



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Journal of Environmental Management

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jenvman](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jenvman)

Research article

## Evaluating governance for sustainable development – Insights from experiences in the Dutch fen landscape

Roos M. den Uyl <sup>a,\*</sup>, Peter P.J. Driessen <sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Centre for Rural Policy Research, Department of Politics, University of Exeter, Rennes Drive EX4 4RJ, Exeter, Devon, UK<sup>b</sup> Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 4 March 2015

Received in revised form

30 June 2015

Accepted 14 August 2015

Available online 28 August 2015

## Keywords:

Governance

Sustainable development

Adaptive management

Transition management

Payments for environmental services

PES

Equity

Democracy

Legitimacy

Uncertainties

Scale

Dutch fen landscape

## ABSTRACT

Prominent strands of discussion in the literature on governance for sustainable development debate how change can be induced to enhance sustainability, and how to evaluate the interventions aimed at prompting such change. Strikingly, there are few contributions about how prominent ideas of inducing change deal with multiple governance criteria for pursuing sustainable development. Moreover, the way ideas about inducing change relate to criteria of governance for sustainable development is not yet studied in an empirical context. This paper therefore comparatively analyses how three prominent modes of sustainable development governance – adaptive management, transition management and payments for environmental services – relate to a set of five prominent criteria reported in the literature, namely: equity, democracy, legitimacy, the handling of scale issues and the handling of uncertainty issues. It finds that the academic debates on these three modes address these criteria with varying attention and rather fragmented, while in the empirical setting of the Dutch fen landscape several aspects relating to the studied criteria were present and substantially influenced the functioning of the three modes of sustainable development. Together, the analysis of the literature debate and the empirical data are able to show that a narrow evaluation perspective may fail to diagnose and capture relevant struggles and complexities coming along with governance for sustainable development relevant issues. The study shows that in order to advance our understanding of governance for sustainable development, it is indeed important to include multiple criteria in studying these modes. Moreover, the study shows the importance of including empirical experiences which manifest when different modes for sustainable development are applied in real-world settings.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable development is still “increasingly being presented as a pathway to all that is good and desirable in society” (Holden et al., 2014, p. 130). At the same time, intervention in current societal and biophysical processes to govern the move toward sustainable development can be characterised as complex (Duit et al., 2010) leading to partly unknown outcomes with various implications for affected groups (Meadowcroft, 2007). Therefore, various criteria are articulated as important by actors involved in, and by researchers studying, governing for sustainable development. Prominently debated ideas about how to evaluate governance for

sustainable development tend to be studied individually and include criteria such as equity (WCED, 1987), democracy (Meadowcroft, 2007), legitimacy (Backstrand, 2006), handling scale issues (Lebel et al., 2005) and handling uncertainty issues (Lafferty, 2004). In parallel, inducing change is prominently debated in sustainable development literature by means of adaptive management, transition management and payments for environmental services (e.g. McCauley, 2006; Voss et al., 2007; Kelsey Jack et al., 2008; Jordan, 2009; Olsson et al., 2008; Smith and Stirling, 2010; Armitage et al., 2011; Kinzig et al., 2011; Driessen et al., 2012). Yet surprisingly few contributions have been made about how prominent ideas of inducing change relate to popular sustainable development governance criteria.

This paper studies prominent ideas of governing change towards sustainable development (in terms of adaptive management, transition management and payments for environmental services) in relation to prominent ideas of what ‘good’ governance for

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [r.m.den-uyt@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:r.m.den-uyt@exeter.ac.uk) (R.M. den Uyl), [p.driessen@uu.nl](mailto:p.driessen@uu.nl) (P.P.J. Driessen).

sustainable development should look like (i.e. in terms of attention for equity, democracy, legitimacy, handling scale issues, and handling uncertainty issues). Here, the main research aim is to enhance our understanding of governance for sustainable development, by assessing how prominent strategies for sustainable development address criteria of governance for sustainable development, both in literature and in practical interventions in the Dutch landscape. The next section elaborates on the criteria and modes studied, and explains the research approach applied. Then the observations from the literature study and the empirical analysis are presented. Finally, we discuss the implications of these observations in the context of understanding governance for sustainable development.

## 2. About evaluating governance for sustainable development

There are only a few studies that take a broad perspective when evaluating modes of governance for sustainable development. However, narrowing a perspective down to a single aspect or criterion or to a strategy's own priorities may lead to missing out explanatory factors. Various frameworks proposed to study modes of governance for sustainable development (Van Zeijl-Rozema et al., 2008; Hysing, 2009; Arnouts et al., 2012; Driessen et al., 2012) do not include all of the prominent criteria identified as important in the evaluation of governance for sustainable development. Only a few authors actually emphasise the importance of taking a wider perspective when evaluating sustainable development governance. According to them, evaluation against a single criterion would be insufficient to reveal issues encountered both in theory and in practice (Adger et al., 2003, 2005; Lafferty, 2004; Jordan, 2008). Adger et al. (2003, 2005) advocate a broad analysis of environmental decision-making to cover efficiency, equity, effectiveness and legitimacy. Biermann et al. (2010) propose a broad perspective by means of a set of five interdependent analytical problem categories to be included in studying sustainable development governance: architecture, agency, adaptiveness, accountability, and allocation and access (Biermann et al., 2010). It is possible that no one mode of governance could entirely fulfil such a set of multiple criteria. Jordan (2008) observes that elements which indicate and contribute to governance for sustainable development “can and often do conflict sharply with one another” (p. 20). The application of multiple criteria may therefore involve trade-offs (cf. Press, 1994; Jordan, 2008; Jordan et al., 2010; Hildingsson et al., 2012). Analysis of instances of neglecting criteria may help to clarify and explain conflicts and tradeoffs.

The evaluation of governance for sustainable development is of course a normative exercise. Understanding initiatives to enhance sustainable development inherently implies studying: how such interventions are decided upon, by whom and why. A consideration of criteria to evaluate interventions aimed at sustainable development, could lead to the idea of proposing conditions, and subsequently, the suggestion of a blueprint for action. Here, we rather consider these criteria as expressions of what researchers have found to be relevant in association to governance for sustainable development. Various researchers have brought these criteria forward, because intervening for sustainable development is inherently normative. We do not have a specific or a priori preference for one or more of these criteria. We investigate how these criteria are addressed in the discussions on the three prominent modes of governance. By studying how these criteria are addressed in empirical practices, we aim to further reflect on the relevance and usefulness of these criteria in order to understand attempts to govern for sustainable development.

This study includes criteria which are 1) each individually argued to be crucial in evaluating governance for sustainable

development; and 2) included in the sets as argued by Adger et al. (2003) and by Biermann et al. (2010). This leads to inclusion of equity, democracy, legitimacy and handling scale issues. Although not explicitly included in the sets as argued by Adger et al. (2003) and Biermann et al. (2010), handling uncertainty issues is also included here, as it is also advocated in the literature as an important issue that influences sustainable development governance (Meadowcroft, 2002, 2007; Lafferty, 2004). Governance for sustainable development involves a capacity to intervene in the distribution of natural resources, while dealing with numerous uncertainties, unpredictable responses and the inability to know all the needs of the current and future generations. Handling of uncertainty issues is argued to be important for evaluation of governance for sustainable government because it plays a major role in anticipating possible knowledge gaps, vulnerabilities and risks (Meadowcroft, 2002, 2007; Lafferty, 2004). These five criteria of governance for sustainable development are further outlined below, and summarised in Table 1. It may be noted that effectiveness is not included in the present study, although it is identified by some as a criterion for evaluating governance for sustainable development. Effectiveness refers to an intervention attaining its goal as a result of a deliberate intention to do so (Adger et al., 2003; Backstrand, 2006; Huitema et al., 2011). Identifying a specific causal relationship between an intervention and attainment of its intended impact is very complex and requires a research design that lies beyond the scope of the present study. The present study does, however, include an assessment of how the three modes are oriented towards aspects of sustainable development in the studied practices.

### 2.1. Criteria

Firstly, the WCED (1987) identified *equity* as pivotal to sustainable development. Equity has been further studied in the context of sustainable development by various authors (Coenen and Halfacre, 2003; Ikeme, 2003; Thomas and Twyman, 2005). The examination of equity to evaluate governance for sustainable government reveals firstly that it comprises distributional features in form of intergenerational and spatial allocation of negative impacts, hazards or threats, and of positive impacts, benefits and access to resources (WCED, 1987; Adger et al., 2003; Biermann et al., 2010). Secondly, equity refers to procedural features, particularly to the ideal of making unbiased decisions and applying regulations without discrimination (Syme et al., 1999; Coenen and Halfacre, 2003; Lee and Jamal, 2008). In assessing intergenerational and spatial distribution impacts and thus whether decision-making is considered as equitable, this study uses Stone (2001) conception: equity occurs when distributions are regarded as fair by involved and affected groups (even though distributions may include both uniformity and unevenness) and when decision-making is regarded as unbiased by involved and affected groups (Stone, 2001).

When democratic processes lead to a selection of decision-makers who believe that sustainable development is important, set normative goals, intend to steer, and determine priorities and possible sacrifices. *Democracy* is included here with the understanding that representation and participation contributes to consensus, public support and improving the quality and outcomes of decision-making for sustainable development (Lafferty, 2004; Meadowcroft, 2007; Rauschmayer et al., 2009). Therefore, related decisions should be representative and made by: leading and non-leading groups; governmental and non-governmental groups; and groups that would profit and that would lose from such decisions (Davies, 2002; Meadowcroft, 2002; Rauschmayer et al., 2009). In terms of democracy, several scholars propose representation and participation in decision-making as aspects to evaluate governance

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1055527>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1055527>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)