

Transforming multilevel water governance: feedbacks from the Durance river case study

Transformation de la gouvernance multi-échelles de
l'eau : retours d'expérience du territoire de la Durance

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette communication s'intéresse à la transformation de la gouvernance de l'eau à travers le retour d'expérience du territoire de la Durance (France). La transformation est comprise ici comme « un changement de situation, que les acteurs impliqués dans la situation pourraient reconnaître comme une amélioration de la gouvernance de l'eau » (OCDE, 2017). En matière de gouvernance, les principaux enjeux de ce territoire sont la gestion d'usages concurrents (production d'énergie, villes, agriculture, conservation et développement des écosystèmes), en combinant des échelles multiples, dans un contexte méditerranéen. Les réformes territoriales en cours favorisent la mise en place d'institutions et d'instruments innovants pour résoudre les problèmes environnementaux, y compris l'eau, à l'échelle régionale. Une gouvernance intégrée et adaptative et une meilleure coordination entre les échelles est par ailleurs requise pour faire face aux enjeux climatiques. Cette étude de cas explore dans quelle mesure un changement de gouvernance a été atteint et quels sont les facteurs qui l'ont favorisé.

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on transformation of water governance through feedbacks from the Durance river territory (France). Transformation is understood here as “a shift in the situation, which stakeholders involved in the situation would acknowledge as an improvement in water governance” (OECD, 2017). As regards to governance, the main challenges of this territory are to manage competing uses (energy production, cities, agriculture, ecosystem conservation and development), combining multiple scales, in a Mediterranean context. Current French territorial reforms foster innovative ways of addressing environmental issues, including water, on a regional scale. Adaptive integrated governance and co-ordination across scales are further required due to climate change issues. This case study explores to what extent transformation in water governance has been achieved and what are the enabling factors on a regional and basin levels to enhance co-ordination across policies, places and people.

KEYWORDS

Adaptation, Durance River, multilevel governance, transformation, water territory

1 INTRODUCTION

This work has been conducted in line with the OECD Water Governance Initiative working group on best practices. In October 2017, a task force conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of a pool of 55 stories. The qualitative analysis assessed the water governance stories against a general question regarding water governance transformation, i.e. “a shift in the situation, which stakeholders involved in the situation would acknowledge as an improvement in water governance” (OECD, 2017).

The current work adopts a similar approach for an extra story regarding the Durance water territory.

Water governance analysis may consider two intrinsically connected dimensions of governance. One is structural and corresponds to the formal or informal institutional framework, and the other is functional and it encompasses the processes and modalities of intervention. As regards analysing to what extent this story achieved transformation of water governance, this analysis considers these two dimensions: (i) the institutional framework and its evolution (water governance structure; i.e. the “what”); (ii) the emergence of new modalities of governance (water governance process; i.e. the “how”). It also tackles the diversification of actively present stakeholders (with multiple perceptions and behaviours; i.e. the “who”).

2 THE DURANCE TERRITORY IN A NUTSHELL

2.1 A highly contrasted territory: spatial and temporal mismatches between water resources and water demand

The Durance River is a typical Northern Mediterranean river. The Durance natural watershed (14.280 km²) is a water producing zone that serves many coastal areas outside the watershed (water consuming zone). The main challenges of this territory are to manage ancient and multiple competing water uses (energy production, cities, agriculture, ecosystems conservation and development), combining multiple scales, in a Mediterranean context. The water territory is organized around water transfers since the Middle-Ages (Figure 1).

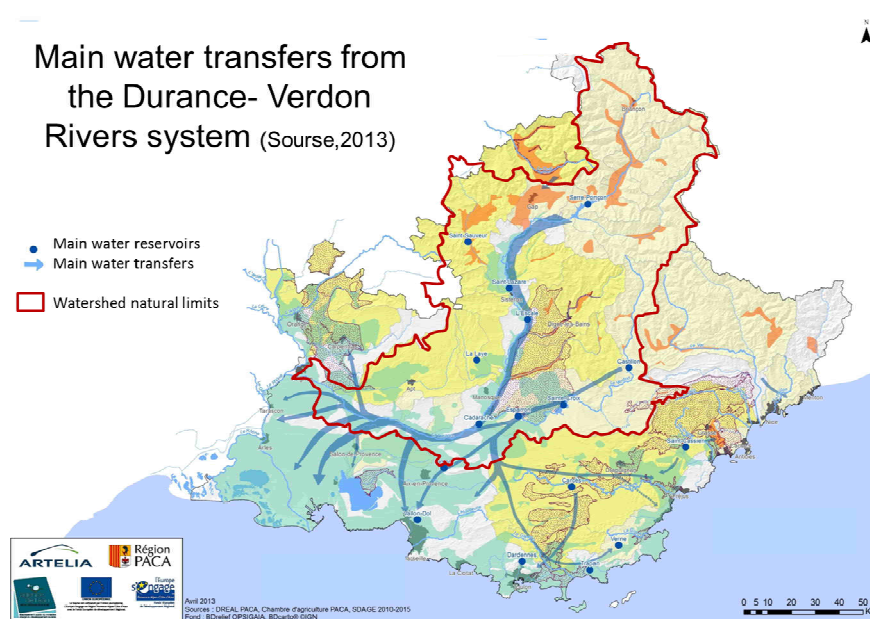


Figure 1: Main water transfers from the Durance-Verdon Rivers system (from Source, 2013)

2.2 A water governance historically shaped by tensions over water resources

Water being highly variable and unevenly distributed across territories and across time, tensions over water resources have punctuated the development of the water territory. From the Middle-Ages, water distribution networks and storage have been developed, water allocation rules, institutions have been elaborated and negotiated, in order to provide water to people when and where they most need it, rather than when and where it would naturally be available. This has contributed to shape a coherent hydro-geographical region with water transfers outside the watershed and to transform water governance over time (Richard & Rieu, 2017).

2.3 What are the impacts achieved as regards water governance? Towards an integrated multi-level governance system bridging scales

Effective and efficient multi-level governance systems need to meet some requirements. Today, the Durance River socio-hydrosystem has a legal and institutional framework that clearly allocates roles, responsibility and resources. However, even if the current governance system combines watershed and problem-shed approaches, it is still fragmented. Furthermore, even if there are no conflicts today, crisis (droughts 2003-2007) highlighted the limits of the current water allocation rules and management. In this context, an integrated approach developed by a regional water governance body -Agora- (Source, 2013) aims at developing effective water governance combining (i) a shared governance involving regional scale (regional authority, state) and strengthened river basin local authorities, (ii) engagement of stakeholders, (iii) an integrated approach of territorial water management and sector based policies, (iv) secured multiple uses in a context of climate change, (v) increased solidarities between territories.

A basin masterplan (SAGE) at the Durance River basin scale is currently considered. This raises the question of the scope and management of this SAGE, the major part of water from the Durance River being transferred to the coastal basins. While the PACA region is positioning itself to animate the regional water policy, the administrative reorganizations modify the distribution of the decision-making power and impact the water allocation modalities that have been historically negotiated.

3 TO WHAT EXTENT WATER GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMATION HAS BEEN ACHIEVED? WHAT ARE THE WAYS FORWARD?

3.1 What factors have enabled transformation?

Three categories of factors have been identified (OECD, 2017) to analyse change in water governance: (i) "Policy framework" captures the "what", and refers to the governance framework (e.g., decentralization, institutional reforms, specific law, impetus to encourage policy coherence, ...); (ii) "Instruments" captures the "how", and refers to the governance process (e.g., existing water planning tools at appropriate scales, multi-stakeholders processes, financial instruments...); (iii) "Institutions" captures the "who", meaning the existence of institutions developing and implementing water policy, projects and programmes at different levels (e.g., new actors set up to implement or facilitate transformation,...). All three of them are identified here as key factors for enabling water governance transformation. From a policy analysis perspective, changes are initiated either from bottom-up or top-down dynamics or both. Considering whom the leading stakeholders are over time, change dynamic has fluctuated between bottom-up and top-down influences resulting today in a mixed-influence dynamic of change.

3.2 What are the lessons learned?

This water governance story takes place in an enabling institutional environment that has changed over time and that it is still moving forward. Considering a long time period for the analysis allowed to demonstrate governance transformation in both structure (framework – "what") and process ("how"). Implementing innovative and adaptive governance framework and tools (such as the Agora) is a key feature in this story. The importance of improved institutional setting in preventing conflicts and dealing with crisis is also featured here: strict conditions and external factors (crisis-drought or floods, need to adapt, political reform processes...) can therefore foster innovative governance processes. Strong political and managerial wills are key factors to make change happen and to maintain agility and capacity to adapt to changing environments.

As regards ways forward, encouraging trade-offs across water users, rural and urban areas, upstream and downstream, and generations, is an important factor of integration and coherence between sectors, scales and times. Allowing greater stakeholders and public participation over time is a key for success and acceptability. It can enhance co-responsibilities between stakeholders and civil society awareness regarding water governance and environmental issues. Monitoring and evaluation are key factors to improve data and information production, to share the results with the public and to make adjustments when needed. It facilitates greater transparency and improved trust.

To conclude, this story stresses the necessity to adapt to local contexts as there is no "one-size fits all solution". Nevertheless replicability can be considered, keeping in mind the idea of learning from and building on the experiences told in this story.

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