26

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DAY 2 - 15:45 - Assembly Area

No Either-Or: From Platform Conflict to Workable Outcomes - Participation Without Forced Consensus

WORKSHOP

DOMINIK GALLENBERGER - University of Innsbruck

Session recap

At a glance

Dominik Gallenberger, a natural scientist (ecologist) at the University of Innsbruck working on climate and science diplomacy, with a focus on transnational river ecosystems such as the Danube, ran a workshop on moving from polarised conflict to workable outcomes. His research interest is how knowledge and data are translated between science, society, law, politics and the economy, and how vocabulary shapes decisions. After a short introduction, participants chose one of several conflict cases and discussed it as a single group guided by questions. The chosen case was the conflict between a wind energy project and Sámi reindeer herding communities in Norway.

Key messages

- Many environmental decisions involve genuine trade-offs, such as climate protection versus biodiversity or indigenous livelihoods, that cannot be framed as either-or choices.
- The words used in a debate are a form of power: terms like 'climate change' or 'biodiversity loss' can become weapons, and the framing of a project shapes who is heard.
- Scientific results are both measurements of reality and constructed knowledge shaped by tools and conditions, so how results are communicated matters.
- Consultation is not the same as power: it matters whether affected communities can actually influence or veto a decision, and who defines the evidence (for example of fair compensation).
- Conflicts are rarely two-sided: each 'side' contains diverse views, and some interests may be shared, such as concern about climate change.
- Independent, culturally competent mediation and methods such as 'systemic consensus' can help find the least contested solution.

Facts, figures and references

- Case discussed: wind energy development on Sámi reindeer herding land in Norway.
- Concepts raised: legal personhood for rivers (New Zealand), systemic consensus, multiple knowledge systems.
- The facilitator plans to use participants' terms and perspectives in research on how language confers power in decision-making.

Takeaways for the community

- Participation processes on contentious topics should be designed to surface trade-offs and give affected groups real influence, not only consultation.
- Attention to vocabulary and framing should be part of process design, especially across cultures and knowledge systems.
- Building mediation capacity, and methods that minimise resistance rather than maximise approval, can help move from conflict to workable outcomes.