



Bridging the gap between policy and knowledge
on biodiversity in Europe

Method 7

Joint Fact Finding

Summary of method

Joint Fact-Finding is a process in which separate coalitions of scientists, policy-makers and other stakeholders with differing viewpoints and interests work together to develop data and information, analyse facts and forecasts, and develop common assumptions and informed opinions (van Buuren *et al.* 2007). Finally, they can use the information they have developed to reach decisions together.

A comparatively small group can be involved, but all opposing positions need to be represented.

A similar process called 'Double sided critique' is also considered by Pullin *et al.* (2016).

Key references

Schultz N "Joint Fact-Finding." **Beyond Intractability**. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: July 2003 URL: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/joint-fact-finding>.

McCreary ST, Gamman JK and Brooks B (2001) Refining and testing joint fact-finding for environmental dispute resolution: Ten years of success. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 18(4), 329-348.

Examples of application

Joint fact-finding was used by the Scheldt Estuary Development Project (ProSes), during the development of joint policy for the Scheldt Estuary in Belgium (van Buuren *et al.* 2007).

It was also used with infrastructure stakeholders in Rotterdam, to ascertain if, how and when the transport infrastructure would need to be adapted to climate change (Schenk *et al.* 2016). The process was convened by the municipality of Rotterdam, and funded by the City of Rotterdam and Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment.

Schenk T et al (2016) Joint fact-finding in practice: Review of a collaborative approach to climate-ready infrastructure in Rotterdam. *EJTIR*, 16(1), 273-293.



van Buuren A, Edelenbos J and Klijn EH (2007) Managing knowledge in policy networks. Organising joint fact-finding in the Scheldt Estuary. URL: <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/10165>

Joint Fact Finding

Cost	Resources to run the process, and maybe also to fund new research activity Usually requires a skilled facilitator or mediator
Time required	Usually rather time-consuming; however depends on where in the process it is used and the nature of the question (complex and contested vs. relatively straightforward)
Repeatability	Medium. Outcome depends on personalities involved; process rather than “a method”
Transparency	Creating protected spaces might sometimes be needed, especially in mediation; however, the result and the process can be communicated transparently
Risk of bias	High if not all relevant groups included and the process is not well facilitated
Scale (or level of detail)	Any
Capacity for participation	Can be limited to relevant scientists/stakeholders holding opposing views but can also include elements to involve the general public
Data demand	The process does not require any data at the outset. The subsequent data demands depend on what is requested by participants, and the question to be addressed
Types of knowledge	All
Types of output	Shared understanding and clarity about remaining disagreements Policy learning
Specific expertise required	Qualified facilitators or mediators are essential for success

Strengths

Enables policy learning
Identifies which 'facts' are disputed
Potentially provides a process to reach agreement through co-designed research
Recognises that knowledge isn't 'value-free' and can be interpreted differently by those with different interests
Can build mutual trust and respect among stakeholders

Weaknesses

Managing competing interests can be difficult, and needs highly skilled facilitation
Ability to invest resources can be asymmetric among stakeholders, creating imbalance of 'power'
Requires mutual trust and respect, which cannot always be achieved
Knowledge and learning are held within a small, temporary network and may not be retained in decision-making institutions

