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# Promoting adaptation to changing coasts

Work Package T.2.4.1: Methodology for Engagement and Involvement of End Users and Key Stakeholders in Coastal Climate Adaptation Schemes

Executive Summary

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**Further copies of this report are available here:** [Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts \(pacco-interreg.com\)](https://www.pacco-interreg.com)

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# Foreword



The Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts (PACCo) project is a cross-border initiative which is financially supported by the INTERREG VA France (Channel) England programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The broad aim of PACCo is to demonstrate that it is possible to work with stakeholders in estuarine regions to deliver a range of benefits for people and the environment by adapting pre-emptively to climate change. It has a total value of €27.2m, with €18.8m coming from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The project focuses on two pilot sites: the Lower Otter Valley, East Devon, England and the Saône Valley in Normandy, France.

**For more information see:** [Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts \(pacco-interreg.com\)](http://pacco-interreg.com)

## Background

The University of Exeter and Lisode Consultancy were commissioned by the PACCo project to independently undertake a research project, to report back to the PACCo project for the delivery of Work Package T.2.4.1.

**The aim of the work package was to develop a transferable methodology for the engagement of stakeholders and communities in coastal climate adaptation projects**, learning from the experiences of the development stages of the PACCo demonstration projects (from initial ideas to the point of planning approval).

To achieve this aim, the team have undertaken the following research activities for both the Lower Otter Restoration Project and the Saône Territorial Project:

1. Description and evaluation of the engagement approaches undertaken, based upon historical documentation.
2. Workshops with community residents.
3. Interviews with project partners and stakeholders.

Ultimately, the final model for the engagement of end users and key stakeholders in future coastal adaptation projects has been developed by drawing upon the outcomes of these research exercises as a collective. Thus, this has enabled the integration of perspectives from the community, project partners and stakeholders, and historical records into the work package output.

Full results have been presented in two companion reports for the work package, which should be treated as one whole:

- In the first report, the approach towards and outcomes of the researchers' evaluation of the PACCo project engagement processes is outlined, along with evidenced descriptions of those processes in chronological order.
- The second report details the contributions of stakeholders and residents from the interview and workshop activities, and drew together all findings into the final model for engagement.

This executive summary outlines the final model output as presented in the second report. The model encapsulates transferable learning for the engagement processes in the development stages of future coastal adaptation and landscape change projects.

# Model for Engagement in Coastal Adaptation and Landscape Change

There are three aspects to the engagement model, which is visualised as a wheel on the following page.

1. **Theoretical Principles.** There are five philosophical principles of engagement within this model, represented by the segments in the central part of the wheel. Whilst we have identified practical recommendations which could help to realise these principles in the process, these segments represent core values of the engagement process.
2. **Sequential Process.** There are elements of the model that relate to the engagement process as it progresses through time. These are represented in the wrap-around arrow. There are four phases: preparation; early engagement; sustained engagement; and engagement into the future. Recommendations as to what to include at each of these stages are given in the following text.
3. **Constraints.** There are external factors that will have an influence upon the engagement process, including what is principally, technically, or financially feasible. In the visualisation, these are represented by the arrows that point away from the centre of the wheel. The engagement process will need to navigate the push and pull of these factors, which will pose challenges for, or limitations on, what would be considered as 'the optimal approach'.

The optimal engagement approach is represented at the centre of the wheel where the theoretical principles intersect. The approach is one in which: stakeholders and communities are empowered in the development process; stakeholders and communities are well represented; there is trust between project partners and engaged parties; information is clearly and accessibly available; and uncertainties are worked with.

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**A note on terminology.** In this report, the following terms are used with the following definitions (adapted from Zimmermann et al., 2014\*):

- **INTEGRATION:** Involvement of various political and administrative levels in the process.
- **LEGITIMACY:** Inclusion of stakeholders and end users, and consideration of their interests or views.
- **CREATIVITY:** Level to which documented outcomes or plans depart from previous ways of thinking for future development.

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\* ZIMMERMANN, T., ALBERT, C., KNIELING, J., & VON HAAREN, C. (2014). *Social learning in climate change adaptation. Evaluating participatory planning*. In G. Martinez, P. Fröhle, & H. J. Meier (Eds.), *Social Dimensions of Climate Change Adaptation in Coastal Regions: Findings from Transdisciplinary Research* (pp. 159-173).

## Visualisation of the Model for Engagement in Coastal Adaptation and Landscape Change



# 1. Theoretical Principles

## 1.1. Empowerment

Landscape change and landscape-scale coastal adaptation schemes will intersect with multiple stakeholder interests and social groups, particularly in sites with significant public access. Accordingly, representatives of both stakeholder interest groups and local communities are likely to experience the consequences of landscape scale proposals (whether these be positive or negative outcomes).

Hence, the engagement process should seek to empower stakeholders and communities in the development process, particularly those who are most likely to be affected or are living in the vicinity. It will be important to recognise and understand the different types of knowledge and the opinions that these groups may be able to contribute.

Empowerment in the process will require an openness to their feedback where, if it is necessary, input could lead to changed ways of thinking or changes in design. Higher levels of *Creativity* will be observed where documented plans or outcomes depart from previous ways of thinking in response to feedback.

It is recommended that groups are engaged from the outset in an approach where “the issue” is discussed and collectively understood, prior to introducing ideas for “the solution”. It will be important for communities and stakeholders to feel able to inform design, and there will be more opportunity for change in response to new knowledge in the initial and early stages (as opposed to in the later stages of development). Discussion should account for both the potential positive and negative effects of a proposed solution, and questions raised (with answers given) should be recorded.

A challenge could be encountered where there is complacency or apathy towards a project, among stakeholders or communities that the project is seeking to engage with. This might mean individuals are less likely to engage themselves, even when there are attempts at outreach. Apathy is more likely when ideas are being discussed, rather than when a firm proposal has been made (i.e. when “something is happening”). However, it is in the earlier stages where there may be most opportunity for *Creativity*. Thus, projects should continue seeking to engage the interest of these groups, whilst being sympathetic towards the reasons why they may not yet have engaged (such as having other personal priorities).



## 1.2. Representation

As landscape-scale projects will interact with multiple interests, engaged parties will need to encompass a spectrum of interests and groups if they in turn are to feel their interests have been represented in project development. Exactly *who* should be represented will be context dependent on the location, land use, and social dynamics; representation will likely need to include political or statutory bodies, landowners, landscape users, and local communities:

- To achieve a high level of *Integration*, there will need to be involvement of various political and administrative levels in the process.
- To achieve a high level of *Legitimacy*, there will need to be inclusion of stakeholders and end users, and consideration of their interests or views.

An effectively managed stakeholder or steering group can be a good forum for ongoing, two-way exchange of feedback and knowledge throughout the development of a project. (Should this be result in a very large group, there can be sub-groups in a larger governance structure.)

Residents who live in the immediate vicinity of a project will need to be represented, although the exact area classed as being the “immediate vicinity” will be context dependent on project scale and local social dynamics. This will require careful consideration as they may include residents living outside of the formally designated project boundary, or in areas other than those identified as most affected through technical assessments alone. Residents in these areas may or may not feel represented by existing organisations or bodies so will require a direct approach. Should there be a stakeholder group, consider inviting these residents to nominate their own representative.

Alongside a stakeholder group with community representation, public engagement events will help disseminate information among the wider community. Public engagement will need to represent different demographics, including those who may find it hard to engage in standard ways. Public outreach may yield new information to consider or highlight so far unrepresented groups that will require closer levels of engagement.

### **1.3. Working with Uncertainties**

Adaptation to climate change involves actions taken to address future circumstances. Whilst awareness and acceptance of climate change itself may be growing, there can be disagreement about its impacts and levels of local environmental risk. This can result in disagreement about whether proposals may be the “right” course of action to take.

Opening with discussion and education about local (or global) environmental risk, prior to introducing ideas for the solution, may reduce levels of uncertainty and instil confidence in the actions proposed (or at least facilitate understanding between groups with different knowledge).

Development of adaptation projects is likely to involve modelling risk scenarios (e.g. sea level rise or flood risk). Local people may have their own understanding of how their local landscape functions (e.g. the way in which water moves in the landscape) developed from personal experience. This may lead them to disagree with model outputs. Opportunities for residents to directly engage with modelling specialists to share (or even input) their own knowledge and to explore risk scenarios may result in greater understanding, confidence, and trust in the modelling outputs. Consequently, this may result in greater trust in the actions being proposed in response to the modelling conclusions.

There may be day-to-day enquiries about other uncertainties, such as about a project’s motivations, decisions, or actions. Alongside making information accessible, quick, clear, and informative responses are more likely to be received favourably by those who are seeking the reassurance.

## 1.4. Trust

Landscape-scale projects intersect with many interests and community groups, and will involve an acceptance of changes in a landscape those people know. To facilitate social acceptability of these changes, there will need to be trust between groups, particularly between project partners and engaged parties.

Trust levels are likely to be influenced by the other four theoretical values; where stakeholders and communities feel empowered and represented, they can access clear information, and feel their uncertainties have been recognised and understood.

To further enhance trust levels and minimise potential escalation of tensions, partners should seek to engage in a transparent, honest, and open process. Partners should ensure they work with communities in an inclusive way and that they listen to and empathise with community voices and opinions. Clear and accessible information should be available and outline the motivations for planned actions, describe the assessments that have been conducted, list the reasoning for decisions made, explain the funding sources and requirements, and be up front about what uncertainties remain.

Levels of trust may be influenced by prior relationships or power dynamics, which will be context-dependent upon the project location and parties involved. Where this is an issue, one consideration may be to recruit an independent facilitator to oversee the engagement process.

Should there be distrust of the assessments undertaken for a project (e.g. a flood risk assessment), one consideration to build trust may be through an openness to independent review of assessments undertaken.

## 1.5. Clarity & Accessibility

Landscape scale schemes might seek to address multiple objectives simultaneously, are likely to have a multi-faceted design, will interact with multiple interests, and could relate to other projects. This complexity can make it challenging to communicate project motivations, decisions, or actions. In response, it can be difficult for other groups to understand and visualise. (There may be greater understanding among those who have been more involved or engaged since an earlier timeframe, than among those who have not.)

It will be important to consider how best to make the information accessible to different audiences and help them to understand the project. This could include (but is not limited to):

- Involving engagement specialists to facilitate two-way transfer of information and understanding.
- Being clear and giving information that refrains from using technical or challenging language.
- Using creative methods to help people visualise the project outcome (e.g. physical models or visual simulations).
- Breaking the subject down into smaller parts that are easier to communicate and convey.
- Responding to enquiries quickly and informatively, with a clear and designated point of contact.

Projects should seek to share information through multiple methods, to increase the likelihood of reaching as many different groups as possible. This should include both online and offline methods, to provide opportunity for both digital and non-digital users to engage. Establishment of a formal social media presence early may help facilitate an effective online dialogue.

## 2. Sequential Process

Throughout the analyses, we determined that there are elements of engagement that will need to take place at phases of the engagement process through time, which in turn will help to support engagement that is empowering, representative, trusted, accessible, and responds to uncertainty. Hence, engagement processes require commitment throughout from initial preparation, through project development, and into the future.

**Preparation.** Prior to the initial outreach, it is advisable to reflect on the local social context. This can include pre-existing relationships between parties; power dynamics between groups; or the effects of projects or proposals that came before. If these variables pose a challenge for the optimal engagement process, consider how they can be overcome. One could consider allocating resources towards an independent engagement facilitator, to enable two-way sharing of knowledge and feedback. Engagement expertise will be valuable for project delivery teams; if not already in existence, this could be gained through appropriate training or the recruitment of professional engagement facilitators.

**Early Engagement.** Early engagement with both stakeholders and community groups is likely to be received more favourably. The tone will need to be sensitive to their respective positions as landscape change is an emotive subject, with differing opinions on potential gains and losses. At this stage, projects should recognise the knowledge and perspectives that the different groups can contribute. There is likely to be more flexibility in design before project ideas become firmer plans, so there is greatest opportunity for *Creativity* in these early stages of development. Where possible, provide opportunities for knowledge transfer about the issue, before introducing ideas for the solution.

**Sustained Engagement.** Engagement will need to be an ongoing process throughout the various stages of project development. Communications will need to be kept up to date, and regular engagement meetings or events held. It is advisable to avoid long time periods between engagement events to minimise risk of an information gap. There will need to be a continued openness to include different voices; it may be more challenging to engage with newly identified voices at later stages in the process, but it is not 'too late' to improve opportunities for knowledge sharing.

**Engagement Into the Future.** There will likely be continued interest in the future of the landscape once a plan has been formed, including issues of future landscape management, post-works. Whilst future engagement beyond the development stage is outside of the scope of the model directly, it is advisable to consider this in advance; give thought to the future and the potential approaches towards continued engagement and empowerment, into the implementation stage and beyond.

### 3. Constraints

The optimal engagement approach will be challenged by the push and pull of external factors that may limit what engagement activities are possible, or what feedback is feasible to incorporate into project designs. In the visualisation on page 7, these constraints are represented by the arrows which point away from the optimal approach to engagement that is situated in the centre, so as to represent how these factors could restrict the ability to engage to meet the theoretical optimum. Constraints include (but are not limited to):

- **Unforeseen Events and National Circumstances**, to which planned activities may have to adapt.
- **Financial Resources**. The level of funds available may limit how much investment can be allocated toward engagement activities, or what changes in design will be achievable, particularly in the early stages prior to there being a recognised project.
- **Funder Requirements**. Funders may have an expectation of what a project will need to deliver (and when), or changes requested by engaged parties may not meet the criteria for access to funding sources.
- **Organisational and/or Individual Motives**. Organisations may have objectives they need to meet as the driver of a project or of their engagement. Opportunities for *Creativity* in a project may be limited if suggested changes do not align with, or deviate from, these objectives (or those of funders).
- **Organisation Capacity**. Engagement activity may be limited by the capacity of an organisation to coordinate activities, or of engaged parties (including stakeholders, community groups, or individuals) to participate and contribute.
- **Changing Personnel**. Staff changes or changes in stakeholder/community representatives may result in a need to cover ground that has already been discussed or lead to new questions and dialogue in later project stages.
- **Legal and Regulatory Requirements**. Legislative and statutory requirements may place restrictions on what is possible, or suggestions raised by engaged parties may not be options that would be permissible in law.
- **Technical Limitations**. *Creativity* may be restricted where ideas proposed may not be practically possible to implement.
- **Apathy towards a project**. Whatever efforts are made to engage with stakeholders or communities, stakeholders or individuals within communities may not themselves then engage. Apathy may be more likely at earlier stages when a project is an 'idea', before it becomes a 'proposal'.

It will be a challenge to navigate these factors, and they will apply pressures on the optimal engagement approach. As a result, engagement will require ever more commitment to work through challenges, and project partners will need to be open with engaged parties when such factors apply.

## Conclusion

Coastal adaptation can result in landscape change with multiple impacts for local people. Consequently, effective engagement with people is key to the success of adaptation schemes, particularly where projects seek to deliver benefits for people and the environment, whilst responding to concerns and questions.

We have proposed a **Model for Engagement in Coastal Adaptation and Landscape Change**, grounded in learning from the two PACCo sites. The Model seeks to describe or characterise an engagement process in which stakeholders and communities are represented and empowered, where there is trust between groups, where information is accessible, and uncertainties worked through. The optimal approach to engagement sits at the intersect between these values and is one which enables the voices of local communities and stakeholders to be heard on an equal footing, in a democratised decision-making process.

Engagement is a task that requires significant commitment and is unlikely to come without challenges. In some cases, these may be externally driven, such as the willingness of funders to resource design changes, or what might be required to meet the requirements of legal frameworks. Other challenges may present themselves on a more human level. Changes to a local landscape which people know and associate with can be emotive, whether through excitement and a sense of gain, or resulting from a sense of loss or grief for a landscape valued for what it has historically been. Thus, engagement must take a sensitive approach from the outset and throughout. This will need good preparation and an understanding of the local social context, early and sustained engagement, and forethought towards continued empowerment of local communities and stakeholders in future landscape decisions.

Projects must listen to diverse voices (including those of both 'experts' and publics) and reflect these back within the approach to coastal adaptation or landscape change. Hence, project teams will need the expertise to navigate the engagement process and the challenges they will encounter. We recommend that delivery teams thoroughly evaluate their engagement expertise prior to initial outreach and, if and where the right expertise may not yet exist and where it is possible, invest in appropriate training or the recruitment of a fair and independent facilitator. This may involve an up-front cost, but strong engagement expertise will foster a sensitive approach to meeting the theoretical values of the engagement Model. It may ultimately save time, effort and even reputation costs, building trust from the outset.

Involving diverse groups in an inclusive way and having an openness to different types of knowledge can seem daunting. For project instigators it may mean an evolution from previous ways of working that have focused on expert-led knowledges. And at times, the views expressed could feel confrontational and discomfiting. Yet *Integrated*, *Legitimate* and *Creative* approaches that meet the values of our Model are more likely to foster positive relationships, to empower stakeholders and local communities more equally, and result in an adaptation project that effectively meets both social and environmental objectives.