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# Influences on stakeholder representation in participatory coastal management programmes

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## Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a study to identify the influences that affect stakeholder representation in coastal partnerships (CPs) in the United Kingdom. This was undertaken through a telephone interview survey with the officers of CPs and a personal interview survey with stakeholder representatives of four partnerships. The surveys allowed the typical flow of stakeholder representation through a CP decision-making process to be established in which: a stakeholder constituency passes their view to their representative; the representative joins in the CP decision process in which constituency interests are represented; this process then delivers a collective decision which has included the consideration of all constituency views. Factors that affect stakeholder representation were found to be: the responsiveness of the representative to their constituency; the inclusivity of access to the partnership and its decision-making process; and the fairness with which the decision-making process operated. It was concluded that if these influences were managed properly, CPs would more accurately reflect the views of all stakeholder constituencies, and would therefore move closer to the aspiration of integrated coastal management.
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## 1. Introduction

This paper presents the contention that stakeholder participation in coastal management processes is insufficient to ensure that stakeholder views are genuinely included in coastal decision-making. The findings presented in this paper suggest that participation is only one of several influences on the ability of stakeholders to contribute to a coastal management

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process. Given that inclusive participatory coastal management is the prevailing coastal decision-making paradigm in much of the world, it is crucially important to evaluate the nature of the processes put in place to deliver the aspiration of inclusivity. This paper examines coastal partnerships (CPs) in the United Kingdom (UK) as an example of participatory coastal management to consider the factors that influence stakeholder representation.

CPs have no formal role in the UK coastal management framework, although their informal role is well established. CPs operate as a local or regional co-ordinating mechanism between coastal stakeholders focused on estuaries or coherent stretches of open coastline. They base their activity on Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) principles and therefore seek an holistic approach to addressing coastal management issues through the active involvement of relevant agencies and stakeholders [1,2]. A key purpose of CPs is to provide opportunities for stakeholders to identify and discuss issues of shared interest and concern. Collectively, stakeholders who comprise the CP then develop and implement a locally focused multi-sectoral coastal management strategy to address the concerns identified. The strategies are entirely voluntary and dependent upon the political will and resources of participating stakeholders for successful implementation. Each CP has an officer, normally funded entirely from stakeholder contributions, to facilitate the work of the CP. It is estimated that there are 45–50 CPs operating in the UK at the present time.

CPs typically have a simple structure, comprising of a forum, steering group, and occasionally topic groups. Of most significance is the steering group, which oversees the general direction of the CP and manages the priorities and workload of the CP Officer (CPO). The steering group normally comprises key stakeholders, particularly statutory agencies, landowners, local authorities, and groups that provide significant financial contributions to the CP. Each CP normally also has a Forum, which comprises all stakeholders. This group meets relatively infrequently (typically twice per year), largely for networking and information sharing purposes. Some CPs will also have topic groups or working groups that focus on specific issues of concern. These groups will typically feed their work into the steering group, which determines the course of action taken by the CP.

The inclusion of stakeholder views in a CP occurs indirectly on a representative basis, in which stakeholder constituencies nominate a representative to participate in the CP to represent their interest [3]. The flow of stakeholder representation through a CP, from the constituency group to the collective decision made by the CP, is illustrated in Fig. 1. Fig. 1 shows that the views of a stakeholder constituency are passed from the constituency to their chosen representative. The representative then participates in the CP decision-making process to represent their constituency's interest. The decision-making process then determines the collective will of the group of representatives. Stakeholder representation describes the process through which the opinions and views of stakeholders are represented in a coastal decision-making process. In ideal circumstances, the flow of stakeholder representation should allow all constituency groups to influence decisions taken by CPs. The inclusion of the interests of all relevant stakeholders in coastal decision-making is central to the delivery of integration, and more broadly ICM [4–7].

However, there are factors that have the potential to compromise the flow of representation and diminish the influence of stakeholder constituencies on coastal decision-making. These factors can exist within the CP and the stakeholder constituency. In order to evaluate these factors, two phases of primary data collection and analysis were undertaken. The factors related to CPs (namely the structure, processes and safeguards of
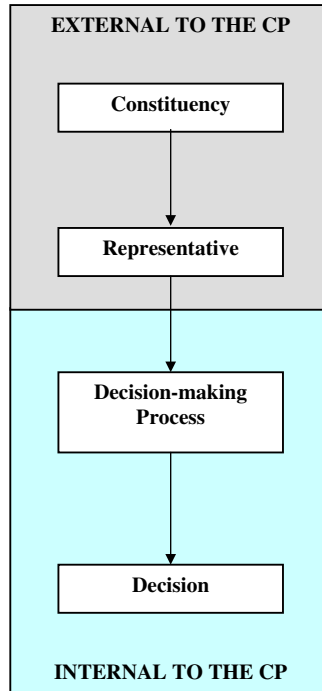
Fig. 1. Typical flow of stakeholder representation through a CP in the UK.

CPs) were investigated through a telephone interview schedule with the officers of 36 CPs in the UK. Factors related to the operation of constituency groups and their representatives were investigated through a personal interview schedule with a total of 58 stakeholder representatives from four case study CPs[1] [8].

This paper identifies the key influences on stakeholder representation originating within a CP and those originating from the procedures within stakeholder constituency groups. The paper is therefore structured around the external and internal factors affecting stakeholder representation in CPs.

## 2. External influences on stakeholder representation

External influences on stakeholder representation occur between the constituency and the representative, in essence, the influences that occur before the representative enters a CP decision-making process. They can be summarised as those that affect the *responsiveness* of a representative to their constituency [9]. The responsiveness of representatives to their constituency was found to be related to three factors: (1) the political representative relationship between a constituency and their representative; (2) the accountability of a representative to their constituency; and (3) the information flows between a constituency and a representative.

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[1]These were the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership, Moray Firth Partnership, Sefton Coast Partnership and Solent Forum.

## 2.1. Representative relationship

The relationship between a constituency and their representative was not monitored by the vast majority of CPs. Instead, the relationship was largely viewed as a private matter because it was external to the CP. However, it was found that the relationship between a constituency and their representative was of fundamental importance to the successful representation of stakeholder views in a CP, as the representative acts as a vehicle for the expression of stakeholder interests within the CP. It is therefore crucially important to the credibility of the CP that the participants have confidence that all representatives (including themselves) truly represent the interests of their respective constituency. The personal interviews with stakeholder representatives examined the mechanisms and procedures of political representation within stakeholder groups.

It was found that a majority of representatives held either a full or partial trustee relationship with their constituency. The trustee representative is empowered to make decisions in the best interests of their constituency either without direct consultation, or up to a defined limit at which point consultation is required [10,11]. This type of relationship carries the risk that representatives may simply represent their own best interests rather than those of their constituency, or in some way represent their constituency inaccurately. This risk should be mitigated by a clear system of accountability through which misrepresentation can be identified and, if necessary, the representative replaced. The key benefit of the trustee relationship for CPs is that representatives are able to discuss, compromise and make decisions knowing they are empowered to do so (albeit sometimes within defined parameters). This is particularly important because these qualities are necessary for effective deliberation in order to identify the collective will of the decision group.

It was apparent that stakeholder representatives became appointed through having either a specific paid role, voluntary role, or by direct invitation on the basis of particular personal interest or qualities. This suggested that representatives involved in CPs are genuine representatives of their constituency, albeit identified through the application of non-uniform but specific criteria. A relationship between the method of representative appointment and the way in which they represented their constituency was not apparent. Instead, the activity level of the representative appeared to be related to the personal commitment of the individual, their perception of the usefulness of the CP, and the level of interest and support from their constituency. It was also found that representatives generally did not have a specified tenure of appointment. Similarly, none had a formal mechanism through which misrepresentation could be identified, although a range of *ad hoc* systems were identified. Together, these findings suggested that representatives generally had the authority to speak on behalf of their constituency, but operated with little accountability. The nature of the accountability of representatives is discussed further in Section 2.2.

The political relationship between a constituency and their representative is a key influence on stakeholder representation as it sets the ground rules for how the representative behaves in decision-making processes. This is both in terms of how the interests of the constituency are presented and the degree of autonomy the representative has in decision-making and deliberation.
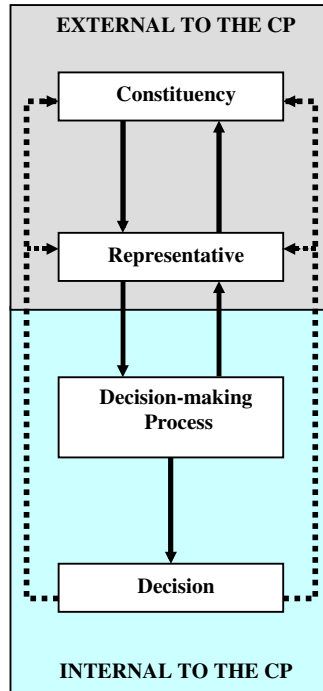
## 2.2. Accountability

In an indirect democracy (in which stakeholder groups are represented by defined representatives), as practiced within CPs, representatives should be accountable to their constituency [12]. However, in practice, very few stakeholder representatives had a formally structured or agreed line of accountability. Despite an absence of formal structures, most representatives did feel accountable to their constituency and explained that if misrepresentation was identified, action would be taken against them. The source of individual accountability was complicated for some representatives who considered their personal accountability to be with groups they did not formally represent. In particular, this was the case for representatives from local special interest groups who often considered themselves accountable to the public rather than their specific group. However, in practice the public had no way of removing or influencing such representatives and therefore could not hold them to account.

The ability of constituencies to identify misrepresentation by their representative, a factor central to accountability judgements, was found to be limited as very few representatives identified any mechanisms in place to identify misrepresentation. Instead, misrepresentation could only be identified by a constituency through a range of informal channels, including reports from other stakeholders, the minutes of CP meetings, the CP newsletter, or wider networking. Some CPOs, particularly of smaller CPs, felt they could identify misrepresentation through knowing what view a constituency was likely to take on an issue and be able to identify a view contrary to that. This, however, is likely to be dependent upon the range of stakeholders present and the capacity of the CPO to be aware of the standpoint of all stakeholder organisations. Difficulties in the identification of misrepresentation illustrated the reliance on trust and the integrity of the representative to present the views of its group appropriately. Where the system of accountability was absent or *ad hoc*, it did *not* inevitably imply that the representative was misrepresenting their constituency. Rather, it was clear that the work of the representative was not scrutinised by their constituency and that there was limited assurance that the representative truly reflected the best interests of their constituency in decision-making.

## 2.3. Information flows

As with the method of appointment of representatives, CPOs did not monitor the methods employed by representatives to seek the views of their constituency. Therefore, the personal interview schedule with stakeholder representatives provided most insight into the information flows between constituencies, representatives and CPs. An overview of the flows of information between these groups is presented in Fig. 2. In Fig. 2, the key role of the representative is apparent in controlling the primary information flow into the CP from the constituency and to a lesser extent the information flow from the CP to the constituency. Secondary information flows were identified from within the CP, where the CP information dissemination strategy by-passed the representative; for example through a website, media releases, or direct mail to members of constituency groups.

It was found that representatives, in general, only sought information and views from key individuals within their constituency. In several cases, representatives considered their own experience sufficient to inform their input to the CP, although this was generally restricted to senior-level representatives. It was apparent that the degree to which a

Fig. 2. Generalised flow of information within CPs.

representative sought the views of their constituency was related to the perception the stakeholder representative held of the importance and role of the CP. Two particular themes were apparent: first, representatives in CPs adopting a more communicative role, appeared less inclined to seek constituency views than those in CPs that took a more managerial approach. Second, there was some evidence that where the CP was perceived as being focused in a certain direction (e.g. a narrow environmental focus, or a puppet of the main funding body), representatives tended to limit the effort they expended seeking the views of their constituency.

It can be postulated that the perception of the CP held by a constituency is likely to be influenced by the information it receives from its representative. However, it was found that representatives pass very little information back to their constituency, either verbally or in writing. Verbal reports tended to be opportunistic rather than formally required, although some voluntary groups required formal reports at annual general meetings. Written reports by representatives to their constituency about the work of the CP were universally rare. Instead, minutes of CP meetings were either circulated to constituency members or placed in an open access file. However, representatives acknowledged that it was unlikely that any member of their constituency would examine the minutes of CP meetings in any detail. Many representatives identified the CP newsletter as an effective method of circulating information to their constituency. It was apparent that the

information reaching the constituency was primarily dependent upon the dissemination activities undertaken by the representative.

A significant implication of the limited supply of information to the constituency was the restricted opportunity for the constituency to judge whether or not their representative had presented their interests adequately to the CP. This is the basis of accountability, as without sufficient information, a constituency is unable to make a decision regarding the quality of representation. If the quality of representation is to be assured, channels are required through which members of a constituency can identify if their representative is representing their views as they would wish. However, it was also apparent that certain constituencies did not consider CPs significant enough to warrant the imposition of formal feedback cycles on their representatives.

Finally, there was evidence to suggest a lack of awareness within constituency groups of the existing and potential role of CPs, and consequently limited interest in the role of their representative. The limited supply of information to the constituency from the representative appeared to be a constraint on the 'impact' of CPs on constituency members and caused problems for the recruitment of representatives. This has important implications for the delivery of CP outcomes, particularly the wider support for voluntary management policies and the long-term representation of a given stakeholder group, especially amongst constituencies in the voluntary sector.

## 3. Internal influences on stakeholder representation

Internal factors influencing stakeholder representation are those that relate to the structure, processes and safeguards of CPs; in essence, the influences that occur within a CP. These were found fall into two main areas. First, were the organisational and representational structures of a CP. These influenced the *inclusivity* of involvement in decision-making by controlling access to a CP. Second, were the factors found to influence the *fairness* of the decision-making process. These were the extent to which deliberation was employed and the democratic basis of the decision-making process. Both sets of influences are addressed in Sections 3.1–3.5.

### 3.1. Organisational structure and legal status

The origins and geographical context of a CP were found to influence its structure and legal status, although not in a deterministic manner. Rather, CPs appeared to have adopted pragmatic approaches to their organisational structure and status based on the interconnected considerations of their local context and the approach taken to stakeholder participation. Where significant participation in the CP had been sought, the structure usually exhibited several themed sub-groups specifically aimed at drawing in stakeholder groups and the public. In addition, a sub-group of 'key partners' (and funders) was generally formed into a steering group to provide the strategic direction for the CP. Conversely, where a CP had a limited breadth of involvement, the structure was less complex, normally limited to a single organisational unit only.

The organisational structure of CPs was found to determine the context in which the stakeholders were able to become involved with the CP. As such, the structure was a fundamental influence on the procedures of CPs. However, from the perspective of representatives, the origin and structure of the CP did not seem to be a particularly

important issue. To a certain extent, the structure appeared to be taken for granted, perhaps because representatives had limited notions of alternative models, or perhaps because the structure worked well for the model of participation employed.

The legal status of the CP appeared to have a significant effect on the credibility of the CP for stakeholders. The lack of legal status and non-formalised authority of the majority of CPs caused many representatives to be critical of the perceived weakness of the CP. CPOs supported this observation, commenting that enhanced legal status (e.g. charity or limited company) and a formal status document (e.g. terms of reference or constitution) helped to provide internal and external credibility for the CP. Indeed, several CPs were actively developing status documents at the time of the telephone interview schedule. These were being developed specifically to: (1) address problems caused by *ad hoc* and opaque operational systems within the CP; (2) provide an externally recognisable legal basis for the CP; and (3) take advantage of enhanced funding opportunities available to more formal organisations.

To summarise, the structure and status of the CP had two main impacts on stakeholder representation. First, where a CP had adopted a participatory and therefore more complex organisational structure in which decision-making was multi-stage, the management of stakeholder representation issues took on enhanced significance. Conversely, in CPs with limited participatory opportunities and therefore a simpler structure, the management of stakeholder representation was less problematic. Secondly, the legal status of the CP appeared to influence the internal credibility of the CP, which was found to influence the involvement of representatives in the work of the CP and the way in which outputs of the CP were perceived by external bodies. Evidence from both CPOs and representatives suggested that more formalised CPs were considered to be more credible, as their purpose, processes, and the role and responsibilities of participants were clearly defined.

## 3.2. Structural representation

Structural representation refers to the way in stakeholder representation is affected by the organisational structure of the CP. The application of membership criteria to gain access to the CP structure or a sub-group was common practice amongst CPs. This was normally undertaken to limit membership to a manageable size. However, it also had the effect of excluding legitimate stakeholders. The membership criteria for specific sub-groups, particularly the steering group, also restricted access to decision-making opportunities. The membership criteria were often subjective, applied by a small group of 'key stakeholders', and not publicly known or transparent. Where a CP had a status document, the membership criteria were often omitted or expressed imprecisely. Similarly, membership criteria to access specific sub-groups were seldom formalised, particularly regarding the steering group. There was no evidence to suggest that CPs were intentionally secretive, however, CPs tended not to routinely supply this information to potential or new members. Since the representatives in the CP had a reasonably high turnover and therefore changed frequently, this appeared to create a sense of uncertainty over the operations of the CP, which, in some cases, appeared to extend to the purpose and function of the CP.

Controls on structural representation clearly had the potential to constrain the resemblance of the CP membership to the coastal use profile. In practice, it was found that the resemblance of the CP membership profile to the wider use population was generally skewed away from stakeholders with an economic interest (e.g. fisheries,

agriculture, and business). In addition, young people and the public typically did not participate. There was no specific evidence to suggest that the skew was caused by the membership criteria, and other explanations were available, such as the perceived bias of many CPs towards environmental issues. A key motivational factor for most participants was the need to identify specific benefits of membership, and restrictive membership criteria did not appear to persuade many representatives of potential benefits.

In summary, it was found that structural representation constraints meant that the views of certain stakeholder groups were denied the opportunity to influence the work of the CP, which constrained the degree of inclusivity that could be achieved by the CP. Consequently the resemblance of the profile of representatives might not reflect the entire coastal use profile. Structural representation was therefore identified as a key influence on stakeholder representation in CPs due to its potential role in limiting the opportunity of stakeholder representatives to gain access to the CP and participate in the decision-making process.

### 3.3. Participation opportunities

The ability of representatives to represent their constituency's interest in the CPs decision-making process was found to be influenced by the nature of the opportunities to participate available to them. This influence, however, was only applicable once a representative was in a suitable structural position within the CP. This is because participation in the decision-making process can only occur once a stakeholder group has met the membership criteria to gain access to the relevant organisational unit in which decisions are taken. The criteria given for successful participation by Cicin-Sain and Kencht [6] assume that, once within a decision-making process, participants are equally empowered and that the decision-making process is fair to all involved. In effect it is assumed that any decision-making process is fair and competent. Successful participation should also be at the meaningful end of continua identified by Arnstein [13] and Wilcox [14].

In practice, opportunities for participation were found to be predominantly restricted to scheduled CP meetings, which tended to adopt formal procedures, structured around a pre-determined agenda. Meetings were generally facilitated by a Chairperson with the assistance of the CPO. Attendance at CP meetings was identified as the key mechanism for representatives to pursue the interests of their constituency. However, attendance was often poor, with representatives from specific sectors commonly absent (particularly agriculture, fishing, and business). This suggested that the participation opportunities provided may not have been suitable for all members of the CP. However, other factors were found to affect attendance, including the perceived benefits of attendance and relevance of the agenda items. Within CP meetings, both CPOs and a majority of representatives considered that all participants had equal opportunity to contribute verbally at meetings, albeit constrained by the skills of the Chairperson to manage meetings effectively and the capacity of individuals to contribute to discussion.

Efforts to encourage the participation of relevant parties were generally driven by the CPO. It was apparent that the membership criteria limited the involvement of certain groups and also the discussion of certain topics. Certainly, the systems in place did not provide everyone who was potentially affected by a decision with the opportunity to participate. This particularly applied to the public. Representatives also highlighted that

the often large volumes of information provided prior to meetings posed a barrier to participation and discouraged the attendance of those unable to read all of the material before the meeting. The perceived level of usefulness of the CP, and the degree of alignment of the CP with constituency aims, were also found to influence participation. The lack of awareness amongst stakeholders of the procedures and processes of CPs also constrained participation, as often stakeholders did not take the opportunities to contribute that were available to them. Those representatives with a lengthy membership profile were perceived to know the system better and be able to exploit it more effectively, potentially at the expense of newer members. As such, several representatives commented on the mutually reinforcing relationship between experience and power. This suggested that if representatives had an improved understanding of the purpose and procedures of a CP, the CP might operate more effectively and perceived inequity between members be reduced. A further consideration for participation was the perceived credibility of the CP, which influenced the motivation (or otherwise) to participate.

Participation opportunities were therefore found to influence stakeholder representation through controlling the operational context of representative involvement in CP meetings (including timing, location, and management of meetings). The timing and location of meetings had the potential to exclude representatives for whom attendance was not possible. Similarly, poor management of meetings was found to dissuade less confident representatives from contributing, constrain opportunities for involvement in decision-making, and potentially, perpetuate perceptions of bias within the CP. However, it should again be noted that the opportunities for stakeholders to participate in CP meetings were only available to those within the CP structure.

## 3.4. Extent of deliberation

Fishkin [15] commented that participation alone is insufficient to guarantee that 'right' decisions are made; instead it was recommended that any decision should be considered carefully through a process of deliberation. Deliberative decision-making allows all representatives to express their view prior to a collective decision being taken. The decision-making procedures employed in the majority of CPs exhibited many of the characteristics of deliberative decision-making, most notably the use of consensus to determine the collective will of participants.

Deliberation opportunities were generally found to be restricted to formal CP meetings, although there was also some evidence of informal deliberation outside, and at the fringes of CP meetings. Both representatives and CPOs felt that CP meetings were generally well run, with all who wanted to speak able to do so. The personal capacity of the representative (including self-confidence and command of relevant information), and the capacity of the Chairperson to facilitate deliberation were identified as potential constraints upon effective deliberation. The time available for deliberation within meetings was also identified as a constraint, however the situation was mixed, as many CPOs reported that important decisions would be deferred to enable further deliberation if consensus had not been reached in the time available.

The completeness of arguments presented within a deliberative decision-making process was related to the breadth stakeholders involved in deliberation. The breadth, or range of representatives was found to be influenced by the structural representation conditions

within a CP and opportunities available to representatives to participate in decision-making. The importance of all stakeholder interests being involved in deliberation was asserted by several representatives. It was apparent that representatives felt that their interest would not be served if they were absent from a deliberative process. Many representatives attempted to send a substitute to CP meetings to remedy this situation, but this was often impractical due to the limited availability of suitable personnel with an adequate understanding of the preceding deliberation. This reinforced the need for consistency of representation. The completeness of arguments was also undermined by the limited inclusivity of CPs, as discussed in Sections 3.1–3.3. This implicitly meant that the completeness of arguments in any decision-making process was compromised, as certain interests were absent. Whilst many representatives also represented 'other' secondary interests, it was unlikely that these would fill all of the potential representation gaps.

In relation to the completeness of capacity, CPOs and representatives generally felt that representatives had enough information to inform their decision-making. However, little information was passed by representatives to their to constituency to inform the views of constituency members. It was also apparent that CPs provided significant amounts of information to support the content of decision-making, but very little guidance on the procedural elements of decision-making or other procedures of the CP. This appeared to be a major constraint on the decision-making process as some representatives did not understand the decision-making process or their role within it. However, there was also evidence that CPOs were not always absolutely certain of the decision-making procedure of 'their' CP.

A final factor concerning the extent of deliberation was the degree of autonomy of the representative. It is important that participants in a deliberative decision-making process are able to compromise and speak with authority on behalf of their constituency. The possibility of a representative being able to meet these criteria appeared to entirely depend upon a representative's relationship with their constituency. Most representatives in CPs were identified as trustees or partial trustees, which implied that representatives were empowered to deliberate, either fully or within defined parameters.

The extent of deliberation within a CP decision-making process was found to influence stakeholder representation by affecting whether or not the decision-making process ensured that all views were given the opportunity to be expressed, explained and debated for as long as required. The effectiveness of the deliberative process was particularly important for representatives of smaller and less powerful stakeholder groups, whose views might otherwise not be afforded adequate exposure. Deliberation has the potential to assure that all stakeholder views reaching the decision-making process are carefully considered and incorporated into the determination of the collective will of the group. Deliberation is therefore central to the delivery of integration and ICM.

### 3.5. Democratic procedures

Popular control and political equity are the defining characteristics of a democratic decision-making process [16]. However, there was a difference in the perception of the democratic procedures in CPs between CPOs and stakeholder representatives. CPOs generally considered their CP to be democratic on the grounds that opportunities to contribute were available to all participants. However, three main factors were found to

undermine this view: (1) membership criteria which provided some representatives with enhanced decision-making roles; (2) the subjective way in which stakeholders were identified to join the CP; and (3) the lack of general resemblance to the wider population, including a lack of public involvement. The key factor found to influence the democratic basis of CPs was the perception amongst stakeholder representatives of bias in the decision-making process. This was primarily related to the dependence of most CPs on certain organisations for funding. In some cases, this was exacerbated by the same organisations also hosting the CP, recruiting the CPO and providing line management of the CPO (also see [17]).

There was a similar mismatch between the views of CPOs and representatives on the accountability of CPs. In general, CPOs felt the CP to be accountable to itself, either fully or partially. In contrast, representatives were generally uncertain, but most felt the CP should be accountable to the local community. This created a tension within the CP, as most CPs had little opportunity for public involvement. The method of accountability in practice was therefore unclear. Furthermore, a perceived power division resulting from the exclusive membership of the steering group was also evident within CPs. This had the effect of further undermining the credibility of the decision-making process and of the CP amongst the membership.

Uncertainty over core funding, in particular, appeared to impact negatively on the internal credibility of the CP and the motivation of stakeholders to be involved. The dominance of certain funders over CP business was also a key concern for representatives, who considered funding and influence to be inherently linked, despite any systems in place within the CP to limit undue influence. This perception, regardless of its accuracy, appeared sufficient to warrant scepticism about the CP and negatively influence its internal credibility. Furthermore, it was evident that stakeholders who believed a CP to be dominated by certain interests did not take their personal representative role as seriously as if the CP was fair and unbiased. Thus, the value representatives placed on their own membership and input appeared limited by the perceived dominance of others.

The democratic nature of a CP decision-making processes was found to influence stakeholder representation through its role in ensuring that decision-making does not bias any outcome in favour of certain groups. Any aspect of decision-making that induces a negative perception of popular control or political equity, potentially undermines the credibility of the CP decision-making process and associated outcomes. In CPs where democratic procedures are poor, there was no assurance that stakeholder views reaching the decision-making process would be treated with equality or have any impact on the final decision. Where the democratic procedures of the CP were *perceived* to be flawed (as opposed to being flawed), this also constrained stakeholder representation, as there was evidence to suggest that representatives were unlikely to engage with decision-making fully. This implies that CPs, in order to avoid the risk of a negative democratic perception, should create independent offices, revised funding profiles, and independent Chairpersons. This supports the finding by Burbridge [2] that statutory members and those who have embraced the 'partnership approach' more fully "undoubtedly have more influence" (p. 1). Rather than providing a passive context, as implied by Burbridge, this research suggests that the CP may contribute to the perception of inequity amongst stakeholder representatives and that this can substantially affect the representation of stakeholder views in a CP.

## 4. Conclusion

The results presented in this paper demonstrate that stakeholder participation alone is insufficient to guarantee that stakeholder views are represented in a participatory coastal management process. The exclusion of any stakeholder perspective, either intentionally or as a result of poorly conceived procedures, will clearly limit the inclusivity of any decision-making process. It also means that any decision reached by the decision-group is likely to be based on incomplete information, have limited political support, and is unlikely to be accountable to all coastal stakeholders. However, the results presented in this paper suggest that even those stakeholders that participate in the decision-making process have no guarantee of having their voice heard. This represents a significant evolution in the understanding of stakeholder involvement in coastal management. The assumption evident so often in the coastal management literature that participation is key to successful ICM is not redundant, but it should be reconsidered. In particular, it should be recognised that participation does not provide a full explanation of the requirements for inclusive coastal management, nor is it sufficient to evaluate the success of stakeholder involvement through measures of participation alone.

In contrast, from the synthesis presented in Sections 2 and 3, it is apparent that the main influences on stakeholder representation occur in three main areas of CP operation. The location and nature of these influences are summarised in Fig. 3. These are: (1) the mechanism through which the view of a stakeholder constituency is represented by their representative; (2) the manner in which a representative is able to participate in the decision-making process of the CP; and (3) the mechanism employed by a CP to make
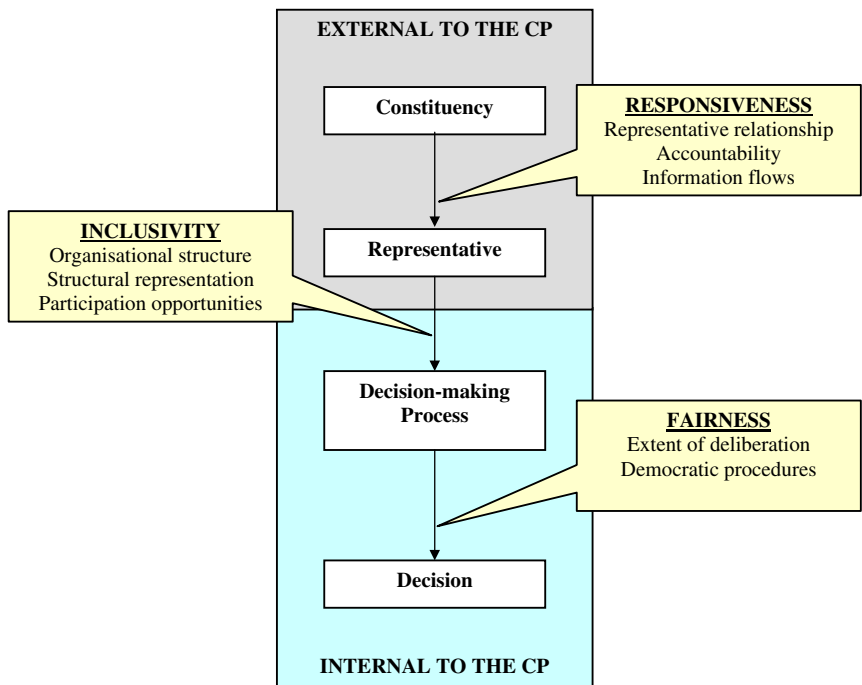


Fig. 3. Identification and location of influences on the flow of stakeholder representation in CPs.

Table 1
Summary of generalised external and internal influences on stakeholder representation in participatory coastal management programmes

| | Influence on stakeholder representation |
|---|---|
| *External influences* | |
| Representative relationship | The relationship between the representative and the constituency is centrally important to defining the role of the representative. It determines the level of autonomy of the representative, and therefore the degree to which the representative is an independent actor in a decision-making process. It also provides the representative with credibility, both within the constituency and within the decision-making process, as it provides the mandate for the representative. |
| Accountability | The accountability link between the representative and the constituency provides assurance that the representative can be removed from the position if not considered to be representing the interests of the constituency appropriately. This also means that the representative, in order to remain in that position, is more likely to represent the constituency in a responsive manner. Formal accountability also makes it clear to the representative and to others, the constituency of the representative. |
| Information flows | The flow of information between the representative and constituency (and vice versa) influences stakeholder representation in two ways: (1) information from the constituency to the representative informs the representative of the views of the constituency on relevant issues; and (2) information from the representative to the constituency allows the constituency to better understand the role and function of the decision-making process, it also allows the constituency to assess the role played by their representative in the decision-making processes and make accountability judgements. |
| *Internal influences* | |
| Organisational structure | The organisational structure and legal status of the coastal management process form the context in which stakeholder representation occurs. This therefore has the potential to fundamentally influence stakeholder representation through the adequacy of the organisational structure for the participatory strategy employed. |
| Structural representation | The structural representation of the coastal management process determines which stakeholders are admitted and which stakeholders are admitted to decision sub-groups. This is important to stakeholder representation, as entry to the decision-group is a pre-requisite for involvement in the decision-making process. Admission to certain sub-groups, particularly the Steering Group (or equivalent) is particularly important as decision-making is concentrated in such sub-groups. |
| Participation opportunities | The opportunities for representatives to become involved in a decision-making process are important because the timing, location, or nature of the meeting may constrain representatives from participation. This has the potential to exclude certain groups from the decision-making as the opportunities for their participation are inadequate. For these groups, stakeholder representation becomes severely limited in its scope and effectiveness. |
| Extent of deliberation | Deliberative decision-making requires that decisions are reached after careful consideration of all points of view and available options. As such, the views of all stakeholder constituencies are able to be represented in a decision-making process. If deliberation is absent or constrained, then representatives may not have the opportunity to fully express or explain their position. This would mean that certain interests may be omitted from the decision-making process. Deliberation is therefore a key mechanism to ensure that stakeholder views are represented in decision-making. |
| Democratic procedures | The democratic procedures of a decision-making process can enhance or constrain the way in which representatives are able to represent their constituency. Democratic procedures can ensure that all views are treated equally and decisions are not biased. Where democratic procedures are absent (or perceived to be absent) the overall confidence in decision-making is compromised and the credibility of any decisions flawed. |

decisions. Fig. 3 also illustrates the internal and external division between the influences. These factors have the potential to impede the accurate representation of stakeholder views in CPs in the UK. Conversely therefore, if managed properly, these factors can provide assurance that the views of a stakeholder constituency can have a genuine influence on the outcome of a CP decision-making process. Furthermore, evidence from the research also suggested that if stakeholder representation was effective, the CP (and its outputs) would be viewed more credibly by those involved. There was also evidence to suggest that external credibility would be enhanced in such circumstances. This in turn would enable CPs to better deliver their central mission—the integration of coastal interests through a broadened base of support and more effective representation of stakeholder interests. Finally, it can be postulated that the factors affecting stakeholder representation presented in this paper are not unique to CPs in the UK, but equally likely to apply to all participatory coastal management processes in which the views of stakeholders are indirectly represented (by representatives) in participatory ICM programmes. In order to initiate that debate, a summary of generalised influences on stakeholder representation is presented in Table 1.

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