



Collaborative governance and environmental authority for adaptive flood risk: recreating sustainable coastal cities

Theme 3: pathways towards urban modes that support regenerative sustainability



Maria Francesch-Huidobro*

Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, Academic Building 1, B7518 Hong Kong, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 May 2014

Received in revised form

28 April 2015

Accepted 11 May 2015

Available online 18 May 2015

Keywords:

Collaborative governance

Environmental authority

Regenerative sustainability

Adaptive flood risk management

Delta cities

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the conceptual and practical linkages between climate change governance, diversity of authority and regenerative sustainability. It empirically explains such linkages in the context of adaptive flood risk management in the delta cities of Rotterdam and Hong Kong which are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It addresses three questions: 1) if what is being witnessed is a transition to more inclusive, engaging, empowering, place-sensitive modes of urban climate governance gaining authority to deliver climate policy, how should these transitions be *conceptualized and analysed*? 2) how do transitions towards collaborative governance and regenerative sustainability and the deployment of authority in these transitions serve *manage the risk of flooding* in places with different cultural and climatic settings? 3) what do different cases demonstrate in terms of the *practical pathways and examples of implementation of regenerative sustainability*? Conceptual and empirical understandings are needed to assess whether these new, flexible forms of governance might ultimately challenge state-centred authority in the policy responses to climate change. This paper reveals that new governance systems are diluting, not supplanting, state authority.

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1. Introduction

Scholars who identify *collaborative governance* as an explanatory concept in contemporary political science recognise that systems of collaborative governance involve the government in a steering (enabling/facilitating) capacity, while the private, commercial and not-for-profit sectors serve in a rowing (driving/executive) capacity (Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1997; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing et al. 2012). Many argue that these 'new' systems of governance are also *gaining the authority* to create policy through an array of public and private actors (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Hall and Biersteker, 2002; Conca, 2005; Biermann and Pattberg, 2008; Castree, 2008). In the environmental policy sector, scholars' thinking is that given the complexity of the real world, these systems of governance and sources of decision-making authority are more likely to deliver more efficient solutions in the provision of collective goods and

management of environmental resources than the state acting alone (Cashore, 2002: 513–14; Mol, 2007; Pahl-Woslt, 2009). Their thinking resonates with the regenerative sustainability paradigm underpinning the vision of this Special Volume. *Regenerative sustainability* encourages a shift in thinking from envisioning solutions to urban development problems in isolation to working with them from a systems' perspective, i.e., holistically and in an integrated manner (Cole, 20012; Du Plessis, 2012). Like the collaborative governance concept, regenerative sustainability supports pathways towards urban modes that 1) engage and empower people to recreate urban areas and manage urban problems through a regenerative, integrated approach; 2) bring this integrated approach to the reconceptualisation of relationships among human systems: technological, ecological, economic, social and political (Cole, 20012; Du Plessis, 2012).

Nowhere is this thinking more relevant than in the governance of climate change. At the international level, the climate regime has largely adopted a 'gloom and doom' narrative while helplessly abdicating its authority in the wake of recent international negotiation failures such as the United Nations Conferences on Climate

* Tel.: +852 344 27237.

E-mail addresses: fmariade@cityu.edu.hk, maria.francesch@cityu.edu.hk.

Change (UNCCC) in Copenhagen (2009), Cancun (2010) and Durban and Doha (2011, 2012) in which too many competing agendas were on the table. At the national level, governments also face a deficit of political authority to enforce policy owing to a lack of trust on the part of their electorates exacerbated by an ongoing financial crisis, the pressures posed by global interdependence, and an ideological shift towards seeing the state as an enabler rather than a driver of climate governance. Accordingly, state-based actors in cities are increasingly partnering with market-based and people-based municipal actors to govern climate policy and formulate action plans.

If what is being witnessed is a transition to more inclusive, engaging, empowering, place-sensitive modes of urban climate governance gaining authority to deliver climate policy, how should these transitions be *conceptualized and analysed*?; how do transitions towards collaborative governance and regenerative sustainability, and the way authority is deployed in these transitions help *manage the risk of flooding* (a case in point) in places with different cultural and climatic settings?; what do different cases demonstrate in terms of the *practical pathways and examples of implementation* of regenerative sustainability?

Using Rotterdam and Hong Kong as case studies, this paper documents how the concepts of collaborative governance, authority and regenerative sustainability may be brought together into an integrated framework to explain how pathways to regenerative ideas are currently evidenced in practice. To begin, the literature review (Section 2) discusses relevant work on collaborative governance, authority and regenerative sustainability as it relates to the emergence of adaptive, regenerative systems of environmental governance. This is followed by a discussion on the authority to enable decision making and the sources of that authority (Section 3). Next (Section 4) is an explanation of the data sources and how the methodological approach is linked to the conceptual framework. Two cases studies (Section 5) demonstrate the differing roles and relationships of sources of climate authority and the factors mediating collaborative governance-type authority for adaptive flood risk management towards regenerative sustainability. The conclusion (Section 6) highlights the importance of devising innovative conceptualizations in conducting empirical and theoretical research on the emergence of governance systems and the diversity of environmental authority for regenerative sustainability as it is increasingly observed today.

The assumptions upon which the structure and logic of the paper is based are, first, that the ability to put in place flood risk management program depends on flexible, adaptive and integrated systems of governance with the authority to implement policies and programs; second, that these flexible, adaptive forms of governance are diluting but not supplanting state authority; and, third, that climate change adaptation benefits from state and non-state actors engagement at an early stage of the planning process and from the establishment of institutions for coordinating that process. Ultimately, the paper queries the ways that climate change adaptation represents a key arena in which different forms of public, private and people governance are constituted, diversified and contested; and the extent to which deploying different forms of authority is facilitating systemic, regenerative change in urban political economies.

2. Literature review

There is a burgeoning literature on the governance of climate adaptation at the national and regional levels (see for example, May and Plummer, 2011; Naess et al. 2011) but scholarship on the city-level in relation to flood risk remains very scarce (Van Nieuwaal et al. 2009; Aerts et al. 2011; Ward et al. 2013; Chan et al. 2013;

Stead, 2014). While none of this literature deals with the roles and relationships of the various sources of climate adaptation authority, Van Nieuwaal's primer (2009), argues that given the global, interdependent, cross-geographical, and cross-sectoral nature of adaptation problems, there is a need to recognise multi-level institutional structures and sources of authority, multiple geographical sites of risk (for example, catchment scale; see also Ward, 2013), multiple-actors wanting to participate and engage, and the need for transparency and openness regarding responsibilities and tasks to be allocated.

2.1. Making the conceptual link

Few studies recognise the link between *collaborative governance* - the arena of collective decision-making in institutionalised settings in which various actors engage in power struggles (Torfing et al. 2012: 55; Emerson et al. 2012), and *authority* - the process through which the legitimate power to change [environmental] practices implies the application of the means through which social organization is achieved (Cashore, 2002; Carter, 2007; Francesch-Huidobro, 2012a). Recognising this link is crucial in order to understand what happens inside governance arenas and to grasp their mutual relations to their social and political context in the process of *regenerative sustainable development*.

2.2. Collaborative governance to regenerate

Collaborative governance is 'an arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets' (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 544). Emerson et al. (2012: 2–3) provide an alternative definition of collaborative governance as 'the process and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic sphere to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'.

Thus, collaborative governance is not limited to unidirectional engagement initiated only by public actors. It also includes mutual engagement between public and private actors. 'Multi-partner governance' is emphasised in this alternative definition, which covers partnerships, joined-up government and hybrid arrangements, established among and within the state, the private sector, civil society and the community (Emerson et al., 2012: 3). This extends the scope of collaborative governance to both *intergovernmental* collaborative structures and *interagency* collaboration. The former refers to collaboration among actors on the vertically arranged governance levels, whereas the latter denotes actors at the same governance level collaborating on specific policy issues.

Emerson et al. (2012) also distinguish the 'drivers' of collaborative governance from its 'system context', while Ansell and Gash (2008) consider both as the 'starting conditions' leading to the development of collaborative governance arrangements. By adding the 'drivers' to their explanation of collaborative governance, direct causal variables are identified. These provide greater insights into the scope of initial engagement during the collaborative process beyond mere 'face-to-face dialogue', as identified by Ansell and Gash (2007). Although face-to-face dialogue is advantageous at the outset, it is not always essential particularly when conflict may be low and shared values and objectives surface (Emerson et al. 2012:10).

In addition to trust, mutual understanding and shared commitment, Emerson et al. (2012) add 'internal legitimacy' as a component of collaborative governance. They define internal

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