



Delft University of Technology

Multi-actor governance

Making sense and managing sensitivities while developing MFFD

Heems, Trudes

Publication date

2017

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Integral Design of Multifunctional Flood Defenses

Citation (APA)

Heems, T. (2017). Multi-actor governance: Making sense and managing sensitivities while developing MFFD. In B. Kothuis, & M. Kok (Eds.), *Integral Design of Multifunctional Flood Defenses: Multidisciplinary Approaches and Examples* (pp. 116-119). Delft University Publishers.

Important note

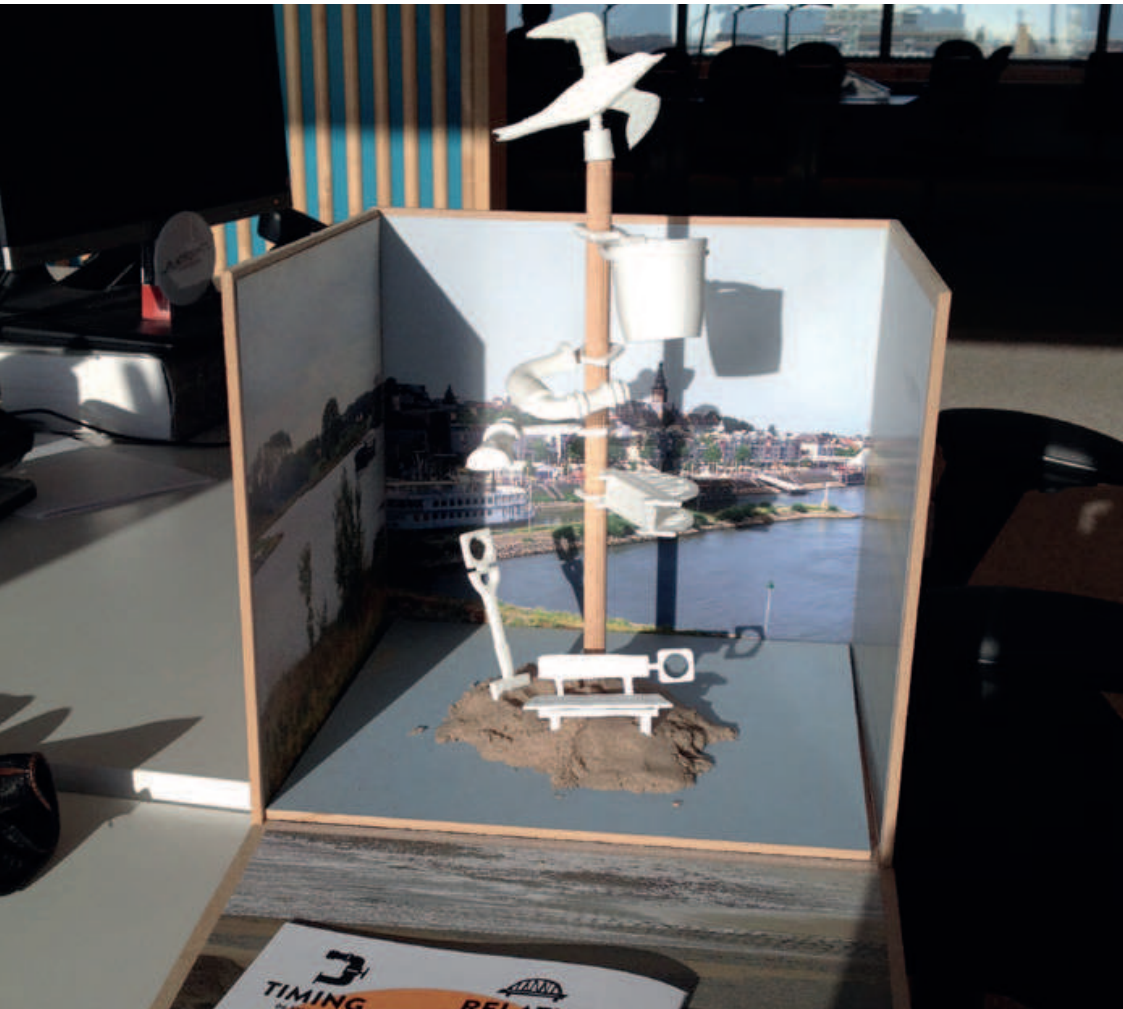
To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights. We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Trudes Heems

MULTI-ACTOR GOVERNANCE

MAKING SENSE AND MANAGING SENSITIVITIES WHILE DEVELOPING MFFD

Dr. Trudes Heems was a Postdoc in the STW-MFFD program at the Faculty of Technology, Policy & Management, TU Delft in the project 'Integrated design'. Currently she works as an independent researcher, investigating the impact of tourism on historical towns in Europe.

Dealing with collaboration challenges in integrated spatial projects

Almost everybody agrees that the environmental challenges we are currently facing need to be approached in an integrated manner, from governments to citizens, and from companies to research institutes (Brown 2008; Brown & Farrelly 2009). To create multifunctional flood defenses, innovative integrated solutions are needed so that land use, responsibilities, financing, as well as risk-taking, are all shared. When developing integrated spatial projects, such as multifunctional flood defenses, the focus is increasingly on multidisciplinary cooperation between actors from different institutions, based on the assumption that collaboration allows knowledge to be shared and thus produces integrated spatial developments (BNA 2016; Janssen 2015; Healy 1998, 2006). But the intense collaboration involved in such projects is not as straightforward as it might appear.

Involved actors look at a project from different perspectives, based on their individual institutional frames. They often have different interests, responsibilities, and opinions about problems that might occur and which concepts might be useful to address these (Hage et al. 2009; Collins & Ison 2009; Barreteau et al. 2010). Problems can also arise because of the physical distance between involved institutions, and when participants make their contributions at different times. Actors may start talking past each other, without always being aware of it. Emotions such as confusion, disappointment and even mutual mistrust can influence the process and the results (Heems & Kothuis 2012). In addition, collaboration can create different expectations: from being informed, having a say, consulting and exchanging knowledge, to collective design, decision making, finance, execution, control and responsibilities. These

differences in expectations are often difficult to manage, and cannot always be met. During the process, involved actors can forget the perspectives and interests of other participants/actors. The project team can lose its connection with their organization, and forget about the importance of organizational and societal support. This can lead to project results that the different actors do not view as equally successful in terms of credibility, salience and/or legitimacy (Cash 2002); it can even lead to outsiders rejecting the project.

Interpretative approaches from social science can clarify how multifunctional flood defenses can be successfully developed when multiple actors are involved, and considering the societal dynamics. Literature on the interaction of science and technology with society has shown that creating innovative solutions depends on complex ensembles of social and technical elements, with the technology embedded in the society (Borras and Edler 2014). Because the institutional and societal context can either support this process of embedding or, alternately, hinder it, we need to understand how this context influences the creation and realization of new projects. Why do involved actors sometimes succeed in cooperating to create a shared project and fail other times? What leads actors to harmonize their actions, and why don't they always do so? To answer these questions we need a deeper understanding of the different perspectives the involved actors bring to the project, and the impact of collaboration on the project's processes and its results. Our research found that when actors are aware of the different perspectives, expectations, and emotions of other involved actors, participation, cooperation and co-creation are more effective and can contribute to credible and realistic results.

Figure 1. The 'so-called Samenwerkingsverband-doos' ('first aid cooperation kit').

Figure 2. The checklist, with seven inspirational cases for project leaders of integrated spatial projects.



Using learning communities to improve integrated spatial projects

Innovative solutions for integrated spatial projects, like the development of multifunctional flood defenses, are the result of multi-actor sensemaking, the process in which actors give meaning to experiences. In this case, the actors need to identify and understand the problems associated with the project, the different functions that could be involved, and the practices necessary to achieve the project. During the process, sensitivities need to be managed, and barriers to communication, collaboration and action need to be overcome. In this way the actors can deal with potential difficulties, in order to develop something new together.

A useful way to approach multi-actor processes is through action research, which is a participatory process of collaboration with involved actors. Working on the boundary of research and practice, action research is able to produce scientifically and socially relevant knowledge, as well as lead to transformative action.

The approach was applied in four learning communities working on water and space, the so-called 'Leergemeenschappen Water & Ruimte' of Platform 31. Initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment (Rijkswaterstaat), the Dutch Union of Water Authorities, and the Dutch Delta Program (a national project managed by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment); these voluntary communities include employees of Water Authorities, municipalities, and provincial government, as well as a few representatives from companies and research institutions. The informal settings of these meetings were found to encourage the processes of sensemaking, and the development of innovative solutions. In this setting, practitioners were interested in the diverse perspectives of other actors, and were intrinsically motivated to think about ways to remove barriers to collaboration. The process

stimulated the exchange of knowledge and experiences between actors from different backgrounds, as well as leading to broader networking.¹

In the learning communities, different ambitions were considered relevant and legitimate, and cases were presented and discussed. Each meeting focused on a different theme, and cases were presented and discussed. Given the practical approach of the practitioners in the learning communities, it was easy to convert knowledge directly into practical proposals for integrated spatial projects. The learning communities can act to link national policy development and local execution of policy in daily practice.

However, the research also showed that it is still difficult to implement insights and solutions in daily practice. The informal settings and neutral organization created many opportunities for sensemaking, but contributed less to daily practice. To implement insights and solutions in their own organization (e.g., Water Authorities, municipalities or provinces), members of the learning communities need strength and perseverance. Incentives for change are often missing, and innovative solutions often lack support within the institution.

To improve the results of integrated spatial projects in practice, members of the learning communities created a tool during a national workshop in 2014, called 'Zoden aan de dijk'² (Figures 2 and 3). In collaboration with the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment and the MFFD research program, they created a checklist for project leaders of integrated spatial projects, as well as a physical 'first aid cooperation kit'³. The kit presents the checklist, seven inspirational cases, and contact data for local experts, all presented around seven themes that are important for successful collaboration in integrated spatial projects. The kit was enthusiastically received by almost 30 project leaders of the Dutch flood protection program.

Footnotes:

1. The results were posted to the Platform 31 website (<http://www.platform31.nl>). Platform 31 organized and facilitated regional and national events of the four learning communities for water and space.
2. A Dutch idiom that can't be translated; literally it means putting sod on the dike, and means "doing something really useful."
3. For more information on the toolkit please contact Jan Dirk van Duijvenbode at Rijkswaterstaat (jan.dirk.van.duijvenbode@rws.nl) or Trudes Heems (trudesheems@hotmail.com).