

## IC12 Is the Dutch institutional structure capable of adapting to climate change?

### Objectives

Climate change calls for institutions that promote the adaptive capacity of society and allow society to modify its institutions at a rate commensurate with the rapid rate of environmental change. Institutions are defined as: “systems of rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that give rise to social practices, assign roles to the participants in these practices, and guide interactions among the occupants of the relevant roles” .

Institutions, traditionally conservative and reactive, will now have to be designed in a way that they support social actors to proactively respond through planned processes and deliberate steps but also through cherishing and encouraging spontaneous and autonomous change that is rapid enough to deal with the impacts, as well as allow for institutional redesign.

This project aims to assess the capacity of Dutch institutions to adapt to climate change and the way in which institutional arrangements can enhance that capacity. We define adaptive capacity as the inherent characteristics of institutions that empower social actors to respond to short and long-term measures either through planned measures or through allowing and encouraging creative responses from society both ex ante and ex post.

### Research questions

From the above-described aim follow three research questions:

- How can the resilience and adaptive capacity of the fragmented network of Dutch institutions to deal with climate change be assessed?
- What are the key implications of such an assessment in terms of barriers and opportunities?
- What general and specific recommendations flow from such an assessment in terms of institutional arrangements and change strategies?

### First results

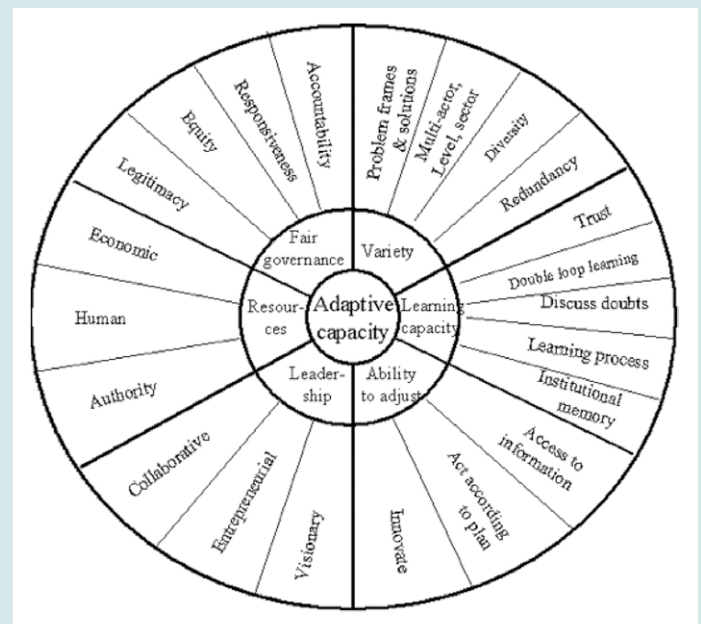
We have completed a research protocol that outlines the different steps of our research and the methodology we will use.

Furthermore, on the basis of a literature review and brainstorm sessions, we have identified six criteria for measuring adaptive capacity. These are:

1. Variety: Whether institutions encourage a diversity of problem definitions and solutions;
2. Learning capacity: Whether institutions encourage actors to learn;
3. Space for planned and innovative autonomous action: Whether institutions provide actors room for both planned and unplanned action;

4. Leadership: Whether institutions give actors the opportunities to take the lead;
5. Availability of resources: Whether institutions have available resources;
6. Fair governance: Whether institutions allow for fair systems of governance.

With these six criteria, we have constructed a Scorecard for Adaptive Capacity. This card can help academics and social actors to assess the inherent characteristics of institutions to stimulate the adaptive capacity of society to respond to climate change; and to focus on whether and how institutions need to be redesigned.



### Activities

Our research has normative and empirical components and will build on theories on multi-level and multi-actor governance, and institutional change. The focus will be on adaptation strategies, specifically in the policy fields of water, spatial planning, nature and agriculture in the Netherlands. The methodology of 12 steps includes, inter alia, (a) literature survey on the adaptive capacity of institutions and multi-level governance; (b) development of a multi-disciplinary method for assessing the adaptive capacity of institutions; (c) content analysis of Dutch national policies in the fields of water, agriculture, nature and spatial analysis; (d) case studies for in-depth empirical assessment; (e) comparative analysis; (f) assessment of the theoretical framework and lessons for addressing these issues; and (g) policy recommendations as to how general and specific challenges can be addressed.



## Longer term perspective

After the first research phase in which the main activities were aimed at developing the conceptual framework to assess the inherent characteristics of institutions to enable the adaptive capacity of society, in the coming phase the emphasis will shift from the abstract to the substantial level. Using the Scorecard for Adaptive Capacity, the research team will now devote its attention to the assessment of the adaptive capacity of Dutch adaptation policy as laid down in formal policy documents (content analysis), and to the assessment of the adaptive capacity 'on the ground' (case studies).

In the last phase we will analyse our results all together. On the hand, we will draw conclusions on the use of the Scorecard for Adaptive Capacity to assess the adaptive capacity of institutions. On the other hand, we will also try to formulate recommendations for policy: how do Dutch institutions score on adaptive capacity and where is room to reform?

## Consortium

We are a multidisciplinary research team consisting of researchers from Wageningen UR (Prof. dr. Ir. C.J.A.M. Termeer: project leader; Dr. J.E.M. Klostermann; Drs. R. Biesbroek), VU - Institute of Environmental Studies (Prof. dr. J. Gupta: project leader; E.J. Bergsma, MSc.), Radboud University Nijmegen (Dr. S.V. Meijerink; Drs. M.A. van den Brink), Erasmus University Rotterdam (Dr. S. Nootboom) and TU Delft (Mr. dr. P. Jong).

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