

Governance of Adaptation 7.4.2 The role of intermediary organizations in knowledge production for adaptation: lessons for robust advisory practices

Description of research

This project deals with a pivotal element of climate adaptation governance: the role of knowledge in decision making. An important locus in that process is science-based advisory work.

Climate adaptation is generally depicted a 'knowledge intensive' domain. In order to make decisions one has to have an understanding of the current and future climate, the consequences of climatic and other changes for the specific topic one is interested in – say the urban climate or coastal protection in some area –, on the functioning of that natural-societal system, on costs and benefits of policies, etcetera. Often, the stakes of collective decisions based on that knowledge are high: investment schemes require large sums of resources, culturally valued environments may change or people may need to be expropriated.

Understanding advisory work is key for climate adaptation. To advance our understanding on these matters we have studied a particular interesting organisation that shaped Dutch climate adaptation policy: the **Second Delta Committee** also known as the Veerman Committee. What lessons can we draw from this committee for the advisory practices in adaptation?



Climate Hoax, Dan Wasserman, The Boston Globe

Research question

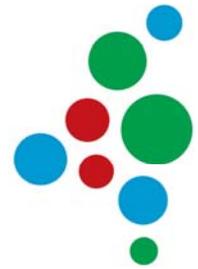
How can we understand advisory practices in adaptation governance? Under what circumstances are advisory practices effective?

The most important conclusions

- Although the generalizability and transferability of the insights of the Delta Committee case must be treated with the utmost caution, we learned important lessons.
- The impact of Delta Committee was high if one considers its effect on institutional reform and the re-shaping of the Dutch climate adaptation agenda.
- This is remarkable, as the advisory report was based on climate knowledge that went well beyond the common IPCC projections and as various recommendations were non-incremental.
- The Delta Committee may usefully be understood as a 'Boundary Organization'. Rather than an organization bridging the 'gap' between science and politics, we should understand these advisory committees as places allowing for the production of 'hybrids'.
- These 'hybrids' are the products of the advisory process: scenarios, recommendations and concepts are neither 'pure' science nor politics. They are amalgams mixing various elements. Their usefulness is to be found in their responsiveness to the needs of, and their acceptability to, all actors involved in the climate adaptation issue.
- In the advisory process it is important to work on the development of hybrids, rather than compose an advisory report of different elements already there (e.g 'pieces of knowledge', 'societal wants', etc).
- This means that the internal design for these committee should follow several principles to enable the joint production of hybrids, most notably regarding the composition, deliberation, management of boundaries and organization of closure.

Kennis voor Klimaat

Knowledge for Climate



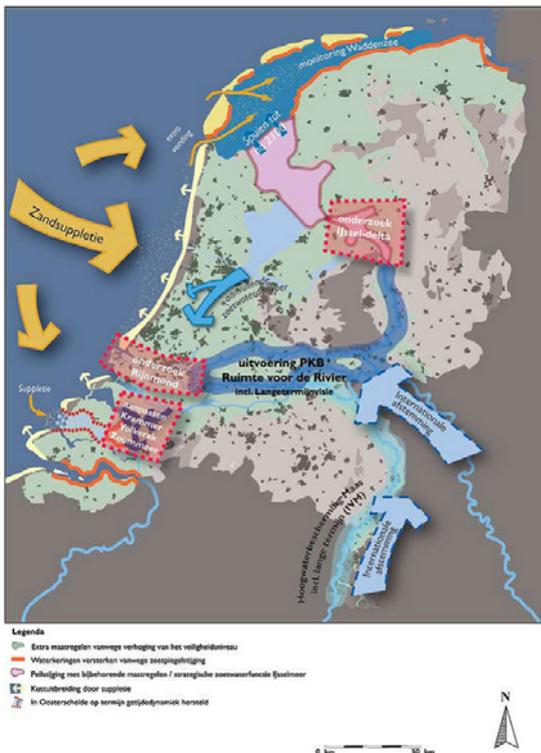
- In case of the Delta Committee this was paralleled by external practices of continued interaction with a range of political, departmental, scientific and public actors in which the Committee positioned the advice. This phenomena is so far underscored in current scientific literature.
- While the former mainly enabled the production of a high quality advice, the latter quested for its acceptance and legitimacy.

Possible applications from the project

- Comparing and evaluating the findings of the Delta Committee with other pivotal cases of science-based advisory now present in climate adaptation policy in the Netherlands and elsewhere.
- Further development of the reflexive understanding on the importance and functioning of boundary organizations in climate adaptation governance
- Developing and testing recommendations for the design and functioning of future science-based advisory organizations set up for climate adaptation policy processes

Bottlenecks of the project

- The Delta Committee is a very influential and remarkable case in science-policy relations in Dutch adaptation governance. However, it is also a very particular case. Applying insights from this case study onto other science-based advisory organizations should be done with the utmost caution.
- Our study revealed the importance of a lot of case-specific tailoring, testing and positioning by the committee to work on the robustness and stability of its advice.
- Optimism to derive standardized 'institutional design principles' for these organizations should therefore be tempered.



Second Delta Committee

More information

Further reading on this project:

- Boezeman, D., Vink, M. & Leroy, P. (2013). The Dutch Delta Committee as a Boundary Organisation. *Environmental Science & Policy* 27, pp. 162-171.
- Vink, M., Boezeman, D., Dewulf, A. & Termeer, C. (in press). Changing climates, changing frames: Dutch water policy frame developments in the context of a rise and fall of attention to climate change. *Environmental Science & Policy*.

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Recommendations of the Delta Committee

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