

## Negotiating space and risks – insights from the changing Swiss flood protection regime.

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The definition and implementation of Swiss politics in the field of spatially relevant policies can be understood as a negotiation process involving different actors from diverse social and state levels (Kissling Näf & Wälti 2002). Zaugg Stern (2006) proposed in his analysis of the changing Swiss flood protection regime, that a structuration theory approach (Giddens 1985) can provide the theoretical and methodological entry points to analyse the rules and actors influencing such political practices.

Partly caused by massive floods in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the institutional framework structuring flood protection in Switzerland has undergone considerable changes (Fig 1).

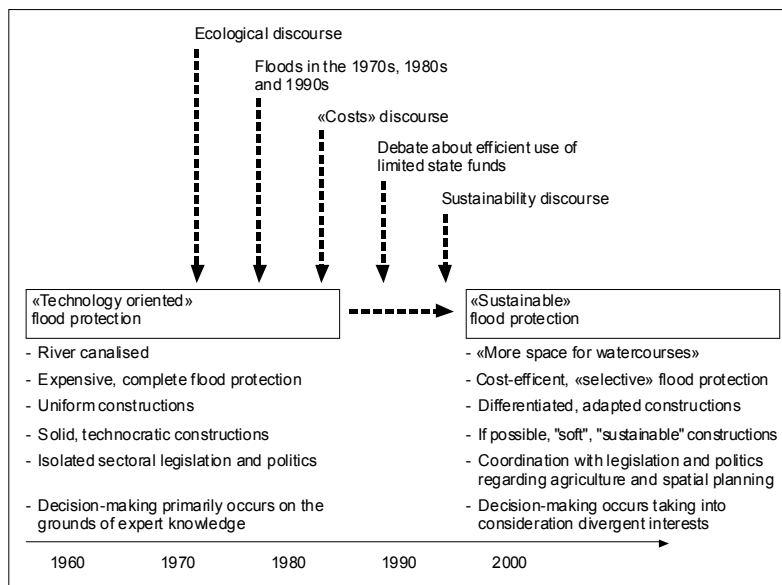


Figure 1. The change from an integral to an integrated flood protection regime

This can be described as a "change in philosophy" – a term meant to express the change from a primarily technologically oriented "expert system" to one committed to the concept of sustainability, involving broader participation in decision making (Zaugg Stern 2006).

Sustainability, though, calls for the coordination of many expectations. Therefore, flood protection projects are today often negotiated against the backdrop of conflicting interests and are usually associated with a substantial change of existing rules and practices of managing rivers and their surrounding lands.

Based on a structurational approach, Zaugg Stern (2006) analysed such conflicts during planning and implementation of two major flood protection schemes at the Swiss rivers Thur and Aare.

The results show that the translation into practice of the new direction of the Swiss flood protection system since the 1980s has been connected with complex and frequently conflicting societal communication processes at regional and local levels. In this framework, historically developed, routinised and institutionally safeguarded regulations of use and protection had to be renegotiated. The planners took pains to integrate the "more public" (and thus more complex) context in which the project planning and implementation occurred – while at the same time struggling to remain able to still take action and pass decisions.

By today, different actors from diverse social and state levels are usually participating in defining issues of space and risks around river management. Still, conflicts often occur. Particularly, the new federal government's policy guideline "More Space for Watercourses" which aims at reserving adjoining lands in order to retain flood waters is a highly controversial issue. It not only clashes with the particular interests of farmers and risk perceptions of local authorities but also with certain principles and objectives of neighbouring policy fields like spatial planning and groundwater protection (Zaugg et al 2004).

On the one hand, these conflicts root in differences between legal norms and guidelines of the hydraulic engineering sector, and policies related to e.g. agriculture, groundwater protection or nature protection.

On the other hand, they highlight coordination problems at the different interfaces between state and the public built or accentuated by the transition from technology to sustainability oriented Swiss hydraulic engineering (Zaugg et al 2004).

In order to mitigate these conflicts, efforts of the hydraulic engineering responsables aim at the harmonisation of legal norms and policies of their policy field with those of the neighbouring sectors (Zaugg et al 2004). However, less efforts were made to systematically analyse and tackle the implementation or acceptance problems which originate in planning and realising hydraulic engineering projects in specific social and political contexts.

The structurational analysis of Zaugg Stern (2006) showed, that context specific procedural rules guiding the sometimes rather complex but necessary balance of interests are essential for legitimising process and results of hydraulic engineering projects. But, these project-oriented measures must be accompanied by fairly long-term efforts to gather the needed social planning resources and skills for policy implementation (like context analysis, stakeholder involvement or conflict mediation) and to initiate a public debate about today's challenges of the hydraulic engineering sector and the socially differentiated goals for river management (Hostmann et al 2005).

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