

Collaborative Governance in Dutch Flood Risk Management: An Historical Analysis

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Abstract : The safety standards for flood protection in the Netherlands have been revised recently. It is expected that all major flood-protection structures will have to be reinforced to meet the new standards. The Dutch Flood Protection Programme aims at accomplishing this task through innovative integrated projects such as construction of multi-functional flood defenses. In these projects, flood safety purposes will be combined with spatial planning, nature development, emergency management or other sectoral objectives. Therefore, implementation of dike reinforcement projects requires early involvement and collaboration between public and private sectors, different governmental actors and agencies. The development and implementation of such integrated projects has been an issue in Dutch flood risk management since long. Therefore, this article analyses how cross-sector collaboration within flood risk governance in the Netherlands has evolved over time, and how this development can be explained. The integrative framework for collaborative governance is applied as an analytical tool to map external factors framing possibilities as well as constraints for cross-sector collaboration in Dutch flood risk domain. Supported by an extensive document and literature analysis, the paper offers insights on how the system context and different drivers changing over time either promoted or hindered cross-sector collaboration between flood protection sector, urban development, nature conservation or any other sector involved in flood risk governance. The system context refers to the multi-layered and interrelated suite of conditions that influence the formation and performance of complex governance systems, such as collaborative governance regimes, whereas the drivers initiate and enable the overall process of collaboration. In addition, by applying a method of process tracing we identify a causal and chronological chain of events shaping cross-sectoral interaction in Dutch flood risk management. Our results indicate that in order to evaluate the performance of complex governance systems, it is important to firstly study the system context that shapes it. Clear understanding of the system conditions and drivers for collaboration gives insight into the possibilities of and constraints for effective performance of complex governance systems. The performance of the governance system is affected by the system conditions, while at the same time the governance system can also change the system conditions. Our results show that the sequence of changes within the system conditions and drivers over time affect how cross-sector interaction in Dutch flood risk governance system happens now. Moreover, we have traced the potential of this governance system to shape and change the system context.

Keywords : collaborative governance, cross-sector interaction, flood risk management, the Netherlands

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