



Institutional development for stakeholder participation in local water management—An analysis of two Swedish catchments



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 December 2013

Received in revised form 7 October 2014

Accepted 14 November 2014

Keywords:

Stakeholder participation

Water management

EU Water Framework Directive

Institutional arrangements

Adaptive management

ABSTRACT

The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) promotes a change of European water governance towards increased stakeholder participation and water management according to river basins. To implement the WFD, new institutional arrangements are needed. In Sweden, water councils have been established on the local level to meet the requirements of the WFD of a broad stakeholder involvement in water management. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the knowledge on institutional arrangements for meeting the WFD requirements on stakeholder participation in local water management. A case study of two adjacent catchments in southern Sweden is presented to analyze how institutional legacy affect organizational arrangements and stakeholder participation. Based on literature studies and semi-structure interviews, the case study is analyzed with special emphasis on the scope, the organization and the activities in practical water management in catchments. The result shows different institutional arrangements for water management, despite similarities of the catchments' characteristics and the regulatory framework on national and regional level.

The study identifies four important factors regarding institutional arrangements for water councils and local stakeholder participation in water management. Firstly, an organization involving key stakeholders that are committed to the scope and goals of the water council and willing to provide resources for the implementation of the planned activities. Secondly, institutional arrangements that include a willingness for flexibility and awareness of the need to include the most relevant stakeholders. Thirdly, a clear leadership to drive the process to realize the specific goals and assess the outcome. Fourthly, voluntary involvement of farmers to take part in the implementation of the measures and contribute with knowledge and experiences regarding local conditions.

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Introduction

The ecological status of water is threatened around the globe due to increasing pressure from human activities and inadequate management. However, the increased awareness of social–ecological systems such as water systems, as changeable, non-linear and complex (Levin, 1998; Holling et al., 2002) calls for more ecosystem-based, participatory and flexible approaches (Saleth and Dinar, 2000; Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007; Hammer et al., 2011). In Europe, the EU Water Framework Directive, adopted in 2000 (WFD) (Directive, 2000/60/EC) is a major factor in changing water governance. One significant WFD feature is that water should be managed according to hydrological boundaries in large river

basins districts (RBD). This has entailed a reorganization to align administrative and hydrological boundaries, which seldom coincided (Folke et al., 1998; Kaika, 2003). A second important feature of the WFD is the emphasis on the inclusion of the general public and stakeholders. The WFD requires Member States to ensure appropriate public information and consultation processes, and to encourage active involvement of affected stakeholders in water planning and management (Directive, 2000/60/EC).

The WFD is known as a “new generation” of EU legislation, allowing a certain amount of flexibility for Member States to solve multi-level, multi-actor and multi-sector governance aspects related to the WFD implementation (Lieberink et al., 2011). One of the main challenges facing Member States is to implement the WFD requirements via national legislation, to management at the catchment and sub-catchment levels where most actual mitigation measures are undertaken (Jonsson, 2005). The strategies for how the WFD is implemented in practice vary among the Member States. Nielsen et al. (2013) identified different strategies for WFD

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implementation in a study of six coastal states in the Baltic Sea Region, where Denmark, Latvia and Lithuania represented a centralized implementation; Finland uses a multi-level governance implementation with strong central coordination; while Poland and Sweden have chosen a regional approach with weak central coordination. Nielsen et al. (2013) found that in general both central and regional implementation strategies are linked with difficulties for the local integration, for instance due to weak legislative hierarchies.

A number of studies on stakeholder participation in water management have analyzed the use of participatory methods and tools to enhance water management (see e.g. Jonsson et al., 2005; Giupponi, 2007; Mouratiadou and Moran, 2007; Andersson et al., 2008; Franzén et al., 2011). Fewer studies link the requirements of increased stakeholder participation to what institutional and organizational changes are needed on the local level, or how this collide or coincide with pre-existing structures in local water governance. de Stefano (2010) showed that the baseline for existing participation practices varied among EU Member States in the early implementation phase of WFD, which made some countries more prepared for the WFD requirements. Enserink et al. (2007) identified differences related to cultural factors such as power distance, in four EU Member States, affecting the initial potential to adapt to the requirements on stakeholder participation. Kastens and Newig (2008) analyzed how pre-existing structures for participation were aligned with new attempts for increased participation in water management according to the WFD. They found examples where participation structures were developed that included too many participants to make constructive work possible underlining the need for additional studies to find viable pathways for institutionalized stakeholder participation. Pahl-Wostl et al. (2008) argued that new institutions for the implementation of the WFD are necessary since old institutions in place might not be appropriate for the new requirements on stakeholder participation. The strong emphasis on public and stakeholder participation in the WFD raises the question how this can lead to more effective implementation. Koontz and Newig (2014) found that despite far-reaching stakeholder processes entailed by the WFD in Lower Saxony in Germany, they did not influence higher governance levels or implementation of measures at the local scale. Thus, there is a need for improved understanding of how long term stakeholder participation can encourage the achievement of water quality goals.

The overall aim of this paper is to contribute to the knowledge on institutional arrangements for meeting the WFD requirements on stakeholder participation in local water management. The following research questions are addressed in the paper: How can local variations in institutional arrangements affect the adaption to WFD requirements on stakeholder participation? What are important factors for institutional arrangements for local stakeholder participation in water management? How can active stakeholder participation facilitate the implementation of plans and measures for improved water quality? In this study, we analyze local water management in two adjacent catchments in southern Sweden from the 1950s to 2013. The water quality in both catchments has been adversely affected by an increasing population and land use changes such as ditching, intensification of agriculture, and industry establishment. The catchments belong to some of the most intensive agricultural areas in Sweden and suffer from eutrophication due to diffuse nutrient leakage. Since these water quality problems are strongly related to the dominant role of agricultural activities in the catchments, farmers are key stakeholders to involve in water management in order to reach good ecological status. In both areas there is a legacy of water related cooperation based on catchments before the adoption of the WFD, which could be seen as a promising feature for the implementation of new arrangements according to hydrological boundaries. To

meet the WFD requirement on stakeholder participation, so called *water councils* have been established on the local level in both catchments, as proposed by the water authorities. However, the institutional development in these catchments shows substantial differences which affected local stakeholder participation in water management and goal achievement.

Theoretical framework

Participation in natural resource management

Public and stakeholder participation has been increasingly acknowledged as important in natural resource management (Human and Davies, 2010), and emphasized in general since the establishment of the UN Aarhus Convention in 1998 (Aarhus Convention, 1998). The arguments for stakeholder and public participation could be divided into two main groups: (i) normative arguments; which include enhanced democracy and basic human rights, and, (ii) functional arguments, which include effective implementation of policies, capacity-building and learning (Webler and Renn, 1995). In this paper, we focus mainly on the latter rationales for stakeholder participation in local water management. However, these arguments have been questioned: existing power relations in a local area could be amplified in decentralization processes, which could jeopardize a fair and empowering participation process (Stenseke, 2009). Also, participation processes require time and resources, which might lead to ineffective policy implementation (Lundqvist, 2004; Newig, 2005). Hence, participation processes are not empowering and effective per se, but the organization of such processes need to involve questions such as; who should be involved, at which stage in the process, and, how should they be involved (European Commission, 2002). An important distinction concerning participation processes is to what degree stakeholders are requested or expected to participate. There are several conceptual models that define participation at various levels of integration ranging from passive access to information towards higher levels of integration such as consultation and collaborative planning, to local self-control (see e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995). The two required participation levels in the WFD; information and consultation, relate to more passive forms of participation, whereas the third encouraged level, active involvement, relates to a more integrated and collaborative form of participation. The WFD does not define in detail what type of participation is required, but states that stakeholders should be actively involved in the planning of programmes and measures, or could be involved in real implementation (European Commission, 2002). In a situation with water quality impacts from diffuse sources such as eutrophication, active participation from local stakeholders including land owners is required to deal with mitigation at the source. Hence, the organization and scope of local water management to enable active participation becomes vital. Reed (2008) reviews best practices for stakeholder participation in environmental management, and identifies eight important features for reaching success in the participation process including; that stakeholders should be involved in early stages of the process; clear objectives for the participation process need to be agreed among the stakeholders at the outset; appropriate methods for engagement and decision-making and skilled facilitators of the process. According to Reed (2008), long-term success of participation processes may depend on institutional arrangements embedding stakeholder participation, which in some cases calls for reorganization and change of government agencies' culture.

Institutional arrangements

Institutional arrangements are important in driving environmental change and key for shaping social behaviour and the

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