

Let's cooperate! How collaborative governance can help to mitigate institutional misfit in protected areas

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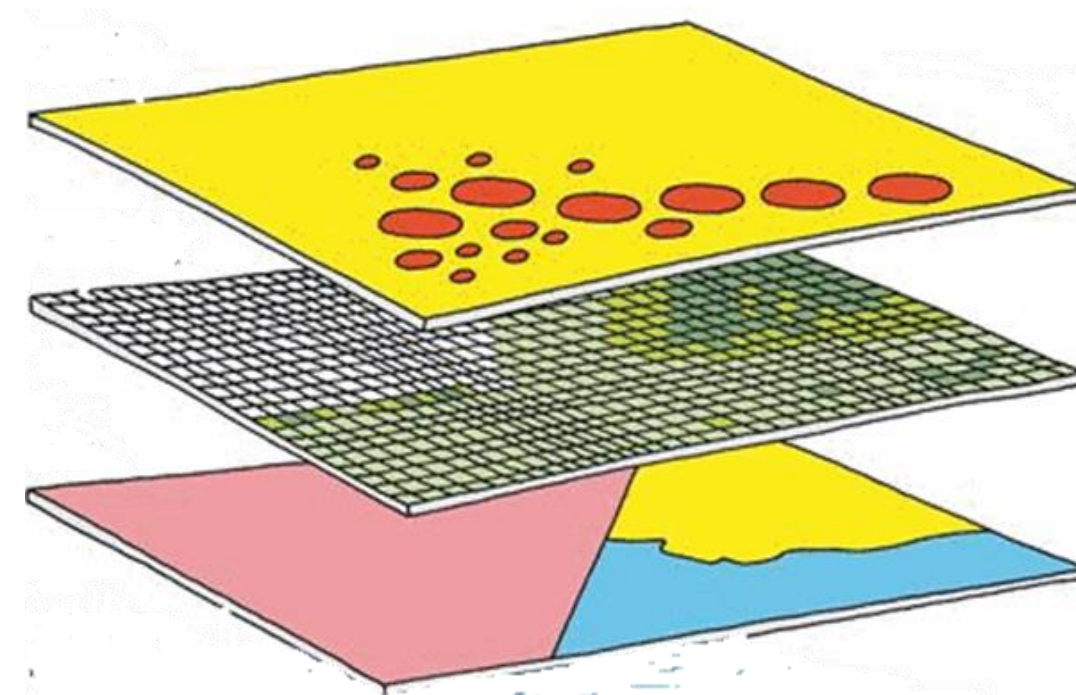
Challenge

One challenge in environmental governance is to reach so-called 'institutional fit'. This means to ensure that the established governance structures by a social system are spatially and temporally well-aligned to the ecosystems and ecosystem services in the given ecological system they are meant to govern. Only then ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation can effectively be provided to society. This seems particularly important in protected areas, designated in locations with high potentials for the provision of a multitude of ecosystem services and as crucial hot spots for biodiversity protection.

Ecological system: Environmental issue

Governance solution

Social system: Administrative units



Research on institutional fit addresses the challenge to find a governance solution that provides a good fit between the ecological system and the social system.

Research question

Against this backdrop, in the cp³ project (www.cp3-project.eu) we analyzed the potential of collaborative governance approaches to mitigate institutional misfit, since such approaches have gained in importance more recently. We define collaborative governance as the vertical (across different scales) and horizontal (across different sectors of society) cooperation of multiple actors, involving partnerships between the public, private, and civil society sphere of society.

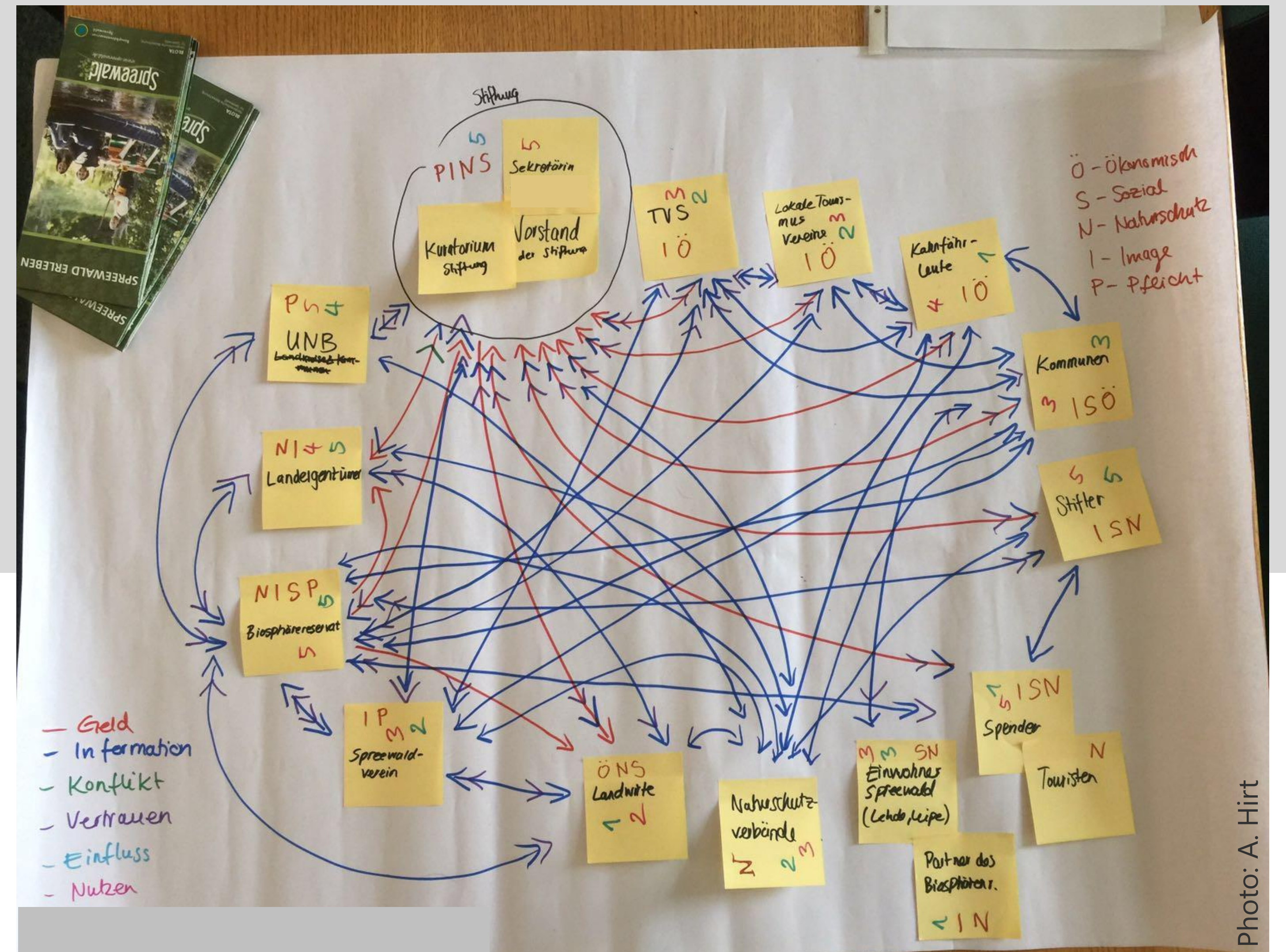
In specific, we investigated the following research question:

→ Through which distinct features can collaborative governance approaches help to address and mitigate institutional misfit?

Case studies & methods

The analysis was based on empirical research conducted in case studies from three European countries, which all represent protected areas: the Biosphere reserve Spreewald, Germany, the Nature park Jauerling-Wachau, Austria, and the Berg en Dal region as part of the National Landscape Gelderse Poort, Netherlands.

Analyzed examples of collaborative governance included a citizen foundation and a water management board in Germany, a community association and a collaborative agri-environmental scheme in Austria, and a network for landscape management in the Netherlands. For the analysis we used a mixed method approach, combining social network analysis (Net-Map tool for participatory network mapping), semi-structured interviews, and workshops with focus group discussions.



A 'Net-Map' from the German case study region which shows all actors involved into the citizen foundation 'Bürgerstiftung Kulturlandschaft Spreewald' and their inter-relationships.

Photo: A. Hirt

The analysis aimed to investigate: the types of actors involved into the collaboration, their inter-relationships (e.g. exchange of knowledge and funding, relations of trust and conflict), their motives, influence, and benefits, the type of misfit addressed, and the main challenges faced.

Results

- The investigated collaborative governance approaches addressed different types of misfits, which included filling a regulatory gap, or improving the spatial and temporal fit for a given environmental issue.
- In addition, other deficits were addressed, such as implementation deficits or a lack in stakeholder participation.
- The collaborative approaches were in general open to the voluntary engagement of all concerned stakeholders, always including public, private and civil society actors, and the networks typically formed according to the magnitude and spatial extend of the perceived environmental problem rather than political boundaries.
- Relations among actors concerned information sharing and co-production of knowledge and were typically characterized by high levels of trust.
- Also, collaborative governance often allowed access to additional resources held by the different actors, which were critical in properly addressing the problem, e.g. in terms of local knowledge, time and voluntary engagement for specific activities or additional funding.
- As many different actors are involved, usually motives are versatile, but despite this fact, often win-wins could be realized due to the actors' high levels of individual motivation for solving the problem.
- Furthermore, collaborative governance supported more flexibility as procedures were often not as prescriptive and less formal when contrasted to more hierarchical or market-based approaches which gives more leeway to the actors to establish procedures better aligned to the specific context of the given problem.
- Finally, main challenges concerned effective communication within the whole network and shortage in long-term funding.



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