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Social-scientific scenarios for discussing climate change adaptation governance at a regional level

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This paper refers to empirical research in the context of the climate change adaptation project “KLIMZUG-Northern Hesse”, particularly of the political scientific subproject "Participation, Acceptance and Regional Governance" (PARG). In Germany, seven inter- and transdisciplinary projects in model regions have been funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for developing new and improved methods for climate change adaptation (program “Climate Change in Regions”).

The core empirical work within the PARG project focuses on social-scientific scenarios for climate change adaptation in different fields of action which were discussed in stakeholder workshops. There are several reasons for choosing scenarios as a method. In the near future it is assumed that technologies for reducing climate protection, resource consumption as well as the constellation of actors for adaptation governance will change. Additionally, land use conflicts between actors will probably rise because of a more intensive use of limited spatial resources. Therefore, it is not only necessary to develop solution strategies for current usage conflicts but also advisable to find answers to future conflicts.

Scenario analysis is a useful method for adaptation governance. First, scenarios could help to reveal course of actions by regarding different values and types of regulation. Second, the method is useful to demonstrate possible futures and stimulating debates on these issues between regional stakeholders. As a third aspect synergies, conflicts and relevant actors for strategy development and for the implementation of climate change measures could be identified. Also scenarios are useful for describing hypothetic but nevertheless realistic regional developments.

Between 2010 and 2011 a set of workshops with regional stakeholders from the sectors energy supply, forestry and agriculture have been conducted a) to reveal synergy and conflict potentials between different fields of action and sectors and b) to gain information about innovative governance formations for implementing regional climate adaptation strategies and implementation measures. In a first round, the sectoral-based workshops aimed on acquiring information about the stakeholders' perception and valuation of climate change impacts and adaptation needs in their fields of action. Additionally, these workshops should offer information about barriers and drivers for implementing adaptation strategies; about information needs and exchange and shed light on structural aspects for enhancing adaptation implementation. The outcomes were used for the development of social-scientific scenarios which were applied in the second workshop round. The findings showed that the perception and the need for adaptation strategies are strongly sectoral-based and closely linked to planning horizons and financial strength within the fields of action.

Social-scientific scenario workshops

For the second round, again sectoral-based workshops with regional stakeholders were conducted. Besides the results of the first workshops, basic data like demographic change, regional climatological scenarios and economic trends formed the basis of all scenarios. All scenarios refer to the year 2030. Basically, these scenarios highlight three possible future trends, which differ with regard to the role of the state and its political focus. In scenario A) "*ecologic focus*" the state plays an active, dominant role by dedicating strongly an ecologic dimension which includes a focus on nature protection, a complete turnover to renewable energy policies etc. In scenario B) "*agreement*" the state defines its role in the coordination of the different societal interests (ecologic, economic, and social) and prefers participative governance approaches. It includes the seeking for compensation between ecologic, economic and social interests. The scenario C) "*economic focus*" describes the state as more cautious, leaving it up to societal actors to design future development. This scenario is linked to the idea of economic growth being the basis for social justice and nature protection. All scenarios use an excessive presentation of future trends but they are not utopian. Within the workshops the scenarios were used as a communicative tool for structuring and fostering the debate.

Some main findings

The findings on the level of content reveal ambivalent argumentations concerning the stakeholders' capacity to take an active role in the process of climate change adaptation. On the one hand, non-action was often legitimated by legal or economic constraints but simultaneously there was hardly any need for more participation in the process mentioned.

Climate change is currently not a main driver for regional stakeholders from the investigated sectors though its impacts are generally not doubted. Much more important are economic and legal factors, e.g. subsidies in the agricultural sector and nature conservation acts for forestry sector. Adaptation is most of all linked with economic capacity, which means the investment potential determines climate change adaptation strategies and the implementation of measures.

Climate change adaptation in Germany is a mid- and long-term task. In contrast, regional stakeholders often have to face more short-term developments in their decision-making processes. One of the main challenges for climate change adaptation strategies will lay in the integration of these different temporally priority settings.

On the methodological level it has to be conceded that the scenarios' complexity and its level of abstraction did not fit well together with the stakeholders' practical stock of knowledge.

Also the use of terms (like "sustainability" or "alternative") differed between the stakeholders and also between the researchers and stakeholders which led to some barriers in the debate about the scenarios' plausibility. For future workshops, a pretesting of terms (e.g. through cognitive interviews) will be integrated.

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