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Go with the flow?

On the development of transboundary policy of climate change adaptation in the Rhine basin

Recommendations on the Governance of Climate Adaptation, Knowledge for Climate, Deliverable 5.2.7

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Summary conclusions deliverable 1:

For deliverable 1 a preliminary comparative analysis of climate adaptation policy in the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia has been performed, using the policy arrangement approach. General results are presented in table 1. In this analysis, several differences and similarities have become visible. There are significant differences in actor constellation and applicable rules. In the Netherlands flood protection is considered a national task with national legal standards, whereas in Germany it is considered an individual responsibility, supported by governments. In the Netherlands there is a centrally lead management style, while in North Rhine-Westphalia the different administrative authorities operate parallel (Becker & Raadgever, 2006). Both parties levee funding through regional taxes, however, Dutch actors can seemingly more easily obtain additional funding for climate adaptation policy, especially flood protection, through the national government.

Perception of flood risk is higher in the Netherlands than in North Rhine-Westphalia. The current protection standards in the Netherlands are far higher than those in North Rhine-Westphalia, and the Dutch Delta Commission advises raising these standards by tenfold (Becker & Raadgever, 2006). These differences emanate through the (national) adaptation strategies, adopted by both the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia. The latter has adopted a trade-off approach, balancing the different interests of the sectors involved in climate adaptation. The German national adaptation strategy distinguishes thirteen sectors that are involved in climate change adaptation, and proposes a trade-off of risks between different sectors like water, nature and agriculture.

In the Dutch adaptation strategy however, there is a protection-approach where safety takes prevalence over everything else ('dominant interest-approach'), although there are some indications present of a subtle movement towards a more trade-off oriented approach, albeit this is still at a very early stage.

Dimension	Characteristic	Netherlands	North Rhine-Westphalia
Actors	Actor constellation	Territorially/functionally decentralized	Territorially decentralized
	Dominant actors	National government, Water authorities	Bund, Ländesregierung, Regierungsbezirke
Resources	Knowledge development	Water-related primary, other sectors secondary	Related to thirteen sectors
	Epistemic community	Multidisciplinary scientific and weather service	Multidisciplinary scientific and weather service
	Responsibilities	Public	Public, and partially private
	Funding	National government	National government
Rules of the game	Legislation	Water Act	Federal Water Act, Wassergesetz
	Material norms	National level	Regional and local levels
	Procedures	National level	Regional and local
Discourses	Policy strategies	Middle and long term, middle scenario	Short term, no scenario chosen
	Policy goals (primary)	Integration of sectors, transparency, awareness, knowledge development	Integration of actors, reducing uncertainties, knowledge development

	Policy concepts	“Living with water”; “Room for the River”	“Room for the River”
	Policy style	Predominantly top-down, risk reduction with elements of trade off-approach	Predominantly bottom-up, risk management, trade off-approach

Table 1: Characteristics of climate adaptation policy

Recommendations for further research

As we have found in the preliminary analysis of the policy arrangements on climate adaptation, there are important differences in risk strategies and risk perception as well as in administrative structures and management styles (trade-off approach vs. dominant interest) in the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia. Further research should disclose to what extent these differences form barriers for continued coordination, cooperation and integration of climate adaptation policy. Through interviews with experts insights in the specific implications for (regional) policy can be gained. Another focus of further research should be to investigate the actual and practical process of setting of goals and measures in North Rhine-Westphalia, including programs, norms and standards in flood risk management, drought policy and river basin ecology, and their outcomes. These can then be compared to their counterparts in the Netherlands. Moreover, the impact of these differences on international cooperation must be further assessed.

Examples of questions that should be elaborated upon for this research are as follows. The differences between the trade-off approach (in North Rhine-Westphalia) and a dominant interest-approach (in the Netherlands) cause differences in water management priorities. The question is to what extent this specific difference accounts for differences in proposed measures in river basins. More specifically: does a more “multi-sector” perspective like in North Rhine-Westphalia account for different programs and measures as opposed to a dominant interest-approach such as in the Netherlands? Do differences in water management styles also affect the appropriate risk strategies and how are these strategies related to specific policy styles? And what barriers to transboundary policy are formed by these differences? We would also recommend further investigation into the societal and administrative support for new adaptation policy. Both parties propose fostering more societal support for adaptation policy, but their approaches may vary in associated measures.

The research should especially focus on the sub-national level and the involved actors. Deliverable 2 will shift the focus of the research to the normative principles. The results from deliverable 1 also have implications for its successor, begging the question whether these differences in policy style color normative principles related to cooperation and climate adaptation, both in formal and practical ways of doing.

Recommendations Dutch Adaptation Policy

From the research for deliverable 1 it has become clear that the actors involved in climate adaptation policy in the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia have different perceptions of the related issues and measures to deal therewith. When engaging in any form of transboundary governance it is first and foremost important to consider these differences. Parties can then try to find

ways to either deal with these differences or try to work around them. Politically sensitive issues are best left out of the negotiations, or at least left out in the initial stage of developing transboundary policy, especially those negotiations that concern adaptation measures. Rather, negotiations should focus on issues that form a common ground for both parties, then gradually build towards issue were parties' opinion are more divergent, to reduce this divergence.

The Dutch climate adaptation policy has been up until now primarily a domestic affair. This is understandable from an organizational and institutional perspective. But such a domestically oriented approach can propose risks to flood protection by being too limited, as water policy from neighboring states influences Dutch water quantity and quality, and cross border climate adaptation measures may be more economically efficient than domestic measures. Te Linde et al. (2008; 2010; 2011) have discussed the difficulties for flood risk strategies of domestic approaches ti climate adaptation policy in transboundary river basins. Also, Dutch climate adaptation has been primarily concerned with flood protection, and given the recommendations from the Delta commission, will continue to be such in the future, despite the indications of incorporating some aspects of the trade off-approach. Adaptation policy involves more interests than flood protection, and is also connected to broader territorial policy. Both parties strive for a more integrated approach to climate adaptation policy. What both parties define as an 'integrated approach', and their aspired extent of integration may be key to increasing transboundary policy. Considering transboundary climate adaptation policy is still in an early stage of development, it will greatly benefit from a mutual exchange of experiences. Existing organizations like the Delta Commission, the International Commission for Protection of the Rhine and the Dutch-German Arbeitsgruppe Hochwasser can be beneficial in this exchange of knowledge. The Delta Commission can connect with these international entities to bring a more transboundary dimension to its propose policies by engaging in international coordination.

Literature

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