








The river basin organization. Reflections on politics and performance.

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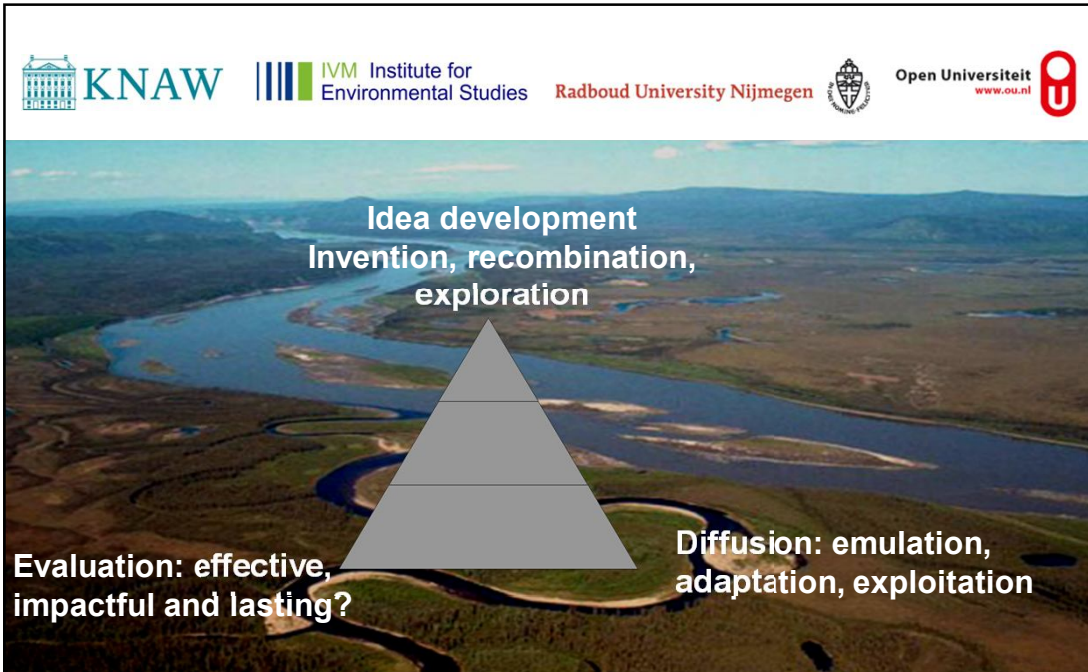







“For the last 25 years, prescriptions of the water policy literature have centered upon two themes. The first is that “the watershed” is the appropriate scale for organizing water resource management [...]. The second is that since watersheds are regions to which political jurisdictions almost never correspond, and watershed-scale decision making structures do not usually exist, they should be created” (Schlager and Blomquist, 2000) => RBOs, and preferably **strong RBOs**.

River basin organizations popular



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Idea development
Invention, recombination,
exploration

**Evaluation: effective,
impactful and lasting?**

**Diffusion: emulation,
adaptation, exploitation**

Governance innovations have constituencies (Voß, 2007). They occur in an 'innovation triangle' (Jordan and Huiteima, forthcoming in Environmental Politics)



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- How have river basin organizations been designed and how were their boundaries chosen?
- Who were propagating and resisting the founding or reform of river basin organizations?
- How well do the river basin organizations function, in terms of democracy, coordination, and environmental effectiveness?

The three questions for the book "The Politics of River Basin Organisations" (EE, 2014)








Four ideal types distinguished on the basis of Ostrom's rules:

- 1. Autonomous RBO (independent position, controls over water, own finances)**
- 2. Agency type RBO (derived position, founded for enhancing cost effectiveness, set budget)**
- 3. Coordinating type RBO (limited authority, plan making focus, derived and limited budget)**
- 4. Partnership type RBO (authority shared, voluntary entry and exit, common interest focus)**

Our proposed typology for analyzing design








Much activity at the international level (World Water Forums, world bank, European Union); but also national actors (Ministries of Environment, etc.)

Strategies (Huitema and Meijerink, 2009):

- 1. Idea development**
- 2. Coalition building**
- 3. Windows of opportunities**
- 4. Venue manipulation/shopping**
- 5. Networking**

Who is advocating RBOs?



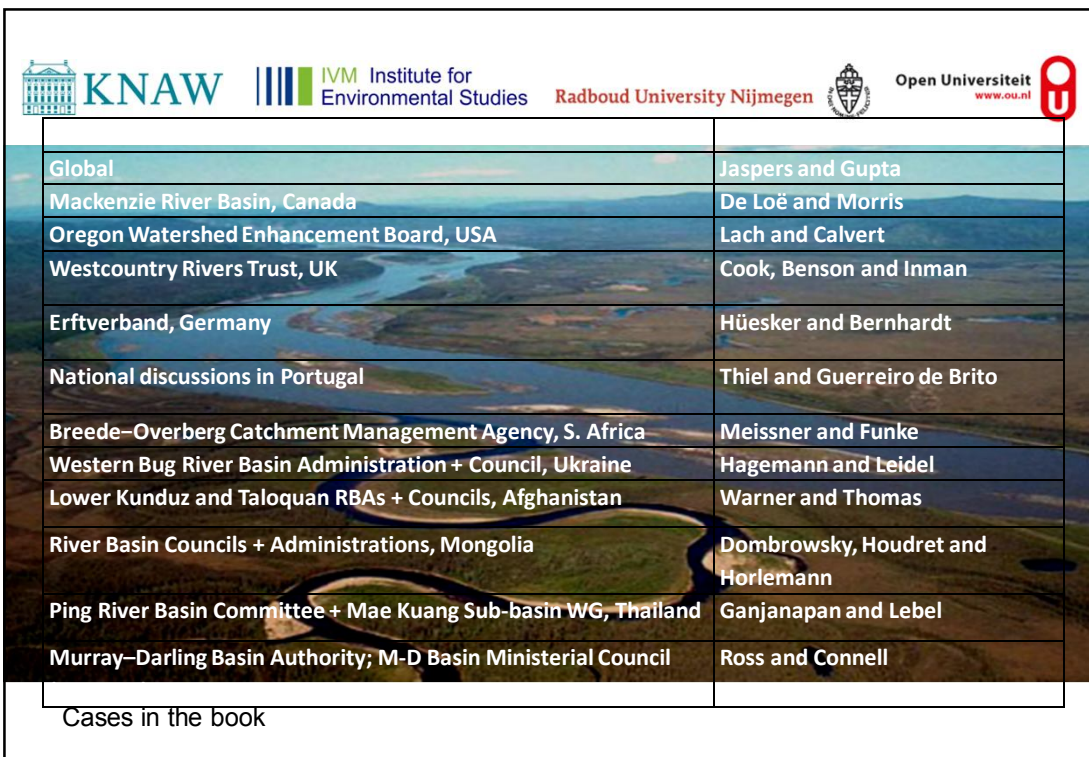









How to evaluate performance?

1. **Democracy: accountability, legitimacy**
2. **Coordination – avoiding contradictory policies, conflicts, redundancy?**
3. **Environmental effectiveness: e.g. does water quality improve?**

Evaluating RBOs?







| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Global | Jaspers and Gupta |
| Mackenzie River Basin, Canada | De Loë and Morris |
| Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, USA | Lach and Calvert |
| Westcountry Rivers Trust, UK | Cook, Benson and Inman |
| Erftverband, Germany | Hüesker and Bernhardt |
| National discussions in Portugal | Thiel and Guerreiro de Brito |
| Breede–Overberg Catchment Management Agency, S. Africa | Meissner and Funke |
| Western Bug River Basin Administration + Council, Ukraine | Hagemann and Leidel |
| Lower Kunduz and Taloquan RBAs + Councils, Afghanistan | Warner and Thomas |
| River Basin Councils + Administrations, Mongolia | Dombrowsky, Houdret and Horlemann |
| Ping River Basin Committee + Mae Kuang Sub-basin WG, Thailand | Ganjanapan and Lebel |
| Murray–Darling Basin Authority; M-D Basin Ministerial Council | Ross and Connell |

Cases in the book









| Chapter | Type(s) found |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Canada | Coordinating |
| USA | Agency |
| UK | Partnership |
| Germany | Agency |
| Portugal | Autonomous |
| South Africa | Agency |
| Ukraine | Agency |
| Afghanistan | Agency/coordinating |
| Mongolia | Coordinating/agency |
| Thailand | Coordinating/coordinating |
| Australia | Agency/coordinating/coordinating |

Empirical findings: designs observed (not randomly selected)!









How designed?

1. Geographical delineation of RBOs is a matter of hydrological criteria, mixed with financial, practical, and political-institutional considerations
2. In few of the countries studied did we find autonomous types of RBOs. The set of governance functions RBOs fulfil is often limited
3. Partnerships are found in small basins; as the basins grow in size the coordinating type becomes prevalent

Design observations



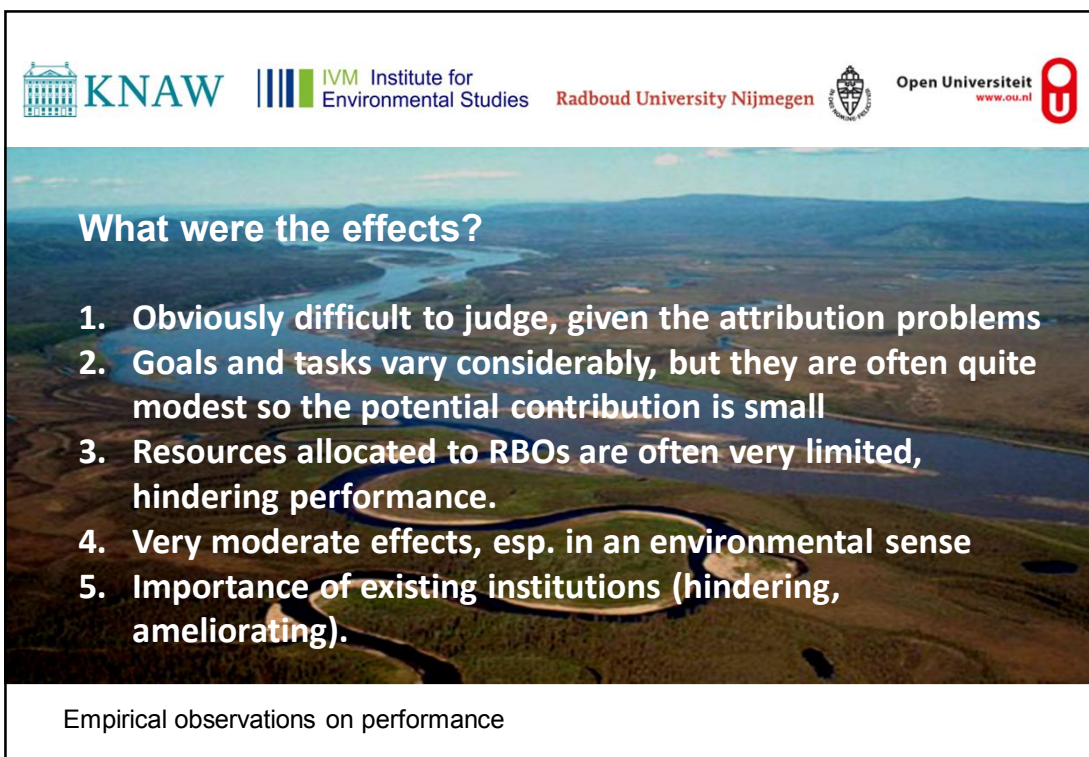









Who was involved, what were their strategies?

1. Confirmed that the designing of RBOs is a highly political process, reflecting diverging interests
2. Data is a key issue/resource in design
3. RBO discourse global, donor agencies carry it to countries like the Ukraine, Mongolia, Afghanistan
4. Role of downstream jurisdictions: pushing for greater authority

Empirical observations on Politics



What were the effects?

1. Obviously difficult to judge, given the attribution problems
2. Goals and tasks vary considerably, but they are often quite modest so the potential contribution is small
3. Resources allocated to RBOs are often very limited, hindering performance.
4. Very moderate effects, esp. in an environmental sense
5. Importance of existing institutions (hindering, ameliorating).

Empirical observations on performance

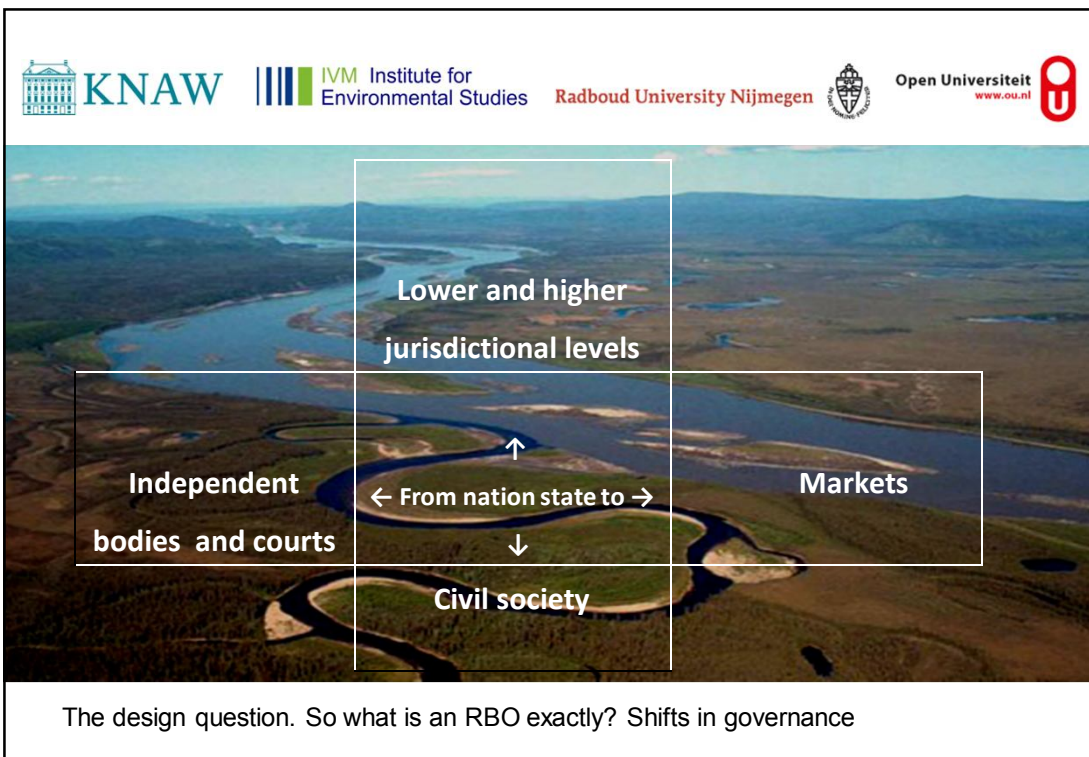



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Implications?

1. RBOs are not a panacea
2. Their introduction not on a blank slate – layering & interplay
3. Design dilemmas – e.g. between centralization and input legitimacy, feasibility and effectiveness
4. Time needed to prove the added value often not given

Some reflections



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Lower and higher jurisdictional levels

↑

← From nation state to →

↓

Independent bodies and courts

Markets

Civil society

The design question. So what is an RBO exactly? Shifts in governance