

Chapter 5

Power asymmetries in companion modelling processes

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As discussed in the previous chapter, ComMod processes, like most participatory processes, are implemented in social contexts characterized by power asymmetries and conflicts of interest between stakeholders involved at different organizational levels. These asymmetries result from complex and context-specific power games, which are often difficult to identify and are dependent on a combination of social, political, economic and cultural factors. One of the most common criticisms levelled at participatory approaches is the lack of recognition of this complexity of the socio-political context in which they are implemented (Lavigne-Delville *et al.*, 2000; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Eversol, 2003; d'Aquino, 2007) (see Chapter 4). There is now an urgent need for researchers working on participation, including the ComMod group, to formalize their position in a better way in the face of this criticism. However, such an undertaking is difficult because behind the need to take better account of the socio-political context, there is not only the necessity to understand it better, but also to think about how to deal with it. This involves taking up the issue of the stance adopted by the designers of participatory processes with regard to the power asymmetries inherent in the socio-political contexts in which the processes are implemented. This issue poses a dilemma for these designers. If they attempt to assert a neutral position with regard to power asymmetries, they will be criticized for being naïvely manipulated by the most influential stakeholders, and *de facto* participate in merely reproducing or even reinforcing the initial power asymmetries. However, if, to mitigate this risk, they attempt instead to assert a non-neutral position, by taking the initiative to strengthen the voice of the least influential stakeholders, questions will then be raised as to their legitimacy to do so. ComMod researchers are no exception to this dilemma.

The ComMod Charter defines an initial stance with regard to the heterogeneity of the intervention context, namely the need to acknowledge the diversity of existing standpoints with a view to establishing a shared understanding of the situation. This mitigates to some extent the risk of the views of the least influential stakeholders being unheard (Collectif ComMod, 2005). Over and above this common general stance, it now appears useful to the group to clarify the diversity of possible positions with regard to taking power asymmetries into account, both in terms of methodological choices and ethical positions.

The aims of this chapter are to provide a method for eliciting the positions adopted with regard to power asymmetries by designers² of participatory approaches and then apply this method to ComMod researchers with a view to identifying and analysing the positions in which they recognize themselves. We analyse here the designers' perceptions of their practices, which depend on the meaning they give to their action. The analysis of the practices actually implemented and their effects is a second step, which has not yet been taken³ As a first step, this chapter formalizes differences and similarities in the positions in which ComMod researchers recognize themselves with regard to taking power asymmetries into account.

Participation, power games and legitimacy: theoretical focus

Power asymmetries within society

Power is considered here as a relational concept, that is, we talk about power relationships. It implicitly refers to two closely related concepts: the power to do something and the power exerted over someone. A widely accepted definition of power is given by Weber (1968, 1995b): 'The probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'. According to some authors, the definitions of power based on Weber's definition make power relationships a zero-sum game: in a relationship, the more power one person has, the less power the other has (Rowlands, 1995). After a range of simplifications, power has gradually become something someone has or has not, which accounts for the frequent dichotomies between strong and weak, dominant and dominated. Scoones and Thompson (1999) deplored this simplistic view of power which conveys a 'populist' view of participation with, on the one hand, rural communities without power, and on the other, technicians or administrations abusing this power. According to Vermeulen (2005), these simplifying dichotomies are problematic because they deny the existence of a form of power among the weakest stakeholders. Vermeulen argues that even in a situation of oppression, the weakest stakeholder always has a certain form of power, as the existence of the oppressor as such is dependent on the existence of the oppressed (Veneklasen and Miller, 2002).

² The term designer of a ComMod process, or more broadly a participatory process, is used here to designate someone who designs, leads and coordinates the whole ComMod process.

³ It is a task that the ComMod group began in partnership with other designers of participatory approaches.

To avoid these simplifying dichotomies, it is possible to analyse these power relationships with more nuance. First, it is important to recognize that very influential stakeholders in a given social field (Bourdieu, 1994) may be less so in another field. Second, it is necessary to characterize the resources mobilized to exert power. According to Giddens (1984), there are three main types of resources: (i) know-how and knowledge; (ii) the standards and cultural values conferring on some stakeholders a legal, traditional or charismatic authority; (iii) physical resources, such as money, natural resources or human resources. Third, power relations can be characterized according to the mechanisms governing them. Boulding (1989) makes a distinction between three different mechanisms: the stick, the carrot and the hug. The stick and the carrot are familiar metaphors, the stick corresponding to a form of power exerted by force or threat, and the carrot reflecting the ability of someone to get someone else to do what he wants by means of incentives, which are mostly economic. Both are forms of coercive power. These are forms of power exerted over someone. Boulding's most important and most innovative concept is the hug, which reflects an integrative or cooperative form of power. This is the power of a group to do something through people coming together to achieve the same goals, in accordance with the same principles and with a sense of belonging to a group. Countervailing power can be considered a form of cooperative power of the least influential stakeholders through a creation of alliances.

Power games in a participatory process

Besides the analysis of power relationships in the initial context, it is also important to follow the dynamics of power relationships in the participatory process. Power asymmetries can have several outcomes in a participatory process (Leeuwis, 2000; Faysse, 2006). Some stakeholders may use their power to include or exclude other stakeholders in the negotiation, to influence the subject and issues of negotiations, to impose their ideas in discussions while ignoring or dominating the views of others, or to control the implementation of decisions without honouring the agreements reached during negotiations. Some may also use their power not to join the negotiation process and eventually block the process if their presence is essential for formulating a viable agreement.

In contrast, the risk of the views of the least influential stakeholders not being heard is also very present in a participatory process. When a stakeholder lacks self-confidence, freedom of expression, access to information or an understanding of the issues at stake, his ability to defend his interests is limited. Some authors note that, in certain negotiation configurations, the least influential stakeholders may have no interest in participating in the negotiation process, unless this ability to defend their interests is reinforced (Wollenberg *et al.*, 2001). Although this idea is not shared by all designers of participatory approaches, these authors believe that a participatory process cannot work without the empowerment of certain stakeholders considered to be in a position of weakness.

Rowlands (1995) makes a distinction between three forms of empowerment:

- the reinforcing of personal abilities, such as increasing self-confidence, better understanding the issues at stake, etc. (this corresponds to the power to do something)
- the reinforcing of relational abilities, which is the development of know-how concerning strategic relationships so as to learn how to influence the outcome of a discussion or negotiation process (this is the power exerted over someone)

– the reinforcing of collective abilities: a group of people learning how to cooperate to achieve more satisfactory results than individuals acting individually (corresponding to the power to do something together); this calls for the group to represent itself as a group defending common interests.

This typology focuses on the forms of learning in empowerment mechanisms, echoing the forms of learning identified in Chapter 9. However, the empowerment concept means more than just learning and increasing abilities within a negotiation arena. This learning process (changes in perceptions and modes of interaction) may have impacts on a society going beyond the negotiation arena (e.g. changes in social status, creation of alliances, etc.). The designer of a participatory process should be aware of such social changes (whether desired or not) and carefully monitor them.

Dealing with power asymmetries: dialogue-orientated versus critical stances

Researchers working on participatory approaches and multi-stakeholder processes are divided on the power issue. Faysse (2006) makes a distinction between proponents of dialogue-orientated approaches and proponents of critical approaches, a distinction that corresponds to two branches of systemic approaches, that is, soft systems and critical systems.

For the former, the main obstacle to the emergence of a successful cooperation between stakeholders with different interests is a lack of communication and mutual understanding. Once these communication barriers are lifted, it becomes possible for such stakeholders to have a shared representation of the situation and reach a consensus, forming a sound basis for collective action (Pretty, 1995; Röling and Wagemakers, 1998). Proponents of this approach consider collective learning to be the main lever for meaningful social change. They refer to systemic approaches of the interpretative type, also called ‘soft systems’ (Checkland, 1981). Based on constructivist epistemology focusing on the various possible interpretations of the system by stakeholders, these approaches have been developed in response to approaches of the so-called ‘hard systems’ type. Hard system approaches are used by the ‘hard sciences’ with strong biophysical and technology dominants and consider the researcher as an objective expert who has to remain outside the system he studies (Flood and Romm, 1995).

The 1990s saw the emergence of a third branch of systemic approaches, namely that of ‘critical systems’, in response to the limitations of soft system approaches to managing conflicting and coercive situations in contexts of significant power asymmetries (Jackson 2000; Ulrich, 2003). Proponents of critical approaches consider it necessary to manage actively and strategically the power asymmetries in a participatory approach so as to prevent any existing power asymmetries dominating discussions and ultimately resulting in a widening of the initial asymmetries. The facilitator of a participatory approach cannot, according to these authors, be considered as neutral in that he has to intervene intentionally in the discussion arena to give a voice to the weakest stakeholders and let them be heard in discussions. Leeuwis (2000) thus suggested that participation should be considered as a negotiating process and not just as a collective learning process. This conceptual shift considers that the stakeholders in a discussion arena talk and interact according to their own interests, which are, among other things, dictated by the existing power relationships. In addition, while the supporters of the dialogue-based approach

consider consensus as a goal and a necessary condition for collective action, the proponents of the critical approach, on the contrary, recommend that a group should not necessarily be pushed too fast towards consensus. Indeed, if such a consensus is reached too quickly, it may often only reflect the views of the most influential participants. In French literature, the concepts of negotiation and '*concertation*' (concerted process) are frequently referred to together. These two concepts have the same theoretical basis, namely negotiation that Dupont (1994) defined as 'an activity involving several interacting stakeholders who, when faced both with divergences and interdependencies, voluntarily choose to seek a mutually acceptable solution'. Beuret (2006) considered that the difference between negotiation and '*concertation*' lies in the fact that negotiation seeks to obtain an agreement on a decision, which is not necessarily the case of a concerted process. The aim of a concerted process is 'the collective establishment of visions, goals and common projects, in order to act or decide together'.

Although historically speaking, critical approaches were established in response to the limits of dialogue-orientated approaches, these two approaches are not necessarily antagonistic. Indeed, a number of key writers on dialogue-orientated approaches are open to criticism and instigate changes in their own thinking (Innes, 2004). Some critical and dialogue-orientated writers also share a common theoretical foundation, that is, the 'theory of communicative action' of the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Habermas makes a distinction between three forms of action based on three forms of rationality (Habermas, 1987; Leeuwis, 2000; Lussault, 2003). In the instrumental action, the individual acts to achieve a predetermined goal. In strategic action, he also aims for a specific goal, but considers the other individuals as potential opponents and he takes them into account in developing his own strategy. In the communicative action, individuals seek mutual understanding and consensus. Although each individual and each situation combines these three kinds of action, the communicative action should, according to Habermas (1987), be the goal for the members of a society. In other words, in an ideal situation, the result of a negotiation process should be based on stakeholders' arguments and not on power relationships. These are the only circumstances under which a genuine, stable agreement can be reached. Habermas (1987) defined a number of conditions for establishing such an 'ideal speech situation' in which each stakeholder has the same ability to participate in the discussion (same rights, same information and same opportunities). All forms of asymmetries and coercion in dialogue are seen as 'distortions of communication'. The theory of communicative action is often associated with dialogue-orientated approaches (Faysse, 2006) and challenged by some proponents of critical approaches who denounce its utopian nature. However, key authors on critical approaches, such as Ulrich (2003) in the field of systems thinking or Leeuwis (2000) in the field of communication sciences, have also used Habermas' theories to demonstrate that dialogue-orientated and critical approaches may be seen as more complementary than antagonistic. We will come back to this point later.

Legitimacy of participatory processes

The question of the position adopted with regard to power asymmetries brings us back to the issue of the legitimacy of participatory processes and those who implement them. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that a designer taking the initiative to empower the least influential stakeholders may be considered as not legitimate to do so. Legitimacy

is here taken to mean acceptance and recognition but this concept is inherently subjective and polysemous. As it is commonly defined in terms of justice and fairness, it may be construed in its legal or ethical dimensions. In this section, we introduce the way that this concept of legitimacy, which is central in sociology, is defined by the major authors in this field, before considering the ComMod group's standpoint on this issue.

The concept of legitimacy was coined by Weber to provide an understanding of how an agreement between social agents provides a social value to any practice (Weber, 1995b). Legitimacy thus marks the daily existence with a number of collectively accepted benchmarks that guide each society. However, Weber provides two very different definitions of legitimacy without always making a distinction between them: a general definition related to individuals' choices of activities, and a justification *a posteriori* of a domination relationship. Legitimacy then becomes a concept for considering power and social relations.

Our considerations on the legitimacy of a ComMod process come more within the scope of Weber's first definition. The ComMod glossary refers to Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991) definition, which is along the same lines. According to them, legitimacy is the 'interaction-based and open-ended result of a compromise between principles and values progressively leading to a convention to which stakeholders make reference to justify their choices'. When questioning the legitimacy of a participatory process, we question both its scientific legitimacy (i.e. perception by the scientific community of the validity of the knowledge produced) and its social legitimacy (i.e. acceptance of the process by stakeholders). While this chapter addresses the question of legitimacy through the issue of power asymmetries, this question is much wider. A specific working group within the ComMod network and a few papers (Daré *et al.*, 2004; Aubert, 2006; Barnaud, 2008) have contributed to the progressive refinement of this question and have suggested to distinguish between:

- legitimacy of intervention – Who formalized its demand? Is the ComMod approach able to respond to it? (see Chapter 4)
- legitimacy of participants – Why some stakeholders and not others? Who invited them? Are they considered as representative of a group? How can this representativeness be guaranteed, if need be? (see Chapter 4)
- legitimacy of models – Has the proposed representation of the system been validated by all the stakeholders considered as essential to ensure its legitimacy? (see Chapter 3)
- legitimacy of the team implementing the ComMod process – Given the profile, the background, the institutional connections, and even the personality of the designers, are they perceived as legitimate by stakeholders? (see Chapter 2).

In addition, is legitimacy seen as given and unchanging, or on the contrary, is it something that may be built or lost over time? When the legitimacy of an intervention is queried, the issue of how the approach was initialized is important (see Chapter 4). For some, the ideal approach would be for the local stakeholders to call on the ComMod researcher to support a group of stakeholders set up by them to deal with an issue that they have identified. In practice this type of situation is rare⁴. Legitimacy is more often

⁴ However, the case can be cited of an experiment led by Michel Étienne in which, following a ComMod experiment in the Causse Méjan, the SCTL called on researchers at the Avignon INRA to use ComMod to facilitate collective learning on pine forest management.

progressively built during the process, which is consistent with the iterative and adaptive nature of ComMod processes (Daré *et al.*, 2004). Each time they return to the field, the designer changes the model, the process and the group of stakeholders involved, so as to take better account of the views, concerns and expectations of the stakeholders (see Chapter 1). This way, the designer progressively increases the social legitimacy of the process.

However, the issue of power asymmetries is not fully resolved by these methodological suggestions, and neither is the question of the influence of the designer in power games. To address these issues, there is a need to go beyond a situation where each designer assesses the legitimacy of the intervention according to its own definition of what is legitimate or not in the context in which they operate. Questioning the legitimacy of each designer thus first implies making explicit its perception of the context and position with regard to this context.

Method: a test for making explicit positions with regard to power asymmetries

To build a shared representation (i.e. shared by ComMod researchers) of the diversity of the positions in which they recognize themselves with regard to power asymmetries, we implemented a ComMod-like process, that is, a collective, iterative and adaptive process.

Method used to build the test

It should first be remembered that there was prior knowledge about the positions of a few ComMod researchers (d'Aquino, 2007; Daré *et al.*, 2007; Barnaud, 2008). We also had the responses provided by 15 ComMod researchers to a questionnaire⁵ seeking to state the designer's position in relation to the socio-political context within which the process was implemented. An initial examination of these questionnaires⁶ made it possible to propose a first analytical method consisting of four indicators, or axes of analysis, graduated from 1 to 5, and assumed to be relevant for characterizing various aspects of the possible positions of researchers with regard to power asymmetries. From these 15 questionnaires, we were also able to identify four different researcher profiles (corresponding to four combinations of positions along the axis). This initial analysis was then submitted to at least one researcher for each profile to allow them to criticize, validate and/or enrich the proposed axis, indicators and profiles. This confrontation led us to revise and refine the axis of analysis and the proposed profiles. The revised version was then submitted to all ComMod researchers who had led and coordinated at least one ComMod process and had thus been faced with the question of their position regarding the socio-political context. They were asked to indicate their position on the axis and select the profile they felt matched them closest or, if necessary, propose the definition of a new profile. Our analysis was, therefore, based on how ComMod researchers see their own practices, according to the meaning they give to their action.

⁵ The questionnaire was sent to all the researchers of the ComMod group and ADD-ComMod project, as part of an ongoing comparative analysis on participation issues (ComMod and non-ComMod) coordinated by Patrick d'Aquino.

⁶ We used the Atlas.ti software designed for the qualitative and quantitative analysis of text.

One limitation was the sampling method: only those who were available or motivated enough to take the test did so (20 out of the 27 asked). However, it can be assumed that the result provides a sufficiently accurate illustration of the diversity of positions existing within the group.

Test: four axes of analysis

Axis 1: neutrality or non-neutrality with regard to power asymmetries

The first axis gives various positions ranging from neutrality to non-neutrality with regard to power asymmetries. This involves the researcher making explicit their position with regard to these asymmetries, and not a neutrality or non-neutrality in absolute terms. Indeed, no ComMod researcher considers themselves as neutral in absolute terms, one of the specificities of the process being to emphasize precisely the involvement of the researcher as a stakeholder within the system, who has, in the same way as the other stakeholders, a particular viewpoint on the system. However, if ComMod researchers agree on their non-neutrality in the sense that they admit to having an opinion on the system, not everyone agrees on intervening in this system on behalf of this opinion. In particular, there is no consensus on the more specific question of positions with regard to power asymmetries, which goes further by examining whether there is any bias in favour of greater equity.

This concept of equity is itself very subjective. Something is regarded as equitable if it seems fair. However, what seems fair or equitable in the eyes of some will not necessarily seem so in the eyes of others. When the concept of equity is used to qualify a participatory process, a distinction can be made between procedural equity and social equity. While procedural equity refers to what happens in the negotiation arena, social equity refers to the impacts on the social system in which this area lies. Although the concepts of procedural equity and social equity are obviously linked, the designer of a participatory process has more control over the former (if any). When the issue of bias in favour of more equity is raised hereafter, it is in reference to that concept of procedural equity. Although no definition of procedural equity has yet been collectively agreed upon within the ComMod network, an equitable concerted process can be defined as a process in which all stakeholders have a chance to voice and assert their interests, with equal opportunity being the ideal (Barnaud, 2008). What interests us here is how the designer of a participatory process positions themselves in regard to this concept of procedural equity, and, accordingly, how they deal with power asymmetries. Their position is expressed in particular through their methodological choices: the choice of the topics discussed, the tools used, the knowledge mobilized, the stakeholders involved, the communication modes or the timing of the intervention can all be considered as ways of expressing a position with regard to power asymmetries.

Within the ComMod group, at first glance, it can be seen that some researchers adopt a dialogue-orientated stance and consider that, to be legitimate, the designer of a ComMod process should show no bias, while others favour a critical stance arguing that such neutrality is neither possible nor desirable. To overcome this dichotomy, which, while certainly practical, is simplistic and insufficient to provide a more nuanced analysis of the range of possible positions, we have identified a range of five possible positions (Table 5.1). To the extent that we want our analysis framework to be applicable to a whole range of participatory approaches wider than ComMod, the positions described in this

Table 5.1. Meaning of the graduation of axis 1 on the expression of neutrality or non-neutrality with regard to power asymmetries.

Position	Definition
1	Neutrality of the laissez-faire type. Deliberately let power games express themselves in the process as they refuse to intervene in favour of more equity beyond the sharing of knowledge.
2	Unconditional dialogue-based neutrality. No wish for any bias towards any of the stakeholders or points of view involved. Give a voice to all groups involved in the same way, as dialogue is considered sufficient to promote greater equity.
3	Conditional dialogue-based neutrality. Same as 2, the difference being they leave themselves with the option of stopping the process if it becomes detrimental to certain stakeholders considered to be in a weak position.
4	Post-normal non-neutrality. Provide a communication arena in which they seek to strengthen the voice of the stakeholders considered to be the least influential ones. Leave any stakeholder free to reject this arena, but consider that the stakeholder's support for the proposed arena is deemed necessary to its legitimacy.
5	Strategic non-neutrality. Same as 4, except that the stakeholders' support for the proposed arena is not necessary (e.g. pressure mechanisms on recalcitrant stakeholders may be mobilized if necessary to strengthen the voice of the least influential stakeholders).

range are not necessarily all observed within this group (this point is also valid for the other three axis).

Position 1 occupies a special place in this range as it is the only position that has no explicit aim of promoting greater equity. It may be considered to be the position that expresses most strongly its neutrality with regard to power asymmetries, but we should not overlook the fact that deliberately allowing asymmetries to persist is a form of bias in itself. Positions 2 and 3 correspond to dialogue-orientated positions. Researchers corresponding to these positions express a bias towards equity, with dialogue and sharing of views as the key levers for promoting procedural equity. However, they assert neutrality in the coordination of the process, considering that they have no legitimacy to intervene in the communication arena by increasing the voice of certain groups of stakeholders. Position 3 (conditional neutrality) differs from the position 2 (unconditional neutrality) in allowing the possibility of intervention in this communication arena by stopping the process if there is too great a risk of influential stakeholders manipulating other parties. Positions 4 and 5 correspond to critical positions. There again, the objective of more equity is stipulated, but the resources used to achieve it differ. Indeed, these researchers call for procedural non-neutrality, considering that attempts should be made to counter power asymmetries, in particular, by empowering certain stakeholders. A distinction is made here between two possible critical positions that have been qualified as post-normal and strategic, respectively. According to Funtowicz and Ravetz (1994), a post-normal stance seeks to improve the quality of the interactions bringing a group to take a decision, more than the quality of the decision itself. Researchers adopting position 4 interpret this by considering that special attention should be paid to the quality of the communication arena, not only in terms of equity, but also in terms of legitimacy, this legitimacy stemming from the support of stakeholders for the proposed communication arena. Researchers adopting position 5 qualified as strategic aim to bring the group of

stakeholders to take a decision. To achieve this, the support of all stakeholders is not necessarily deemed necessary. In particular, they make provision for the possibility of establishing mechanisms to exert outside pressure on certain recalcitrant groups of stakeholders whose presence is essential for formulating a viable agreement.

Axis 2: initial analysis of power games – not a priority or necessary?

The second axis is an indicator of the methodological choice made regarding the type of initial analysis of power games, reflecting how the researcher takes account of the socio-political context in which they operates (see Chapter 4). There is a consensus within the ComMod group on the fact that the ComMod process reveals power games (Daré, 2005), and that it is important to give adaptive consideration to the power games thus highlighted. However, the issue of the importance of a preliminary analysis of power games is not the subject of a consensus. As pointed out in Chapter 4, a number of arguments can be made for a greatly reduced or no initial diagnosis. In addition to the advantage of lower costs, the designer with limited knowledge of the context in which they operate may highlight the fact that this could allow them to remain neutral and not influence the course of the process, leaving the stakeholders in control of the direction they take. Others put forward the pointlessness of an initial analysis of power games based on a survey lasting a few weeks or even months, as these intimate social interactions are difficult or even impossible for an outside observer to identify, and whose analysis is moreover necessarily subjective. Another key argument for a reduced initial analysis is that the implementation of the approach itself provides a better understanding of the socio-political context. However, does the designer of the ComMod process not then run the risk of understanding too late the importance of a given power game? As imperfect as it is, can a ComMod approach do without on an initial analysis of strategies and power games, as well as any existing power asymmetry? Table 5.2 describes the graduation of axis 2 relating to the importance attached to a given initial analysis of power games.

Table 5.2. Meaning of the graduation of axis 2 on the initial analysis of power games: non-priority or necessary?

Position	Definition
1	The initial analysis of power games is not a priority because it is pointless (it is impossible to understand power games in a society to which we do not belong) and unnecessary (the process itself reveals power games).
2	Although the initial analysis is not entirely worthless (in absolute terms, if we could understand power games), it is pointless (we cannot understand power games in a society to which we do not belong).
3	Based on pre-existing knowledge of the general context, the initial analysis is carried out on a group basis with local stakeholders selected and brought together during participatory workshops.
4	An in-depth initial analysis with individual interviews is required as it helps to identify the most significant obstacles to the emergence of an equitable concerted process.
5	An initial analysis of the anthropological type (by long-term immersion), providing intimate knowledge of the society is a prerequisite for implementing any participatory process.

Axis 3: perception of the risk of reinforcing power asymmetries in the initial context

While there is a consensus within the ComMod group on the existence of power asymmetries among stakeholders, there is no consensus as regards the risk of seeing these power asymmetries dominate the ComMod process to such an extent that the process would reproduce or even strengthen the initial power asymmetries. Axis 3 (Table 5.3) examines the way in which the designer sees the context in which they operate, and more specifically, their assessment of the risk of the process implemented resulting in initial power asymmetries being reproduced and reinforced (i.e. domination of the process by the most influential stakeholders and the views of the weakest stakeholders being unheard). The researcher's position on this axis thus depends on both the context itself and how they perceive it. In proposing this axis, we wanted to test the idea that the position adopted by the researcher depended in part on the context in which they found themselves. We acknowledge, however, that given that this context may change during the process, the perception of risks and the position adopted are also likely to change.

Table 5.3. Definitions of the graduations of axis 3 on the perception of the risk of the process implemented resulting in initial power asymmetries being reproduced and reinforced.

Position	Definition
1	Low or negligible risk of the views of certain stakeholders in a weak position not being heard, dialogue considered as sufficient to allow all the stakeholders concerned to be heard.
3	Non-zero risk of certain views not being heard, but power asymmetries do not necessarily dominate the process, the arguments put forward may prevail.
5	High risk of processes resulting in the initial power asymmetries being merely reproduced in case no specific intervention is geared to empower the least influential stakeholders.

Subsidiary axis: objective of the process implemented

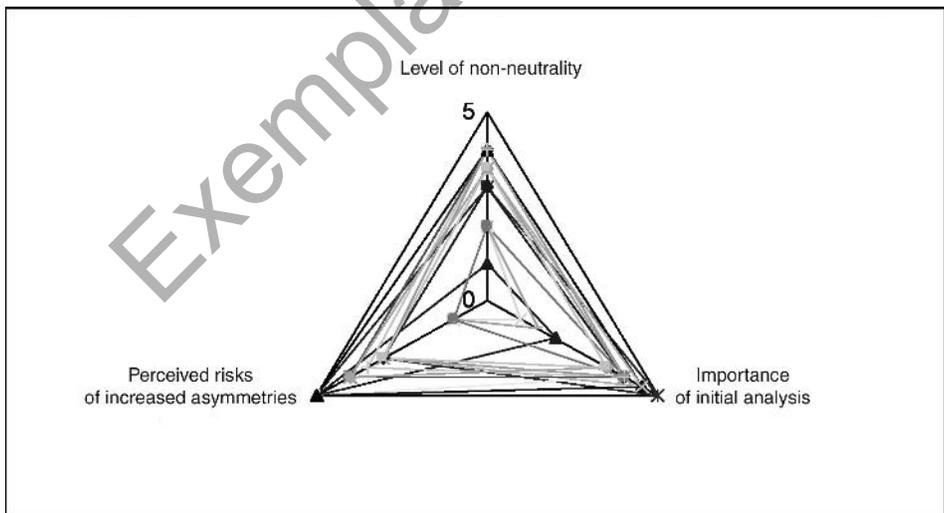
The fourth axis is about the objective of the implemented participatory process. It is slightly different from the other axis because it is not a direct indicator of the position adopted by the researcher with regard to power asymmetries. Moreover, the position on this axis is highly variable, since the objective of a participatory process often changes over time, especially in ComMod processes, which are inherently adaptive. As a result, this axis was not used to characterize the profiles describing various possible positions with regard to power asymmetries. However, we decided to keep this axis in the test, firstly, because it is important when discussing the legitimacy of a process to know its purpose (we will come back to this later), and secondly, because we wanted to test the idea that there is a correlation between the objective and the stance adopted with regard to power asymmetries (defined by the other three axes). For this purpose, we have defined five possible objectives for implementing a participatory process (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4. Meaning of the graduation of the subsidiary axis on the objective of the processes implemented.

Position	Definition
1	Better understand the system (research objective).
2	Share with local stakeholders the researchers' view of the system (i.e. knowledge, perception) exchange of views between researchers and local stakeholders).
3	Facilitate an exchange of views, not only between researchers and other stakeholders, but also among these other stakeholders (facilitate a collective learning process).
4	Support a concerted process between local stakeholders ahead of decision-making.
5	Support local stakeholders up to decision-making on collective action.

Results: contrasting profiles

The test that 20 ComMod researchers agreed to take consisted of two parts. In the first part, they were asked to indicate their position on the four axes of analysis. Figure 5.1 shows the results for the first three axes, as the answers given for the fourth axis could not be included given the variety of objectives pursued jointly or successively by each ComMod researcher. This figure is a first illustration of the diversity of the positions in which ComMod researchers recognize themselves.



On the first three lines, when a researcher said that they considered they were between two positions, we kept the intermediate value. While such an intermediate value made sense for the first three lines, this was not the case on the objectives line.

Figure 5.1. Position of the 20 ComMod researchers who took the test on the three axes stipulating their position with regard to power asymmetries.

In the second part of this test, four profiles corresponding to four types of combinations of positions on the first three axes were briefly described. The researchers were asked to identify the profile they felt closest to or propose, where appropriate, a new profile better matching their position.

Figure 5.2 shows that most of the ComMod researchers who took the test (16 out of 20) correspond to profiles 3, 4 or in between the two.

As can be seen in the discussion, the results of Figure 5.2 show a bias. They mask the fact that a researcher may adopt one position or another depending on the intervention context or even the time the process takes place. These figures are based on a dominant profile at a given moment in the life of a researcher. They are given here for illustration. What we are interested in is the identification of the different possible positions, each with their own consistency.

These profiles are presented below, starting with the brief description available in the test through which the respondents identified themselves (or not). This presentation was then refined through discussions arising out of the test and concrete examples illustrating them. The hybrid profiles proposed by six out of the 20 researchers who took the test are presented following the four types initially identified.

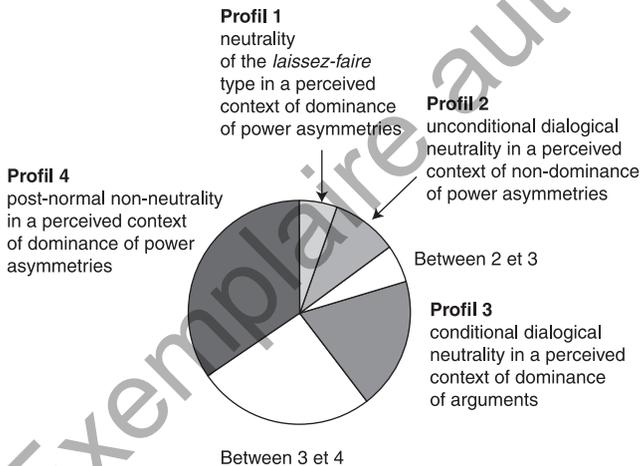


Figure 5.2. Distribution of the 20 ComMod researchers who took the test on the profiles identified.

Profile 1: neutrality of the *laissez-faire* type in a perceived context of dominance of power asymmetries

The researchers corresponding to profile 1 (one researcher interviewed) (Figure 5.3) consider that the power asymmetries inherent in the socio-political context are inevitably reproduced in the ComMod process, but they do not seek to counter them, as they consider that it is not their role to promote greater equity, and that it is pointless because the actions taken are generally not sufficient to change the existing power asymmetries, and what emerges is beyond their control. They also consider that while the initial analysis of power relationships is not necessarily pointless, it is not possible to have sufficient knowledge of the social mechanisms at work.

The researchers in this profile believe that participation is a means and not an end. It is not an end in that there is no underlying ambition to promote values such as participative democracy and social equity. The ComMod process is seen as a way to respond effectively to a request made explicitly by an external agent, such as, for example, to make a group of stakeholders aware of a given common problem to facilitate its resolution. The existence of such a mandate is a key explanatory factor in the coherence of this profile. Indeed, it is the existence of this mandate that legitimizes the ComMod process in the view of these researchers. They thus call for an absence of bias in favour of procedural equity when it is outside their mandate.

Another key explanatory factor in the coherence of this profile is the idea that the participatory processes implemented are not able to counter power asymmetries in the socio-political context. For example, in the Tarawa experiment in the Kiribati islands, the project team retrospectively identified various categories of stakeholders, that is, consensual players, pseudo-players and meta-players (Dray *et al.*, 2007). Whereas the former were open to dialogue, the latter, who had strong interests to defend, dominated the discussions, holding on to their initial positions until the end of the workshop. The Tarawa assessment report showed that the efforts made by the project team were considered to be pointless in attempting to ensure that these pseudo-players took the view points of others into consideration. The meta-players for their part corresponded to stakeholders involved at higher institutional levels who were not invited to the role-playing game workshop and who, subsequently, imposed their own decisions without taking into account any of the proposals that emerged from the workshop. In retrospect, it appears that it might have been better to include these meta-players in the initial role-playing game workshop. Would a more thorough initial analysis of power relationships have helped to anticipate these constraints? One of the designers of this project, recognizing himself in profile 1, was doubtful. For such an initial analysis to make it possible to anticipate the complexity of power games, a thorough analysis of an anthropological type would be necessary. As this ideal is incompatible with the resources and time schedules of most research and development projects, the designer considered that a faster analysis carried out in a few weeks or months would have been insufficient and, therefore, pointless.

The next section shows that while the researchers in profile 2 also consider that an initial analysis of power games is not a priority, they think so for quite different reasons.

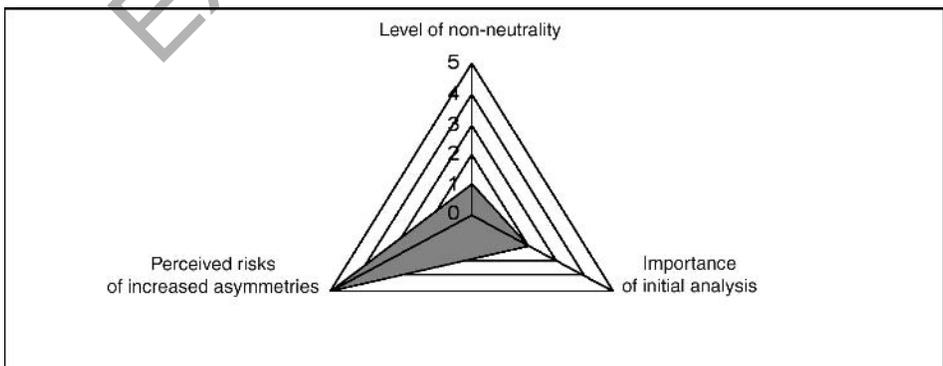


Figure 5.3. Standard position of researchers in profile 1 on the three axes stipulating their position with regard to power asymmetries.

Profile 2: unconditional dialogue-based neutrality in a perceived context of non-dominance of power asymmetries

The researchers corresponding to profile 2 (two researchers interviewed) (Figure 5.4) consider that in a participatory process, sharing of knowledge and good quality dialogue are levers for a greater equity in the concerted process. They call for a neutral position with regard to power asymmetries in that they seek to give all stakeholders an equal say, without taking the side of a particular group, and without seeking to increase the voice of certain stakeholders. The initial analysis of power asymmetries is not a priority, as the ComMod process reveals them anyway, which logically leads to them being mitigated, at least to some extent.

In experiments carried out by researchers in this profile, the call for the unnecessary nature of the initial analysis may go further. In the Larzac experiment in southern France, for example, the designer of the process emphasized his quasi-absence of knowledge of the socio-political context was a way to ensure a lack of bias as a designer, which is a *sine qua non* condition for his legitimacy. However, this position raises the problem of the implicit knowledge of a context. Furthermore, in calling for a lack of bias, the designer runs the risk of imposing a bias unconsciously. They thus do not escape the need for a reflective analysis of his practices. In the assessment report on the Ouessant experiment in northern France, in the face of participants pointing out his strong powers of persuasion, the project designer was worried, explaining that the only thing of which he wanted to convince people was the merits of a method based on dialogue and discussion. He felt legitimate to convince them because of the existence of a mandate that explicitly called for the implementation of such a method. This mandate itself can be considered as a bias that should be made explicit. We will come back to this later.

Besides this question of legitimacy, the second explanatory factor determining this position is its fundamentally dialogue-orientated nature. Without denying the existence of power asymmetries between stakeholders, this position is based on the assumption that dialogue leading to a greater mutual understanding among them can give rise to the emergence of proposals taking the interests of all into account. ‘When I place a sheep breeder and a forestry officer face to face, the power asymmetries are obvious and cannot be mitigated. I’m convinced, however, that the power of the most powerful will be better

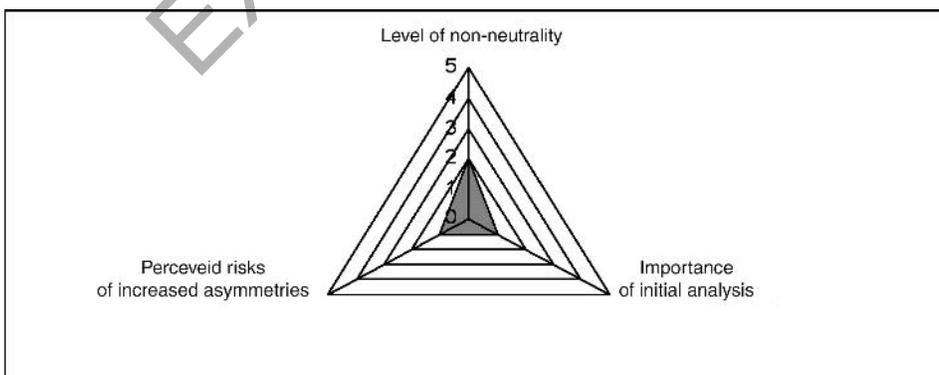


Figure 5.4. Standard position of researchers in profile 2 on the three axes stipulating their position with regard to power asymmetries.

used because it takes more account of the interests of the least powerful' (M. Étienne, personal communication). This position is based on the capacity for empathy of the most powerful stakeholders and assumes that agreeing to participate in a discussion process such as ComMod is, in itself, a sign of such a capacity for empathy, and thus reduces the risk of manipulation. It should be noted here that the researchers who recognized themselves in profile 2 have only carried out ComMod processes in France, which might have influenced their position. Further analysis would, however, be required to provide conclusions about the existence of correlations between intervention countries and the positions adopted.

Profile 3: conditional dialogical neutrality in a perceived context of dominance of arguments

In the contexts in which they operate, the researchers in profile 3 (four researchers interviewed) (Figure 5.5) consider that the power asymmetries of the initial context do not necessarily dominate discussions, which may be based more on arguments. They call for a neutral position with regard to power asymmetries, not wanting to take sides for one group of stakeholders as this could be detrimental to the legitimacy of the process. However, they assess the effects of the process they implement and may decide to stop it if they consider it potentially harmful to certain groups of stakeholders already in a weak position. This neutrality is thus only relative, or conditional, and is specified as such. Concerned to 'know where they tread', they attach importance to the implementation of an initial analysis of power relationships in the form of individual interviews.

This profile is intrinsically a profile between dialogue-orientated and critical stances. Researchers adopting it are dialogue-orientated like those of profile 2 as they consider that good quality dialogue should allow stakeholders to exchange their points of views through expression of argument rather than power relationships. In this respect, they call for certain neutrality and a low level of intervention in the facilitation of the process, so ensuring their legitimacy. They recognize, however, the limits of the dialogue-orientated approach in contexts of conflict or coercion, and adopt a cautious approach considering that, unlike profile 2, a thorough initial analysis of the socio-political context and careful monitoring of the power games at work are needed, at least as a precaution. While they

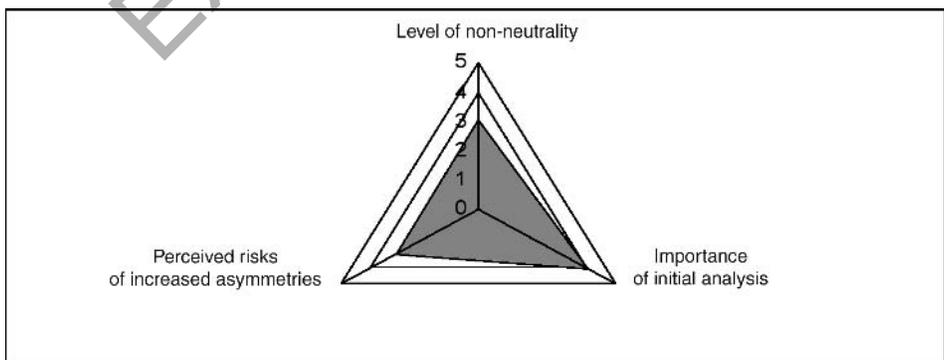


Figure 5.5. Standard position of researchers in profile 3 on the three axes stipulating their position with regard to power asymmetries.

are not very interventionist within the communication arena, they allow themselves to intervene in the process by stopping it if the risk of manipulation by those in positions of power becomes too great.

For example, in the SAGE Drôme experiment in southern France aimed at establishing dialogue and mutual understanding between farmers and water managers in a catchment, farm advisory professionals were invited to the test of a role-playing game. They viewed the role-playing game as a potential consulting tool to help them ‘convince’ farmers of the need for concerted water management. ‘Such proselytizing use poses a problem and cannot be allowed by the game designers because the underlying model has not been validated for this type of objective and the risk of manipulation associated with it’ (Barreteau, 2007). The existence of this risk of manipulation partly influenced the decision of the research team not to seek to continue the ComMod process.

Profile 4: post-normal non-neutrality in a perceived context of dominance power asymmetries

Researchers in profile 4 (seven researchers interviewed) (Figure 5.6) believe that because of the power asymmetries among stakeholders, there is a significant risk of the ComMod process reproducing and finally, increasing the initial inequalities. An in-depth initial analysis of power relationships is thus required to identify any potential obstacles to the emergence of an equitable concerted process, and then scale the ComMod process to try to overcome these obstacles in the proposed communication arena by strengthening the voice of the stakeholders in a weak position⁷. They thus stipulate their non-neutrality with regard to power

asymmetries, a position that poses questions about its legitimacy. Within the context of a post-normal approach, their objective is to provide a communication arena as rich and equitable as possible. This position establishes its legitimacy by seeking the support of local stakeholders: their non-adhesion to this arena calls into question its legitimacy and makes the designer question the process they are implementing.

The researchers in this profile feel they have a certain responsibility towards the stakeholders who, with regard to the question raised by the ComMod process, have strong interests to defend but little capacity to do so. They fear that the process will harm them if they are not able to defend their interests in the communication arena. These ‘weak’ stakeholders may be very different in different contexts. For example, in a Senegalese experiment, the project team chose to empower local officials dealing with higher administrative levels to enable them to have more of a say on decisions regarding land use in their municipality. In the Thai Mae Salaep experiment, however, local officials were seen as dominant stakeholders who could mask the views of some of the marginalized individuals in the community if no precautions were taken. Furthermore, while in the ButorStar experiment in southern France, environmentalists were seen as stakeholders in a position of weakness in the negotiations with hunters and farmers, in another context, in Nan, in mountainous northern Thailand, the environmental stake hold by the national park was, on the contrary, in a position of power compared with the villagers that would be affected by the establishment of the park. The position of the researchers of this profile implies

⁷ This profile corresponds to a ‘critical companion stance’, which was stated, tested and discussed in Barnaud (2008).

that they systematically stipulate which stakeholders they consider to be vulnerable and which should be given special attention and what capabilities of these stakeholders they want to reinforce. Then comes the question of how should ComMod researchers, while adopting a critical position, intervene in the communication arena to limit the risk of initial power inequalities being widened? To do this, they can intervene at several levels (this list is not all-inclusive).

- The selection and sequencing of the methods used (e.g. discussions in plenary sessions or in small groups, individual interviews, etc.): for example, in a Thai experiment, when facilitating discussions among farmers belonging to different ethnic groups, the ComMod process designers realized that the Hmong could not express themselves in plenary sessions. It was decided to hold separate workshops for the Hmong and Thais before returning to a common collective workshop (Becu *et al.*, 2008).
- The choice of dynamics represented in the models: in the Mae Salaep Thai experiment, for example, the role-playing game was deliberately designed to highlight the problem of unequal access to irrigation water, a problem that wealthy farmers, benefiting from irrigation, had an interest in covering up.
- The selection of participants and the invitation procedures: the selection of participants is a powerful lever of action in the communication arena. The process designers may try to ensure that all the participants in attendance will be able to defend their interests. They may also influence the creation of possible coalitions and alliances that could strengthen the position of weak stakeholders. Still at Mae Salaep, the grouping of farmers without access to water around a charismatic religious leader was crucial in allowing them to defend their interests (Barnaud *et al.*, 2008c). This leader corresponded to what some authors in the field of adaptive management called ‘champions’ (Gilmour *et al.*, 1999). However, when the designers themselves select the participants, this can raise a question as to the representativeness⁸ and legitimacy of these participants.
- The choice of animation procedures during workshops: for example, the animator of a plenary debate may choose not to push a group of participants too fast towards a consensus that might only reflect the opinion of a minority.

Profile 4 is the one that raises the most questions about its legitimacy as the choice to be non-neutral might be seen as a form of interference or intrusion. For example, when the process designer selects the participants, the composition of the group may seem arbitrary to local stakeholders who would have preferred to make the selection themselves. However, the power games at work in a process of self-selection may lead to the exclusion of certain categories of stakeholders. A designer adopting the position described in this profile, is torn between, on the one hand, a desire to let the local stakeholders guide the process, without intervening, at the risk of the process being manipulated by the most influential stakeholders, and on the other, the concern to structure the

⁸ The participants asked to participate in the participatory processes often ‘represent’ other stakeholders sharing common interests in relation to a given problem. However, these are not necessarily ‘real representatives’. Indeed, to be truly representative of a group calls for this group to be recognized as such, which is different from a group regarded as such by researchers, which corresponds more to the concept of category. This also calls for members of this group to have appointed or elected this person to represent them. In most cases, a number of participants correspond to false representatives, who have no responsibility with regard to those belonging to the same category. In this case, if the process is designed to support a group decision process consideration needs to be given to widening discussions to all those ‘represented’ in this way (Barnaud, 2008).

communication arena to allow the voice of the least influential stakeholders to be heard, at the risk of weakening the legitimacy of the process. The designer adopting a critical stance is in a situation of continuous instability, calling for him to question continually his practice (Barnaud, 2008). The adoption of a critical stance also raised the question of the risk of creating conflicts where there were none. By highlighting power asymmetries and empowering certain stakeholders, the participatory process may upset the established order. For example, in the case of the Bhutanese Lingmteychu experiment, while the creation of a village committee to manage the resources of the subcatchment area reduced a conflict over the sharing of irrigation water between two villages upstream, it in turn fuelled a similar conflict between two communities further downstream. Local people may prefer a situation, which while no doubt unequal, is at least peaceful. For these reasons, adopting a critical stance calls for the designer of the participatory process to give continuous critical consideration to their own legitimacy and the legitimacy of the process they are implementing in the eyes of the local stakeholders. Such legitimacy is acquired by systematically making explicit the intervention's assumptions, goals and sides taken (especially with regard to power games), so that local stakeholders can either reject them or accept them as legitimate. Systematically making explicit the assumptions underlying the participatory process is one of the ComMod approach's methodological pillars. We will discuss its limits in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

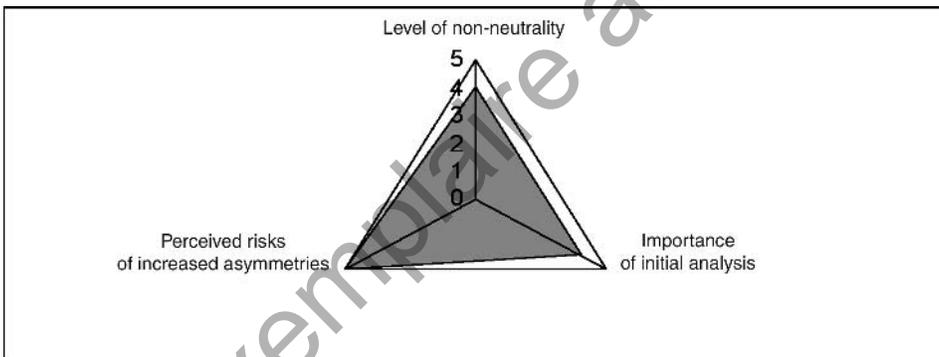


Figure 5.6. Standard position of researchers of profile 4 on the three axes stipulating their position with regard to power asymmetries.

Hybrid profiles

Out of the 20 researchers who took the test, five considered themselves to be somewhere between profiles 3 and 4. For example, the designer of the Kat Aware experiment (Farolfi *et al.*, 2008) combined parts of the definitions of the initially proposed profiles to produce a hybrid profile better suited to him (the text in italics was changed from the definitions of the initial profile). ‘Researchers in this profile consider that because of the power asymmetries among stakeholders, there is a significant risk of the ComMod process reproducing and finally, increasing the initial inequalities. An in-depth initial analysis of power relationships is thus required to identify any potential obstacles to the emergence of an equitable concerted process, and to scale the ComMod process to try to *understand* [instead of overcome in the initial definition] these obstacles in

the proposed communication arena. They call for certain neutrality with regard to this balance of power, not wanting to take sides. However, they assess the effects of the process they implement and may decide to stop it if they consider it potentially harmful to certain groups of stakeholders already in a weak position. This neutrality is thus only relative, or conditional, and is specified as such. Concerned to “know where they tread”, they attach importance to the implementation of an initial analysis of power games in the form of individual interviews’. They added: ‘In other words, while aware of the risks, everything possible should be done to understand *ex ante* the power asymmetries in order to avoid macroscopic errors in the approach and its implementation. ‘However, when animating the workshops, their position is not necessarily “interventionist” but more dialogue-orientated’ (S. Farolfi, personal communication). While only four researchers considered their position to be between two profiles, the comments of a larger number of researchers point to such an intermediate position or an alternation between profiles 3 and 4 (and sometimes between profiles 2, 3 and 4), depending on the characteristics of the context of the process undertaken or how it changes over time. It would seem that this is a common feature to many ComMod researchers, as discussed in the next section.

Discussion: from divergence to concordance

We showed above the existence of contrasting positions with regard to power asymmetries within the ComMod group. However, our method aimed precisely at identifying these differences. We will now analyse what, over and above these differences, brings ComMod researchers together on this issue.

Adaptive use of the complementarities between dialogue-orientated and critical stances

Owing to our quantitative analysis method, the results presented above mask a more qualitative aspect that arose out of the responses to the test. It is the flexibility in the positioning of those researchers who, while fairly easily identified in a dominant profile, may in fact see themselves in a stance or another adaptive approach according to the intervention context or objective. Some researchers put forward, for example, the idea that in a context where they consider that power asymmetries are likely to predominate, a critical stance and a thorough initial analysis of the power games with individual interviews are required, while in a context where the power asymmetries seem less important, a more dialogue-orientated stance and a lighter analysis of the power games may be sufficient (these remarks highlight the importance of the context discussed in Chapter 4). Others think that when the process objective is to produce knowledge or facilitate a learning process, a dialogue-orientated stance is adequate, while when the goal sought is negotiation or decision-making, a critical stance is required. Still others suggest that the process objective should be scaled to the context. Among them, some believe that in the case of moderate power asymmetries, the goal is about collective learning, while in cases of more important power asymmetries, the target is more to facilitate a real negotiation process. Others suggest on the contrary that the more power relationships are unequal, the more targets should be modest (targets of mutual understanding and collective learning instead of negotiation and decision-making).

The comments of the researchers who took the test also show that the flexible, scalable adoption of one position or another may be sequential depending on successive phases in the process. Several researchers cite, for example, the possibility of adopting a critical initial stance to prepare a communication arena as balanced as possible (e.g. by organizing specific workshops to empower the stakeholders considered to be in a weak position), which then allows the adoption of a dialogue-orientated stance with an approach as hands-off as possible. Others instead suggest that in the initial stage of the process (exchanges of points of views, increased mutual understanding), a dialogue-based stance may be sufficient, while, when moving on to the scenario exploration stages towards a point where group decisions are involved, a more critical stance is necessary.

Broadly speaking, these comments show that ComMod researchers have a common awareness with regard to the issue of power games, which each researcher uses as a basis for establishing a personal representation of these power games in his intervention context, before choosing his position. Furthermore, a certain unity emerges from the ComMod group around the adaptive use of the complementarities between the dialogue-orientated and critical stances.

From a theoretical point of view, the ComMod groups is thus more in line with the ideas expressed by tenants of critical stance like Ulrich (2003) or Leeuwis (2000), who urged us to go beyond the conventional opposition between dialogue-orientated and critical approaches. These authors refer to the theory of communicative action of Habermas (1987) (which is traditionally used by dialogue-orientated authors) to demonstrate these complementarities. We saw above that Habermas identifies three main types of actions: the instrumental action, the strategic action and the communicative action. The strategic management of power asymmetries (recommended by critical authors) actually comes within Habermas' strategic action. Such strategic action attempts to remove obstacles to equity (obstacles that Habermas calls 'communication distortions') and to promote the emergence of collective learning based on communicative action (what Habermas calls an 'ideal speech situation'). Moreover, while dialogue-orientated stances are usually associated with social learning theories and critical stances with negotiating theories, Leeuwis highlights the sterile nature of this opposition. Indeed, researchers working in the field of negotiation usually make a distinction between distributive and integrative negotiation processes (Follett, 1940; Leeuwis, 2004; Carnevale, 2006). In the first case, the stakeholders confront each other to decide how they could 'share the cake' in a zero-sum game. In an integrative process, the stakeholders instead reformulate the problem to 'make the cake bigger', paving the way for positive-sum games. Such a process is more demanding in terms of cognitive change as it calls for the stakeholders to consider the interests and values underlying their initial positions. Leeuwis (2004) argued that collective learning is needed to favour such integrative negotiation processes, once again stressing the complementarities between dialogue-orientated and critical stances.

Making one's position explicit to be able to question its legitimacy

We saw above that there are several different ways to view the legitimacy of a participatory process. This is primarily linked to the objective of the process. When the objective is to produce knowledge, priority is given to determining its scientific legitimacy (does the scientific community see the ComMod process and the knowledge it generates as valid?), while when the objective is to support a negotiation or decision-making

process, priority is more to determine its ‘social’ legitimacy (in the eyes of the stakeholders of the society in which it takes place). Furthermore, the need for ‘social’ legitimacy will differ according to the goals sought: it will be stronger, for example, in the case of a process aimed at supporting a decision-making process than in a process aimed simply at sharing knowledge.

Thus the need for legitimacy may change over a ComMod process according to the intervention’s objectives, and conversely, objectives may change depending on the legitimacy of the process. It is not uncommon to see ComMod processes that begin with low social legitimacy and initially aiming at ‘modest’ knowledge production and sharing goals, move, at the request of stakeholders, towards decision-support objectives that need higher social legitimacy.

Moreover, we saw that different positions with regard to power asymmetries correspond to various ways of thinking about the legitimacy. First, the intervention’s level of social legitimacy can be linked to the existence of a request or a mandate (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion on this point); it is the main source of legitimacy in the case of profile 1 (*laissez-faire*). In dialogue-orientated profiles 2 and 3, legitimacy is determined by the designer not taking sides for any stakeholder or point of view. Finally, in the critical profile 4, the process’s legitimacy is determined by the participants accepting the assumptions and objectives of the process as legitimate. This calls for the designer of the process to make these assumptions and objectives explicit. However, while it is evident in the case of profile 4 because of its asserted non-neutral position, it seems that whatever the profile, ComMod designers should make their assumptions explicit. It is indeed one of the ethical rules of the ComMod Charter, which is expressed as follows: ‘make explicit any implicit assumptions in the experiment: this is an objective in itself and the process involves developing procedures for making explicit such assumptions’ (Collectif ComMod, 2005).

Thus, even in low-interventionist stances such as dialogue-orientated profiles 2 or 3, researchers should state their position to participants. Getting the stakeholders to sit around a table and put their knowledge on an equal footing is not a neutral stance. Participants should be aware of these assumptions so that they know into what they are getting involved. By the same token, in profile 1, the origin of the mandate that gave rise to the process should be systematically clarified to the participants.

Following on from the above results and discussion, the methodological and conceptual enhancement of companion modelling can be pursued on the ‘power games and legitimacy’ theme. Indeed, the methodology chosen by ComMod researchers to increase the process legitimacy, which involves systematically stating the process’ goals and assumptions to enable their validation or invalidation by the participants, raises three questions: (i) could and should all assumptions really be made explicit?; (ii) do the stakeholders really have the means to validate or invalidate these assumptions?; (iii) which stakeholders are supposed to validate the assumptions for the intervention to be seen as legitimate? Do all stakeholders need to validate the assumptions? How to deal with situations where only certain groups of stakeholders refuse to participate in the process?

With regard to the first question, it should first be mentioned that in certain situations, it will not be in the designer’s interest to reveal all his assumptions to all stakeholders, as this may go against the objectives he is pursuing. It is not necessarily appropriate, for example, to fuel a conflict by stating what each stakeholder said about the other.

How can the assumptions that should necessarily be clarified be distinguished from the others? According to what criteria? Besides, it is unrealistic to think that everything can be made explicit. Indeed, these assumptions include factors such as the designer's values, culture and tacit knowledge. In selecting the assumptions to be clarified, there is still a bias, which should in theory itself be made explicit. However, even if the clarification of all assumptions seems unrealistic, attempts should be made to go as far as possible. For this purpose, tools such as logbooks (see Chapter 7), in which the choices made and the events transcribed as the process proceeds, may be useful. It is indeed also through their methodological choices that a designer reveals its assumptions. Finally, a ComMod process is often covered by an inter-disciplinary team. Such teamwork may stimulate discussions regarding the team members' different positions and assumptions with regard to the socio-political context, and thus facilitate the process of clarification of these assumptions⁹.

These concepts, such as equity, are also generally subjective and plural and would ideally require prior debate to recognize these differences and reach a shared definition. Moreover, even if significant clarification efforts are made at the start of the process, the participants may not have the means to really understand all the details of the process in which they are invited to take part, and will in part discover them as it proceeds. While it is essential to allow stakeholders gradually to acquire enough understanding of the process' assumptions and thus increase their abilities to alter its course (see Chapter 9), the difficulty of such an undertaking should not be underestimated. To offset these difficulties, the implementation of a rigorous protocol for monitoring/assessing the effects of the participatory process on the participants and their perception of this process is essential¹⁰ (see Chapter 7). Any reluctance or deadlock situation should be considered as opportunities for the designer to question the legitimacy of the process.

Finally, the third issue requiring further attention is the identification of the stakeholders needed to validate the process for the intervention to be seen as legitimate. This calls for questioning, on the one hand, the legitimacy of the choice of stakeholders considered to be representative of a virtual entity (e.g. the community, farmers, politicians, civil society, etc.), and on the other hand, the most effective procedure for identifying the key stakeholders to be included in the process. In particular, this raises the problem of particularly conflicting or coercive contexts in which certain groups of stakeholders, even though concerned by the issues addressed by the ComMod process, refuse to join in the discussions so creating a deadlock situation (see Chapter 4). In such situations, some participatory approaches adopt a strategic stance involving the use of mechanisms that place outside pressure on such stakeholders. However, such practices appear to go against ComMod's ethical framework. Does this mean that ComMod is not applicable in such contexts?

⁹ Daré et al. (2007) analysed the specific role of sociologists in a team designing a ComMod process. In addition to the knowledge they provided on the social context, they 'questioned the match between the model and its social uses' (p. 111). They also supported a particular position: 'we need to go beyond the debate between commitment and detachment to stake a claim to a scientific, humanist and pragmatic commitment' (p. 113).

¹⁰ This calls for continuing the research efforts undertaken in the monitoring/assessment methods during the ADD-ComMod project (see Chapter 7).

Conclusion

Faced with the need for ComMod researchers to provide better formalization of the positions they adopt with regard to taking account of the socio-political context, in particular, with regard to the power asymmetries inherent in intervention contexts, this chapter provided a rapid method for clarifying these positions in the form of a short multiple-choice questionnaire. When applied to ComMod researchers, this method revealed both the existence of contrasting dialogue-orientated and critical profiles within the network, as well as two major points of agreement within the group. First, most ComMod researchers call for open-ended, adaptive positions and recognize themselves occasionally in dialogue-orientated approaches and sometimes in critical approaches, depending on the objective pursued, the process phase, how they see the intervention context and any changes in the power games during this process. They thus share the views of authors who consider dialogue-orientated and critical stances to be more complementary than contradictory. Second, although the various positions in which the ComMod researchers recognize themselves correspond to various ways of considering the legitimacy of participatory processes, they share the same methodological procedure when questioning and seeking to reinforce this legitimacy. This legitimacy is based on the systematic clarification of their assumptions to allow stakeholders to validate or invalidate them. Our analysis enables us to refine and interrogate this major characteristic of the ComMod stance. It is indeed unrealistic to think that everything can and should be made explicit. Therefore, ComMod researchers now have to face the following questions. How to select the assumptions that should be made explicit? According to what criteria? How to select the stakeholders who are supposed to validate the assumptions for the process to be seen as legitimate? All this is likely to fuel a debate that could lead to the drafting of a new version of the ComMod Charter far more explicit regarding the way to take into account the socio-political context of the intervention.