



Water governance in England

Improving understandings and practices
through systemic co-inquiry



Participants engaging in analysis of the current water governance situation in England. CADWAGO workshop, 27th April 2015, The Open University in London, UK

Our research

CADWAGO researchers from the Open University have been working with Government bodies, NGOs, consultants, water industry, academics, and others to improve understandings and practices in relation to water governance in England through systemic co-inquiry.

Co-operative (or collaborative) inquiry involves researching with people, rather than on people. Thus, participants are involved as co-researchers, and may contribute to the research design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Systemic co-inquiry is a specific type of co-inquiry which draws on systems theories, methodologies and techniques. It is a mode of investigation that is open to changing situations, pursuing new directions, and engaging with new or different theoretical/methodological frameworks. The inquiry focuses on processes of social learning and the emergence of opportunities, rather than on pre-defined timelines and outputs.

This systemic co-inquiry consisted of two one-day workshops, which focused on the current and future water governance situation in England respectively.

Key actions to improve water governance

Four categories of actions to improve water governance emerged from the systemic co-inquiry workshops: stakes and stakeholding; facilitation; institutions and policies; and knowing and learning about water governance. Realizing these actions is perceived by the workshop participants to be a key step towards improving water governance in England. Although the actions are specific to the UK context, they have implications for many water governance situations.

Insights for Europe

Systemic co-inquiry leads to new stakeholder relations, understandings, practices and co-owning of emergent policy innovations to transform water governance.

Stakes and stakeholding

- **Identify stakeholders**, e.g. map and analyze the local/national/global actor network in relation to target beneficiaries
- **Build stakeholding**, e.g. re-frame catchment coordinators as learning system facilitators; produce a UK rivers program (similar to BBC Coast); engage people in things that they really care about such parks, bird watching, health and well-being

Facilitation

- **Identify facilitation needs**, e.g. seek examples/stories of getting hi-level buy-in to a change strategy
- **Provide facilitation**, e.g. academics to provide evidence to NGOs and others for them to choreograph their own responses for lobbying

Institutions and policies

- **Develop conducive institutions**, e.g. make reports more accessible to people; change of language, open access to data; add catchment science to school syllabus
- **Develop conducive policies**, e.g. re-frame Water Framework Directive enactment as part of an iterative social learning system

Knowing and learning

- **Co-produce knowledge**, e.g. organize a systemic inquiry between CaBA, Catchment Systems Group and National Capital Committee
- **Jointly identify what constitutes an improvement**, e.g. collectively establish the multiple benefits that will engage society in water governance