

WATER CO-GOVERNANCE BASELINE AND GOVERNANCE SHIFTS PERCEPTIONS REPORT

[May 2021]



Interreg
North Sea Region
WaterCoG

European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

Overview

The WaterCoG project brings together partners from Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, and the UK to determine the benefits of a more collaborative (Co-Governance) approach to water management.

The purpose of this Water CoG report is to:

- 1) Provide a stakeholder validated overview of the perceived baselines of water-related governance structures in different NSR countries at local, regional, and national levels.*
- 2) Identify shifts in governance and the impacts this has seen during the project.*

We have been exploring the different co-governance approaches in the partner countries through a range of activities including workshops (Box 1), online surveys, pilot activities, knowledge exchanges as part of transnational and bilateral events and linking with other projects.

The report is structured by each country WaterCoG project partner view on co-governance structures, concluding with a synthesis of partner findings.

Box 1: Baseline workshop in Løgstor



The project partners attended a Baseline workshop in Løgstor (May 2016). The workshop was also attended by external representatives such as DEFRA, CaBA, Environment Agency, SOAS, Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, Local Government Denmark, Kenniscentrum NoorderRuimte.

The workshop presented initial questionnaire findings around key water co-governance areas: mechanisms for participation; perceptions of governance baselines were discussed e.g. top-down vs. bottom-up structures; hypotheses around governance were discussed e.g. the legal targets around good water governance.

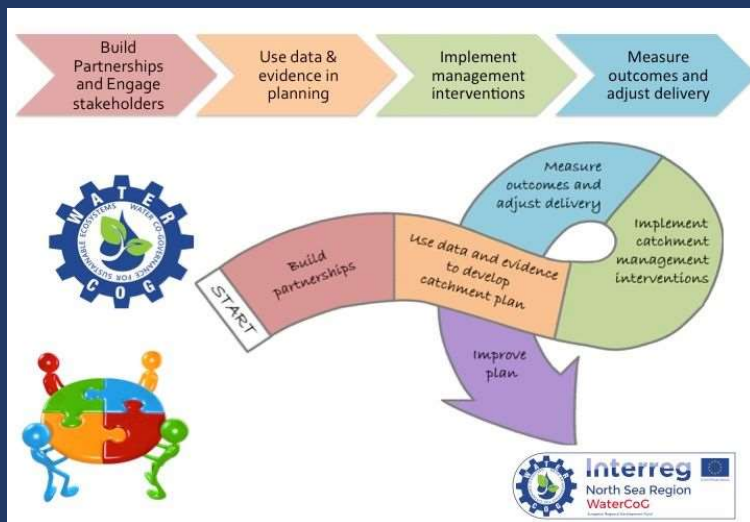


Figure 1: Adaptive Management Approach

The WaterCoG project has adopted the adaptive management approach (Figure 1s) to identify shifts in governance structures across the partners. This is explored further in the project's country pilot evaluation reports* and the synthesis of all partner findings**.

Figure 2: Governance triangle pressure points diagram. This framework was developed to understand the varying levels of governance in water co-governance approaches, and the levels of strength of each area of governance (i.e., strong top-down or bottom-up approaches). Nearly all identified the need to connect a missing middle group/approach to connect top-down and bottom-up governance. Featured in the Water Co-Governance Implementation Concept Paper***.



* <https://northsearegion.eu/watercog/output-library/>

** https://northsearegion.eu/media/16681/final_watercog_pilotsevaluation_synthesis.pdf

***<https://northsearegion.eu/media/19787/cogov-implementation-concept.pdf>

UK

The Rivers Trust, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust

UK focus on the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA), taking an existing structure of Catchment Partnerships across the UK, and enabling further growth and integration of programmes and stakeholders.

WaterCoG has been focused on supporting local CaBA delivery with a focus on two catchment partnerships (Cam and Ely Ouse and Yorkshire Dales) as well as supporting national co-governance approaches.

A particular focus on data- and evidence-led approaches has grown and been actively encouraged by the project, to better inform key environmental, social, and organisational challenges discussed in collaborative, co-governance forums.

What was the governance baseline?

The governance structure was based around strong top-down and active, organised bottom-up groups.

What were the main governance challenges?

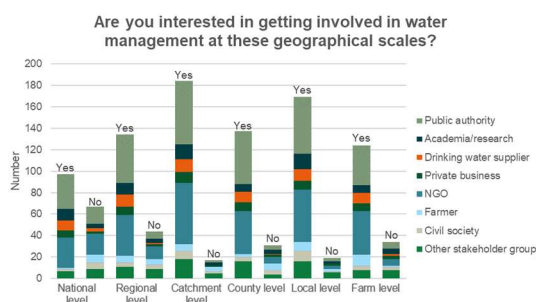
The main governance challenge at the baseline was the need to connect a missing middle group/approach to connect top-down and bottom-up governance. There was an evidence need to engage citizens and society more widely to ensure momentum and sustainability of co-governance approaches.

Box 2: Stakeholder perspectives

"Suffolk's River Lark, one of England's chalk streams, is at risk of decline it's catchment heavily polluted and exploited for its water resources. The River Lark Catchment Partnership has put together a stakeholder group including Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Rivers Trust, and the RiverFly Partnership to assess the status of the pollution and to draw up an action plan for improving its water quality. This effort is being mentored by MP Jo Churchill. Our action plan calls for an integrated approach across all sectors and has now commenced being delivered by all partners." (River Lark Catchment Partnership)

The Citizens Jury invited members of the public to come together around the question "How do you connect with water in your local environment, and what needs to be changed in the future to benefit people and wildlife" for short, intense experience of deliberation, taking evidence, and forming recommendations. This Citizens' Jury process was done online over 6 sessions in February and March 2021, using Zoom. Each session lasted between 2 and 2.5 hours (15 hours in total). The 22 Jurors were selected from within the river catchment and balanced for the diversity of local demographics. The topic for the Jury (Creating a river that is balanced and fit for purpose) was chosen by a diverse group of stakeholders in a series of planning sessions and conversations. Feedback included: "Thank you for the opportunity and they should definitely be run again for more environmental issues" and "It was rewarding to work on really practical and evidence-based recommendations which we know will bring significant benefit to all users." (Local Participants, iWharfe Project Citizens Jury)

Figure 3: Survey feedback



From surveys, the 'Catchment level' and 'Local level' geographical scales gained the greatest interest across stakeholders for more involvement in water management.

What has changed from the baseline, during the WaterCoG project?

Co-governance shifts in the UK have been demonstrated in the form of more actively engaged citizen and community groups working with Catchment Partnerships, water companies, NGOs, businesses, agencies, and government to monitor environmental impacts in catchments. CaBA and the Catchment Monitoring Cooperative approach has enabled this and shown increases in data- and evidence-led approaches to co-governance action planning. The progression of governance approaches has shifted (and is still in the process of doing so) from a confrontational approach from the bottom up challenging institutions with new datasets, to a progression towards more collaborative and evidence-led co-governance approaches to enabling change across catchment partnerships. One of the key lessons learned is around catchment monitoring: questions around how much catchment monitoring takes place, how citizen science could help increase and improve this, and how extensive monitoring is funded sustainably.

Figure 4: Photos showing citizen engagement in key catchment partnership events and practices.



Citizen engagement – River Lark



iWharfe / Citizen Jury (Photo: Environment Agency)

Germany

Oldenburgisch-Ostfriesische Wasserverband, Lower Saxony

Formal top-down governance used to be complemented by early stage discussion between the water provider and single stakeholder groups.

The Round Table provided a first multi-stakeholder forum

Many resources were invested in building trust by increasing transparency and providing data.

Information flow was improved, and some stakeholders reported increased trust.

What was the governance baseline?

Governance mainly driven by formal processes, and strong stakeholder groups, organisations, and institutions.

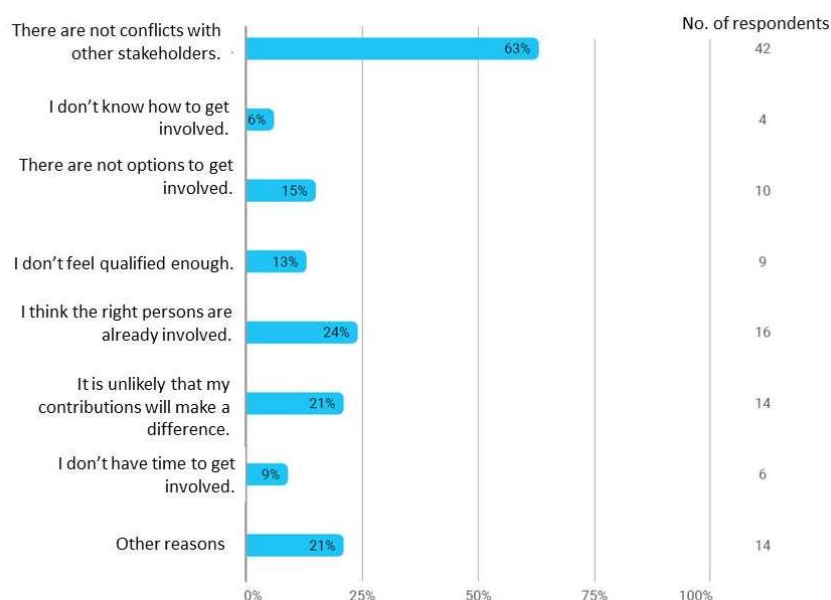
What were the main governance challenges?

The observed drought symptoms did not need to be integrated into the formal hydrological expertise and management plan. That led to concerns about the soundness of groundwater withdrawal. Earlier conflicts in other areas fuelled this lack of trust. As a consequence, the public opinion increasingly withdraws their support to the current approach of local groundwater abstraction. This cause a threat to further abstraction rights of the public water provider.

Box 3 – Stakeholder perspectives

“The Round Table Großenkneten aimed to inform about the complex issues on groundwater management- and it is important to see the specific numbers. The experts presenting were key to the quality of the process.” (Local participant)

Figure 5: Survey feedback: Many of the respondents working in the water sector identified the lack of understanding. In addition, the figure below shows the importance of a clear scope of co-governance process. Co-Governance is not an end in itself. The blue columns indicate response to the question: Which of the following reasons hinder participation in water management? Total: 105 respondents.



What has changed from the baseline, during the WaterCoG project?

The Round Table helped most stakeholders to better understand the hydrological situation. The improved transparency was much appreciated. Still, not all conflicts could be solved.

Figure 6: The venue was packed at the Kick-off in May 2016. More than 20 stayed on board for more than three years. (Photo: OOWV)



Denmark

SEGES, Kommunernes Landsforening, Aalborg Kommune

From a position with mainly top-down regulation the focus where on establish more “local based water planning” and strengthening local engagement.

Co-Governance approach has been at work first in the pilot and later outside the pilot, and this have given raise to large interesse and new initiatives among local authorities and stakeholders in DK.

New concepts developed in WaterCoG for local catchment approach and citizens science have led to increased engagement among stakeholders and citizens.

Catchment officers tested in WaterCoG became a national program and this have led to increased ownership among farmers for environmental solutions and have led to implementation of several hundred constructed wetlands.

The concept “Water boards” have demonstrated an increased cost effectiveness regarding implementation of environmental measures in streams.

The national strategy on water governance is still mainly top-down driven and it’s still a challenge left to get a better top down / bottom up interaction.

What was the governance baseline?

The governance baseline was a strong regulatory top-down approach.

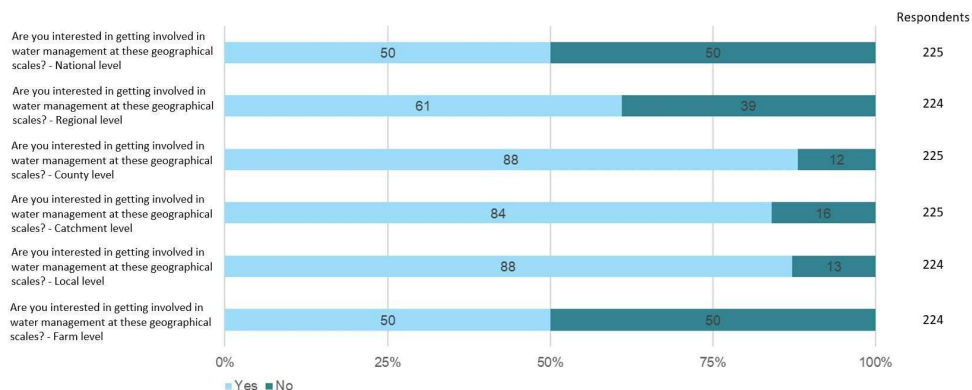
What were the main governance challenges?

The main challenge at the baseline was the need to strengthen the bottom-up and middle group approaches to governance.

Box 4: Stakeholder Perspectives

“The paradigm in nitrogen regulation has changed in relation to a more targeted effort, but the management and administration itself are following the old paradigm with top-down regulation. But there is a growing interest among local authorities, research institutes, NGOs, and companies to approach water planning in a new way, based on local conditions and ownership. I believe that WaterCoG project have played a crucial role as a catalyst for working with locally based planning, and that tools are being developed here to create ownership. It does not come by itself.” (Maria Pilgaard, Environment Political Adviser at VELAS)

Figure 7: Survey feedback. From surveys, the 'County level', 'Catchment level' and 'Local level' geographical scales gained the greatest interest across stakeholders for more involvement in water management. While the 'National level', 'Regional level' and 'Farm level' gained less interest. Indicating that it's in the 'middle', between top and bottom, where most stakeholders want to meet and share interest.



What has changed from the baseline, during the WaterCoG project?

Since project start there have been a clear increase in initiatives for local collaboration with a catchment-based approach between local authorities, local farming associations and other stakeholders. The interest and local initiatives are facilitated due to WaterCoG activities both in the pilot area and many other places in DK. As an inspiration from WaterCoG, the government have decided to spend 2,1 mio. € for a pilot program 2022-2024 to test a local based approach to achieve good ecological status in coastal waters. Additionally, the government have decided to optimize local and regional collaboration for implementing measures in the landscape. The WaterCoG activity regarding ghost nets has given attention to the problem and The Ministry of the Environment has allocated 1.2 mio. € for this task in the period 2022 to 2024.

Figure 8: Stakeholders on fieldtrip, a good platform for exchanging knowledge



Sweden

Havs-och vattenmyndigheten, Vattenmyndigheten Västerhavets vattendistrikt

How can we strengthen local participation and collaboration at all levels using a holistic perspective and co-creating sustainable change? How can we increase voluntary local measures for better water quality? What role can water councils play in this?

The results show the need to consciously use methods that create true participation based on approaches of openness, dialogue, and equal terms.

Key successful impacts:

The water councils' role as an important neutral meeting place has developed and become clearer.

New local water groups have emerged and financial support for many local projects have been granted.

Methods used and tested have been published as tools for collaboration on a well visited website.

Increased awareness of the role of catchment officers for coordinating and supporting local involvement and collaboration. Resulting in government mandates and new grants for catchment officers.

What was the governance baseline?

Unclear roles for the water councils. The participants found it difficult to reach out, they felt they were not taken seriously, and that progress was slow.

What were the main governance challenges?

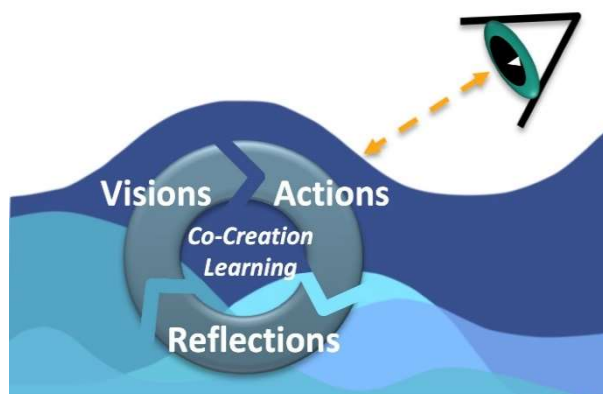
- *Open and neutral meeting places with facilitative approaches and a diversity of participants that create and maintain participation, collaboration, and a more holistic view.*
- *Coordination to continuously facilitate collaboration and processes that lead to actual measures.*
- *Long-term financing for coordination.*
- *Local commitment and co-creation need to be viewed as an important resource both for local sustainable development and democracy.*

Box 5: Stakeholder perspectives

"Water is much more than just water, with all life living in it. I have got another perspective on it, now it is not just about canals which drain our fields, but it is something else as well – fish and birds." (Farmer in a water council)

"The water council itself is a fantastic network. What enormous knowledge we have. That is the function of the water council. You can connect it to yourself and your own organization. Who works with sustainability issues? You should look at your own small network" (Politician in a water council)

Figure 9: Image from the Swedish project describing important parts of the process for joint learning and co-creation. By looking at the process from the outside, knowledge arises about the process that we can bring along. Approaches and methods providing access, space and influence are needed. Recurrent evaluation is also an important part.



What has changed from the baseline, during the WaterCoG project?

The pilot water councils have served as meeting places for various interests such as landowners, associations, companies, municipalities, and authorities. Our pilot groups have developed visions and plans based on the participants' own commitments and knowledge. From the three water councils, 22 local projects have emerged as well as additional seminars with different themes. This has led to educational projects as well as local measures such as habitat improvements, construction of wetlands and removal of migration obstacles. It has also led to inventories and sampling projects where landowners and citizens have contributed. " We can offer a place where you can collaborate." (Participant in a water council)

Figure 10: River walks involve a group of people exploring a watercourse and its surrounding on foot together. Through the participants experiences and curiosity, and by listening and telling, the groups different competencies and interests meet in a common knowledge building process. In the Swedish pilots, a multitude of different tools were applied in the participatory processes.



The Netherlands

*Hanze hogeschool Groningen,
Hoogheemraadschap Hollands
Noorderkwartier*

At the start of the project governance could be improved and no adequate tools seemed available.

We stimulated engagement of stakeholders (focus on citizens) to raise awareness and capacity building on sustainable water management.

During the project we increased a shared understanding of complex ecosystem and water management issues supported with active stakeholder involvement.

For the future: further development of tools to increase citizen engagement and identify their challenges to face.

What was the governance baseline?

Governance model focused on water boards, municipalities, and citizens.

What were the main governance challenges?

How to increase connection with citizens by the use of WaterCoG tools to improve water governance by enabling water managers to make best use of tools and knowledge.

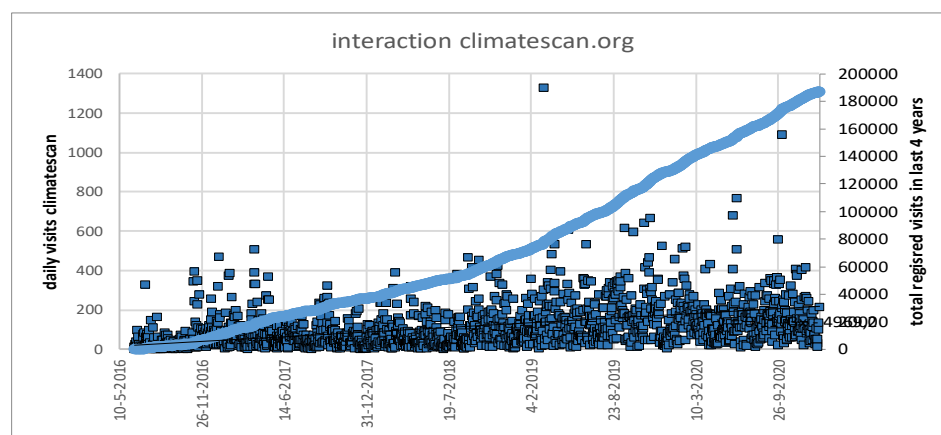
Box 6: Stakeholder perspectives

Transboundary tools as ClimateCafe and ClimateScan are applied at Dutch pilots Oude Diep, Groningen and Texel. The WaterCoG ClimateCafes in Germany (Oldenburg) and Sweden (Malmo and Gothenborg) raised awareness about climate adaptation and have built capacity with stakeholders resulting in concrete outcomes. Evaluation of these events led to the decision to hold ClimateCafes on regular basis also after the WaterCoG project to keep engagement with stakeholders.

“Tools as climatescan as citizen science motivated me and colleagues to share information about sustainable water management which I will continue after the WaterCoG project.” (Marthijn Maneschijn (WDOD))

A citizen science tools as climatescan is a great way to share info about sustainable watermanagement to a bigger public. For experienced users as myself but also for colleagues with another specialty. Thomas Klomp (Samenklimatebestendig)

Figure 11: Interaction with ClimateScan during WaterCoG project



Source: Restemeyer, B.; Boogaard, F.C. Potentials and Pitfalls of Mapping Nature-Based Solutions with the Online Citizen Science Platform ClimateScan. *Land* **2021**, *10*, 5.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/land10010005>

What has changed from the baseline, during the WaterCoG project?

Three Dutch pilots from local to regional scales between 2016 and 2019 using the WaterCoG Toolbox: 1 Texel Pilot: set up a cooperation process with farmers to deal with salinity in irrigated areas. 2 Oude Diep: evaluating the need for more co-governance approaches as climatecafe.nl and climatescan.org 3 Climate Resilient Cities & Climate Atlas: providing a knowledge platform for fostering climate change adaptation.

Figure 12: Participative research on sustainable water management combining research, education with stakeholders raising awareness and building capacity.



Conclusions

Since the start of the project, there have been shifts across the country partners in terms of water co-governance approaches.

All countries have demonstrated that tailored approaches are crucial for adopting co-governance approaches in different countries.

However, there have been some similar steps and findings (such as better data- and evidence- led approaches or adoption of catchment officers) that support improved co-governance through connecting top-down and bottom-up governance approaches.

Challenges still remain, such as institutional barriers to implementing shifts in governance, and the need for greater community and citizen engagement in water co-governance.

During the project, the collaboration and knowledge sharing between countries in the project has been crucial for sharing methods and tools for co-governance approaches.

What have we found since the baseline of the project?

The project has provided an opportunity to build up the missing 'middle' – groups or organisations who can support bringing together stakeholders in co-governance approaches. However, this has highlighted a lack of institutional level of support – the frameworks guiding co-governance approaches need to be strengthened.

The project has informed 'processes of knowledge' – allowing the chance for stakeholders to start up the creation of common understanding of their own stakeholder and geographical environments, and identify 'wins' across stakeholders. There is a need now to build and maintain structures to support these processes and the financial means to support this.

Since the start of the project, more partnerships have developed and have found the space and opportunity to connect, which has also supported a framework through which to start to engage more citizen science and community engagement. This project has played a key role in enabling the legitimacy and mandate for groups to create and engage in co-governance networks.

A key thing to understand and discuss within co-governance forums is the ownership and responsibility of stakeholders. Partnerships have found that it is vital to revisit these questions and cannot expect stakeholders to jump immediately into new ways of working, this takes time to develop.

Pilot synthesis report findings:

A separate project report highlights a synthesis of findings from across the project's pilots. The report notes that every individual country has faced challenges and implemented different shifts to co-governance make-up; but that there are some common themes and findings.*

Forward look and recommendations

Water co-governance structures remain focussed on siloed challenges rather than a systems-based approach. It is vital for all water stakeholders to adopt holistic approaches which bring together actors to address water-related challenges. Key questions have been raised by the project across all country partners, for example 1) who has the responsibility to make co-governance approaches happen, and 2) what do stakeholders do in the face of conflicts around water?

Co-governance models can be shifted, updated, and created across organisations and representatives. However, to fully achieve the ambition of improved water co-governance in North Sea Region Ecosystems would be to enable effective citizen participation in the development and delivery of sustainable solutions. Moreover, establishing effective co-governance processes takes time; though legislation and policy can be created, greater frameworks and institutional support for co-governance partnerships need to be established across all countries in tailored ways. The future Interreg North Sea programme framework again highlights the need for '4.1 Better Cooperation Governance'.**

*https://northsearegion.eu/media/16681/final_watercog_pilotsevaluation_synthesis.pdf

**<https://northsearegion.eu/about-the-programme/programme-news/understand-the-themes-in-the-future-programme/>