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**Translating Integrated Water Resources Management to Turkish:
The Case of Public Participation in Water Management**

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Abstract

Water management in Turkey is undergoing fundamental changes in the recent decades with the influence of such external driving forces as the European Union negotiation process, the pressure from the international actors towards the liberalisation of the water sector and a coupled debate on water, food and energy security. This paper focuses on public participation, i.e., the involvement of non-governmental actors in the decision-making processes of water management. A discourse analysis is conducted to understand whether, how and why public participation is contested in the sense that different actors assign different meanings and uses to it. Three local cases are examined, and the contestedness of public participation in these cases is investigated through utilising the Contextual Interaction Theory for the systemic elaboration of the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion on to what extent it is possible to transfer the idea of public participation to Turkey.

Keywords

water management, public participation, contested concept, discourse analysis, Turkey

1. Introduction

Global Water Partnership (2000) defines public participation as a key principle of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Incorporation of the values, beliefs and knowledge of both lay public members and organised stakeholders through participatory mechanisms is regarded as an indispensable element of IWRM, even leading to the argument that IWRM cannot be implemented without public participation (Jaspers, 2003; Delli Priscoli, 2004). Being the major legislation of the European Union (EU) water policy, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) positions public participation as an essential element of sustainable water governance and includes provisions that aim a high level of the involvement of lay public members and organised stakeholders in all phases of water management processes (EU, 2002).

The recent emphasis on improving the participatory nature of water management can be justified by the benefits expected from public participation. Normative and instrumental approaches can be differentiated regarding these expected benefits (Coenen, 2009). Normative approach assumes that participation is necessary for better functioning democracies through serving normative ideals such as inclusiveness, representativeness, impartiality, transparency, deliberativeness, lawfulness, and empowerment (Leach, 2006). Instrumental approach, on the other hand, considers participation as a tool to increase the legitimacy of policy decisions and improve the effectiveness of policies through incorporating knowledge from a diverse set of stakeholders and reducing conflict by providing arenas of deliberation. Since they are not rival approaches, both normative and instrumental values can be expected from public participation (Beierle and Cayford, 2002; Coenen, 2009).

Along with the ambitious expected benefits, there are also questions and challenges regarding the added value of public participation in water management (Mostert, 2003; Özerol and Newig, 2008; Neef, 2009). For instance, if the participants are not competent, interested or knowledgeable, then their input can prove futile for making the necessary decisions or cause confusion for the decision-makers. Another issue is about the resources allocated for the participation process. The use of time, money and labour can prove to be inefficient if a successful outcome is not reached. The failures in public participation are attributed to numerous factors such as poor planning of participation processes, complexity and vagueness of higher level participation mandates for the local actors, inexperience about participatory mechanisms, differing perceptions about the expected outcomes of participation and reluctance in putting participation in practice (Steelman and Ascher, 1997; Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

The debates around public participation imply the existence of multiple views and approaches as to what is meant by participation and what uses are attributed to it by different actors and in different contexts. Therefore public participation can be considered an “essentially contested concept”, i.e., a concept that lacks an agreed and fixed definition (Gallie, 1956). Few scholars elaborate on the contestedness of public participation. Day (1997: 433) examines public participation in policy planning and concludes that contestedness of public participation is “*a very complex one that involves the subtleties and intricacies of democracy and ... requires expertise for its ramifications to be grasped*”. The conclusion of Day (1997) exemplifies the contested nature of public participation; even understanding its complexity requires expertise,

which can make the openness and inclusiveness of public participation questionable. For the specific case of public participation in water management, the contestedness of the concept was touched upon by Sneddon and Fox (2007), who examine a case from transboundary water management and observe that the multitude of national and international actors entail different meanings to public participation and use those meanings to pursue individual goals or to exert power on other actors. Except the studies by Day (1997) and Sneddon and Fox (2007), there is little scholarly work on the implications of the contestedness of public participation in the general realm of water management. With this paper we aim at contributing to this debate by pondering on the two following questions:

How does the concept of public participation become contested in water management?

What is the influence of the contestedness of public participation on its transferability to different contexts?

Since the contestedness is about the meaning and use of the concept, discourse analysis is an appropriate method to study this phenomenon. The method gives the opportunity to understand how a social reality is shaped through analysing the *text* – written and verbal communicative messages – and the social and historical context (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). As described in section 2, we utilise the Contextual Interaction Theory (Bressers, 2009) as a theoretical framework to systemically elaborate on our findings regarding the discourses about public participation. Section 3 is devoted to the description of the Turkey case, for which we conducted the empirical study. In section 4, we explain how the local cases for in-depth analysis are selected and how the data is collected, organised and analysed. We present the background information and findings from the three local cases in section 5 and discuss their similarities and differences in section 6. Finally we close with concluding remarks in section 7.

2. Theoretical Framework: Contextual Interaction Theory

Contextual Interaction Theory (CIT) is among the actor-centred approaches to analysing policy processes (Bressers, 2009). The theory consists of two interrelated components, namely the actor characteristics model and the contextual layers. The actor characteristics model represents the actions and interactions of actors through their motivation, cognition and resources, whereas the contextual layers include the so called specific, regime and wider contexts, which include multiple factors that are associated respectively with the history and circumstances of the policy process at hand; the higher regime that includes the governance structure and property rights; and the broader political, economic, cultural and technological contexts.

For the analysis of the public participation processes from the perspectives of different actors, CIT is particularly useful since it provides a systemic model of the influence of actor characteristics among each other and on the interaction processes of different actors. It also enables the incorporation of the influence of contextual factors directly or indirectly on actor characteristics. As presented in Table 1, we formulate four questions that can be answered to explain the meaning and use of public participation. Each question can be answered in several ways that pinpoint the influence of actor characteristics, contextual factors, or both. Based on the scholarly literature that we reviewed above, we identify some of the possible answers to each question.

Table 1 – Questions about the Contestedness of Public Participation

Questions	Possible Answers
Who constitutes “the public”?	The participants represents the all the interests within the public sphere There is a bias in representation towards the advantaged groups “The public” is not defined explicitly
What constitutes “the participation”?	Business-as-usual (participation is symbolic) An indispensable element of the decision-making process “The participation” is not defined explicitly
Why is participation introduced?	Self-adopted by the internal actors as a key principle An obligation imposed by external actors The rationale behind the introduction of participation is not clear
What are the benefits of participation?	Participation contributes to the functioning of democracy Participation is a tool to reach policy objectives The expected benefits of participation are not clear

Answering the above questions can enable us to find out whether there is disagreement, uncertainty or ambiguity regarding the meaning and use of the concept by different actors. Building on the definition of contestedness, we argue that if there is disagreement, uncertainty or ambiguity regarding its meaning and use by different actors, then public participation is contested within the given context(s). As the contestedness of public participation is an obstacle against its effective implementation in a given context, we assert that the higher the level of contestedness, the more difficult to implement public participation effectively.

3. Public Participation and Water Management in Turkey

Water management in Turkey has been undergoing fundamental changes, which can be attributed to various external and internal factors. The external factors mainly include the EU negotiations about the alignment of the national legislation and institutional structure to the EU system, and the World Bank’s preaching towards the liberalisation of the water sector. The key internal factors are the on-going coupled debate about water, energy and food security under the pressure from population rise and climate change.

Public participation is among the hot topics of water management due to the changing role of the governmental and non-governmental actors in water management. Previous experiences with public participation in the broader sphere of environmental decision making are limited yet increasing. Both the governmental and non-governmental actors increasingly promote public participation as a major element to incorporate into the environmental decision-making processes (SPO, 2007a and 2007b). The fact that Turkey did not ratify the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998) is an obstacle for the access of public to information and effective public participation, not only in water management, but in all areas of environmental decision-making. Nevertheless, there are efforts to incorporate participatory mechanisms and improve the implementation of public participation processes. For instance, with support from the Dutch government and the

European Commission, pilot projects were implemented in western Turkey to establish the institutional background for the WFD implementation (Grontmij, 2005). Accordingly, public participation and knowledge dissemination are emphasised among the critical topics for compliance with WFD requirements. Turkish regulations on water and EU requirements are compared and a gap analysis is made. Accordingly, the introduction of a Water Law is well proposed and a draft legal framework is presented. However, efforts still have not produced the desired result, as the Water Law is not in the government's agenda.

Regarding agricultural water management, which has the highest share in the use of national water resources, the DSI (Directorate General of State Hydraulics Works, the national water authority responsible for the planning, development and management of all the freshwater resources in Turkey), has undertaken the so-called "accelerated irrigation management transfer programme" in mid-1990s and the water user organisations, mostly in the form of irrigation associations or irrigation cooperatives, are established to takeover the responsibility of managing the irrigation canals within the boundaries of irrigation districts, which comprise of several villages and/or municipalities. Today, typically irrigation associations are responsible for the surface water management and irrigation cooperatives for groundwater. Although the two bodies have some legal and administrative differences, they are both structured around the idea of farmer's participation in irrigation management processes. This participatory irrigation management approach continues to be one of the key issues in the DSI discourse (DSI, 2010 and 2011). Accordingly, it is argued that the farmers' awareness on irrigation and self-organization abilities will in turn enable them to internalize irrigation management, thus ask for infrastructure investments and contribute to the investments. The countrywide establishment of water user organisations constitutes a substantial step towards increasing the role of farmers in the decision-making processes of agricultural water management, but several factors reduce the effectiveness of this step. Financial power of both irrigation cooperatives and irrigation associations are usually quite considerable, as they collect contribution fees from the members, which for some irrigation districts amount up to millions of euros annually. Often, the top management positions are occupied by the prominent persons in the irrigation districts, e.g. the large landowners, village heads, etc. Supervision of water user organizations in terms of operations and financial management is a controversial issue and lack of sanctions against malpractice lead to corruption in some organizations. Corruption is often in the form of collecting the contribution fees from the farmers and not providing the service properly. Further, despite the regulation that mandates employment of a technically competent professional in the management team, water user organizations often suffer from lack of expertise in irrigation management.

The hydro development in Turkey has been under a transformation since the Turkish government has embarked on an effort to promote small-scale hydroelectricity facilities, known as HEP (hydroelectric plants). The scale is massive, with over 1600 of such facilities planned for Turkey's rivers over the coming decades. Rights to the river are granted for a 49-year period to private companies in order to build small-scale, run-of-the-river production facilities. Such a transformation of rights to river from state to private sector led to considerable tensions over rivers. These struggles reflect not only the conflict of interests but also denote a discursive struggle over the very meaning of the river (Islar 2010). The public participation is one of the contested issues since many communities weren't satisfied with the outcomes of participatory meetings of hydropower projects.

Regarding the broader discourse on public participation, two types of documents are relevant, namely the national policy planning documents and the national environmental law. The importance of enhancing local capacity for decision making is addressed in national policy planning documents. For instance the latest development plan (SPO, 2006) pinpoints the sharing of knowledge and partnerships between public and private sector and the NGOs. Participation of stakeholders in the regional development processes is one of the points emphasized in this plan. Accordingly, participation is coupled with establishment of a common culture for sharing and synergy between the stakeholders, enhanced internalization of collective action and awareness. The Environmental Law, which was enacted in 1983, has been amended substantially in 2006 so as to incorporate several environmental policy integration principles, including among others the participation of non-governmental actors in the decision making processes. The current version of the Law bears a statement as follows: “*the right of participation in environmental policy making is essential and it is under the responsibility of the Ministry [of Environment] to provide a participatory environment for the local administrations, professional chambers and unions, NGOs and citizens.*”

4. Case Selection and Data Analysis

Turkey has seven sub-national regions with diverse geographical and climate conditions and cultural and ethnic backgrounds. To have a comprehensive view about the local contexts, we selected the following cases from three different regions:

- South-Eastern Anatolian Region: the case of Harran Plain about irrigation management with abundant surface water, transferred from the Euphrates River.
- Central Anatolian Region: the case of Konya Closed Basin about irrigation management with scarce groundwater extracted from wells.
- Eastern Black Sea Region: the multi-case study of privatized small-scale hydropower development in the region.

For each case, we analysed the characteristics and interactions of governmental and non-governmental actors that claim a role in water management, and investigate how they define and use the term “public participation”. In order to gather the necessary data about the actors and the context, we utilised three types of sources, namely *text*, interviews and direct observation. The *text* includes previously generated data in the form the official documents, research reports, news, press releases and speeches. Through the interviews and direct observation we generated data that does not exist in the *text*, which is mainly produced by corporate actors, e.g., departments of central and local administration, professional organisations, environmental non-governmental organisations, etc. The opinions of certain actors, such as the individual water users and their organisations and the middle-level personnel of governmental organisations, are not directly reflected in most of the *text*. Therefore we conducted qualitative interviews to elicit the perspectives of such actors about the public participation processes. We also made direct observations through participating in relevant activities such as workshops, conferences, and seminars organised by the relevant actors, and visiting the case study sites multiple times. We analysed the collected data by examining the documents and interview notes in order to answer the questions in Table 1, based on the concepts in the theoretical framework that we provide above.

5. Case Studies

In the subsections below, we provide a brief description of each case, and the discursive analysis of public participation with answers to the four key questions.

5.1. Harran Plain

5.1.1. Case Description

Harran Plain is in Sanliurfa, which is one of the nine provinces included in the GAP (Turkish acronym for the “South-Eastern Anatolian Project”), a multi-sector regional development programme on-going since 1980s. In Harran Plain, extensive irrigation is practiced using the Euphrates River’s waters, stored in Atatürk Dam reservoir and transferred to the fields through Sanliurfa Tunnels. The irrigation system is large-scale with main, secondary and tertiary irrigation and drainage canals. The size of the area irrigated through the system is around 1,500 km² (Aküzüm et al., 1997).

When the irrigation with water from Euphrates River started in 1995, DSI stipulated the establishment of water user organisations in the newly-irrigated areas by the local administrations and representative farmers. All the water user organisations established in Harran Plain are “irrigation associations”, which is a specific type of water user organisations as we describe below. Irrigation associations operate and maintain the irrigation canals, distribute water to the farmers and collect irrigation fee, which is meant to cover the expenses incurred by the water user organisations. DSI’s role is defined as a facilitator and supporter of the transfer process, through providing trainings, lending machinery and equipment, and giving advice on technical issues.

The irrigation associations manage the whole canal scheme. Each irrigation association is responsible for the management of secondary and tertiary canals in its territory and all the irrigation associations that take water from the same main canal take turns to manage main canal. As the irrigated areas are expanded, new irrigation associations are established.

5.1.2. Discourses about Public Participation

Who constitutes “the public”?

In 2005, irrigation associations acquired the status of *local administration associations* under the Ministry of Interior through the Local Administration Act. This implied the involvement of local administrators, i.e., the heads of villages and the mayors of municipalities, as the natural members of the top management of the irrigation associations. The Irrigation Associations Law, which was specifically crafted for the irrigation associations and enacted in March 2011, redefines the legal status of the irrigation associations as *public legal entities*. The enactment of a specific law and the change in the legal status of the irrigation associations implies the retreat of local administrations from the management of irrigation associations, and a reregulation of the management structure of the irrigation associations through specialised legal provisions.

The Irrigation Associations Law contains a provision about assigning the number of votes according to the size of the fields owned (or used) by the members of the irrigation association, and grants a maximum of five votes to the farmers that own (or use) larger sizes of land. This

provision favours the participation of large-scale farmers over the disadvantaged farmers. There are no other mechanisms to involve the disadvantaged farmers. A smallholder farmer summarises his views on being involved in management: “*You need to be aga¹ to manage things*”. Although it is among the mandate of participatory irrigation management, it is difficult to argue that the establishment of irrigation associations in Harran Plain enabled the involvement of disadvantaged groups in the decision-making processes. On the contrary, the tribal structure continues to shape the participatory mechanisms within the management of irrigation associations. Hence, it can be concluded that introducing participatory institutions is not sufficient to overcome the power asymmetries in management and to reduce inequality in terms of access to resources (Molle, 2008).

What constitutes “the participation”?

Both the DSI and the irrigation associations interpret the participation of “*individual*” farmers, mainly in the form of paying the irrigation fee each year, maybe with several instalments, and voting for the elections every four year. When it comes to the social interactions of the farmers both with the management and staff of the irrigation associations, the persistence of the tribal culture, which relies on strong ties among the members of large families, is substantial. The informal relationships are exploited to get things done by any type of organisation: “*If you want to be served by the government offices, you need “uncles” [relatives or friends to ask for help]*”. Tribal culture prioritises the family and friendship over official relationships. This influences the uncertainty as to how management processes work and obstructs the enforcement of sanctions both on farmers that do not obey the collective rules, and on the irrigation associations that do not function properly.

The perceptions of the farmers and DSI are different regarding the functioning of irrigation associations. Farmers’ focus is on financial effectiveness: “*Irrigation associations are just distributing the water. Most of them are corrupt and only care about embezzling the farmers’ money.*”, whereas DSI officials emphasise the legal status of irrigation associations, which was an issue for DSI until the enactment of the Irrigation Associations Law: “*They were rambling, since there was no coherent legal setting for them and they had no connection to the Ministry of Interior. Now we will monitor them and make sure that they do the things right; otherwise we always the right to sell the irrigation canals to private companies*”. A similar discourse can be observed in the Irrigation Associations Law, which envisages that the irrigation associations can participate in build-operate-transfer agreements with private companies regarding the operation and maintenance of the irrigation facilities.

Why is participation introduced?

Transfer of the use right and management responsibility of the irrigation schemes is implemented in almost all the irrigation infrastructures developed by DSI. In the preamble of the Irrigation Associations Law, the key rationale behind the transfer programme is expressed as *the need to decrease the public expenditure on the operation, maintenance and repair of irrigation infrastructure, to improve the quality and speed of services, and to increase the collection rate of irrigation fees through creating the sense of ownership of farmers regarding the irrigation facilities*. Such expectations are valid in many transfer programmes implemented throughout the

¹ The landlords that own large-scale land primarily in the east and south-eastern regions of Turkey. The landless farmers are usually dependent on an aga to make a living.

world (Vermillion, 1997). For the Turkey case, the realisation of economic expectations is highlighted by all the actors; however there are criticisms about the lack of ownership by the farmers, since the irrigation infrastructure is deteriorated in many areas, even including the comparably new infrastructure in Harran Plain.

What are the benefits of participation?

DSI argues that farmers are managing the irrigation systems themselves and the irrigation associations have the financial and administrative autonomy, which is a big achievement of the irrigation management transfer. However, the farmers in Harran Plain continue to see the state as the ultimate decision-maker: “*State will solve our problems [about soil salinity]*”. There is no faith in the capacity or willingness of irrigation associations to solve the problems – a position mainly valid for smallholder and landless farmers. On the other hand, DSI is considered the “*dominant*” and “*reputable*” actor in the eyes of many governmental and non-governmental actors. It is in a teaching and imposing role. This constitutes an obstacle to create collaborative processes about irrigation management, especially through the involvement of other relevant actors, such as the Directorate General of Agrarian Reform, which carries out the land consolidation and land distribution activities in many regions including the Harran Plain.

A key item in the agenda of all related governmental organisations is to train the farmers for better irrigation management and practices. The rhetoric on farmers’ ignorance and training imply that the “*blame-the-farmers*” approach is still valid. If training is crucial to improve farmers’ capacity in irrigation management, the farmers should have been trained well before the irrigation management transfer (Merrey et al., 2007). However, this was not the case in Harran Plain, and the training of farmers is still considered a “*to-do*” after having practiced irrigated agriculture more than a decade.

5.2. Konya Closed Basin

5.2.1. Case Description

Konya Closed Basin is a large size closed basin, with over 50,000 km², enclosing 5 cities (including Konya City, with population around 2 million people). It is a prominent agricultural area, where agriculture is mainly irrigated and dependent on groundwater. With more than 3 million inhabitants, the basin still keeps growing in population. Similar to the structure presented in the Harran Plain case, surface water for irrigation is managed by irrigation associations and groundwater is managed by irrigation cooperatives. The basin has been encountering some major water problems and the water users - especially the farmers in the region - bear the consequences of these problems. Water-related problems in the basin mainly include the below items:

- Major agricultural products in the basin are the plants (some green plants, corn and sugar beet) which are supported by the government and which require excessive water.
- Rate of groundwater withdrawal (over 4.5 billion m³ per annum) in the basin is higher than that of replenishment (around 2 billion m³ per annum), which causes a ca. 3 metres of annual drop in the groundwater table. Excess withdrawal is mainly originating from the illegal wells that farmers drill in their fields. DSI discloses that as high as 70,000 out of ca. 100,000 wells are illegal (not licensed by DSI).

- As a consequence of groundwater retreating deeper each year, farmers encounter higher energy costs for water withdrawal that in turn harm their products' competitiveness in the market and sustainability of their agricultural income.
- On-farm irrigation method is primarily surface irrigation, typically “wild irrigation”, spending more water than required. Less than 5 per cent of the land is irrigated by drip or sprinkle systems.

Highly unsustainable situation in the basin is attracting the attention of NGOs who see farmers' irrigation habits and irrigation infrastructure as the origins of the water problems and thus running projects for capacity building and infrastructure enhancements. While there are ongoing efforts in the basin for capacity building and infrastructure support by the NGOs (specifically WWF-World Wild Fund) and academic units of the region, still there are a lot to do to secure the sustainability of water resources in the basin.

5.2.2. Discourses about Public Participation

Who constitutes “the public”?

Inhabitants of the basin are basically farmers who show quite similar characteristics in their agricultural activity in terms of crop type, irrigation technology, etc. Several parties, to name some but not all, the local agricultural authority, DSI, academia (agricultural engineering department of local university), NGOs who have been running capacity building and awareness raising (against drought) projects in the region, the regional utility company, etc., have expectations from the farmers, mainly centred around the suggestions that “*change your irrigation technology to a less water consuming one, change your crop selection to a less water consuming one, change your irrigation habit to spend less water*”. Public, often denoting only the farmers and occasionally including the irrigation associations and cooperatives, is characterized as “*non-cooperative*” regarding their visible reluctance to follow suggestions related to water sustainability. Among the parties mentioned above, there is a common tendency to view public as ignorant, even unconscious about their core business.

Views on irrigation associations and cooperatives are on the other hand are variable. Their operations - malpractice or good practice- define where they stand in the eyes of the local authority. Some irrigation associations and cooperatives are well known for their long-lasting corruption, which is often overlooked by the local authorities, mainly due to the lack of institutions and legislations that monitor and control the operations of these unions. There are some irrigation cooperatives known for their good practice.

What constitutes “the participation”?

Most farmers are members of either an irrigation association or cooperative, and thus anything they have to say about irrigation is addressed at the association or cooperative. For other issues related to their agricultural activity, the address is not that clear, and the farmers often do not know where to apply. On the other hand, local agricultural authorities in Konya complain about the lack of interest in farmers: “*We are here for them to answer their questions about which crop to choose, techniques for increased production, good practices in fertilizer use, etc. We have training programs, etc. However, they do not come to us, and they keep doing this agriculture business just the way they learn from their fathers. Yet, water now is not as abundant as it was in their fathers' time.*”

Participation in practice is often used interchangeably with the words “contribution” to the infrastructure costs and “taking responsibility” for sustainability of water resources. The irrigation associations in the region who use surface water have been suffering from water loss in the secondary and tertiary canals, as high as 60% in some regions, due to the open canal grid system. DSI recently decided that the grid system must be rebuilt, with a transition from open to closed canal system and asked the irrigation associations to rebuild these tertiary canals. DSI covered 50% of the cost on behalf of the associations and provided them with credit of favourable terms, e.g. 3 years of grace period, zero interest rate, etc. for the remaining 50% of the cost. Associations were expected to cooperate and collect the required fund from the member farmers. In some associations, farmers were reluctant to pay the contribution fee, both because their income is very limited, and because they believed that it was not fair to collect this money from them, it should be under government’s (DSI in this case) responsibility. A farmer puts the issue as: *“Everyone claims a part of my little income: the utility company, the irrigation association, cooperative [agricultural cooperative that purchases the crops from the farmer and sells to the merchants]... do they want me to starve? It is I who should be supported”*. While the general tendency in the government side is not sympathizing with this proposition as these are regarded as operational costs to be born by the farmer, irrigation associations are blamed for exploiting the farmers with their corrupt operations.

Taking responsibility for the sustainability of water resources is a rather new expectation from the farmers. Farmers are expected to follow the suggestions such as shifting to drip irrigation, adjusting their crop selection for less water consuming plants, refrain from opening new irrigation wells, etc. However, still farmers see very little incentive in following these suggestions. As an academician who has been involved in some pilot projects in the region put: *“It is hard to persuade them that they will get the same productivity with less water”*.

Almost all parties agree upon the idea that awareness raising among the farmers proved to be inefficient, and best way to get them cooperate is to design proper incentive and sanction mechanisms to force them financially to cooperate. On the other hand, even heavy sanctions are not able to produce cooperative behaviour at some points: regarding the continuously dropping ground water table, opening new irrigation wells in the basin is strictly forbidden by law, yet farmers keep opening illegal wells for irrigation in their farms. Head of DSI regional office comments on the issue: *“It is illegal, yet I totally understand the farmers who open new wells. They need water to survive and the existing wells are not sufficient enough. These people have to find a way to access water for their livelihood. What we need to do at this point is legalizing the existing illegal wells and regulating their use through some quotas.”*

In almost none of the interviews, a stakeholder referred to “participation of public in decision making”. Therefore, participation is confined to participation in actions normatively defined by the knowledgeable and powerful stakeholders.

Why is participation introduced?

Confining participation to contribution to required collective actions, participation in the basin is regarded as the foremost requirement of water sustainability. DSI, academia and NGOs agree upon the same game-theoretic proposition: *“If let alone, all farmers will act in their own interest*

and open new irrigation wells, spend more water than they need, etc. and deplete the groundwater faster. We need to convince them otherwise and make aware of the greater good.”

In the eyes of DSI, participation is also a tool for making farmers more engaged in the decisions: *“When asked to contribute financially, farmers are better at adopting the new systems. That is why we ask for a 50% contribution from the farmers to the closed canal system infrastructure. This way, they will be more inclined to protect the close canal system.”*

What are the benefits of participation?

Although participation practices are open to debate, some benefits are being enjoyed too. Academia and NGOs who run capacity building and awareness raising projects create quite an interest in the nearby farmers. Financial gains are still regarded as the most important outcome of practices that are being promoted in these projects. A farmer comments on this: *“Farmers in Altinekin² are getting the same crop as me, but paying less for the water and electricity³. I want this project in my village, too.”*

5.3. Eastern Black Sea Region

5.3.1. Case Description

The Eastern Black Sea region is one of the richest basins when it comes to the hydropower potential in Turkey (total basin area is 24.077 km²). The basin has increasingly become sites of private hydropower development after the legal reform in 2001 which allows private sector to lease the use rights of rivers for 49 years to promote the production of electricity. Due to the region’s geographical and topographical advantages (high precipitation level, steep valleys) it is one the most preferred places for the run-of-river type of hydropower facilities. The estimated contribution of this region to the small hydroelectric potential of Turkey is around 16 % (Uzlu et al., 2011). As a result, at least 300 projects are licensed and in the process of construction. Despite its energy potential, basin is hosting many species as well as 2.5 million people, many of whose lives are dependent on these rivers.

This small-scale hydro development is regulated by ‘water use rights contracts’ prepared by the DSI. Accordingly rights of river are granted for companies for 49 years only to produce electricity. This implies that communities have a limited or no rights to use the river for other purposes such as their domestic and agricultural use. As emphasized in the contracts, the ultimate rights of rivers belong to the state, and private companies obtain user rights. However, it is the company who is responsible for construction, management, operation, security of the power plants and potential risks derived from the usage of rivers. Due to the fact that rights and responsibilities over the use of rivers are now transferred to the private entities, there are serious uprisings from the rural communities in the region regarding their exclusion both in the current legal framework and in the decision-making processes.

² A pilot project site in the basin where WWF has implemented an intense program including demonstrations, trainings and change of irrigation infrastructure to drip irrigation.

³ Electricity bills are typically one of the highest and ever growing item in the farmers cost structure, as the groundwater is brought to surface from depths as high as 100 metres by using electric pumps.

5.3.2. Discourses about Public Participation

Who constitutes “the public”?

The only mechanism that brings different stakeholders in this process is the environment impact assessment (EIA) notification meeting. According to the Ministry of Environment, the transparent and democratic participation of different stakeholders is a necessary condition in the EIA process since it is a process of finding out and preventing the future social and environmental implications of development programs (Ahmad and Wood, 2002).

There are many views from private sector and affected communities on about the effectiveness of EIA meetings. Some of the locals from the region argue that meetings are far from being inclusive and democratic in practice. Majority of the communities do not participate to these meetings because they believe their views are being ignored and undermined. Moreover, majority of the private sector perceive EIA notification meetings as ineffective and time-consuming, and thus, not cost effective.

What constitutes “the participation”?

There is no formal structure about how EIA meetings should be held. Due to the fact that meetings are designed only for consultation and sharing of information, the outcome barely influences the decision-making. Especially, in the case of Eastern Black Sea Region, the participation is very limited due to the high level of mistrust between the local people and private companies. Some villagers do not recognize the process because they feel ignored, undermined and alienated from the process. Local knowledge and values are not recognized and included in the decision-making.

As a reaction, in the region there is a powerful mobilized opposition towards hydroelectricity projects due to the social and environmental concerns. Activist groups like Karadeniz Resurrection, Brotherhood of Rivers Platform and Ikizdere Association protest power plants projects in the EIA meetings. In many of these cases non-participation has also become a position since some argue that participation would imply an indirect support of the process.

Why is participation introduced?

The international regulations and EU approximation process have also influenced the Turkish EIA process. Recent changes in the EIA regulation put more emphasis on the public participation. According to that, related stakeholders have to be informed and consulted about the projects during the planning process. Moreover, public participation is crucial to build a trustful relationship between stakeholders. It is argued that when public opinions are included in the decision making, people could then develop a sense of ownership (Shepherd and Bowler, 1997) and this might reduce conflicts. However, as mentioned before such a trust relationship is not built between private companies and local people of the region since the scope of the participation is limited only to consultation.

What are the benefits of participation?

Although not functioning properly EIA notification meetings is the only platform that brings public and private sector together. It is through these meetings where people can exchange their opinions about the projects. Due to the mistrust between stakeholders, most often these meetings cannot go further than a formality.

In the Eastern Black Sea Region, the active resistance against HEP projects perceive EIA meetings as a mechanism that perpetuates the privatized hydro development regardless of the opposite views of the people. One example is that despite the court decisions against the EIA reports of some projects, EIA meetings for those projects were still being held. However, some companies do recognize the importance of people's consent as we see in the Yuvarlakcay case in the south-western Turkey, where a company has withdrew its project as a result of the local resistance (Islar, 2010).

6. Discussion

The analysis of the above cases in three different regions reveals both similarities and differences, which can be attributed to various factors. Constituting typical examples of participatory irrigation management, the Harran Plain case and the Konya Closed Basin case provide insights about the interactions among the water users, who include both the individual farmers and their collective organisations, and DSI, which still assumes the leading role in the management of irrigation systems. The tension among the water users and DSI can be attributed to the imposition of the participatory approach on farmers without making sure that the farmers and water user organisations possess the required individual and organisational capacities for irrigation management so that they have similar interpretations of the concept of "participation". Furthermore, the scope of the "public" is mostly limited to more powerful farmers, which in most situations is taken for granted both by the farmers and the DSI. In the case of Eastern Black Sea region the focus is on the participatory mechanisms in the development and planning processes of hydropower, which complements the other cases both in terms of the sectoral use of water resources and the phase of water management. Similar to the other cases, the participatory process is contested due to the different interpretations of "participation". While the DSI and private sector perceive the involvement of the public as a way to share information and consultation, local communities demand a more active role in the decision-making process. Compared to the other two cases, there are two main differences in the Eastern Black Sea case. Firstly, the part of the affected local communities mobilizes against the mechanisms that exclude their effective participation, and thus, aim to extend the scope of "public". Secondly, the role of DSI is less prominent in the participatory process since the risks and responsibilities of hydropower development are partly transferred to the private actors, i.e., the companies that already took over the right to use the water resources.

In all the cases, the DSI still holds the property right of both the water resource and the physical infrastructures. This positions the DSI as the prominent actor of the system as well as the ultimate decision-maker. The scope and the forms of the participation of other parties, including both the public members and private actors, are shaped through the discourse that the DSI leads.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we presented cases from the Turkish water management context and elaborated on the questions as to whether, how and why public participation is a contested concept in water management. Our findings indicate that public participation is contested in all cases, as it is given different - and even conflicting - meanings and uses by different actors. Furthermore, we observe that the immaturity of the adoption of participatory mechanisms in the broader arenas of environmental decision-making is reflected to water sector, too. The low degree of individual capacity of water users and the institutional capacity of their organisations to engage proactively in the decision-making processes is an obstacle in clarifying and further broadening the boundaries of both the “public” and “participation” components of public participation processes (Bressers and Lulofs, 2010).

The contextual factors at the local level and the characteristics of different types of actors are also influential on the contestedness of public participation. In the Harran Plain case, the long-standing tribal relations and power asymmetries among the water users manifest themselves in all decision-making processes. Furthermore, the lack of previous experience in irrigation management and the abrupt transfer of responsibility from DSI to the newly-established irrigation associations is one of the key determinants of the on-going discourse on the incapability of farmers and their irrigation associations. In Konya Closed Basin case, it is observed that actor characteristics play a prominent role in the way participation is interpreted. Often there is a referral to the incapability of farmers, which might explain why participation is confined to participating to financial costs and following the suggestions provided by the more capable stakeholders. In the case of Eastern Black Sea region, resistance movements show that effective and inclusive participation is a necessary condition both for the future of hydro development projects and the social and political sustainability. Many projects cannot even be constructed due to the active resistance which eventually cost money, labour and time to the private companies.

Given the highly contested nature of public participation in all the three cases that we examine, it is difficult to argue that public participation is effectively transferred to the Turkish water management context or it contributes to the implementation of IWRM in Turkey. We argue that there is ample room for improvement in terms of reaching a shared understanding about the meaning of public participation and enjoying its expected benefits towards IWRM. In this regard several recommendations about the design and implementation of public participation processes can be made so that its contestedness can be relieved. Regarding the implementation of participatory irrigation management, the involvement of disadvantaged farmers is of utmost importance. Since correlating the right to participate with the size of the land, and somewhat related attribution of power, conflicts with equal representation, the small-scale and landless farmers should be given equal opportunity with large-scale farmers. Furthermore, given the situation that the managerial and financial effectiveness of water user organisations are in question, the monitoring and evaluation by third-party (or independent) organisations can be useful to change the perception of both the farmers and DSI regarding the functioning of water user organisations. For the planning phase of water development, an independent stakeholder advisory group, which can voice local concerns, provide local knowledge, help to identify key issues as well as facilitate cooperation between different groups, might make public participation processes more effective.

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