

## Understanding emergent participation practices in water governance

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### ABSTRACT

This introductory article discusses the proliferation of different forms of participation in water governance. It is argued that creating public value through participation can only succeed when effective co-creation between public authorities and communities emerges. However, challenges to realizing co-creation are manifold, and differ among the various types of participation. In this respect, we introduce a typology of different forms of participation, based on the distinction between top-down (invited) and bottom-up (created) participation. We use this distinction to analyze different dynamics in participatory water governance and to delve deeper into the dilemmas and trade-offs. Lastly, the various contributions to this special issue are introduced.

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## Introduction

Water management and governance are in transition. There is a steady increase of various forms of participatory, deliberative and collaborative approaches to water governance and management (Akhmouch & Clavreul, 2016; Margerum & Robinson, 2015; Von Korff, Daniell, Moellenkamp, Bots, & Bijlsma, 2012), in which governments try to include communities in policy making or service delivery. There is also growing attention to the roles communities can play, or do play, when it comes to wicked challenges like climate adaptation, environmental conservation or resilience building (Lebel et al., 2006; Magis, 2010). In this respect, there is a rise of bottom-up initiatives by grass roots, companies and stakeholder groups that take responsibility for the delivery of goods and services in the water domain. This is expressed for instance in community-led approaches to disaster risk management (McLennan, 2018), initiatives which challenge governmental proposals for water management measures (Edelenbos, van Buuren, Roth, & Winnubst, 2017), and other bottom-up forms of collaborative water governance (Guerrero, Bodin, McAllister, & Wilson, 2015; Koontz & Newig, 2014). Some authors mention the rise of community activism in water management (e.g. Brown, 2005). Other authors have shown the increasing role of community initiatives in water-related issues,

such as combining water safety measures with landscape planning that addresses recreational and nature values (Duijn, Van Buuren, Edelenbos, Van Propering-Verkerk, & Van Meerkerk, 2019, this issue).

In addition, and partly as a result of those initiatives, numerous hybrid constellations of public, private and societal actors have emerged, who interact and co-produce in developing public goods and services, such as water supply and sanitation, irrigation services, blue-green infrastructure and flood risk measures. It is typical in these constellations that the roles of public, societal and private actors are dynamic and often cannot be sharply delineated. The 'public space' around water issues becomes filled with new types of actors and new coalitions between these actors. But the way they interact is also evolving. It seems that their interaction modes are becoming more horizontal and reciprocal.

This development can be seen as a response to traditional and institutionalized approaches in water management that can be characterized as technocratic, expert-driven, hierarchical and monocentric (Huntjens et al., 2011; Teisman, van Buuren, Edelenbos, & Warner, 2013; Tortajada, 2010). At the same time, it also reflects new societal dynamics, in which people are more willing and able to take an initiating role in processes of policy formulation, implementation and service delivery (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). More direct forms of participation and deliberation with citizens and other stakeholders are increasingly seen as essential additions to the classical representative system of democracy to retain legitimacy (Dryzek, 2010; Van Buuren, Klijn, & Edelenbos, 2012; Van Meerkerk, Edelenbos, & Klijn, 2015). A cautious evolution from governance approaches based on new public management principles towards governance based on value creation and co-production can be witnessed in many domains (Osborne, Radnor, & Strokosch, 2016; Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015). This special issue shows that this also holds true for the water domain.

This special issue aims for a deeper understanding of the emergence of new participatory spaces in water governance. This emergence raises important questions about the role and strategy of public water authorities. They have to align their activities and strategies with those of other actors and find ways to realize outcomes in co-creation with them. But how to come to a fruitful interplay between stakeholder initiatives and water authorities? What are the conditions necessary to achieve good governance based on complementarity between (formal) governmental action and (informal, bottom-up) collective action? How do they differ in the context of a 'weak state' or a 'strong state'? The contributions to this special issue shed light on these questions.

This introductory article discusses innovative participatory spaces in water governance and provides background for this special issue. The evolution towards more participatory water governance is discussed both in more formalized and institutional practices of participation (government-led) and in the more informal, bottom-up settings in which communities are leading and giving shape to participatory practices. In this respect we make a distinction between top-down and bottom-up forms of participation (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016; see also Duijn et al., 2019, this issue), also referred to as 'invited' and 'created' spaces of participation, respectively (Denters, 2016). We refine this distinction further to cover the many appearances of created and invited forms of participation. Next, we discuss various barriers and conditions for fruitful interaction between public water authorities and stakeholders (either citizens or societal and private actors) in relation to invited and created spaces of participation. Although water governance without

participation cannot be easily imagined anymore, the issues in relation to co-creation are manifold and intricate. We outline several conditions for co-creation, and delve deeper into the trade-offs that emerge, based on the articles that form this issue.

## **Towards more participatory water governance**

In the domain of water governance there is much attention to the question of how best to involve stakeholders in processes of policy making, decision making and implementation. More and more, participation has become part of the standard repertoire of water authorities (Newig & Fritsch, 2009; Reed, 2008). Participation is a multifaceted concept (see also next section). It can be a matter of consulting or engaging stakeholders in decision making, but also of empowering local stakeholders and groups to contribute to solving public challenges. Involving stakeholders is seen as necessary or desirable for effective policy implementation. When successful, these participation processes might result in long-term engagements in which stakeholders and communities are involved in the provision and monitoring of public services. Especially in countries with relatively weak administrative structures, this kind of participation is often promoted by international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a way to foster development. The slum project in Ahmedabad (Grassini, 2018, this issue) is a clear example.

However, governments can have different motives for starting participatory efforts in water governance, such as increasing support for policies, enhancing problem-solving capacity, breaking deadlocks, avoiding litigation costs or improving the quality of decisions (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Reed, 2008). Ricart et al. (2018, this issue) describe public participation by invitation and distinguish between three objectives for this kind of participation: 'normative concerns (people have a right to influence matters that affect them), substantive concerns (bringing diverse perspectives and knowledge together results in better policies) [and] instrumental concerns (the public accepts water policy because they were actively involved in shaping it)' (p. 1). While improving the quality of decisions is an important and frequently mentioned motive, public acceptance is often a more powerful one (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). This can be framed negatively, as a way to strengthen the government's position and to retain power, but also positively, as a way to give stakeholders a voice on issues that matter to them, to take their needs and interests into account.

From this point of view, important questions are in which phase of a planning or policy process stakeholders are invited, and in which role, and what degree of participation should be aimed for. Hassenforder, Clavreul, Akhmouch, & Ferrand's paper (2018, this issue) on the OECD's investigation of effective stakeholder engagement goes deeper into various approaches to stakeholder involvement, both emerging (bottom-up) and top-down. The Dutch and US cases of 'formal stakeholder engagement' show clear differences from the African cases of 'spontaneous stakeholder engagement', in which the emphasis is much more on empowerment. Participation in the latter cases was organized as a means to enable implementation by mobilizing local actors with crucial resources.

A recurring issue with government-led participation is that expectations of influence are raised, but not always met in practice (Reed, 2008; Van Meerkerk, *in press*). Furthermore, continuous motivation and commitment of society is challenging. Societal actors are often not satisfied with the strictly conditioned rules of engagement, particularly when their influence in decision making is limited (Edelenbos, van Meerkerk, & Schenk, 2018). As an

alternative to government-led participation, bottom-up participatory initiatives are emerging in which society itself sets the rules for engagement.

### **The rise of bottom-up initiatives in water governance**

Spontaneous action through bottom-up initiatives in the domain of water management is certainly not a new development, but seems to be on the rise. Local actors (society, stakeholder groups or NGOs, private companies), confronted with situations that affect their interests, organize to create some form of collective action. Bottom-up initiatives can arise from dissatisfaction or complaints about governmental policy or actions, or emerge in spaces that governments have withdrawn from due to budget cuts (e.g. Edelenbos et al., 2018; Gofen, 2015). For example, local stakeholders may develop alternatives to government proposals for flood risk management measures (Edelenbos et al., 2017). This can be an explicit reaction to government-led participatory efforts in which citizens or other stakeholders do not feel sufficiently heard or in which they are, in their experience, involved too late in the decision-making process. As a response, and to avoid being marginalized as exclusively negative and NIMBYist ('not in my back yard'), they may develop their own initiatives (Edelenbos et al., 2018). Such community-based initiatives (CBIs) are (although unintendedly) triggered by a controversial policy process initiated by public authorities.

Some examples of CBIs and collaboration in water governance are joint efforts of local stakeholders to protect nature, and in some cases to manage fishing and tourism (Eckerberg, Bjärstig, & Zachrisson, 2015). These initiatives have a hands-on, do-it-yourself character, taking action to contribute to common issues. The actors are responding to specific needs in the local community and have, as Bang (2009) describes, a common project-oriented identity. Compared to traditional activists, they are less focused on fighting 'the system' (conventional or formal politics and existing power structures). Rather, they want to be taken seriously as prudent and competent actors or perhaps partners of governments in delivering services to their members or communities. In line with this, in their study on collaborations in the Swedish mountain area, Eckerberg et al. (2015) found that bottom-up initiatives are generally more action-oriented than top-down initiatives, which had more of a policy and organizational orientation.

These various examples show there is a thin line between community engagement as a participation strategy (see previous section) and bottom-up initiatives. Engaging local communities can mobilize their self-organizing capacity and thus result in new bottom-up initiatives. It can have an emancipatory effect. Participation processes then shift from a strongly formalized process towards a process in which stakeholders evolve into partners and more equal relationships emerge. The cases described by Grassini (2018, this issue) and by Romano (2017, this issue) clearly show this evolution, in which participants become partners. Furthermore, community initiatives can also become vital partners for governments in the processes of planning, management and also implementation, including operation and maintenance.

### **Towards a typology of invited and created spaces for participation**

Participation and engagement of local stakeholders can thus emerge through the invitation of policy initiators and formal decision makers (*invited* participation, in

which the government offers stakeholders a say in public policy and implementation processes) or through the initiative of local stakeholders themselves: *created* spaces for participation (Denters, 2016). The former has at least two flavours. Invited participation can be aimed at empowering and mobilizing stakeholders, as a means to enlarge the possibilities of collective action and thus to enhance governance capacity for service delivery – for instance, by giving participants the skills they need to take a co-producing role in tackling environmental issues (Das, 2014). Invited participation can also be used as a means to increase legitimacy and support for policy measures (Van Buuren et al., 2012). In that case, participation (or consultation) is used to hear the voices of stakeholders and to try to take their interests into account when policies are drafted.

In created spaces for participation, we can make a distinction, building on Margerum (2008). He distinguishes project-oriented initiatives (actors develop their own, alternative project proposal), action-oriented initiatives (actors initiate a certain action), and policy-oriented initiatives (actors mobilize to try to change policies). Clear examples of the first category (project-oriented initiatives) are given by Edelenbos et al. (2017), who describe three cases in which citizens developed their own alternative plans for flood risk management because they totally disagreed with the governmental plans. These initiatives are thus ‘provoked’ by a government launching a controversial proposal. Action-oriented initiatives are illustrated in the article of Duijn et al. (2019, this issue): citizens (or collectives) start their own project aimed at realizing certain goods or services and thus claim some ‘public space’ for realizing this initiative. The third category match all forms of grass-roots movements and environmental activism, aimed at mobilizing people to promote certain values or rights (like access to water or sanitation) via agenda setting or policy lobbying (Mazzoni & Cicognani, 2013).

These five types of participation are schematized in Table 1, partly building on the typology of Margerum (2008).

These different types of participation can evolve into other types. They are dynamic: processes of mobilization and emancipation can change the very meaning of participation in a concrete situation. Furthermore, they can result in collaborations between governmental and non-governmental actors (cf. Ricart et al., 2018, this issue). The various contributions in this special issue show that in most of the described cases, actors come to a form of collaboration or partnership, whether through invited participation or in created spaces of participation. This collaboration is necessary to enable value creation and to improve governance capacity, the capacity to collectively solve public issues in an effective and legitimate way (Van Buuren, Driessen, Teisman, & van Rijswick, 2014). We thus can redefine the challenge of participation in water governance as the challenge to come to effective co-creation of public value. The next sections consider the questions of how to conceptualize co-creation and what conditions have to be met for it to occur.

## **Participation and the quest for effective co-creation**

As explained above, the interesting question is when and under what conditions co-creation of public value can be realized. Co-creation can be defined as the outcome of processes of co-producing and co-delivering public goods and services in which society, stakeholder groups and governmental actors have joint responsibility and their collaboration results in public value (Osborne et al., 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015). In this article, co-production is defined as the



**Table 1.** Different types of invited and created participation.

Type of participation	Invited participation			Created participation		
	Capacity-driven participation	Legitimacy-driven participation	Project-oriented initiatives	Action-oriented initiatives	Policy-oriented initiatives	
Description	Stakeholders are invited to participate to strengthen governance capacity	Stakeholders are invited to participate to enhance legitimacy	Stakeholders/ citizens mobilize to develop their own project proposal, challenging governmental decision making affecting their interests	Stakeholders/ citizens mobilize to organize and manage on-the-ground action in managing water resources (e.g. monitoring, education, restoration)	Stakeholders/ citizens mobilize to change existing rules or initiate new rules and regulations for managing water resources	
Motive	Empowering stakeholders is a way to enable action	Participation is a way to ensure support for policy action	To prevent public authorities from realizing their own proposal, by developing a credible alternative	To realize an initiative that adds public value	To start a policy-oriented lobby (because current policies or rules disadvantage stakeholders' position)	

voluntary or involuntary involvement of public service users in the design, management, delivery or evaluation of public services (cf. Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016). Co-creation, then, is the outcome of successful processes of co-production. Not every process of co-production results in co-creation of public value. Many processes of collaborative governance even fail to reach a consensus (Cho & Jung, 2018). Many produce some form of mutual adjustment or support, but are not successful in synchronizing agendas and creating some form of added value out of the interaction. Co-creation of public value is thus an important yardstick for successful invited or created participation.

Aside from the motives for participation, government-led participation can be focused on mere consultation or can provide more extensive room for deliberation and influence of stakeholder groups. The famous ladder of Arnstein (1969) is often used to label the extent of participation, ranging from manipulation (symbolic participation) through one-way consultation (a form of tokenism) to two-way collaboration and control by the local community at the top of the ladder. The literature contains numerous examples of participatory efforts after which stakeholders were disappointed or lacked commitment due to weak impact on policy making and decision making or unclear feedback on what happened to their inputs. As pointed out by Hassenforder et al. (2018, this issue), invited participation may lead to 'box-ticking' approaches, where engagement is carried out only to comply with legal frameworks and rules, and limited to the minimum required level. In this respect, government-led participation often includes the lower rungs of Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein, 1969), from manipulation to forms of one-way consultation; co-creation (partnerships and delegated power, the top rungs) are much harder to achieve in practice (Reed, 2008).

As described in the previous section, participatory spaces can also be created by stakeholders themselves. Here again is the question of whether interaction with governments results in co-creation of public value or whether bottom-up initiatives compete with government initiatives, go alone, or are neglected by governments. Romano (2017, this issue) shows how rural water committees became embedded in all kinds of formal networks, ultimately resulting in their formal recognition as water managers. This is a clear example of how bottom-up, locally grounded collective action resulted in co-production of public policy processes. Romano describes the crucial role of bridging networks in the creation of participatory space and the empowerment of community-based water governance regimes. And the initiatives of private actors to use public assets for innovative forms of energy production resulted in formal arrangements for the distribution of roles and responsibilities (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017, this issue).

### **Conditions for co-creation**

The question now comes up, what are the conditions for participation leading to co-creation of public value? Several contributions in this special issue (Grassini; Fischer et al.) go deeper into explaining the effectiveness of participatory practices in leading to public value creation. Some recent publications on this topic (RePolis, 2017; Voorberg et al., 2015) make a distinction between three sets of conditions. First there are the capabilities and characteristics of the participants. This is a factor that it is often mentioned in the participation literature (e.g. Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2006; Reed, 2008). Governments can invest in developing the knowledge needed to

create a more level playing field during participation trajectories. Furthermore, they can invest in capacity building to ensure that society is given the support to develop the skills and resources needed to engage (Lowndes et al., 2006). When it comes to created spaces of participation, Romano (2017, this issue) clearly illustrates that the resources and internal characteristics of actors matter for whether they are able to successfully participate in policy and implementation processes. Romano shows that there is a clear relation between the internal social capital of a stakeholder group and its external effectiveness.

Other studies have pointed out that the same holds true for the leadership of such a group. Community leadership is a key condition in the mobilization of resources and the development of organizational capacity. The literature extensively describes various activities and characteristics of community leaders (e.g. Purdue, 2001; Selsky & Smith, 1994). Specific leadership activities in the context of CBIs are community building and mobilizing; building collaborative and strategic alliances between CBIs and institutional power holders; and identifying and exploiting new entrepreneurial opportunities (Van Meerkerk, Kleinhans, & Molenveld, 2018).

A second factor in the effectiveness of participation is how the interaction between public authorities and participants is structured. Fischer et al. (2017, this issue) clearly show that the characteristics of the forum that is used to structure participation are important in realizing consensus and inclusiveness. A crucial task for authorities organizing participation efforts is to make participation transparent and ensure that there is feedback on how input is processed. To turn participatory efforts into meaningful co-creation, scholars stress developing an authentic dialogue and due deliberation (Dryzek, 2010; Van Meerkerk et al., 2015). This includes careful deliberation of problem definitions and goals of participation with the participants. This requires skilful facilitation of informal group discussions, including maintenance of 'positive group dynamics, handling dominating or offensive individuals, encourage participants to question assumptions and re-evaluate entrenched positions' (Reed, 2008, p. 2425). Grassini (2018, this issue) also finds the role of different types of 'active mediators' to be a key factor in facilitating due deliberation and negotiation at different levels between local stakeholders and formal power holders. She shows that these mediators enabled the embedding of local participatory efforts in formal strategy and decision making. Moreover, they played a role in counterbalancing unequal power relations 'in such a way that communities could also benefit from the project despite huge power unbalances' (p. 18).

Engagement with stakeholders as early as possible in decision making has been frequently cited as essential if participatory processes are to lead to high-quality and more meaningful co-creation (Reed, 2008). According to the review by Reed (2008) of the literature on stakeholder participation in environmental governance, society typically gets involved in decision making only at the implementation phase of a project, and not in the earlier project identification and preparation phases, hampering meaningful influence. This may make it a challenge to motivate participants. Furthermore, it places participants in a reactive position, where they are asked to respond to proposals that they perceive to have already have been finalized (Chess & Purcell, 1999).

Much work on participation and co-production stresses the need to develop trustful relationships between government officials and participants and among the different groups of stakeholders or participants. Trustful relationships raise the quality of

information exchange and mutual learning, contributing to both the satisfaction of the participatory process and to the quality of the outcomes (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Frequent face-to-face dialogue and timely information exchange is important in this matter (Ansell & Gash, 2008). As De Vente, Reed, Stringer, Valente, and Newig (2016, p. 24) note, summarizing one of the main findings of a comparative case study on the role of process design in participatory processes for sustainable land management: 'If information exchange occurred through face-to-face contact between participants, there was also a significantly greater likelihood that the process would lead to sustainable solutions; conflict resolution; [and] increased trust among nonstate actors and between nonstate actors and researchers.'

The third key factor in explaining outcomes is the response and receptivity of public institutions and their capacity to adapt to the participatory process or to CBIs that knock on the door (see also Duijn et al., 2019, this issue). Research shows that this response is one of the biggest deterrents to organizing effective and meaningful participation (Lowndes et al., 2006). According to the literature on co-production of public services (including society-initiated forms of co-production), government organizations are often not compatible with such initiatives. They often lack the rules, mechanisms and infrastructure for communicating with outside organizations, considering their input, or collaborating with their initiatives (Kleinhans, 2017; Voorberg et al., 2015). Public servants may see such prospects as just too much work, which interferes with their daily business, or they may simply lack incentives to invest in collaboration with CBIs. As Voorberg et al. (2015, p. 1342) note, for public officials, 'it is often unclear to what extent public services can be improved by incorporating citizens or how co-creation creates budgetary benefits'. Duijn et al. (2019, this issue) consider to what extent Dutch water boards successfully deal with CBIs and show that this strongly depends on the ability of the water boards to organize internal and external alignment.

### **Dilemmas and trade-offs of co-creation**

In situations of both invited participation and created participation there are various dilemmas when actors try to co-create public value. In the case of invited participation, we can distinguish at least three dilemmas, especially on the higher rungs of Arnstein's ladder (1969). First, it is difficult to manage the expectations of participants, especially when public authorities have specific responsibilities with regard to, for example, flood risk management or sanitation. There is an inherent tension between creating space for participation and, as a water authority, responsibly executing your formal tasks in a way that is both legally correct and accountable. Water authorities are bound by legal norms. They have to stay within predefined budgets, and have to fix projects within a certain period. That makes participation a risky endeavour: co-production with other actors may result in a more time-consuming process, with a quest for more public money and solutions that do not necessarily meet legal requirements (McLennan, 2018).

Second, though invited participation is often seen as a way to safeguard smooth implementation, it can become very time-consuming and complicated (Reed, 2008). Including many different (even if relevant and affected) actors can prolong decision making and increase needed capacity and investments. Participatory processes need extensive facilitation and mobilization. Processing feedback, and other instruments

necessary for good participation and information (e.g. joint fact-finding), require timely investments. And when many different stakeholders are included in the process, many different interests affect the result, increasing the chance of greater costs, which are politically difficult to ignore (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). These processes may lead to intense debates, quarrels and conflicts, leading to process stagnation and even deadlocks and impasses (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Decision making and implementation are seen as easier and more straightforward when they can be done without stakeholder participation. When participation is not approached as an opportunity for value creation, its potential remains unlocked. But when it is, it also requires time, resources and competencies to organize it in a proper way. And of course this in turn can produce the perceived inconvenience and delays that come with participation.

Moreover, participation also requires a certain 'equality of arms' and 'balance of power' between the invited actors and those who invite them. Power imbalance and lack of resources for participation are often-mentioned barriers to effective participation processes (e.g. Lowndes et al., 2006; Reed, 2008). As noted previously, governments can invest in the resources needed to create a more level playing field during participation trajectories or invest in capacity building. In many cases, participation requires a form of empowerment and transfer of resources. This presupposes that public authorities trust that their partners will use this empowerment in a way that contributes to the values they want to pursue. But it is not unimaginable that such a resource transfer will backfire and enable stakeholders to organize resistance against public activities, or to develop counter-initiatives, with help from the expertise and resources they got from the authorities.

To summarize, the Achilles' heel of invited forms of participation is the difficult trade-off between the public responsibility to provide water-related goods and services and the ambition to give stakeholders real influence in this domain. Especially in strong states, this difficulty can be quite an obstacle to real co-creation, as it means that public authorities have to restrain themselves and enable others to become equal partners.

In the case of created participation, several other dilemmas can emerge for governments. First, if the government is considering whether to support an initiative, an important question is how representative the initiative is for the local community (Denters, 2016; Edelenbos et al., 2018; McLennan, 2018). Second, when CBIs are supported or are allowed a greater role in the production of public services, the issue of formal accountability arises. Empowering CBIs or giving them more influence over water governance issues (e.g. the maintenance of public spaces) can come at the price of government control. Third, collaboration with CBIs can be quite time-, resource-, and skill-consuming for governments (Watson, 2015). It often requires customization: tailor-made solutions for a specific project. This might conflict with key values, such as the state's legality, reliability and impartiality (Grotenbreg & Altamirano, 2017, this issue). Fourth, politicians and executives may consider CBIs, which often depend on volunteer behaviour, unreliable, because of the unpredictable behaviour or commitments of citizens (Roberts, 2004). In this respect, a 'risk-averse, conservative administrative culture' may explain why society is not considered a reliable resource for partners (Voorberg et al., 2015). Fifth, society-based initiatives are often engaged in ways of delivering services which had hitherto been regarded as strictly professional, thereby changing the rules of the game or deviating from established policy and practices (Gofen, 2015; Van Meerkerk et al., 2018). Grotenbreg and Altamirano go

deeper into various value dilemmas of water authorities in dealing with CBIs in the Netherlands.

The main problem of co-creation in society-based initiatives thus has to do with the tension that arises between the self-organizing logic of these initiatives compared to the (often deeply ingrained) institutional logic of public water authorities, which focuses on accountability, risk avoidance and complexity reduction. Duijn et al. (2019, this issue) clearly show the many problems for Dutch regional water authorities trying to align themselves effectively with community initiatives. This tension often hampers effective co-creation. And when it becomes too great, the people who proposed the bottom-up initiatives can become frustrated and consider withdrawing from the participatory processes.

## Outlook

The articles in this special issue present an interesting overview, dealing with both officially invited and informally initiated forms of participation and delving into issues such as the need to more comprehensively understand the concepts of invited and created participation and their use in practice; the changing role of water authorities; the value of bridging social capital in hybrid networks of societal, public and private actors; and the dilemmas and difficulties that arise when new actors enter public water arenas.

Fischer et al. go deeper into the role of governmental actors in water forum networks. These forums are government-created spaces of participation aiming to enhance knowledge exchange, policy coordination and participation in policy-making and decision-making processes. They include actors from the public (public administration), private, and 'third' sector (e.g. civil society groups), as well as from the scientific community. At the same time, the growth of these decentralized participatory spaces also sharpens the challenge to coordinate different, but related, policy-making and decision-making processes for water management. Via social network analysis, Fischer et al. show how various forums are connected and which actors play important bridging roles. Their analysis of the 23 forums and their more than 300 actors shows that public administration actors are the ones that connect the different water forums with each other, even though they are clearly outnumbered by other types of actors. They argue that this shows the changing role of government actors in governance systems: from hierarchical and leading policy makers towards more brokering, coordinating and facilitating. In this respect public administration actors still play a crucial, but somewhat different, role in participatory spaces.

The value of bridging social capital is analyzed by studying multisectoral alliances of rural water committees and NGOs in Nicaragua through the lens of transformative participation in the article of Romano. For the rural water committees to become more relevant in service provision and play a role in policy making, it was crucial to expand their social and geographical mobility, which had prevented their contributions from even being recognized by the government. The alliances they formed with NGOs and multilateral organizations, and the related social capital they built, gave the committees political visibility and thus access to state officials and channels of representation. This gave them the opportunity to participate in public policy processes at the municipal and national levels, which was beneficial for the country as a whole. Through their involvement in water legislation, decades of experience in community participation at the national level was recognized. A fundamental point this article reflects on is that

bridging social capital can overcome limited social and geographical mobility, which prevents actors from engaging in public policy processes.

Ricart et al. examine different stakeholder engagement tools in multifunctional irrigation systems, comparing case studies from different countries. They have studied the effects of participation on the management of irrigation systems. They find that stakeholder engagement strategies have reduced tensions between stakeholders, redirected regional planning strategies, decentralized water responsibilities, and integrated values and beliefs from different stakeholders. But these effects varied strongly between cases (and also depended on context and setting). In most of the cases studied, participation is still an institutionally led top-down process, but in a few, stakeholder participation resulted from a bottom-up process. According to Ricart et al., the differences in outcomes cannot simply be explained by whether stakeholder participation was top-down or bottom-up. The relational dynamics evolving during the interaction are more important. This includes factors such as clear feedback mechanisms, openness of the process, and good information flows between actors. At the same time, they find that participation processes have trouble engaging the wider public. Another key challenge they identify in the case studies is the difficulty of organizing meaningful participation over complex water governance issues. Facilitating social learning and a comprehensive approach are then important for managers facilitating these participatory processes. Some tools are discussed in this respect.

The difference between formal and informal forms of engagement or participation is further elaborated on by Hassenforder et al. They describe how the two differ, what their relative strengths and weaknesses are, and how they can be combined such that they strengthen each other. The authors convincingly show that formal and informal engagement each has its own strengths and can be effective in different contexts. They also have their own weaknesses and shortcomings: formal forms of engagement can be captured and can easily produce 'consultation fatigue', while spontaneous and informal forms of engagement often lack support and long-term commitment. Finding the middle ground where both forms of engagement are combined and complement each other seems to be a promising way to bring participation in water governance to the next level. The authors stress the importance of context-specific explanations when it comes to the question of which approach is effective.

A typical example of a bottom-up participation process that gradually evolves towards a more hybrid governance approach is given by Grassini. This case study of a CBI in a slum-upgrading scheme in Ahmedabad, India, shows the importance of a comprehensive understanding of participation in practice. Participation, at the core of water governance, is assumed to be based on dialogue among the parties concerned to achieve understanding and learning and thus joint decision making. The objective is that the results of the project or programme are beneficial in the long term. In this case, the author shows that in spite of the project's receiving international recognition, disproportionate power relations among the several parties restricted dialogue, participation and learning. But she also shows how, within these limitations, the most vulnerable populations gained power as they understood the benefits they could gain by manipulating the system.

CBIs give rise to serious challenges for water authorities, especially when they emerge in a context of traditionally strong water authorities. Duijn et al. describe the difficulties that arise when water authorities have to align their strategies internally

but also externally with other water authorities when they are challenged by water-related CBIs. Such initiatives do not fit into the rather strict task orientation of water authorities. The reflex response is therefore to take a defensive stance towards these initiatives or to force them to align with the internal procedures and routines of the water authority. The Dutch context shows convincingly that in the context of a strong state, created spaces for participation come with serious difficulties and require institutional transformation, in which water authorities change their role perception and task orientation.

The many dilemmas that come with participation and new, hybrid roles for water authorities are the central theme of the article of Grotenbreg and Altamirano. They delve into the various dilemmas that emerge when water authorities are confronted with private initiatives and the various coping strategies they develop to deal with these dilemmas. External initiatives necessitate a form of public facilitation, but for governments it is really difficult to combine traditional administrative values (like equality, transparency and rule of law) with the values which are important to make private initiatives happen (like delivery, austerity and customization). The authors show that in general water authorities deal with these dilemmas in a rather ad hoc way. Common mechanisms to cope with value dilemmas are casuistry (finding case-specific solutions), cycling (giving different values prevalence sequentially over time) and hybridization (allowing the coexistence of practices with different value bases). The authors conclude with a couple of critical remarks on the current discourse celebrating private and societal initiative as a way to modernize water management. Given the responsibilities public authorities still have, whether or not other actors develop initiatives to provide certain public goods or services, facilitating these initiatives must come with value dilemmas and trade-offs.

As we said in the introduction, water governance is in transition. We can no longer imagine water governance without stakeholder participation. But the new relationships between water authorities and societal stakeholders are anything but settled. That also means that we don't know what kinds of equilibrium will emerge out of the current transitional phase. This underlines the importance of rigorous empirical analyses of (trends in) different participation practices and their impacts in different contexts.

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