When Does Collaboration Work? Empirical Lessons from Regional Natural Resource Management in Australia

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Outline

• Collaborative Environmental Governance (CEG)
• Questions and Methods
• Insights from Practice
• Lessons
Collaborative Environmental Governance

- a broad family of innovative modes of environmental governance defined by a set of principles – collaborative, multilevel, participatory, deliberative, flexible, integrated, adaptive

- brings public, private and community actors together to collaborate - pool appreciations and tangible resources, and share in decision making power to solve a set of problems

- creates and governs through a new “regional” jurisdiction (eg ecosystem) that is distinct from traditional jurisdictional boundaries

- preference for nonbinding agreements and guidelines (as opposed to legal command and statutory instruments) (De Burca 2010; Trubek & Trubek 2010; Karkkainen, 2004; Stewart and Jones, 2003)
What’s so interesting about CEG?

- It is a different way of thinking about and creating arrangements for governing environmental issues than what has gone before

  - goes beyond nation states and intergovernmental regimes at the international level, as well as conventional government backed instruments such as command and control at the domestic level
Collaborative Governance

• Global (environmental) governance and earth system governance (Castells, 2008; Biermann, 2008; Biermann and Pattberg 2008)

• CEG
  – Great Lakes in USA/Canada (Karkkainen 2006)
  – Chesapeake Bay, CALFED Bay Delta and Habitat Conservation Plans in USA (Wiersema 2008; Orts and Coglianese 2008; Wilhere 2009)
  – Regional water strategies in New Zealand (Gunningham 2009)
  – Regional Natural Resource Management in Australia
Questions

• What do we make of CEG?
  – Significant praise but still many questions (Head 2009; Orts & Coglianese 2007; Alexander 2010; Paton et al 2004; Lane 2006)
  – Transition is far from complete and takes many different forms
  – Research agenda is still evolving (Trubek and Trubek 2010)
Questions - Collaboration

- Under what conditions can we achieve successful collaboration?
  - whether and how genuine power sharing can be achieved between government bodies?
  - the extent to which government intervention, law or incentives are needed and what forms these should take?

Legal Regulation and CEG

There is more that needs to be done to work through the nature, role and significance of the collaborative governance practices and the implications for law, regulation and public policy (Trubek and Trubek, 2010; De Burca and Scott, 2006)

• Gap hypothesis
  • legal regulation resists (either tacitly or directly) the practice and processes of CEG
  • impedes developments which do not conform to traditional legal structures (Wilkinson 2010; De Burca and Scott 2006; Scott and Trubek 2002)
Methods

• 57 semi structured interviews and a document analysis

• Two case studies drawn from regional natural resource management in Queensland, Australia
  – Part of a wider study in Australia and New Zealand

• Interviews – capture main interests involved or connected to these programs (federal, state, local government, regional bodies, NGOs, farmers, local catchment groups, industry bodies)
Regional NRM

  - federal & state funding/in-kind ($3 billion)
  - regional targets, planning and implementation across 56 regions
  - 14 regions in Queensland (some 100 000s km$^2$)
  - framework of national objectives and accountability controls (e.g. biodiversity and coastal environments)

- Caring for our Country (2008-2013)
  - $2 billion funding
  - national priorities, 5 year outcomes, short term targets and project delivery through competitive grant system
Findings - Regional NRM

• Some success
  bodies formed and sustained, plans developed, outputs achieved and limited environmental outcomes (e.g. NRM plans, property management plans, some protection of native riparian vegetation, building fences and clearing weeds)

• Why?
  • operational funding/in-kind support
  • economic incentives
  • nested regional structures

  • large regional collaboration was relatively successful because body had worked simultaneously at comparatively ‘easier’ smaller scales. It did so by dividing the large region into small areas, at which level collaborative processes faced fewer transaction costs and were more closely connected to local actors.
Findings - Regional NRM

• BUT - lack of significant environmental outcomes

“our budget is a few million a year. Now what we are expected to do with a few million dollars is make sustainable land use, protect all the biodiversity and fix the water quality out to the reef, all within 10 years. That’s a pretty big ask”.

• Gaps in engagement, including marine tourism, mining, and environmental NGOs representatives
Findings - Regional NRM

• No incentive to cooperate and share power
  • “[the federal government] think they’ve so much money to run this thing that the state will click and dance. Well it started to click and dance and then it decided well no, get nicked …there’s not enough money…so you had a failed system to start off with”.

• Conflict produced funding delays and erratic guidance that did little to reduce transaction costs
  • “I see the Queensland - Federal crunch as incredibly negative. It’s stopped us getting funding when we needed our funding…and then that flows through to the community”
  • “the regional bodies have been evolving at the same time as the [guidelines] and infrastructure …so we haven’t necessarily provided them with the framework or the support to be able to achieve what we want them to achieve”
• **Agency conflicts**
  • “[its a] disintegrated government system....[its] a tragedy because…the whole of government solidarity sort of fell apart”

• **‘Dubious’ legitimacy of regional bodies produces gap between legal regulation and CEG**
  • “these groups are made up of well meaning amateurs who have replaced the local tennis club with this regional group…so the state government is very equivocal about, NRM bodies, I don’t know that they want them really”

• “the tension lies in this issue of statutory delivery tools that government has their hands on and the outcome that the community through the regional bodies want to achieve...the partnership and the alliance between regions and legislation, well they haven’t achieved it yet”
  – a hot spot or a site for a new protective areas to save critical parts of the landscape
  – “the state is missing in action”
Lessons - Collaboration

- **Funding**
  - unless governments are prepared to spend substantially more on CEG, it is highly likely to suffer from gaps in engagement and limited environmental outcomes

- **Nested institutions**
  - But unwillingness of governments and agencies to share power and resources

- **Effective and credible incentives**
  - economic incentives (or similar peer/regulatory pressure) needs to be harnessed to ensure that many otherwise unwilling stakeholders engage in collaboration
Lessons – Gaps and Hybridity

- Regional NRM approximated “gap” hypothesis
- Detrimental to collaborative success
- Hybridity - legal backing
  - Different forms of hybridity?
  - Abandon hybrid solutions?
END