Planning for Flooding: A Network Governance Perspective on Flood Risk Management 2014

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Abstract

In England, flooding in recent years has had a detrimental effect on the economy, the environment and the health and wellbeing of people affected. Climate change research suggests that the occurrence and consequences of flooding may worsen in the future. Therefore, effective flood risk management (FRM) is crucial. Traditionally, to prevent flooding mainly structural measures were taken, such as barriers and embankments. In recent times, the emphasis has shifted to managing the risk of flooding by using non-structural methods as well, such as spatial planning. Simultaneously, there has been a shift from government to governance in FRM. Due to privatisation, agentification and decentralisation, decision making increasingly takes place in local governance networks. Actors with differing interests and flood responsibilities interact and negotiate in order to influence FRM, such as local authorities, the Environment Agency (EA, which has national responsibility for FRM), water and sewerage companies and developers.

This PhD research explores the nature of network governance in FRM in England. The research focuses on local planning processes to examine the development and functioning of governance networks, in order to identify key factors that influence FRM. To achieve this, a multiple case study approach was applied, comprising two cases of local planning processes. The first case is a major mixed development in the North East of England that has issues with river and surface water flooding, whilst the second case is a major redevelopment of a cricket ground in the South East that is at significant risk of river flooding.

The findings show that in both cases governance networks were formed to make decisions on FRM. In the first case, the actors co-operated and were able to implement a sustainable method of FRM. In the second case, the actors were unable to agree and the decision was referred to central government, which granted permission for development against the EA's advice. One key factor influencing FRM was the actors' ability to align interests, in particular the developers, the local authority and the EA, causing either conflict or co-operation in the governance network. The individual interests were derived from various factors, such as legislation, financial benefits and personal preference. The actors then used their agency to reach collaborative or individual

objectives by utilising knowledge and structures to their advantage. Therefore, the nature of network governance influences flooding and the consequences of flooding now and in the future.