor for effective learning processes is, for instance, leadership which is still poorly understood.
- The huge **diversity of learning platforms** in terms of their objectives, design, formats, participants, levels, political and societal contexts and embeddedness, timing, etc. poses considerable problems to their systematic, comparative analysis and evaluation, and to the identification of best practices. This challenge may be reduced by developing more consistent and differentiated conceptual frameworks for the analysis and evaluation of such processes.
- Moreover, **cultural differences** can have significant implications for the design and effectiveness of facilitated learning processes. For instance, using participatory games (experiments) as a method is culturally not accepted everywhere.
- Better understanding the various **contexts of learning processes** is crucial, including all factors influencing policy processes and preference formation, but also including the **embeddedness** of learning processes in broader policy, governance and societal contexts.
- This is also a precondition for answering the interesting question in which situations and contexts (and under which conditions) deliberative policy learning is promising or not, and in what sense. The normative dimension has to be more explicitly addressed here. What are the **settings where learning is important and desirable**, and where is it unimportant or even risky (or why did learning platforms fail)? Is deliberative learning a panacea? What is the relationship between learning and multi-stakeholder deliberation in each case, and what role for scientific expertise respectively? Participants learned about promising practical applications of scenarios in multi-stakeholder learning processes (e.g., Decision Theater).
- Accordingly, we should also do more research into the outcome of learning processes, i.e. the **uptake of learning outcomes in the policy process** or broader societal discourses.