

AARHUS STORYTELLING

Stories Part II – Convention's Implementation in the Region and its Global Significance

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- Thank you for giving me the chance to talk
- Personal background: not a law teacher or a lawyer. Nor an environmental activist. But rather a participation activist.
- I dedicate my professional life to local democracy, and to facilitate participation processes at all levels, be it very local, regional or national.
- When I came to Riga to the third session of the Meeting of the Parties, it was to witness the efforts of French academics in documenting, researching and helping the development of public participation procedures established in France both, before and in the years following the adoption of the Aarhus Convention.
- So far, I was a daily user of the Convention, but only as a text. I did not expect to discover that there were real people behind the text, and that they were very active in the implementation of that text.
- Then I was proposed by the French Government to chair the Task Force (TF) on Public participation in international forums (PPIF). It was, and still is difficult to implement public participation on local issues, but I must say it seemed to me a huge challenge to make it possible for the public to weigh on the international decisions. How can you make public participation possible when a decision is going to affect several billions of lives?
- A quote from Mark Twain, I like very much, says: « They didn't know it was impossible, so they did it ».
- International negotiations are no longer hidden from the public since COP-15 in Copenhagen in 2009.
- PPIF Task Force was able to hear the frustrations from civil society organizations (CSOs) after COP-15, and could establish an area for debate on what went wrong in Copenhagen.
- UNFCCC became then a regular and important area of work for PPIF TF and then for PPIF sessions in the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.
- It illustrates the leverage effect of PPIF on international negotiations, through various ways:
 - the intervention of Aarhus Parties in public participation policies of international forums, when they open for contributions
 - the expertise from the secretariat towards other international forums secretariats
 - the Aarhus model on consensus building, and the rights of CSOs in the Convention operating modes
- Lessons learnt from UNFCCC were useful for addressing other areas of work such as financial institutions
- Climate negotiations were also the field for experimenting PPIF at national level
- Example of France
 - who established a National Committee for ecological transition for preparing positions before negotiations
 - who prepared itself for hosting COP-21 in a more open way to CSO. I consider that, with a huge amount of efforts from the French Ministry of the Environment, made possible by the dedication of Thomas Legoupil.
- Yet the challenge is still ahead for broader public participation extended to citizens, and the

way these citizens can express themselves and be listened to by decision makers in international forums

- And indeed, the improvement is never achieved forever. We've had a number of tough discussions on the objectives of the PPIF thematic session. I remember the fact that some Parties were not so happy to have a regular session, rather long in time, when we could point out the areas and international forums where intervention was needed from Parties so that they could fulfil their commitment under article 3, paragraph 7.
- It ended up with a very strange wording for me, but I believe well balanced: Decision VI/4: Requests the Working Group: (a) To convene regularly, on a needs basis, a thematic session on PPIF.
- I've been very much involved in a broad reform of environmental democracy in France for the last three years. And in that process, I must say that I am inspired every day with the experience of the Aarhus Convention, the way negotiations are held, the discussions with all stakeholders, and the way we can balance the wordings so that all stakeholders can move forward and improve environmental democracy.
- At the end, I don't know whether I could be useful to the Convention or not, but I am sure the Convention was useful to me. Thank you for that.
- Conclusion: Many people say PPIF is impossible, and this is a good reason for us to do it.