

A very short introduction

1: Participatory Modelling

e-Bulletin #3



In the interviews that I conducted last week, the word ‘modelling’ meant a lot of different things to different people, so in an attempt to clarify what I mean by modelling in relation to this project I am using this bulletin to give you an introduction to participatory modelling, and some of the benefits it might yield when bringing stakeholders together to explore flood risk in Hebden Bridge.

In this bulletin:

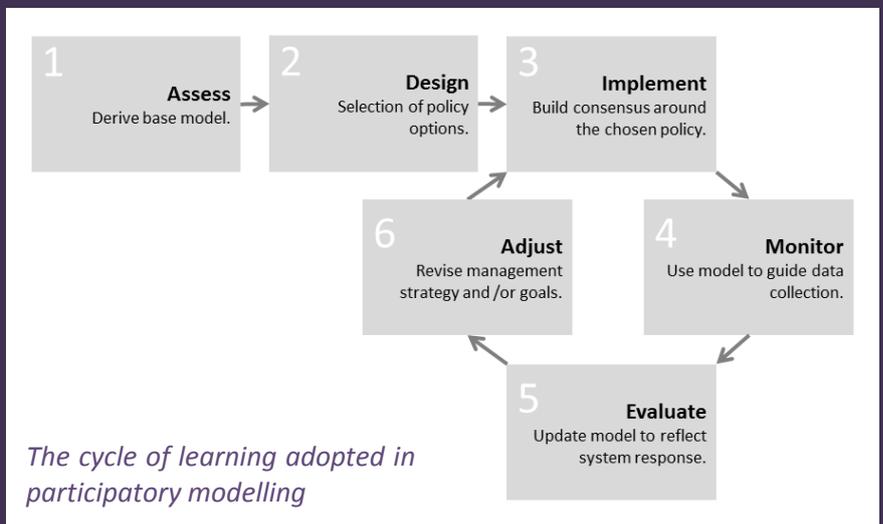
- Participatory modelling
- What’s in it for Hebden?
- Next steps

The possible benefits for Hebden Bridge

1. Engages stakeholders and the public in the modelling process
2. Increases the sharing of knowledge of the environmental system under a range of scenarios
3. Identifies and clarifies impacts of different solutions
4. Supports decision-making, regulation or management
5. Creates a transparent and open process
6. Opens up discussions on gaps in knowledge and information
7. Helps stakeholders to understand the assumptions and limitations of a model

Participatory modelling in a nutshell

It has often been shown that expert-led modelling risks producing outcomes which have very little relevance to those working ‘on the ground’. The majority of modelling is currently developed by the scientific community and remains underused by policy makers, forming a divide between scientific knowledge and what is happening in practice. Participatory modelling aims to take a more ground-up approach, where a primary aim is to involve stakeholders at a much earlier stage in the process, in order that the model helps to answer the right questions. As such the participants *become* the modellers. Participatory modelling further shifts an often linear decision-making process into a cycle of learning (see diagram), which includes idea generation, policy formulation and the monitoring and tracking of change. It is stripped of the complexity that characterises traditional modelling techniques and so allows those with little formal training to grasp the modelling process and feel comfortable to contribute.



Next steps

Thank you to those of you who gave up their time to meet and have a chat with me last week about the project, I felt I got to know everyone a little better, and had some really useful discussions which will help to inform the first modelling workshop.

In the next e-Bulletin I aim to take this theme of participatory modelling further by talking about Bayesian Networks, the particular modelling technique we will trial in Hebden Bridge. Having not been applied to flood risk before, it is a novel and rather exciting pilot project, which I hope you find rewarding.