

|                                      |
|--------------------------------------|
| Research                             |
| ▶ What is resilience?                |
| ▶ Research themes                    |
| ▶ SES Modeling and Visualization Lab |
| ■ Research school                    |
| ■ Centre vacancies                   |
| ■ Baltic Nest Institute              |
| ▶ Centre-hosted research programmes  |



Photo: J. Lokrantz/Azote

## Doing stakeholder participation the right way

### Careful and correct approach key to successful merger of conservation and development.

Considering the close interdependence between social and ecological systems, one would think people-oriented management and conservation of ecosystems ought to succeed better than top-down authoritarian practices.

In line with this, the pragmatic reasons for involving stakeholders and the **need to better connect ecosystem managers** are becoming more and more well-established among researchers.

Nevertheless, there are those who argue that stakeholder participation slows down the decision-making process (with unfortunate compromises as a result), and that the participation of economic interests in decision-making on biodiversity conservation tends to have negative consequences for biodiversity.

So which is it?

According to centre researchers Lisen Schultz, Andreas Duit and Carl Folke, stakeholder participation is not a straightforward recipe for success, but done the right way it adds a number of crucial aspects needed for a more sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystems.

This is the conclusion of their new article in an upcoming issue of World Development.

#### Keep it professional

Schultz and her colleagues' analysis of the role of stakeholder participation is based on a survey of 146 Biosphere Reserves in 55 countries, which Lisen conducted as part of her doctoral studies at Stockholm University.

Unlike the more well-known World Heritage sites, the Biosphere Reserves are intended to protect biodiversity and encourage local development at the same time, by sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being.

The results show that worries about participation resulting in unsatisfactory compromises between conservation and development, decreased effectiveness and disappointing outcomes may be

#### References

Schultz, L., A. Duit., and C. Folke. Participation, adaptive co-management and management performance in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. In press, World Development doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.09.014

#### About the authors



Lisen Schultz works with the role of managers and 'bridging organizations' in adaptive governance.

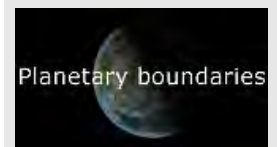
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#### Centre calendar

- 16/02  
Forum för miljöforskning 2011 — tema MATEN
- 17/02  
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- 18/02  
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- 18/02  
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**MISTRA**

exaggerated.

"The only negative effect of participation that we could detect was the link between a high participation of volunteers and ineffectiveness in achieving "conventional" conservation goals such as plant and animal protection. However, a properly organised conservation where volunteers complement rather than substitute more formal structures, enhance the effectiveness in reaching sustainable development goals," says **Lisen Schultz**, lead author of the new study.

#### Advantages outweigh disadvantages

In short, a smooth involvement of stakeholders can facilitate increased efficiency (as people are more likely to support and implement decisions they have participated in making), improved accuracy (as a more diverse and broader knowledge base is utilized), and strengthened legitimacy (as people affected by decisions are invited into the process of making them).

"Our analysis shows that the involvement of farmers, fishermen and other local resource users in decision-making increases the likelihood that projects that integrate conservation and development are successful," Schultz concludes.

The next step in this research will be to look closer into the forty-six responding Biosphere Reserve centres that were found to collaborate successfully with local inhabitants, government bodies and scientists to integrate biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

They provide interesting learning platforms that enable management to respond to ecosystem feedback, and facilitate learning among stakeholders.

Source: Schultz, L., A. Duit., and C. Folke. Participation, adaptive co-management and management performance in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. In press, World Development doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.09.014



**Carl Folke** is Science Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre and has extensive experience in the social and economic dimension of ecosystem management.



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