Stakeholder map – visualizing linkage between stakeholders

Introduction

Stakeholder mapping uses the intuition of the researcher to visualize the interlinked relationship of stakeholders after collecting and analyzing information about the different stakeholder groups and their relationships. The outcome of the process is the graphical representation of the stakeholder network.

Stakeholder maps can represent a wide range of stakeholders, including formal institutions, NGOs, groups of stakeholders having the same interest (e.g. group of farmers, group of bird watchers etc.), or even individual citizens if they are key players in relation to the focal issue. Stakeholder maps can be used as the first step of designing the stakeholder engagement process together with the stakeholders themselves.

The geographical scales at which stakeholder mapping is a workable tool range from the local to the European level. Stakeholder maps generated at the local scale can be very detailed both in terms of the listed stakeholders and their relationships, and are able to reflect the complexity of the social context of the focal issue. Stakeholder maps at larger geographical scales are broader; they consist of the key institutional players and the larger stakeholder groups but hardly represent place specific actors or small subgroups of stakeholders. Thus, stakeholder maps at larger scales are better reflecting the institutional dynamics around the focal issue.

Keywords

Stakeholder map; stakeholder network; natural resource management

Why would I choose this approach?

Stakeholder mapping is a descriptive-analytic tool to discover and visualize the relationship among the stakeholders of a focal issue (i.e. a land use planning process, an ecological restoration project, or a change of the legislation of protected areas, etc.).

What are the main advantages of the approach?

- Easy to prepare (no special expertise or material is needed)
- Cheap and relatively quick
- Visually represents the stakeholder groups and their networks, which makes this tool suitable for initiating discussion about existing relationships and developing the stakeholder engagement strategy in a participatory way

What are the constraints/limitations of the approach?

- Although it builds on empirical data, the map is created in an intuitive process – it is necessary to be verified through a stakeholder dialogue to reflect the views of stakeholders (and not only the approach of the researcher)
- It is less detailed and less systematic than social network analysis

What types of value can the approach help me understand?

The final outcome of the analysis, the stakeholder map, is a graphical representation of stakeholder relationships which includes all relevant stakeholder groups, their subgroups, their basic interests in the focal issue, and the linkages among them. Therefore, it helps to understand the distribution of values related to a focal issue.

How does the approach address uncertainty?

Identification of stakeholders and linkage between them is not a static delineated fact, but a starting point. For instance, it can help to invite an initial group of stakeholders for a starting workshop of a project.

How do I apply the approach?

The process of generating a stakeholder map can be split into five key steps.

Step 1: Define the issue

A preliminary step of stakeholder mapping is the identification of the focal issue which influences the range of stakeholders to be included and their basic interests.

Step 2: Collect data

Two basic data sources can be used as background information of the stakeholder mapping process.

- *Media and document analysis:* Newspapers, blogs, official documents (e.g. development plans and project descriptions) etc. can be analyzed in order to identify as many stakeholders in the case study area as possible. Based on the media and document analysis, a tentative list of potential stakeholder can be collated and their relative importance can be identified in relation to the focal issue.

- *Key-informant interviews:* The second data source is the personal information provided by key stakeholders (i.e. stakeholders having dense networks, being able to influence the outcome of the project etc.).

Step 3: Analyze data

Step 4: Build the map

This is the most creative part of the analysis, when the information collected at previous phases will be combined with personal intuition. Basically it is the group of researchers who draw the map, although you can try to build the map within small group of stakeholders by using participatory techniques/facilitation. In each way three basics steps have to be accomplished.

- *Listing:* Write down the name of each stakeholder (or group of stakeholders) you identified during the analysis on post-it notes.
- *Placing:* Start arranging the post-its according to the relationships between stakeholders. Start with a determinative stakeholder, and then systematically illustrate the ones that are closely related to it and move towards the more and more loosely connected ones. The structure of the stakeholder map can be hierarchical or centralized.
    - You can build a *hierarchical structure* where stakeholders are arranged according to their influence on the focal issue (the focal issue will be in the top of your map, stakeholders having more power will be put closer to the focal issue, stakeholders depending on others will be put below etc.). A strict hierarchy system is easy to represent as the relations between stakeholders are specifically defined.
    - You can build a *centralized structure* where a key stakeholder is in the middle, and others are arranged according to their relationship to this key stakeholder. This is an appropriate structure if there are several loosely related stakeholder groups in your case study.

Consider that all stakeholder maps are different and a given case can be represented by various ways. So feel free to try each ways and create different arrangements until you find the "best" structure which gives a meaningful representation of stakeholders' relationships.

- *Linking:* Once you finished the arrangement, draw the relationship between the stakeholders by using lines and arrows. Cross-linkages can also be represented between stakeholders. Be careful to use the different markers consistently (e.g. thick lines for strong supporting relationship, dotted lines for weak supporting relationship, arrows to represent the direction of influence, double arrows for conflict etc.). The stakeholder map can be more understandable by using different colors or signs to distinguish different stakeholder groups.

Step 5: Verify the map

In the last step you have to verify the stakeholder map with stakeholders themselves. The easiest way is to consult again your key informants and ask their opinion about the map.

Requirements

Requirements		Comments
Data	Data is available x Need to collect some new data (e.g. participatory valuation) Need to collect lots of new data (e.g. valuation based on surveys)	Media and document analysis, key-informant interviews
Type of data	Quantitative x Qualitative	
Expertise and production of knowledge	x Working with researchers within your own field Working with researchers from other fields x Working with non-academic stakeholders	No special expertise is needed to create a stakeholder map, although being familiar with social scientific research methods (e.g. document analysis, interviewing) and concept-mapping or mind-mapping is an advantage.
Software	x Freely available License required Advanced software knowledge required	
Time resources	x Short-term (less than 1 year) Medium-term (1-2 years) Long-term (more than 2 years)	
Economic resources	x Low-demanding (less than 6 PMs) Medium-demanding (6-12 PMs) High-demanding (more than 12 PMs)	13-15 days altogether
Other requirements		

Where do I go for more information?

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For an example please consult the webpage of the The UK Forestry Commision, which visualized the results of their stakeholder analysis by the help of a stakeholder map, and summarized also the process of how the map was created: http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-5XKJM7

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