

Editorial Note

Going deeper into Water Governance Capacity

One of the objectives of our journal is to boost the knowledge on Water Governance Capacity. The crucial role of water and flood protection is acknowledged for many decades all over the world. The importance of ‘good governance’ is discovered more recently, and is now clearly on the agenda. The focus there however is dominantly on the governance of organisations.

The next step in research is the focus on the ‘governance as a whole’. In a global society with an intense set of interrelations, the quality of ‘good governance’ no longer can be found in the functioning of one single organisation. Good care for river basins, flood protection and water services can only be delivered by an often wide range of different organisations, in the public domain on several levels of government, but also in the (semi-) private domain and in the societal domain by citizens and NGOs.

A systemic approach of governance capacity is crucial and urgently needed. The attempts of the OECD to make assessments of Water Governance Capacity is promising. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that the scientific underpinning of this kind of assessments still can be improved considerably. While there is a long tradition in many countries on the systematic research into the interrelated water systems, there is less research focussing on the governance system dealing with these interrelated water systems.

This special issue systematically tries to fill in this knowledge gap. It focusses on crucial interrelated water systems, like the Great Lakes, crucial for fresh water supply and so many other aims. Crucial for these systems often is that ‘there is nobody in charge’. To say it in another, but essentially in the same way: ‘there are many in charge for parts of the system and focussing on specific aims’. How then, can we identify the governance capacity in these kinds of compounded systems?

A crucial scientific theme here is ‘boundary’ and ‘transboundary’ governance capacity. I am grateful that so many scientist have made the effort to elaborate this theme in more depth, trying to get more grip on the challenge of identifying water governance capacity, using a joint set of concepts. Starting from the rapidly growing literature on collaborative and network governance, the authors identify boundary-spanning and multi-level relations as crucial elements of governance capacity.

The authors show that *formal* organisations and institutions often are crucial for specific tasks and responsibilities in the system and that *informal* arrangements are often used to fulfil the need of boundary crossing, mainly building on trust and developing reciprocity. The understanding that governance capacity is generated not only through the

capacity of governmental organisations but also through boundary crossing capacity and joint action. This combination of government and governance is crucial in our search for understanding and improving governance capacity.

Last, but not least the authors in this special issue elaborate for interesting indicators for governance capacity. Compliance is the first one focussing on mechanisms in place that encourage joint care for the interrelated water systems. The authors elaborate a wide choice of hard and soft mechanisms. Secondly, they elaborate the intensity of trans-boundary actions. Showing that this can range from information sharing to integration. Thirdly, they deal with the strength of the governance over time. Is the set of arrangements stable and able to recover from a threat or to adopt to new situations and threats (resilience). This concept of resilience, borrowed from the socio-ecological system literature, makes it possible to look at governance systems as living systems able to adapt. This approach is in my perspective crucial for understanding governance capacity. Legitimacy is the fourth crucial indicator for governance capacity. If the care for water systems is spread amongst a variety of organisations and institutions, as is the case in the case analysis in this special issue, the whole network has to be perceived as legitimate and has to achieve a sufficient level of transparency to elected officials as well as to 'the public'. The authors take a good step towards more understanding of the importance and appearance of this indicator.

Finally, the authors discover the interrelations between indicators. It seems as if a sufficient level of quality of all indicators has a self-propelling positive impact on the other indicators, while an insufficient level, can lead to an erosion of the other three. Informal cross-boundary networks need special attention in governance capacity research. This special issue opens up directions for further research on governance capacity.

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