Flood risk governance in Europe: towards a diversification of strategies

Prof. Peter Driessen
Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development
Research Group Environmental Governance
Utrecht University

About the lecture

There is broad consensus within both scholarly and political debates that 'governance' is a pivotal domain for the realization of societal transformation processes guided towards sustainable development. Stimulating sustainable development often requires transitions that can't be made by individuals alone. Thus, sustainable development is a matter of collective action. The research programme of the *Research Group Environmental Governance* at Utrecht University seeks to make a relevant and significant contribution to the scholarly and political debate by analysing, explaining and evaluating modes of governance and by formulating recommendations about interventions that have the potential to make governance outcomes more congruent with sustainability goals. Special attention is given to the actor dimension, the institutional dimension and the content dimension of modes of governance.

In this lecture I will especially focus on the issue of *flood risk governance*. European countries, especially urban areas, face increasing flood risks due to urbanisation, increase of exposure and damage potential, and the effects of climate change. In literature and in practice, it is argued that a diversification of Flood Risk Management Strategies (FRMSs) makes countries more resilient to flood risks. The latter requires innovations in existing Flood Risk Governance Arrangements, development of new arrangements and the coordination of these arrangements, but it also requires these arrangements to be tailored to their physical and institutional context. Within the EU FP7 project STAR-FLOOD (2012-2016), a comparative analysis and evaluation of flood risk governance in The Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Poland, France and England has been conducted. I will address the question of which key governance issues emerged from this comparative analysis and evaluation, how they are currently being dealt with, and how a governance approach to FRM may complement more natural science-based approaches to FRM.

The project identified at least seven key findings that are relevant for all researched countries (and probably also beyond), being (i) the necessity and importance of a diversification of Flood Risk Management Strategies for improving societal resilience to flooding; (ii) the need to establish connectivity between actors, levels and sectors through what we coin "bridging mechanisms"; (iii) the importance of achieving co-production of FRM strategies and measures by governmental actors at different levels with private actors including businesses, NGOs and citizens; (iv) the need to improve fragmented and often non-enforceable rule systems, while pursuing the subsidiarity principle more ambitiously than is now often the case; (v) the need to optimise the available resources for FRM, including finance, knowledge infrastructures and societal awareness of flooding, addressing financial scarcities and the need to prioritise in open political debates; (vi) the need to operationalise the notion of "diversification of FRM strategies" in a country-specific way; (vii) the need to follow general design principles for

improving FRM that are sufficiently tailored to local circumstances, thus ensuring that FRM optimally contributes to societal resilience and is seen as efficient and legitimate by all actors involved.

About the speaker

Peter Driessen is Professor of Environmental Governance at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. He is also Vice-Dean for Research at the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University and scientific director of the Netherlands national research programme on climate adaptation, *Knowledge for Climate.*
http://www.uu.nl/staff/PPJDriessen