

Book Review

Governance as a Trialogue: Government–Society–Science in Transition

Anthony R. Turton, Hanlie J. Hattingh, Gillian A. Maree, Dirk J. Roux, Marius Claassen & Wilma F. Strydom (Eds)
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The phrase ‘good governance’ has become a contemporary hot topic or even a buzzword all over the world because one can hardly find a study or report concerning sustainable development and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) without this phrase being used repeatedly. While there is no question about the importance of ‘good governance’, unfortunately, there is a lack of clear understanding about the concept of ‘governance’. This timely book is an attempt to understand the complex and multi-dimensional issues related to governance in an organized way.

In the introductory Chapter, Anthony Turton, Hanlie Hattingh, Mairus Claassen, Dirk Roux and Peter Ashton introduce a Trialogue Model of governance that is structured around three groups of actors, namely government, society and science. The authors present nine hypotheses to introduce scientific rigour into the development of processes that occur in the black box of governance. Good governance occurs when the interfaces between the three groups of actors, The Trialogue, are effective since it allows appropriate feedback loops and information exchange that facilitate an informed decision-making process. This chapter describes three actor-clusters of the Trialogue and the interfaces between them, i.e. the government-society interface, the government-science interface and the science-society interface.

The subsequent part, consisting of Chapters 2–6, deals with an overview of governance. Chapter 2, authored by Allan Hall, provides a global context for considering the ecosystem governance issues discussed in the subsequent chapters. This chapter explains the concept of governance, the various forms of governance, the necessity of effective global governance in an increasingly interconnected world, and principles of effective global environmental governance. Based on the lessons learned from IWRM planning processes in Malawi and Zambia, in Chapter 3 Alex Simalabwi explains the importance of scale and power relations to water governance. He points out that factors at the international scale such as international conventions, protocols, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have strong influence on water governance at the national scale. In addition, power relations among various stakeholders and decision making and information sharing processes between central to local government and vice versa are crucial to water governance.

In Chapter 4 Malin Falkenmark stipulates that achieving good ecosystem governance consists of two distinct elements—what to govern and how to govern. She stresses that pragmatic good ecosystem governance requires research to find ways to balance human and ecosystem needs. This chapter reveals that good ecosystem governance requires a clear understanding of three different systems, i.e. the natural biophysical system, the social system and the governance system. In conclusion, the author suggests that the Trialogue model could be improved by changing the ‘science process’ corner into a ‘biophysical process’ corner. Science processes are needed at all the three corners of the processes, i.e. government-society-biophysical, and therefore contribute a fourth overarching dimension to the Trialogue Model.

Chapter 5 elaborately explains the role and implications of good governance in achieving sustainable development and IWRM in Southern Africa. It discusses Africa’s development challenges, the importance of IWRM and good governance for achieving sustainable development in Southern Africa. To understand the dimensions of the concept of good governance, the author, Peter Ashton, discusses five key principles of good governance and also explains five key steps necessary to be agreed upon by Southern African countries to achieve IWRM. He stipulates that understanding the complex and multidimensional nature of IWRM and good governance are crucial to realize sustainable development in practice.

In Chapter 6, Ken Conca analyzes the transnational dimensions of freshwater ecosystem governance. He stipulates the important role of international law in resolving interstate water disputes. In relation to this statement, he summarizes the findings from the content analysis of 62 international river basin agreements. The author stresses that transnational social networks mechanisms play an important role in ecosystem governance and conflict management. The author also analyzes how the complex pattern of institutionalization discussed in this chapter offer both the validation and refinement of several core hypotheses linked to the Trialogue Model.

Part 3, consisting of Chapters 7–12, concentrates on the cross-examination of the Trialogue Model. In Chapter 7, Geoffrey Gooch discusses the role of formal and informal institutions in ecosystem governance. The roles of different forms of knowledge and civil society in ecosystem governance are also analyzed. The author examines different organizational structures, their aims, norms and values, as well as the associated problems related to cooperation between different institutional cultures. He presents a number of Trialogues in the context of sustainability, epistemology and policy processes, and discusses their significance to ecosystem governance. He emphasizes that understanding the ways of local level policy formulation, institutional contexts that influence ecosystem governance, and how different forms of knowledge are utilized in ecosystem governance, are important. In conclusion, this chapter recommends some specific guidelines for future research related to governance.

The evolution of international norms and values for transboundary groundwater governance are elaborately examined in Chapter 8. The author, Raya Stephan, analyzes how international law plays an important role in facilitating the quality of the interfaces between three actor-clusters of the Trialogue Model. After reviewing the basic principles and the emerging trends in the codification of international ground water law, the author concludes that the core norms and values of international law have the potential to be incorporated in national law. Based on the hypothesis that successful governance requires effective interfaces among the three actor-clusters of the Trialogue Model, Chapter 9

provides an articulate analysis of the dynamics of transboundary groundwater management in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The authors, Michael Campana, Alyssa Neir and Geoffrey Klise, critically scrutinize the provisions of the Boundary Water Treaty (1909) and the scopes and jurisdiction of the International Joint Commission (IJC), as well as International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). After presenting eight case studies involving water quality and quantity, the authors conclude there is a Trialogue working in the groundwater management of North America, however, the interface relationship between the three actor-clusters is not always balanced.

In Chapter 10, Nyambe Nyambe, Charles Breen and Robert Fincham describe how organizational culture acts as a strong determinant of adaptability and responsiveness in public agencies. They recommend that examining assumptions that lie at the core of organizational culture is critical in seeking adaptation, responsiveness and managing for changes. This examination has an important role in harmonizing the goals of three actor-clusters of the Trialogue Model. Chapter 11, authored by Sandra Fowkes, presents the lessons learned from a short-term initiative in the governance of fire management in South Africa that provides insights and may have an application in enhancing ecosystem governance. The author specifically focuses on the government-society interface of the Trialogue Model. Based on practical experience, the author argues that science cluster does not hold equivalent power to government or society clusters of the Trialogue Model. She suggests that science plays a far more powerful and useful role in shaping the governance decision space by making itself available to all the role players. Chapter 12, authored by Barbara Schreiner, examines the government-society interface of the Trialogue Model with particular reference to experiences gained from the management of the Phongolopoort Dam in South Africa. She describes the role of water in addressing historic socio-economic inequality in South Africa. She recommends that in fledgling democracies it is vital for government to be proactive in ensuring full public participation. She stresses the need for solid scientific knowledge to achieve rational and appropriate solutions.

Part 4, comprising of Chapters 13–15, offers the cross-cutting issues and requirements related to governance. In Chapter 13, Dirk Roux, Kevin Murray and Ermita Wyk analyze the critical role of appropriate and sufficient knowledge for making informed decisions that promote good governance. The authors describe the key concepts of knowledge, learning and ecosystem governance. They also identify 10 main issues of concern with regard to the types of knowledge required for good governance, the desirable processes of knowledge generation and learning, and the characteristics of good learners. In conclusion, the authors propose nine guiding principles intended to foster appropriate learning environments for good ecosystem governance.

In Chapter 14, based on experience and lessons learnt from the South African River Health Programme, Wilma Strydom, Liesl Hill and Estie Eloff elaborately explain the role of communication between the three actor-clusters of the Trialogue Model. After explaining the term ‘communication’, the authors identify the criteria for good communication and the link between communication and good governance. They emphasize that communication within the science-society interface of the Trialogue Model is important for good governance and informed decision making. In Chapter 15, Jane Doolan describes the integrated river management programme in Victoria State, Australia and the evolution of this programme during the last 15 years. She also analyzes the key factors influencing this evolution, and consecutively examines the practical

applicability of the Trialogue Model based on Victorian experience, concluding that Trialogue model could be more applicable if it includes an additional dimension—time.

The concluding part, comprising Chapters 16–17, summarizes the contents of the whole book. In Chapter 16, Linda Godfrey mentions that the interfaces between the three actor-clusters of the Trialogue Model are influenced by the maturity of democracy, the political system, the organizational culture and the societal condition. Three models reflecting the strength of engagement along the Trialogue interfaces in an undemocratic society, a young democracy and a maturing democracy are discussed. In Chapter 17, Anthony Turton and Hanlie Hattingh offer a new definition of governance and evaluate nine hypotheses presented in Chapter 1 against the empirical background provided by the studies presented in Chapters 2–16.

As a whole, this is a well-produced book and will appeal to a wide audience of policy makers, government officials, engineers, economists, sociologist, public administrators, NGOs, environmentalists and university students studying natural resources management. This is a ‘must read’ book to anyone who wants to know and comprehend the multidimensional facets of good ecosystem governance, as well as to learn what is really meant by ‘good governance’ and how to achieve good governance in reality.

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