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Participatory integrated coastal zone management in Vietnam: Theory versus practice case study: Thua Thien Hue province

Bieke Abelshausen *, **Tom Vanwing**, **Wolfgang Jacquet**

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2 Pleinlaan, Brussels 1000, Belgium

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KEYWORD

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Abstract Sustainable management processes have undergone a shift from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach. This bottom-up approach allows for a more apprehensive inclusion of stakeholders. In traditional hierarchical societies a combination of both is considered more desirable. This combination is described as a participatory approach that allows for bi-directional knowledge sharing. The question asked is whether this theoretical approach is viable in practice, taking into account different social, political and cultural influences. Qualitative research in bi-directional knowledge sharing and stakeholder participation in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) was conducted in the provinces of Thua Thien Hue in Vietnam. Qualitative research was conducted using coding analysis. This analysis showed that in practice a great reluctance for change affects the implementation of ICZM. This reluctance is directly related to the level of power of stakeholders and the level to which stakeholders are embedded in the top-down tradition. Two contradicting results emerged. On the one hand the theoretical understanding of participatory ICZM is highest when reluctance for change is highest and vice versa. On the other hand a decrease in power results in an increase of the sustainability of the implementation of participatory ICZM. This research concluded that a 'platform or structure' is essential to achieve sustainability. In the Vietnamese context the tradition of power results in a platform which is both formal and non-formal. A non-formal platform is needed to create social capital, whereas a formal platform will limit the risk for arbitrariness and allow for institutionalisation.

Introduction

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) is defined as the dynamic process for the sustainable management and use of coastal zones (Douvere, 2008) and their impacts on both marine and land parts (European Union, 2009). As defined by Cicin-Sain (1993), 'ICZM is a process that recognises the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32 2 6292624; fax: +32 2 3292623.
E-mail addresses: babelsha@vub.ac.be (B. Abelshausen), tvwing@vub.ac.be (T. Vanwing).
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distinctive character of the coastal zone – itself a valuable resource – for current and future generations'. ICZM in specific and Water Resource Management aspire a shift from a top-down approach towards a more participatory approach (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2008).

In theory this new approach aims to include stakeholders as co-designers and co-decision makers. Moreover, in theory it should allow ICZM to move from a one-directional management approach to an approach which not only allows for bi-directional knowledge sharing (Roux et al., 2006; Soncini-Sessa et al., 2007) but which demands co-management (participatory resource management). It is the hypothesis of this research that participation should not be implemented as a methodology for sustainability; participation and knowledge sharing are intrinsic conditions for sustainability in ICZM. With this research an attempt is made to determine on the one hand, whether this is a valid hypothesis in the context of Vietnam and on the other hand how this theory can be translated into practise in the contextual specificity of Vietnam.

In the initial phase of the research data is collected on the current, past and future programmes and policies on ICZM in Vietnam. Specifically, the research examined the inclusion of participation and bi-directional knowledge sharing and the interpretations given to and the understanding of the value of these concepts. Participatory resource management (PRM) in Vietnam is best understood as the concept of co-management. Co-management is defined as a knowledge partnership in which the sharing of power and responsibilities between governmental stakeholders and local resource users in a management process allow for such partnerships to come about (Berkes, 2008). PRM as a methodology was brought into relation with the designers of policies and programmes and its end-users. Each programme and policy was assessed both in its development and implementation phase allowing for further insight in the reasoning behind a use or lack of use of PRM in ICZM. The collection of data on PRM is divided in PRM-participation and bi-directional knowledge sharing; this division is however not absolute as PRM aspires bi-directional knowledge sharing. PRM or co-management is characterised by pluralism, communication and negotiation, transactive decision making, social learning and shared action/commitment (Plummer and Fitzgibbon, 2004). Bi-directional knowledge sharing is expressed by these different characteristics as such that it includes the sharing of information, decision making through dialogue, and mutual gaining of knowledge (Plummer and Fitzgibbon, 2004). Bi-directional knowledge sharing does not imply that all knowledge, to its full extend, will be shared in every setting or actions. Knowledge will be shared in the manner that is deemed appropriate according to the social and cultural contextual setting and the desires of the involved stakeholders. This article will illustrate that in order to achieve sustainability; participation and bi-directional knowledge sharing are as intrinsic to ICZM as is the coast.

Material and methods: qualitative research

Data collection

The findings presented in this paper are based on a 2 year inductive qualitative research conducted in the context of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The geographical scope was placed on the province of Thua Thien Hue (TTH). Thua Thien Hue province has a population of around 1,200,000 with a population density of 225 person/km^2. There are two main economic sectors in Thua Thien Hue; agriculture–forestry–fishery and industry–construction of which the latter has approximately 1.5 times the value of agriculture–forestry–fishery. Agriculture accounts for 61.1%, fishery 30.6% and forestry only 8.2%. (NCAP, 2008). Fishery activities include catching on sea and rivers, ponds, farming of shrimp, fish and other aqua-products (NCAP, 2008). Data was collected via semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in Vietnamese with the aid of a translator. Interviewees were identified via literature review and were contacted with the aid of the Integrated Management of Lagoon Activities (IMOLA) programme. In order to assess ICZM programmes and policies 14 different stakeholders were interviewed (Table 1). The stakeholders consist of national and local government institutions, mass organisations, research institutes and universities, and representatives of ICZM programmes.

Instrument

Generative questions were developed for the purpose of semi-structured interviews. These questions were developed to aid but not to limit the research (Trochim, 2011). They provided insight in the function of the interviewee in his/her organisation/institute and the position this organisation/institute occupies in ICZM. Furthermore, insight was gained into whether PRM and bi-directional knowledge sharing are considered as important aspects of ICZM. Detailed information was obtained on the view of the specific organisation/institute and their view on other stakeholders. Open questions provided in-depth understanding of the challenges and needs concerning participatory ICZM in the future.

Data analysis

Manual (i.e. paper and pencil) (Strauss, 1987) coding as an inductive approach was used in this research to allow for the emergence of frequent, dominant or significant themes (Thomas, 2006). Coding is a method of analysing qualitative data (Lofland et al., 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998) with the aim of managing and organizing qualitative data and allowing for the identification of relationships between theories and case-by-case comparisons. (Gibbs, 2007). Coding was conducted in a cyclical process with the one initial coding analysis cycle (Abelshausen, 2010) and two recoding cycles. The coding structure which resulted from this initial analysis (Abelshausen, 2010) was created in chronological order which is in correspondence with the research objectives. This because ICZM programmes and policies were researched in their present, past and future form. The second and third cycles are based on the research hypothesis allowing for a more in depth analysis, independent of chronological order. Initially, identification was made of upper level categories (i.e. labels) based on the research objectives. Lower level labels were derived from multiple analyses of the raw data.

Fig. 1 provides an overview of the final qualitative coding analysis structure. The process which led to this final coding analysis structure consisted of three intermediate steps. Each