

How power inequalities shape policy conversations, and what we can do about it?

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Power, Health and Social Justice



The public engagement paradox: growing participation and growing inequalities

- Inequalities in health, income, wealth, education... stemming from **inequalities of power and influence?**

unless **corrective measures** are taken participation of all varieties will be skewed in favour of those with higher socioeconomic status and formal education

(Ryfe & Stalsburg 2012)

Inclusion / exclusion

- **External** (i.e. access to the process)
- **Internal** (i.e. influence within the process)

Diversity

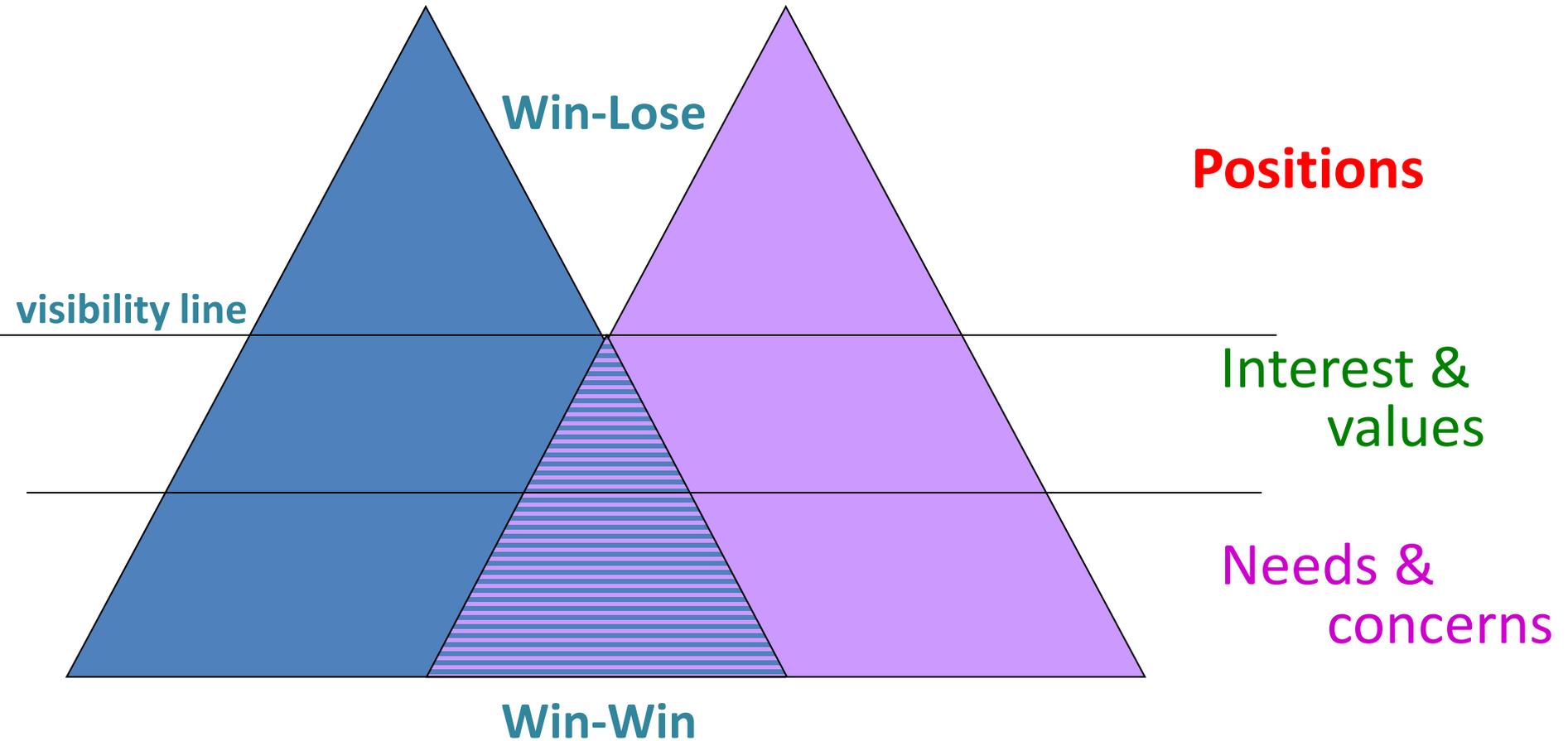
- **Backgrounds** > e.g. gender, income, age, ethnicity ...
(demographic diversity)
- **Perspectives** > e.g. views, values ...
(discursive diversity)
- **Knowledge** > e.g. experience, expertise ...
(epistemic diversity)

common rituals and pitfalls in public/policy conversations

- ✧ Exchanging monologues and/or pre-packaged arguments
- ✧ Dominant voices
- ✧ Posturing / peacocking
- ✧ (Ab)using jargon
- ✧ Spiral of silence and avoidance (+ groupthink)
- ✧ Confrontational exchanges
- ✧ Polarisation and oversimplification



PIN diagram (Andrew Acland)



And what can we do about it?

- Build correctives to power inequalities into policy processes/conversations:
 - **Inclusion:** external and internal
 - **Diversity:** backgrounds, perspectives, knowledges
- Develop **a more participative and deliberative democracy:**
 - ‘deliberative democracy’ is based on the idea that decision-making should be based on reasoned public dialogue and deliberation, where no force other than that of the better argument should prevail (Habermas 1975)
 - The goal of public deliberation is to make democratic institutions responsive to reasons and evidence, not just the power of numbers, money or interests
- Key role of **skilled facilitators** in helping to address power inequalities through process design and careful facilitation
 - Enabling policy conversations underpinned by **principles and practices of public dialogue and deliberation (D+D)**

