



**RESOURCE**

# Social Learning and Water Resources Management

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**Description / Abstract**

Natural resources management in general, and water resources management in particular, are currently undergoing a major paradigm shift. Management practices have largely been developed and implemented by experts using technical means based on designing systems that can be predicted and controlled. In recent years, stakeholder involvement has gained increasing importance. Collaborative governance is considered to be more appropriate for integrated and adaptive management regimes needed to cope with the complexity of social-ecological systems. The paper presents a concept for social learning and collaborative governance developed in the European project HarmoniCOP (Harmonizing COLlaborative Planning). The concept is rooted in the more interpretive strands of the social sciences emphasizing the context dependence of knowledge. The role of frames and boundary management in processes of learning at different levels and time scales is investigated. The foundation of social learning as investigated in the HarmoniCOP project is multiparty collaboration processes that are perceived to be the nuclei of learning processes. Such processes take place in networks or “communities of practice” and are influenced by the governance structure in which they are embedded. Requirements for social learning include institutional settings that guarantee some degree of stability and certainty without being rigid and inflexible. Our analyses, which are based on conceptual considerations and empirical insights, suggest that the development of such institutional settings involves continued processes of social learning. In these processes, stakeholders at different scales are connected in flexible networks that allow them to develop the capacity and trust they need to collaborate in a wide range of formal and informal relationships ranging from formal legal structures and contracts to informal, voluntary agreements.

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