WATER GOVERNANCE, A FRAMEWORK FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

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■ In the world of water management the term "water governance" is gaining popularity over the last decade. Next to the development (since the 1980's) of the conviction that we need Integrated Water Management or Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as a prerequisite for effective, efficient and sustainable water management, nowadays the opinion is growing that good water governance is essential to be able to be successful in water management. Without good governance it will be difficult to reach the desired results in the control of water pollution, in the prevention of disastrous flooding and in the effective, efficient and well-balanced dealing with periods of water shortage.
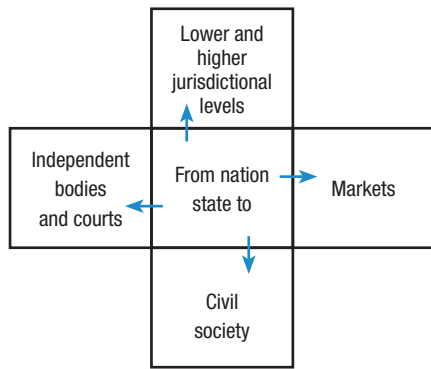
■ In the document "No Water No Future; A Water Focus For Johannesburg", an initial contribution of HRH the Prince of Orange to the Panel of the UN Secretary General, in preparation for the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 it was stated "the world water crisis is a crisis of governance – not one of scarcity". The second World Water Assessment Report (2006) used the same statement to highlight the central role of water governance. It makes clear that many believe that water governance needs more attention.

Less clear may be what exactly 'water governance' is. How is it defined? What elements belong to it? How can it be used in practice? In this paper I try to contribute to a better understanding of 'water governance' and offer a framework as a supporting instrument to compare the different definitions and descriptions of water governance.

In section 2 it is shown that the popularity (and the use of the word) governance has grown in the same time that the popularity of the word government has decreased. This more or less coincides with the decreasing attention or attractiveness of 'the nation state'. In section 3 different definitions and prescriptions are shown and compared. A three layer model of water governance is presented in section 4. The usefulness of the model in relation to other systematic approaches is shown in section 5 and finally some concluding remarks are made.

Government and governance

Searching on the internet for an answer on the question "What is water governance?" one of the websites found was the WATER GOVERNANCE BLOG initiated by Huitema of the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) of the VU University Amsterdam and Meijerink of the Institute for Management Research, Radboud University Nijmegen[1].In their explanation they point at the fact that in the 1990's, scholars seized on the term 'governance' to make better sense of the situation that had arisen in many countries after the 1980's, when 'big' government had retreated under the pressure of neo-liberal reformers like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. In essence power and authority from the nation state has been transferred to markets, to civil society, to independent bodies and the courts, and to both higher and lower jurisdictional levels (based on Huitema, 2005).

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This shift from government to governance is characterized in a diagram showing a transfer of power and authority from the nation state towards:

■ Lower and higher jurisdictional levels (deconcentration, decentralization, devolution, Europeanization, globalization);

■ Markets (privatizations, quasi markets, contracting out, public private partnership);

■ Civil society (networks, self governance, participation);

■ Independent bodies (agentification) and courts (juridicialization).

This trend was also observed by prof. Balkenende in his inaugural lecture on the 24th of March 2011, when accepting the chair on Governance, Institutions and Internationalization at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. In his speech called *Over governance en maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid: hoe verder?*[2] (Translated: About governance and societal responsibility: how to go on?) Balkenende states that traditional organizational paradigms (ordeningsparadigma's) become outdated and that the actual situation is not unambiguous. Balkenende points at the end of the concept of nation states. Power becomes more and more fragmented. It is becoming less exclusive a matter of governments. Balkenende: 'Authorities continue exercising tasks, but they will do such much more in dialogue with others.' Those others can be: new economies, multinationals, NGO's, and religious groups. The trend of 'governance' gaining attention in relation to 'government' can also be shown by Ngram Viewer of Google books, that gives an indication of the frequency of the use of terms like government and governance. The graphs that can be made this way and that are based on 5.2 million digitized books by Google confirm the tendency described above. The data show that the use of "government" is gradually decreasing in the period of 1970 till 2008. Looking at "governance" in the same way makes clear that here the situation is the other way around. The word governance is more and more used and especially after 1990 the popularity is growing.

Defining "water governance"

In June 2009 in Singapore a special international workshop on water governance was held, for which a group of selected international experts was invited to address the issue of water governance[3]. In a summarizing paper we can read:
"Governance has been used mostly as an umbrella concept and no agreed definition exists. Governance is not synonymous with government. It is instead a complex process that considers multi-level participation beyond the state, where decision making includes not only public institutions, but also the private sector, civil society and society in general. Good governance frameworks refer to new processes and methods of governing and changed conditions of ordered rule on which the actions and inactions of all parties concerned are transparent and accountable. It embraces the relationships between governments and societies, including laws, regulations, institutions, and formal and informal interactions which affect the ways in which governance systems function, stressing the importance of involving more voices, responsibilities, transparency and accountability of formal and informal organizations associated in any process."

Governance

What attracts scientists to the term 'governance' is its ability to 'cover the whole range of institutions and relationships involved in the process of governing'

Pierre and Peters 2000

Let's look at the words used here:
Multi-level participation – public institutions – private sector – civil society – transparency – accountability – relationships between – laws – regulations – interactions – organizations – process.
This seems quite complex.

An important factor making it even more complex is that we all may mean different things when we use words like this.
One of the difficult, but also challenging aspects of defining something is that we have to do it in a way, or a form, that enables communication. Mostly we use language for this. One problem of using 'language' is that we sometimes need many words to make something clear or to describe something. According to some this can be considered as almost impossible. Often Ludwig Wittgenstein is quoted on this, when in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus[4] he writes as the last one of his theorems:

'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.'

Wittgenstein didn't mean by it that we should not use language, but that we should use it in such a way that we understand what is going on, based on the described facts that represent the truth and that language is not able to express something which is not 'in the world', like for instance ethics.
Wittgenstein in the preface of his book: 'What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent'

Let's go back to definitions that have been given : Kooiman (2003)[5] in his book "Governing as governance" describes what he calls a working definition of 'social-political' or 'interactive' governing and governance, or simply governing and governance, as follows: "Governing can be considered as the totality of interactions, of which public as well as private actors participate, aimed at solving societal problems, or creating societal opportunities; attending to the institutions as contexts for these governing interactions; and establishing a normative foundation for all those activities."
and
"Governance can be seen as the totality of theoretical conceptions on governing"
In fact we see three levels in this definition of governing/governance:

- ■ the level or layer of the problems to be solved or the opportunities to create

- ■ the level or layer of the institutions

- ■ the level or layer of the normative foundation.

Later on, in section 4, I will come back to this. Let's first look at some other definitions often quoted:

GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP (2002)

"Water governance can be described as a range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society."

ROGERS AND HALL (2003)

"Governance aspects overlap with the technical and economic aspects of water, but governance points us to the political and administrative elements of solving a problem or exploiting an opportunity."

There are many more definitions that can be given. In their article "Putting the cart before the horse: Water governance and IWRM", Lautza et al, show different selected definitions of governance. These are presented in the table on the right:

Graham et al. (2003)
. . Governance is a *process* whereby societies or organizations make their important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account. Since a process is hard to observe, students of governance tend to focus our attention on the governance system or framework upon which the process rests – that is, the agreements, procedures, conventions or policies that define who gets power, how decisions are taken and how accountability is rendered.

International Institute of Administrative Sciences (1996)
The *process* whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence, and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development.

Kaufmann et al. (2005)
The traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

Institute of Governance Studies (2008)
The concept of governance is . . . the sum total of the *institutions* and *processes* by which society orders and conducts its collective or common affairs.

UNESCAP (2009)
The *process* of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).

UNDP (1997)
The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It is the complex *mechanisms, processes and institutions* through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences

ADB Institute (2005)
Summary of existing literature on governance includes: the *processes* by which governments are chosen, monitored, and changed; the *systems* of interaction between the administration, the legislature, and the judiciary; the ability of government to create and to implement public policy; and the *mechanisms* by which citizens and groups define their interests and interact with institutions of authority and with each other.

Miller and Ziegler (2006)
The manner in which power is exercised through a country's economic, political, and social institutions.

And of course a definition used at the Water Governance Centre should be mentioned: "Water governance refers to the way the management of flood risk and water resources, fresh water supply and waste water treatment are organized, and the interaction between the organizations responsible for the related political, administrative, social, legal and financial elements. Many organizations are involved in water issues, all on their own competences and disciplines. Together they make sure that clean and fresh water supply is guaranteed in countries such as The Netherlands, while flood risk is reduced to a minimum".

Or in short: **Water governance is all you need to give water its place in society.**

There are other forms of communication that may be used, like this graphical display[6].

Illustration 1:

Graphical representation of water governance

Nevertheless still the use of language for explanation is indispensable.

A three layer model of water governance as a framework

To be able to communicate clearly about the important aspects of water governance it seems useful to look more closely at the basic elements. For this I developed a "Three layer model of water governance". Core element of this approach is that Good water management comprises three layers: a **content layer**, an **institutional layer** and a **relational layer**.

A content layer while knowledge of the water systems is an essential prerequisite The same goes for knowledge of the nature of the problems. Also experience and skills are necessary to be able to solve the problems. However, in most cases this is not enough to reach a good water status. An adequate organizational framework together with the necessary (legal) instruments and a good financing structure are fundamental requirements for successful integrated water resources management (the institutional layer). Besides that, for successfully solving persistent water problems attention for what I like to call the 'relational layer' is required. Important elements of this layer are communication and cooperation between different actors and with the public, stakeholder participation, transparency and trust. Water governance focuses most explicitly on the institutional and relational layer, without overlooking the importance of and relations with the content layer.
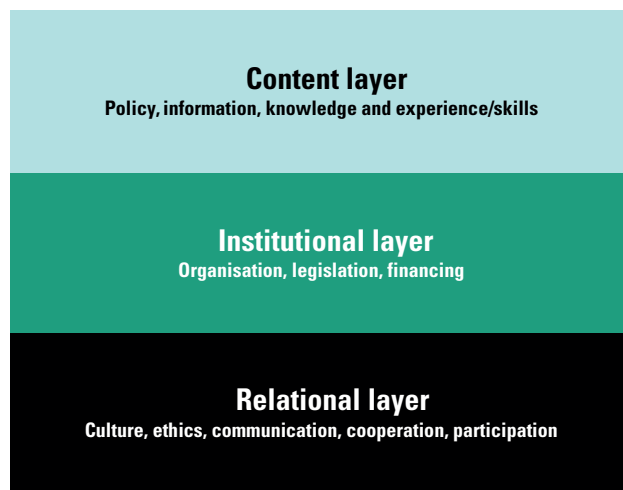

Illustration 2:

Three layer model of water governance

The three layer model in relation to other approaches

The intention to introduce the three layer model is not to add another definition of water governance to the existing ones, but to create a framework that can be used to compare the different approaches and can be used as a checklist.

THE OECD

A different Way of analysing and assessing water governance is used by the OECD in the report "Water Governance in OECD Countries. A Multi-level Approach"[7].

Three layer model	OECD gap analysis
Content layer	Policy
	Capacity
	Information
Institutional layer	Administration
	Funding
Relational layer	Objective (motivational)
	Accountability

Referring to both the definitions of water governance by the GWP and by UNDP the OECD report describes water governance as ' ... *the set of systems*

	Three layer model	OECD gap analysis	WGC Academic Panel Method	Building Blocks WGC
Content layer	Clear Policy	Policy		
	Knowledge and skills	Capacity	Knowledge quality	
	Information	Information		
Institutional layer	Organization	Administration	Institutional quality	Adminisitrative Organization
	Legislation		Juridical quality	Water Law Planning
	Financing	Funding	Economic quality	Financing system
Relational layer	Culture and ethics	Objectives (motivational)	Acting and interacting capacities	Stakeholder participation
	Communication and coordination	Accountability		
	Participation			

that control decision-making with regard to water resources development and management. It is therefore more about the way in which decisions are made than about the decisions themselves. It covers the manner in which roles and responsibilities (design, regulation and implementation) are exercised in the management of water and broadly encompasses the formal and informal institutions by which authority is exercised.'

The OECD multi-level Governance Framework is organized around seven " gaps". These gaps can be seen as points of attention that should or might be considered:
Administrative gap, Information gap, Policy gap, Capacity gap, Funding gap, Objective gap, Accountability gap.
Arranging them according to the three layers gives the scheme as shown above.

THE WATER GOVERNANCE CENTRE BUILDING BLOCKS AND THE ACADEMIC PANEL ASSESSMENT METHOD

The same can be done for the five building blocks described in " Building Blocks for good governance" by the Water Governance Centre (WGC)[8] and the assessment method developed by the Academic Panel of the WGC.
Elements distinguished as building blocks are Administrative Organization, Water Law, Financing System (and economic analysis), Systematic Approach and Stakeholder Participation.
The assessment method of the Academic Panel focuses on respectively Juridical quality, Knowledge quality, Economic quality, Institutional quality and Acting and interacting capacities.

Bringing the different approaches together in the three layer model gives the table above. It shows that there is quite some resemblance between the approaches, but also some differences: legal instruments are not in the scope of the OECD, while Information is not separately mentioned in the WGC methods.

Concluding remarks

It's a kind of an 'open door' that every approach has its own positive points as well as its points of discussion. So has the three layer model. Nevertheless it can help to communicate about the essentials of water governance and can be of help when different approaches of water governance are to be compared. ■

1 http://www.watergovernance.eu/what-is-water-governance/ - accessed nov.2012.
2 Prof. dr. Jan Peter Balkenende, *Over governance en maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid: hoe verder?*, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 24 maart 2011.
3 Cecilia Tortajada (2010): Water Governance: Some Critical Issues, *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 26:2, 297-307.
4 Ludwig Wittgenstein (1918) *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Wien.
5 Jan Kooiman (2003), *Governing as governance*, London, Sage Publication Limited.
6 Wehn de Montalvo, U. (2013) 'Citizen participation in water governance through knowledge sharing and feedback', presented at the European Commission Citizen Observatories Coordination Workshop, Brussels, 29-30 January.
7 OECD ,Water Governance in OECD Countries: A Multi-level Approach, Paris (2011).
8 http://www.watergovernancecentre.nl/Publikaties/.