



Interactive Water Management and the Level of Participation in Decision-making

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From a territorial point of view, we can easily differentiate between hierarchical levels like global, international, national, regional and local or even individual. Regarding water management another hierarchy in scale can be observed. Integrated water management deals on the highest level with the total of the water system. Examples are the ocean or a river basin. Sub systems like a coastal zone, a tributary, a stream, pond or ditch can be considered hierarchically on a lower level.

Both types of hierarchy have their own institutional arrangements. As territorial scales are reflected in governance, like international body, country, state, province, region or municipality, water systems are regulated by international organisations, river basin committees, water agencies or land-owners. It is obvious that decisions bearing consequences for local water management should not be part of decision-making on the level of the total water system. The European subsidiarity principle, formally bringing down the decision to the lowest level possible, refers to the political relevance of this intention.

A third important difference for management of commons like water systems is the time scale. Long term policies should develop strategies for sustainable development, but an actual crisis requires a short term decision and direct results.

Nowadays decisions at these different levels of hierarchical scale, institutions, and time are all made by public bodies in close interaction with stakeholders and the public. Every level of scale and time requires the involvement of different groups of stakeholders or the public. In other words, the style of interaction naturally fluctuates with the nature of the decision at stake. In this paper we explore the relation between hierarchical scale, related institutional arrangements, and time of decision making considering a water system on the one side and the style of participation on the other.

We search for optimal use of the ladder of participation in the different levels of scale and time in integrated water management, using examples from actual cases of interactive policy-making. Examples of the international commissions that deal with the river Rhine are taken into account, next to the case 'Freude am Fluss' where the Rhine is considered at relatively low levels of local participation. Another case situated at Lake Veere (The Netherlands) deals with the participation of local stakeholders. In an interactive process, an advice for reorganizing a watery area is made, based on the value judgments of stakeholders.