Tracing Power and Influence in Networks:Net-Map as a Tool for Research and Strategic Network Planning

Description

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Abstract: Believing that complex problems call for complex solutions and that stakeholders should have a say in policies that concern them, policymakers have strongly promoted the development of forums and organizations made up of many stakeholders to address complex governance issues such as water management. Both developing and developed countries have instituted multistakeholder water governance bodies on local, national, and international levels. However, while the belief is strong that these integrated bodies should improve governance, how and to what extent that actually happens is still unclear, not only because of the complexity of the matter but also due to a lack of appropriate research tools for the analysis of complex governance systems.

This paper presents an innovative empirical research toolâ??Net-Mapâ??developed to better understand multi-stakeholder governance by gathering in-depth information about governance networks, goals of actors, and their power and influence. Researchers and implementers alike can use Net-Map to collect qualitative and quantitative information in a structured and comparable way. It can be used both as a research tool and as an instrument for organizational development and strategic network planning. A case study on the development of a multi-stakeholder water governance body in northern Ghana illustrates the application of this research method. The method can be used on many different levels, from the community, to national or even international levels.

Net-Map merges characteristics of two existing methods, namely social network analysis and the power mapping tool. Using a participatory approach, interviewees and interviewers together draw a network map of the actors involved in the policy arena and characterize the different kinds of links between the actors. They then add â??influence towers,â?• made of checkers pieces, to transfer the abstract concepts of power and influence into a three-dimensional form. Finally, the interviewee assesses the goal orientation of the different actors (for example, developmental versus environmental or pro versus con a certain intervention).

The tool provides an influence network map of the governance situation as well as qualitative and quantitative data about the perceived power and influence of the actors. While the data lend themselves to complex quantitative analysis, this paper mainly focuses on the use of the tool for the purpose of mapping and organizational development. The paper explores how the mapping process itself also stimulates a structured in-depth discussion of crucial issues and ways forward. In Ghana, the method has proven to be interculturally applicable and easy to apply and adapt. Interviewees were excited about their own learning processes throughout the interview. Implicit understanding and concepts were visualized and made explicit so that group members could understand where they agree and differ in their perception of the governance arena.

Tags

1. Networks

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