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# Focus Groups, Citizens' Juries and Open Space method: Innovative tools of public involvement in water management

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## Overview of innovative public involvement tools:

- Focus Group interviews
- Citizens' Juries
- Open Space method
- Compared to identify the most effective participatory approach for river basin management plan design



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## Focus groups

- 4 – 8 members in a group discussion on certain issue
- In a free atmosphere participants exchange their points of views and experiences building each other awareness and acceptance of others perspectives
- Reach common understanding of the problem
- Source of information on uncovered topics



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## Example: Mapping stakeholders needs in Emajõgi River Basin

- How are environmental risks perceived?
- Sources of environmental information?
- Interest towards water management?
- Possibilities for influencing environmental policy-making?



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## Interviews

- Schoolchildren
- Community activists
- Water tourism entrepreneurs
- Fishermen
- Farmers
- Summer cottage owners
- Local government officials
- Representatives of water sport club
- Environmental NGOs





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## Participants perception of the experience

Majority of participants' expectations were fulfilled:

- Got to speak their own opinions, and hear others
- Exchange of information and experiences on water management
- Pleasant to discuss together issues that otherwise are not talked about



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## Focus groups findings

- Awareness of the risks is a precondition for interest in participation in solving environmental problems
- Water information is hard to understand for common people
- Water management earns too little public attention
- WM is dominated by out of local context environmental protection and EU bureaucracy standards
- **Focus groups is an efficient method to evoke diverse understandings and building public awareness**
- **Time consuming**



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## Citizens' juries

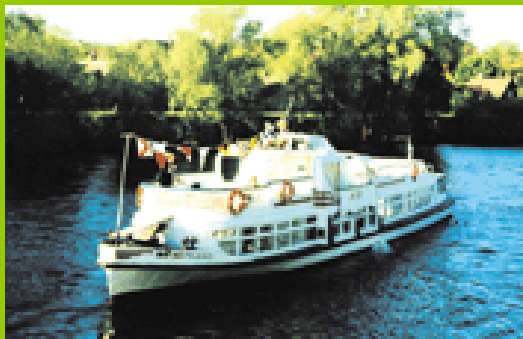
- A group of representatives of the community comes together to carefully deliberate on the problem significant to the community.
- Panel members hear expert opinions give their suggestions for the solution.
- The decision made by the panel will be delivered to the policy-makers and for implementation

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## YES or NO for the water tourism development on Emajõgi River





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## Conducting Citizens' Jury

- **Jury members:** inhabitants of Puhja and Rannu municipalities
- **Presentations of witnesses from different sectors:** river port, nature reserve, NGO, engineer, businessman
- Enabled participants to get to know different perspectives on the development of Emajõgi region
- Gives participants possibility to utter their opinion on issue at stake
- Gives information on the public perceptions of the problems and value orientations, needs and interests
- End of the day Jury compiled their recommendations
- Report was sent to state and local authorities dealing with River Emajõgi WM issues





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## Open Space Method

- MIN. MODERATION & MAX CITIZENS' INPUT
- Participants are free to raise a problem of discussion
- Choose a group of discussion to contribute to
- Jointly evaluate the significance of the problem
- Compose a strategy for the problem solution



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# Future of Environmental Education in Lake Peipsi basin?

- Discussion groups on: teachers' capacity, state support, media coverage, technical means for water education education, etc.
- **Example of following concrete action:**  
Strategy report on outdoor environmental education development sent to the Ministries of the Environment and of Education





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# Lessons Learned

## **Citizens' juries, focus groups and open space methods:**

- Enable participants to get to know different perspectives on a challenge in water management
- Give information on the public perceptions of the problems and value orientations, needs and interests
- Promote political dialogue aimed at mutual understanding: not aiming at complete agreements, but rather that they try to resolve conflicts by finding an acceptable solution
- **After careful consideration ordinary people were able to discuss complex water management issues!**



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## For more information:

- [www.ctc.ee](http://www.ctc.ee)
- [www.riverdialogue.org](http://www.riverdialogue.org)
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