Chapter 3

The Governance Assessment Tool and Its Use

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3.1 Introduction: The Implementation Challenge

Especially in the context of climate change adaptation, the sustainability of natural resources requires an integrative vision, apt policies and adequate implementation to realise the proposed measures in practice. Mentioning all three issues does not imply that they have clear boundaries between them. Instead, between vision and policies and between policies and their implementation mutual influences occur. Often policies get further shape in the process of implementing them. This is more true when the policy formation and implementation have a multi-actor character, like in most cases of drought resilience management in Northwest Europe. Instead of singular policies with a separate implementation process, drought management is often a combination of water system and behavioural adaptations, which relates to and draws resources from various policy sectors, and requires concerted action on multiple levels and time scales (Bressers and Lulofs 2010). Such a challenge can be labelled as complex and dynamic. It requires a lot of ‘connective capacity’ (Edelenbos et al. 2013). It is essentially this nature of ‘complex and dynamic multi-actor interaction processes’ that requires a good governance context to enable the realisation of practice projects. Without a good governance context the degree of trust, openness and mutual liking is likely too low to allow for real cooperation.

In Chap. 1 it has been explained that the analyses in this book make use of a specific theory and method of governance analysis that aims to be practice oriented in

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that it tries to assess to what degree the governance context is supportive or restrictive for the realisation of the chosen policies and projects. In this chapter, this so-called Governance Assessment Tool will be presented and explained. Also some remarks guiding its use will be made. In the next section we will first introduce the theoretical approach in which the Governance Assessment Tool is rooted (Sect. 3.2). In this so-called Contextual Interaction Theory, operational decision making and implementation processes are studied from three actor characteristics (motivations, cognitions and resources) that are influenced by the three contextual layers of case specific circumstances, the governance context and the more general wider context like the technological development. Section 3.3 presents the Governance Assessment Tool itself, including its descriptive and evaluative questions. Thereafter in Sect. 3.4 we will guide the reader on how to use it to facilitate governance analysis.

3.2 Understanding Policy Implementation as Multi-actor Interaction Process: Contextual Interaction Theory

The Governance Assessment Tool is rooted in a theory of policy implementation that is labelled Contextual Interaction Theory (Bressers 2004, 2009; De Boer and Bressers 2011). It views implementation processes not top down, as just the application of policy decisions, but as multi-actor interaction processes that are ultimately driven by the actors involved. Thus it makes sense to explain the course and results of the process from that simple starting point and to place these actors and their main characteristics central stage in any analytical model. This is also relevant because in the history of implementation research hundreds of crucial success factors were proposed and used to analyse all kinds of different cases. This can be theoretically interesting when one can try to carve out the impact of a single factor from those of all the others. In practical reality however practitioners must deal with situations in which all factors are around simultaneously, and thus with combinations of all factors that are thought to matter (Bressers and O'Toole 2005). Even in a rather simple model of fifteen factors having each only two possible values there are some thirty thousand different combinations of circumstances that can be imagined. That is not only unworkable as an analytical tool (Goggin 1986), it is also overdone. There are no thirty thousand (or more) fundamentally different implementation settings. But since interaction processes are human activities, all influences flow via the key characteristics of the actors involved (Bressers and Klok 1988). Thus, it is possible to explain the course and effects of implementation processes with a set of three core factors per actor. Such explanatory model is far more parsimonious, at least to begin with. All other factors, including governance conditions, are regarded as belonging to the context that may influence this set of core factors. In Fig. 3.1 we include these factors: their motivations that may spur the actors into action, their cognitions, information held to be true, and their resources, providing them with capacity to act individually and power in relation to other actors. Among the actors involved in the process there need to be a sufficiently

Fig. 3.1 Process model with the actor characteristics used in Contextual Interaction Theory (Source Bressers 2009)

strong combination of motivations, cognitions and resources to enable the process to succeed (Bressers 2004; Owens 2008).

The basic assumptions of Contextual Interaction Theory are quite simple and straightforward.

The theory's main assumptions are:

1. Policy processes are multi-actor interaction processes. Both individuals, often representing organisations or groups, or organisations themselves can be considered actors when participating in the process.
2. Many factors may have an influence but only because and in as far as they change relevant characteristics of the involved actors.
3. These characteristics are: their motivation, their cognitions and their resources, providing them with capacity and power (Knoepfel et al. 2011: 68).
4. These three characteristics are influencing each other, but cannot be limited to two or one without losing much insight (Mohlakoana 2014).
5. The characteristics of the actors shape the process, but are in turn also influenced by the course and experiences in the process and can therefore change during the process. There is a dynamic interaction between the key actor characteristics that drive social interaction processes and in turn are reshaped by the process. Deliberate strategies of actors involved can try to promote such changes both in other actors and within their own group or organisation.

And, as we will discuss further on in this section:

6. The characteristics of the actors are also influenced by conditions and changes in the specific case context of for instance characteristics of the geographical place and previous decisions that among others can set the stage for some actors and exclude others from the process.
7. A next layer of context is the structural context of the governance regime. This is the context that our Governance Assessment Tool concentrates on.
8. Around this context there is yet another more encompassing circle of political system, socio-cultural, economical, technological, and problem contexts. Their influence on the actor characteristics may be both direct and indirect through the governance regime.

Figure 3.2 shows these various layers of context. They are pictured as overlapping circles that all three have direct potential impact on the characteristics of the actors, indicating that wider context do not need to first influence governance and then the specific case context before having an impact, even though some of their influence will work like that. Also the other way around, the case process influencing the evolution of the contexts, is possible, but this influence will mostly be limited to the specific context.

In Fig. 3.3, many theorems and other ideas are employed. Compared to Fig. 3.1 this figure does also show process development (change processes—in the form of the processes over time). The actor characteristics are much more elaborated here, not visualised as linked to specific actors and for presentation reasons placed outside of the process box. This enables showing the mutual influences between these factors and the process itself (compare Mohlakoana 2014).

Motivations—The origins of motivations for behaviour, including for the positions taken in interaction processes, first of all lay in own goals and values. Self-interest, like in many economic theories, plays of course a strong role here. But also more altruistic values can directly lead to genuine own goals (Gatersleben and Vlek 1998). External pressures can be also a motivating force. Like all motivational factors they could in principle also be conceptualised as belonging to one's 'own' purposes. However, such conceptualisation will make them often forgotten or underemphasised. These external pressures can be based on force, but more often will be softer influences from normative acceptance of the legitimacy of such external wishes and even by identification with the group from which such expectations come. Last but not always least also the 'self-effectiveness assessment' (Bandura 1986) can play a large role as a motivational factor. This concept points to the de-motivational effect that occurs when an actor perceives its preferred behaviour as beyond its capacity. It shows part of the relation between motivation and the availability of resources. While all of these elements are rooted in social and

Fig. 3.2 Interaction processes influenced simultaneously by various layers of context

Fig. 3.3 Dynamic interaction between the key actor characteristics that drive social interaction processes and in turn are reshaped by the process (Source Bressers 2009)

learning psychology and thus seem to apply to individuals, also organisations and individuals representing groups and organisations (so-called ‘corporate actors’) can have the same set of origins of motivations.

Cognitions—The cognitions of actors (interpretations of reality held to be true) are not only a matter of observations and information processing capacity, though these aspects are important and with the information technology revolution are a source of quick changes. In policy sciences the so-called ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer 1995; Fischer and Gottweis 2012), reflects a variety of approaches that emphasise that knowledge is produced itself in mutual interactions, based on interpretations of reality of actors, that themselves are mediated by frames of reference. Some frames of reference are termed by Axelrod (1976) as ‘cognitive maps’, by Schön (1983), Schön and Rein (1994) and later van Hulst and Yanow (2014) as ‘frames’, by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) as ‘policy core beliefs’ and ‘deep core beliefs’. Dryzek (1997) speaks of ‘discourses’, thereby also stressing the language dependency of understanding and the role of words, one-liners, stories and the like to guide, but also to restrict and bias understanding. While these approaches are quite different in their conceptual understanding and methodology of reconstruction, they also share some understandings: that cognitions are not just factual information about, but more interpretations of reality, and that such interpretations are influenced by filters, frames and interactions with other actors. Not

the whole of the theoretical approaches mentioned, but only this ‘common ground’ is incorporated in the cognitions box of the contextual interaction theory. Part of these frames is related to ‘boundary judgments’, ideas about what does and what does not belong to a subject at hand (Bressers and Lulofs 2010). These different cognitions can refer to subjects or aspects of the project or the problems it wants to solve, or about the time frames that are relevant like short term results versus contributing to a long term vision, or about the relevant levels and scales: just local, or also embedded in a higher level or bigger scale of problem-solving. Differences in these boundary judgments between the various actors in the process can have significant impacts on their interactions in the process.

Resources—While resources as an actor characteristic are important to provide capacity to act, in the relational setting of an interaction process they are also relevant as a source of power. Resources are here meant to be any asset that public and private actors can use to support their actions. This implies that the relevance of resources is dependent on the actions an actor wants to perform. Having resources that other actors need access to for their preferred actions provides a basis of power. While in the previous figures the actor characteristics are purely linked to separate actors in Fig. 3.3 they are related to the actions and interactions in the process. Therefore this box is labelled “capacity and power” in Fig. 3.3. The relationship between power and resources is not always direct. Power in first instance largely results of attribution to an actor by others. However when this attribution is not backed by real resources it is fragile as soon as it is challenged. The resources that are the root of these powers encompass much more than formal rules, though legal rights and other institutional rules can be an important part of it, aside from resources such as money, skilled people, time and consensus (Klok 1995; Knoepfel et al. 2011).

Not only the resources of the actors themselves, but moreover the dependency of an actor on the resources of another actor shapes the balance of power. A classic example is the dependency of authorities on the jobs created by industry, which industry can use as a source of negotiation power. The example also shows that in Contextual Interaction Theory not just formal powers count, but that power can be based on all kinds of resources. Resources not only shape power relations, but are also a prerequisite for action as such, determining the capacity to act of any actor. The resource base for action can be greatly enlarged by engaging in dependencies with other actors with relevant resources, at the expense of loss of autonomy and thus—in some cases—power. Whether a specific resource contributes to capacity and power depends on the action that is intended. Resources that seem irrelevant to get certain things done might be essential to get other things done.

There are mutual relations between the three key actor characteristics. Every change in one of the three has influences on the other two. While we typically start with mentioning motivation, many would like to start with the way reality is understood and problems and chances perceived, or whether some useful information is available (on relevant technology, economics, social, geographical or environmental conditions), as a prerequisite for motivation. It must be borne in mind that the influence is mutual: without certain interests and values, available

data may be overwhelming and too time consuming to process. The development of information needs some focusing of attention (creating selective perception as a bias). The actions for which an actor is motivated require resources, and the availability of those resources is bound to influence the actors' ambition, for instance because a lack of necessary resources creates a low self-effectiveness assessment (Bandura 1986). While 'knowledge is power' (attributed to Francis Bacon 1561–1626) may be one-sided, it is certainly true that information can serve strategic purposes and hence can be used as one of the bases of power. On the other hand the gathering and processing of data is also an activity that needs resources. Lastly, the three factors are not only shaping, but are also (re)shaped by the activities and interactions that happen in the process.

Above we explained the model of social interaction processes in Contextual Interaction Theory. It is applied to the implementation of drought resilience measures in this book. It has been used extensively in implementation case studies on various fields, also outside of the water sector. Its treatment in this section served to show what our understanding is of the nature of the processes that may find more or less supportive governance and other contexts in practice. Contextual Interaction Theory contains not only this part on the interaction process of implementation and realisation but also a part on these contexts and their relevance. In the next section we will explain the layers of context further and how they may be supportive or restrictive for the success of the interaction processes under study. In doing this we will concentrate on the layer of governance characteristics.

Governance is often said to differ from earlier developed concepts like government or policy in that it emphasises the multi-level and multi-actor character of all forms of steering of any specified (sub)sector of society. In our approach to the concept of governance we do not only discern the multiplicity of the levels and of the actors involved, but also apply the idea that the concept of governance assumes multiplicity to the dimensions of the older concept of policy: goals, instruments and the means to apply them (Howlett 2011). In each governance context there will likely be multiple goals involved, multiple instruments and multiple means to apply them. In Chap. 1 it was explained how this led to a conceptualization of governance in five dimensions (Bressers and Kuks 2003).

In Fig. 3.4 these dimensions are listed as filling the structural layer of context for the implementation processes. The structural context at for instance national level is much more stable than the specific case context. The structural context will to a far lesser degree be influenced back by individual implementation cases. In fact it is the essence of the difference between the specific and the structural context that the latter holds for in principle all similar cases and not only for any specific case. This is not to say that the structural context is not changing over time, just that these changes are even more the emergent result of many actors and factors than changes in the specific context.

Fig. 3.4 Elaboration of the layers of context in contextual interaction theory (Source Bressers 2009)

3.3 The Governance Assessment Tool

The previous section has explained some theoretical roots of the type of governance assessment that we use in this book. In this section we will explain the Governance Assessment Tool that has been further developed in the context of the DROP project. To be able to systematically describe what the five dimensions of governance look like in the given governance context we developed a set of questions that can be used to guide the analysis of policy and other archival documents, and structure the conduct and analysis of qualitative interviews with key informants. Figure 3.5 gives an overview. All five dimensions include a descriptive question regarding the time dimension—that is, ‘Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future’. In the context of the DROP project, it was particularly relevant to include this time dimension to spot any visible trends in the governance dimensions across case study regions. This is particularly important in Europe where countries face the same deadlines, like the 2015–2021–2027 assessment years of the Water Framework Directive.

While it is not difficult to see that all five elements of governance have strong relevance for the inputs into the process and the motivations, cognitions and resources of the actors therein, they do not specify what aspects of them create a more or a less stimulating context for the process.

Governance dimension	Main descriptive questions
Levels and scales	Which administrative levels are involved and how? Which hydrological scales are considered and in what way? To what extent do they depend on each other or are able to act productively on their own? Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future?
Actors and networks	Which actors are involved in the process? To what extent do they have network relationships also outside of the case under study? What are their roles? Which actors are only involved as affected by or beneficiaries of the measures taken? What are the conflicts between these stakeholders? What forms of dialogue between them? Are there actors with a mediating role? Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future?
Problem perspectives and goal ambitions	Which various angles does the debate of public and stakeholders take towards the problem at hand? What levels of possible disturbance are current policies designed to cope with? What levels of disturbance of normal water use are deemed acceptable by different stakeholders? What goals are stipulated in the relevant policy white papers and political statements? Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future?
Strategies and instruments	Which policy instruments and measures are used to modify the problem situation? To what extent do they reflect a certain strategy of influence (regulative, incentive, communicative, technical etc.)? Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future?
Responsibilities and resources	Which organisations have responsibility for what tasks under the relevant policies and customs? What legal authorities and other resources are given to them for this purpose or do they possess inherently? What transparencies are demanded and monitored regarding their use? Is there sufficient knowledge on the water system available? Have any of these changed over time or are likely to change in the foreseeable future?

Fig. 3.5 Main descriptive questions specifying the five elements of governance for water management implementation (*Source* Bressers et al. 2013)

To indicate what status of the five elements of governance contributes to a stimulating rather than restrictive governance context for the implementation and realisation of water management measures, four quality criteria have been elaborated over the years (Bressers and Kuks 2004; De Boer and Bressers 2011; Kuks

et al. 2012; Bressers et al. 2013, 2015). The structural context influences the process not only through its direct contents, but also through its *extent* and *coherence* (Knoepfel et al. 2001, 2003; Bressers and Kuks 2004). The extent refers to the completeness of the regime. The coherence is the degree to which the various elements of the regime are strengthening rather than weakening each other.

Regimes with an insufficient *extent* are by definition weak as guardians of sustainable use of water resources, while some relevant parts of the domain go unregulated. Most of the time, growing complexity is an answer to real needs and developments. As a matter of fact, societies in modern times have generally grown into a situation of increased complexity. Increased populations, borders, overlaps, activities, rivalries, etc. are a fact of our current living environments. A growing complexity in governance can be viewed as a logical adaptation to that development (Gerrits 2008; Teisman et al. 2009). Many external change agents, such as technological developments, add new scales, new actors, new problem perceptions, new instruments, and new responsibilities to the existing ones. The essence of extent is not the number of involved scales, actors, perceptions, instruments and resources as such, but rather the degree to which these are complete in reflecting what is relevant for the policy or project. In that sense it should not be mistaken for another way of making a descriptive inventory like with the descriptive questions.

By *coherence* we mean the following: When more than one layer of government is dealing with the same natural resource (as is often the case), then coherence means inter alia that the activities of these layers of government are recognised as mutually dependent and influencing each other's effects. Likewise if more than one scale is relevant the interaction effects between those scales should be considered. When more than one actor (stakeholder) is involved in the policy, coherence means that there is a substantial degree of interaction in the policy network, and preferably productive interaction providing coordination capacity. When more than one use or user is causing the problem of unsustainable resource use for example, coherence means that the various resulting objectives are analysed in one framework so that deliberate choices can be made if and when goals and/or uses are conflicting. When the actors involved have problem perceptions that start from different angles, coherence means that they are capable of integrating these to such an extent that a common ground for productive deliberation on ambitions is created. The same holds for instrumental strategies that are used to attain the different objectives, as well as for the different instruments in a mix to attain one of these objectives. Coherence of the organisation of implementation means that responsibilities and resources of various persons or organisations that are to contribute to the application of the policy are co-ordinated, or these actors themselves are co-ordinated.

In the implementation process, the additional fragmentation that is typical for complex but non coherent regimes will tend to lead to more discord between the actors (goals), more uncertainty (cognitions), and more stalemates (power) and, thereby, can hamper implementation. In the implementation process, coherence of the structural context (the regime) will tend to lead to less discord (due to more 'win-win'—solution creativity), less (subjective) uncertainty (due to more exchange of information and less distrust) and less stalemates (due to less possibilities for

target groups to play the implementers off against each other and more standard operation procedures for the solution of conflict).

While in stable and relatively simple situations extent and coherence might be sufficient to evaluate the degree to which the governance context is supportive or restrictive for the implementation of policies and projects, more complex and dynamic situations require extra criteria (De Boer and Bressers 2011). For the success and failure of complex spatial projects and policy implementation in complex situations in general, some form of ‘adaptive implementation’ is important, trying not only to see the reality as a field of obstacles, but also as a terrain of potential—often unexpected—opportunities and being adaptive enough to use every ‘window of opportunity’ to bring the ultimate purpose closer to realisation. Therefore it is essential that the somewhat static factors of extent and coherence are supplemented with the factor of flexibility, indicating to what degree the relevant actors have formal and informal liberties and stimuli to act.

Flexibility is defined here as “the degree to which the regime elements support and facilitate adaptive actions and strategies in as far as the integrated (et al. multi-sectoral) ambitions are served by this adaptiveness”. Consequently it is also the degree to which hindrances for such adaptive behaviour are avoided. Like extent and coherence, the flexibility of the regime as such could be understood in terms of the five elements of governance described above. A regime is more flexible in as far as the relationships between the levels and scales involved are more based on decentralisation of power, without upper levels withdrawing support. This is closely related to empowering rather than controlling relations, and thus on trust. A similar feature describes flexible regimes in terms of actor relations in the policy network. Here too the combination of giving leeway to each actor group to optimise its contribution to the whole programme while still viewing the programme as a joint effort qualifies as flexibility. In terms of general problem perception and goal ambitions flexibility implies that these in their variety are not only integrated into a sort of common denominator (like with coherence), but also that these mixtures are allowed to be different in emphasis according to the opportunities of the context in the various concrete situations. This implies some acceptance of uncertainty and openness to emergent options, which again relates to trust. The instruments and their combinations in policy strategies or mixes are more flexible in as far as means from different sources (like public policies and private property rights) may be used as well as indirect means (here relating to opening or improving options for the use of means that more directly serve the goals) are available and allowed to be used. Lastly the flexibility of the organisation responsible for the implementation—the responsibilities and resources given by the policy programme(s)—can be measured by the discretion available to pool resources like funds and people with those of others to serve integrated projects and to be held accountable on the basis of the balanced virtues of the achievements (as in an integrated project), rather than on the basis of separate performance criteria.

Given the dynamic and change oriented nature of some policies, like realising more drought resilience in the water system, there is yet another regime quality that can be influential for the practical process. That is the obvious, but no less important

aspect of intensity. *Intensity* is “the degree to which the regime elements urge changes in the status quo or in current developments”. The ‘amount of change’ is thereby measured in analogy with Newton’s ‘law of inertia’, so as the degree of energy it takes to produce the change. In systems theory, induced changes will typically meet negative feedback loops, weakening their impact, while in some cases positive feedback loops creating dynamics for permanent change are also conceivable (True et al. 1999; Bressers and Lulofs 2009). In policy studies’ terms intensity is related to the size of the task to create new dynamics by creative cooperation, or conflict. Consequently this urges change of conservative motivations or overcoming them by power, changing cognitions including widening of boundary judgments regarding the issues at stake, and developing new availabilities and combinations of resources. In other words: with more intensity the urge to use clever adaptive strategies to deal with and change the setting of the process increases. In terms of the five elements of governance intensity is greater in as far as also upper levels are more deeply involved, actors that are also powerful in other domains are more deeply involved in the relevant policy network for the issue at stake, the issue plays a larger role in the public debate leading to a greater openness to try to push developments away from a business-as-usual track (thus with more ambitious goals), the instruments made available to be used include more interventionist ones, and the amount of resources made available for implementation is larger.

In summary, the four criteria are defined by the questions that they pose:

1. Extent: are all elements in the five dimensions that are relevant for the sector or project that is focused on taken into account?
2. Coherence: are the elements in the dimensions of governance reinforcing rather than contradicting each other?
3. Flexibility: are multiple roads to the goals, depending on opportunities and threats as they arise, permitted and supported?
4. Intensity: how strongly do the elements in the dimensions of governance urge changes in the status quo or in current developments?

For each of the five dimensions of governance, the four criteria mentioned above are specified with specific questions (Fig. 3.6) which forms a matrix of assessment for the governance of drought and water scarcity for a region. This matrix forms the core of the Governance Assessment Tool (GAT). Together, these questions shed light on the degree of supportiveness or restrictiveness of the governance context towards the implementation of policies and projects. It is important to note that the GAT does not assess the functioning or success of an actor or a specific adaptation plan. Rather, the GAT assesses the entire governance context, enabling reflections on the way that this context supports or restricts the implementation of policies and projects.

While this version is developed by the scientists of the “governance team” in the DROP project its usability reaches far beyond drought management. In fact the tool is applicable to a wide range of implementation projects in water management and even beyond.

Governance dimension	Quality of the governance regime			
	Extent	Coherence	Flexibility	Intensity
Levels and scales	How many levels are involved and dealing with an issue? Are there any important gaps or missing levels?	Do these levels work together and do they trust each other between levels? To what degree is the mutual dependence among levels recognised?	Is it possible to move up and down levels (upscaling and downscaling) given the issue at stake?	Is there a strong impact from a certain level towards behavioural change or management reform?
Actors and networks	Are all relevant stakeholders involved? Are there any stakeholders not involved or even excluded?	What is the strength of interactions between stakeholders? In what ways are these interactions institutionalised in stable structures? Do the stakeholders have experience in working together? Do they trust and respect each other?	Is it possible that new actors are included or even that the lead shifts from one actor to another when there are pragmatic reasons for this? Do the actors share in 'social capital' allowing them to support each other's tasks?	Is there a strong pressure from an actor or actor coalition towards behavioural change or management reform?
Problem perspectives and goal ambitions	To what extent are the various problem perspectives taken into account?	To what extent do the various perspectives and goals support each other, or are they in competition or conflict?	Are there opportunities to re-assess goals? Can multiple goals be optimized in package deals?	How different are the goal ambitions from the status quo or business as usual?
Strategies and instruments	What types of instruments are included in the policy strategy? Are there any excluded types? Are monitoring and enforcement instruments included?	To what extent is the incentive system based on synergy? Are trade-offs in cost benefits and distributional effects considered? Are there any overlaps or conflicts of incentives created by the included policy instruments?	Are there opportunities to combine or make use of different types of instruments? Is there a choice?	What is the implied behavioural deviation from current practice and how strongly do the instruments require and enforce this?
Responsibilities and resources	Are all responsibilities clearly assigned and facilitated with resources?	To what extent do the assigned responsibilities create competence struggles or cooperation within or across institutions? Are they considered legitimate by the main stakeholders?	To what extent is it possible to pool the assigned responsibilities and resources as long as accountability and transparency are not compromised?	Is the amount of allocated resources sufficient to implement the measures needed for the intended change?

Fig. 3.6 The governance assessment tool matrix with its main evaluative questions (*Source* Bressers et al. 2013)

3.4 Using the Governance Assessment Tool

It is important to note that even with all the questions that specify the cells of the matrix, hard “measurement” in the sense of a quantification is not possible. Some degree of “informed judgment” is inevitable when assessing the status of the four criteria relevant to the various governance dimensions.

The GAT can be used by stakeholders themselves, or as a guidance for interactive workshops with stakeholders. In the DROP project we had the opportunity to use the GAT in a very elaborated way. Thus it makes sense to first explain some options on how to use the GAT in a situation that time and involvement are limited. Thereafter we will explain how we used the tool in the DROP project and what we recognised to be the main success factors.

3.4.1 Diagnosing with the Governance Assessment Tool in a Short Period and with a Limited Number of People

The structure of the Governance Assessment Tool and the guiding questions it poses in each cell, enables any *individual stakeholder* (e.g. a project leader, or policy advisor, or policy makers) who understands the dimensions and criteria to assess the governance context s/he is working in. All it requires is a few hours to assess the situation for each cell, on the basis of knowledge held by heart. Obviously such assessment is limited by the degree of correctness of such estimates. But that is no reason to be negative about it. Such an individual thought experiment at least turns implicit knowledge and perceptions into explicit ones that can later be shared with others in a systematic way. It also serves the purpose that the individual stakeholder becomes more aware of the issues on which there is uncertainty or even lack of knowledge. Lastly, assuming that the perceptions of such ‘insider’ make some sense indeed (as often will be the case), it provides an assessment of one’s own working circumstances that can be practical in finding ways to improve them or otherwise deal with them.

A next step in elaborated use of the tool is when a *group of practitioners interactively* uses it for a systematic brainstorm on the governance context of their common policy or project. This could take for instance the form of a half day workshop. Compared with the previous approach there are more people that can contribute knowledge and that can counter one-sided bias in perceptions, creating a degree of “inter-subjectivity”. The joint effort is also an important aspect in itself, as it provides a basis for sharing information and sharing perceptions, that can later be of utmost value for productive collaboration (HarmoniCOP 2005). The session can be concluded by brainstorming on how to deal with the governance context about which by then a joint understanding has evolved. In as far as differences of opinion occur and persist, the session has probably pinpointed more precisely than before where the disagreement is all about.

A variant of the above is the situation in which an experienced analyst, for instance a scientist that worked with the tool more often, leads the session, turning it into a *guided workshop*. An obvious advantage is that the governance expert has a good understanding of the precise meaning of the concepts and the reasons why they are included in a model explaining the degree to which the context is

supportive or not. This can help the participants to concentrate on the substantive matters while nevertheless all cells of the assessment tool get appropriate attention. The governance expert can also help in the interpretation of the consequences of the assessment and will develop experience in how to deal with such situations, creating learning from one case to another. The disadvantage however can be that the participants are less actively involved and feel more like interviewees than like discussants. A good balance between too much and too little guidance is important for a productive process that provides the participants with learning experience.

A further way in which the tool can be applied is when not practical learning experiences of practitioners, but *scientific research* is the main purpose. In such a project all kind of sources are used to assess the cells and interviews with practitioners are just part of the data gathering. The Governance Assessment Tool will in such studies often be used as a way to “measure” the dependent or independent variable in the study. For this purpose normal approaches to methodology apply.

One more way in which the tool can be applied is the *elaborate way it is done in the DROP project* (multiple analysts from multiple institutions, disciplines and countries, in multiple rounds and various ways of interaction with practitioners). This is a very special situation that requires much resources, but provided both scientifically and practically a lot of new knowledge. About this ideal methodology (and its risks and pitfalls!) the next subsection will elaborate further.

3.4.2 Diagnosing with the Governance Assessment Tool in the DROP Project

In this section both experiences with using the GAT in the DROP project will be shared and advices for potential users will be presented that are based on the lessons learned while using the GAT. While the text contains a lot of advices on how to use the GAT, it does not have the character of a manual. As regards to the implementation of the GAT in the case of the DROP project, a number of important factors can be highlighted explaining the relative success of the project. Many of them relate to the challenge of using the tool to assess a variety of cases with different main policies and projects in various national and regional conditions. This requires both a good common understanding of the concepts in the GAT and a good common understanding of the empirical situation that can be supported by the items listed below.

Continuous iteration between science and practice—A way to ensure the valid and reliable assessment of the governance context of a particular region is through liaising with those embedded strongly in the governance context and water management reality. In the DROP project, the governance assessment has been developed by social scientists with the help of the practice partners (project partners from the region such as water authorities and county councils) and other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. This has allowed both for continuous

iteration between science and practice, as well as for access to regional stakeholders for interviews to ensure an even representation of relevant stakeholders. In order to enable a complete coverage of the perspectives and opinions of different stakeholders, the governance team visited each region twice and prepared a draft assessment report for each region, which was finalised after the second round of visits. The practice partners and other stakeholders interviewed were encouraged to ‘feedback’ into the draft reports to ensure that the governance assessment reflected the reality of water management in that specific regional context. Having exchanges with practice partners on the governance assessment can also contribute substantially to the development of recommendations. It is relatively easy to propose that some action should be undertaken to improve or circumvent weaknesses in the governance context. But the development of advices about how to implement such actions needs inputs from the practice partners.

Diversity in backgrounds of the analysts diagnosing the governance context played a positive role. It helps avoiding scientific disciplinary terminology. Simple and clear messages are easier to translate into concrete and feasible actions. In an interdisciplinary project team, there is a constant need for mutual adjustment and searching for a common language. Equally, that the governance team was composed of ‘outsiders’ to the region meant that there was objective reflection on what were sometimes very local issues and to the institutional rules and habits involved. Questioning what would otherwise be taken for granted by observers from the own country or region, can provide important eye-opening reflections.

Visit several regions—In DROP we found it quite useful to have the team members visit several regions. This observation of several governance settings allows for comparative analysis already during the data gathering phase, and as a result that creates the possibility to sharpen questions along the way. Most members of the governance team visited two or three regions twice, one team member even visited all regions.

Awareness raising ‘intervention’—Doing such research in the region also forms a type of awareness raising ‘intervention’. A number of the stakeholders interviewed had a fairly low awareness of the relevance of drought for their cases and the role of climate change therein. Nevertheless, the fact that an international governance team was visiting their region, asking many questions on the subject and returning with feedback and further questions half a year later contributed to pushing drought and water scarcity onto regional agendas. The modification side-effect of such ‘action research’ can also inhibit local actors in participating fully in the assessment. The fact that the GAT is not meant to evaluate the work of the practice partners, but the context under which they have to do their work should be made clear and might help in this respect.

Pre-collect existing documentation—Given the diversity of nationalities and diversity of professional backgrounds of the governance assessment team, it was found to be useful to collect some existing documentation or prepare a short document to provide prior information on the context of climate change, water management, and other relevant policies of each region. This levelled up the governance team members’ understanding of the main features of each site before

the interviews. It also allowed the interviews to focus on issues that were not published or available elsewhere, thus using the short time of the interviews more efficiently.

Governance analysts translating themselves—When translation was needed between the English language questions of the governance team members and the representatives of stakeholders that were not comfortable in that language, it proved to be good to have one of the governance team members to fulfil the “translator” role. This way the relation between interviewers and interviewees did not get disrupted and the knowledge of the tool by the governance team member ensured good interpretations and summaries of what was said by the stakeholders. Furthermore it proved to be particularly useful to be able to adapt the questions to the case by using terms of local institutions.

Local institution contacting stakeholders—The inclusion of a local institution as a cooperative partner for the interviews was very useful for contacting relevant stakeholders. The local partner possessed a well-established network and could more easily convince stakeholders to participate in interviews. Additionally, the local partner was central in compiling and screening the most relevant stakeholders and actors, including less obvious groups, to interview for achieving the widest scope possible. The assessment team made sure that also potential critics were involved among the stakeholders interviewed. A problem occurs if a major stakeholder group cannot be reached, because then the point of view of this group cannot be involved in the discussions. During the second visits, the governance team tried to make up for such situations, in some cases by visiting those stakeholders at their own offices or even homes. Like with all evaluations, selected outcomes of the governance analysis can also be used by actors as a tool in power relations. While the use of the GAT requires mutual trust between the interviewed actors and the governance team, a neutral position is required, as well as a capability to understand and integrate various positions.

The interviews had a variety of settings—Some were individual interviews and some group interviews to test the efficiency of each approach. The analysis is very much dependent on open discussions between the interviewees and the interviewers. It is necessary to gather critical issues, therefore individual interviews or small groups of interviewees seemed more suitable for the establishment of trust, and the open discussion of sometimes critical or difficult issues. Another experience was that the presence of a representative of the practice partner (water authority) at the interviews was sometimes useful to get a good introduction of the governance assessment exercise to the interviewees, but should also be dealt with carefully in order to make sure that the interviewees feel they can talk freely.

Generally the GAT should not be used as a battery of questions to put forward during each interview, but *used as a checklist* to make sure that all issues were dealt with in the course of the conversation while keeping the flow of the conversation as much as possible. The questions from the GAT should be adapted to the local contours of each case, such that the questions targeted the specific local context, including appropriate strategies and instruments, local actors, and level of analysis.

Debriefing sessions—Through a series of short debriefing sessions by the governance assessment team directly after each round of interviews, the data was extracted and analysed in the context of the 20 evaluation items of the GAT matrix. Within a week after each session, a teleconference (phone or skype meeting) provided additional exchange and inputs to the main authors of each case report. The draft case reports were distributed for comments among the governance team members, and ultimately discussed with the practice partners during the second visit to the case areas. These draft reports also formed the basis for judging what issues to focus on in the second round of interviews—as the development of these reports allowed the identification of issues or stakeholder perspectives missing in the assessment.

Careful summarising of results—The results of a GAT analysis can be summarised, even in the form of figures or tables. The issue is that transferring the richness of the data gathered by numerous documents and interviews into more condensed layers of summary and ultimately into an overview has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand it is necessary to enable comparative analysis between several cases. On the other hand, the summary should not hide away essential observations that form the evidence for the scores. In the DROP project this has been achieved by assessing each of the twenty cells of the matrix by a brief statement and sometimes a score at a three or five point scale, followed by a paragraph to page length of observations on which this statement is based. The scores on a three point scale have also been translated into graphical visualisations showing the matrix with colours ('score cards') indicating the value of each cell. These visualisations enable a quick overview of the results. However, one should always keep in mind that such a summary of summary is a derivate of a much richer set of observations and its interpretation.

Comparative analysis—The multiple case study character of the use of the GAT helped us to develop recommendations based on what works well elsewhere and what stands out in one region compared to other regions. Insights from pilot cases that face similar challenges are potential sources of advices, with the benefit of having a clear example to illustrate the ideas with concrete outcomes. Additionally, as a contribution for the learning experience of the practice partners, hearing about the governance assessment conclusions regarding other regions provides the possibility to refresh the way their own context is reviewed.

Procedure to compile recommendations—Statements of the different cells and questions of the assessment matrix were screened carefully. Important connecting issues were then highlighted. Especially the critical statements, which the stakeholders made during the interviews, were screened by the governance team to identify the improvement areas. This brainstorming exchange within the governance team was useful in developing and structuring ideas relevant to the recommendations. Comparisons between the different case studies were also explored to identify common issues as well as opportunities among the case studies. Different approaches and experiences could be compared and used as the basis for further discussion. One major step was to gather feedback to the developed recommendations. It was evident that the recommendations were developed with limited

knowledge of the history of the local and regional institutions and their culture and experiences. As a result, it was very important to discuss the recommendations and gather feedback.

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced the Governance Assessment Tool that has been used in the DROP project and forms the analytical basis of this book. We started with the origins of the tool in Contextual Interaction Theory, and proceeded with the dimensions and criteria that form the backbone of the tool, and form a matrix. In these matrix evaluative questions are formulated that can be discussed with local and regional stakeholders. Based on their answers and further information and insights a judgment can be reached to what extent the governance circumstances are supportive, restrictive or neutral for drought adaptation. A visualisation with coloured cells of the matrix can show in one quick glance the governance state of affairs in that region. To create more precise visualisation, arrows can be added to each box indicating upward or downward trends for that box. The chapter ends with a discussion on the application of the GAT. The tool can both be used in relatively simple ways and as in the DROP project in a very elaborate way.

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