



Prescribed by law and therefore realized? Analyzing rules and their implied actor interactions as networks

Authors: Laura Herzog, Karin Ingold, and Edella Schlager

This paper uses water management in the German Ruhr catchment to investigate the effect of actor beliefs, reputation, and institutional arrangements on collaboration. The authors are especially interested in the differences between how state water law defines how various organizations are supposed to interact versus how they interact in practice. The authors apply the Institutional Grammar to the Federal Water Act of North Rhine-Westphalia to identify the prescribed interactions. Meanwhile, they survey thirty-nine organizations involved in water management in the Ruhr catchment to determine the network of perceived interactions. The authors also use the survey data to identify how the water management organizations make decisions about collaboration.

KEY FINDINGS

- Water management in the Ruhr catchment involves more actors and more types of collaboration than are defined in state water law.
- Actor beliefs and reputation play a greater role than written rules in shaping how collaboration on water management takes place.

Perceived Interactions > Prescribed Interactions

The authors found a greater variety of on-the-ground collaboration among organizations involved in water management in the Ruhr catchment than is spelled out in the Federal Water Act. Approximately one-fourth of prescribed interactions also appear in the network of perceived interactions, while twenty-three organizations appear in both the perceived and prescribed interactions. These disparities are partly because the Federal Water Act does not identify all on-the-ground actors, while simultaneously naming groups that, in practice, do not play a significant role in water management.

Perceived Power and Actor Beliefs > Institutional Arrangements

The survey asked respondents to identify what organizations they most regularly work with, ideas for improving water management, what principles they want to see implemented with respect to water management, and which organizations among the other thirty-eight they view as powerful and influential. The authors found that interactions as codified in rules were not the major factor in determining which organizations collaborated with one another. Instead, reputation and shared beliefs were more important.

For more information, please see Herzog, L., Ingold, K., & Schlager, E. (2022). Prescribed by law and therefore realized? Analyzing rules and their implied actor interactions as networks. *Policy Studies Journal*, 50(2), 366-386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12448>.

This Research Case represents an interpretation of the original scholarship which was reviewed and approved by the original author(s).