

Transboundary water cooperation & water diplomacy ...with Mekong River as a case



WAT-E2080 Water & Governance, 21.1.2021



PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

1. Transboundary waters

- Setting the bio-physical basis
- Governance i.e. key institutions and actors
- Water diplomacy
- Finland as a transboundary champion 
- SDGs & Integrated Water Resources Management IWRM

Transboundary:
crossing administrative borders,
usually those between two
independent countries.
Commonly used term when
talking about rivers shared by
several countries ('rajajoki').
→ Also called
'shared waters'

2. Mekong River as a case

- Mekong as a river and as a governance context (MRC and beyond)
- Mekong development: the role of IWRM, impact assessment & transboundary cooperation to address the hydropower boom

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS: my key points

- 1) Transboundary waters are almost everywhere
– and they are feeling increasing pressures
- 2) Governance of transboundary waters is particularly tricky
due to differing interests and scales as well as geopolitics
 - Water diplomacy as an emerging theme to complement
transboundary water cooperation
 - Link to SDG6 implementation, too
- 3) Finland is a small transboundary water hero! 



TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS:
setting the bio-physical basis

TRANSBOUNDARY (FRESH) WATERS

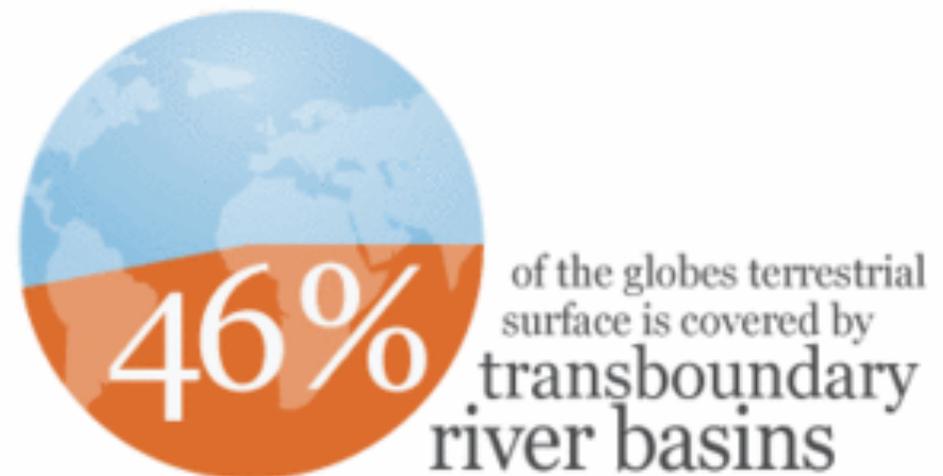
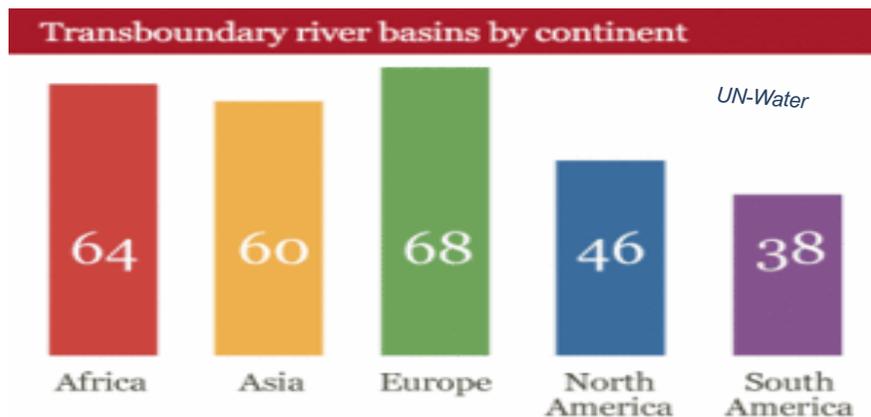
- There are around 310 transboundary river & lake basins globally
(note updated, higher figure: e.g. UN-Water 2008 had only 263 basins: depends on how you count, too) *McCracken & Wolf 2019*
- Many river basins seeing intensive water use and rapid development (e.g. hydropower, irrigation), often with strong imbalances between upstream and downstream water use *(e.g. Munia 2020)*
 - Coupled with differing geopolitical power relations & governance settings = recipe for tensions and even conflicts, both within and between the countries
- Note: here the emphasis is on rivers, but there are also a number of transboundary lakes, aquifers & groundwater systems + marine ecosystems & oceans
 - Baltic Sea + HELCOM one interesting example for marine governance (see e.g. Pihlajamäki & Tynkkynen 2011: <https://www.fiia.fi/julkaisu/governing-the-blue-green-baltic-sea>)

TRANSBOUNDARY (FRESH) WATERS

The world's transboundary river & lake basins cover over 40% of population, around 47% of its land surface, almost 60% of global water flow and around 150 countries

For more,
see e.g:
www.geftwap.org

→ Their governance therefore a major water governance issue, particularly given the differing institutions and actors in different riparian countries – and the related tensions



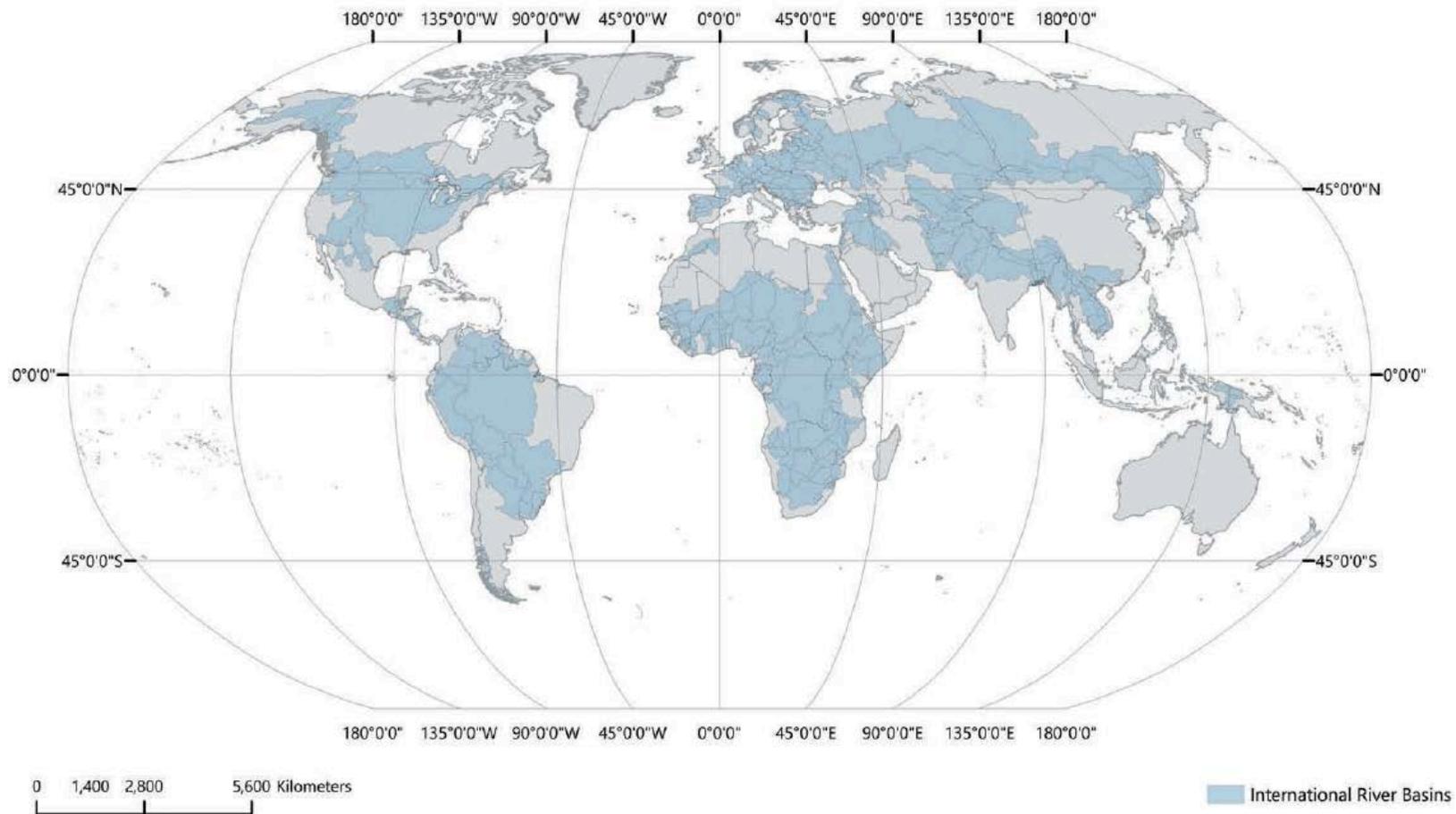
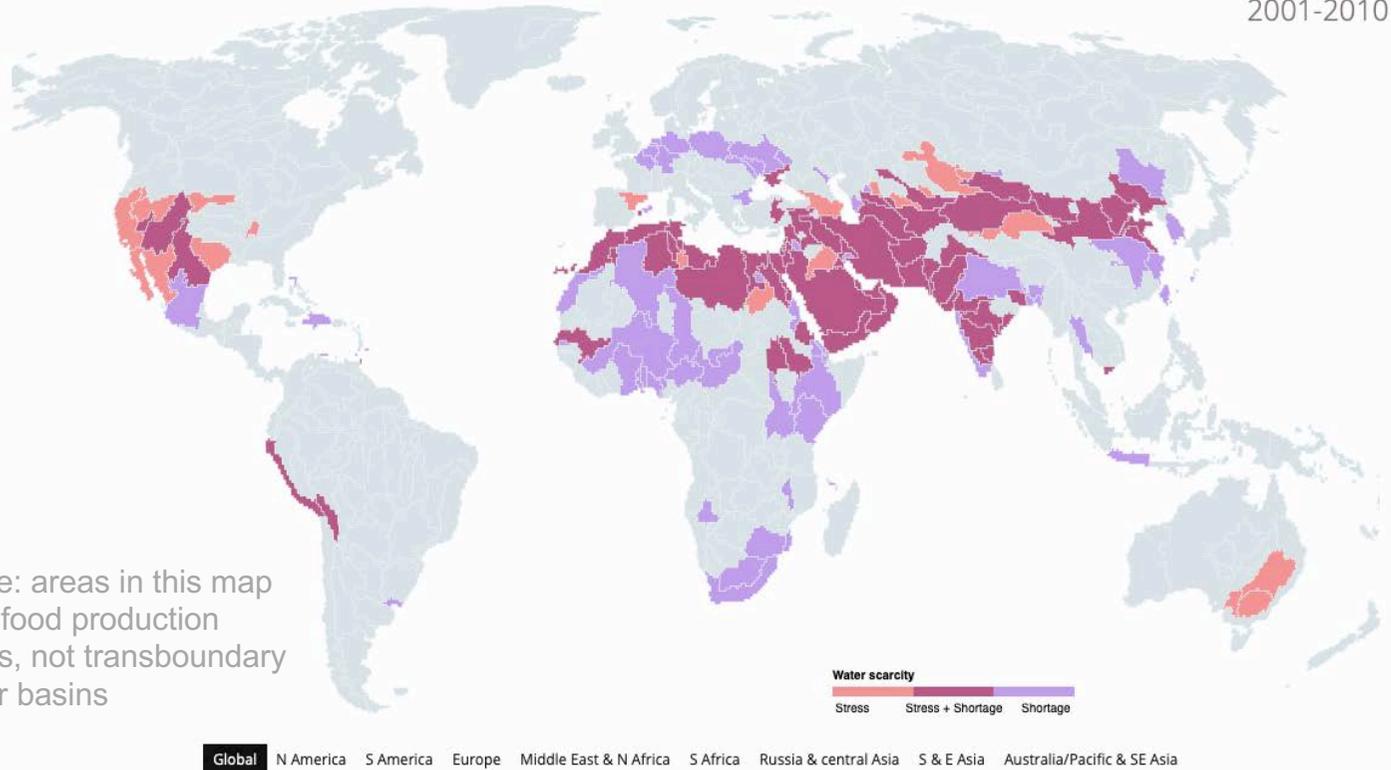
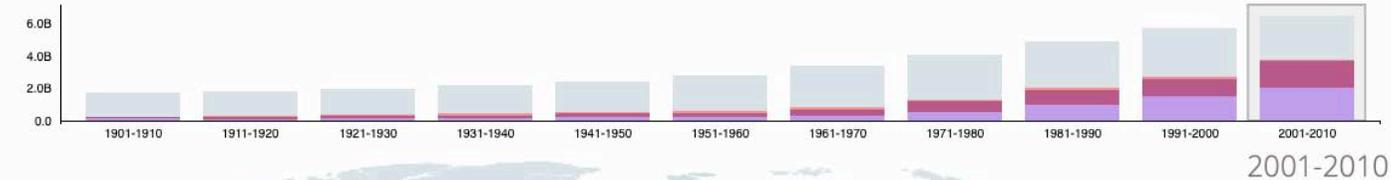


Figure 2. International river basins of the world. There are 310 international river basins, covering 47.1% of the Earth's land surface (without Antarctica). © Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database, Oregon State University, Cartographer Melissa McCracken, Robinson Projection, Source: Data from TFDD (2018); FAO GAUL (2014).

Source: McCracken & Wolf 2019

PRESSURES: WATER SCARCITY

Global population living in water scarcity



Water scarcity, including both **water shortage** (low water availability per capita) and **water stress** (high consumption relative to water availability, increasing, with climate change often reinforcing the trend

Source: <https://waterscarcityatlas.org>

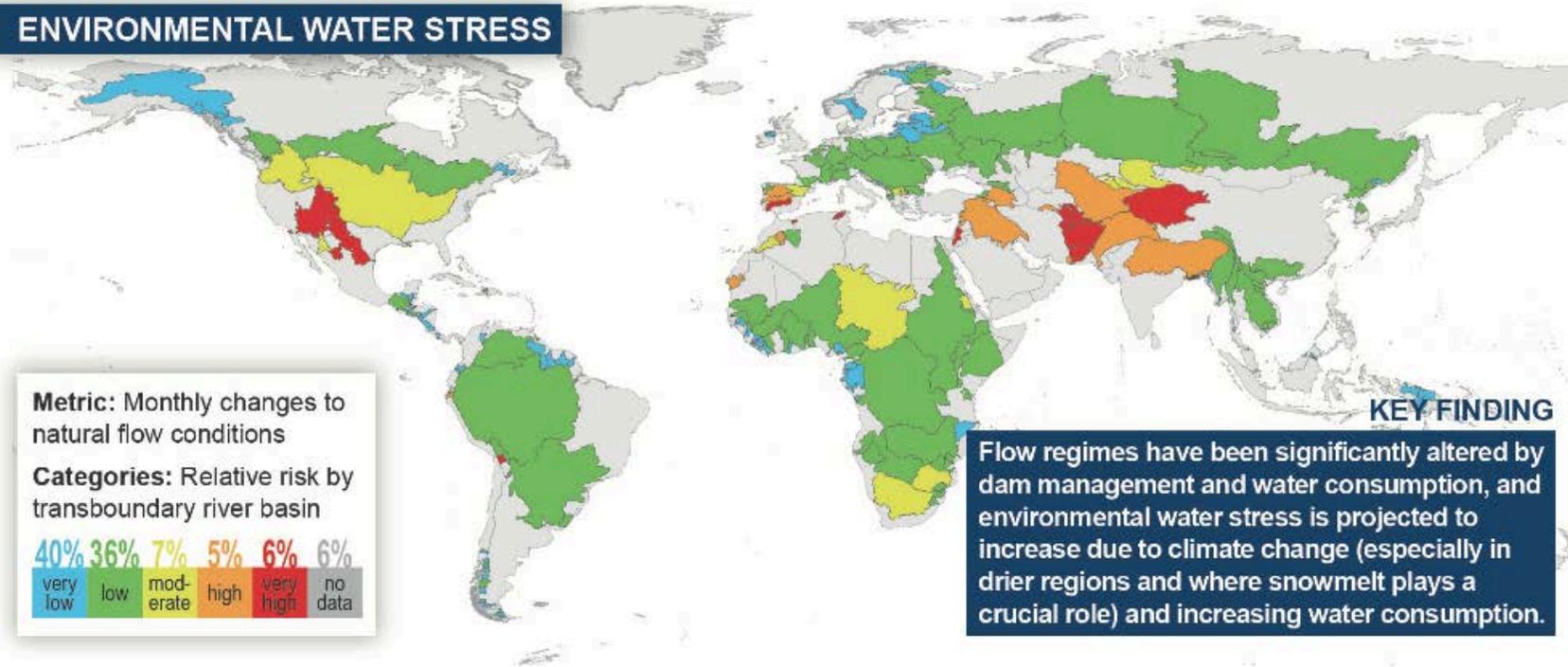
→ Done by Aalto's WDRG researchers!

PRESSURES: WATER SCARCITY



Water quantity Transboundary river basins have varying uses in different countries. The Environmental (below), Human and Agricultural Water Stress indicators often depict high stresses in the same basins, highlighting competition for water between sectors and between countries. In some basins, poor water quality exacerbates water stress.

ENVIRONMENTAL WATER STRESS



Trans-boundary basins (also) feeling the increasing stress

Very high relative risk transboundary river basins for Environmental Water Stress: Cancoso/Lauca, Colorado, Dasht, Guadiana, Hamun-i-Mashkel/ Rakshan, Hari/Harirud, Jordan, Kowl E Namaksar, Murgab, Rio Grande (North America), Tarim.

Source:
Transboundary Waters
Assessment Programme
(<http://www.geftwap.org>)

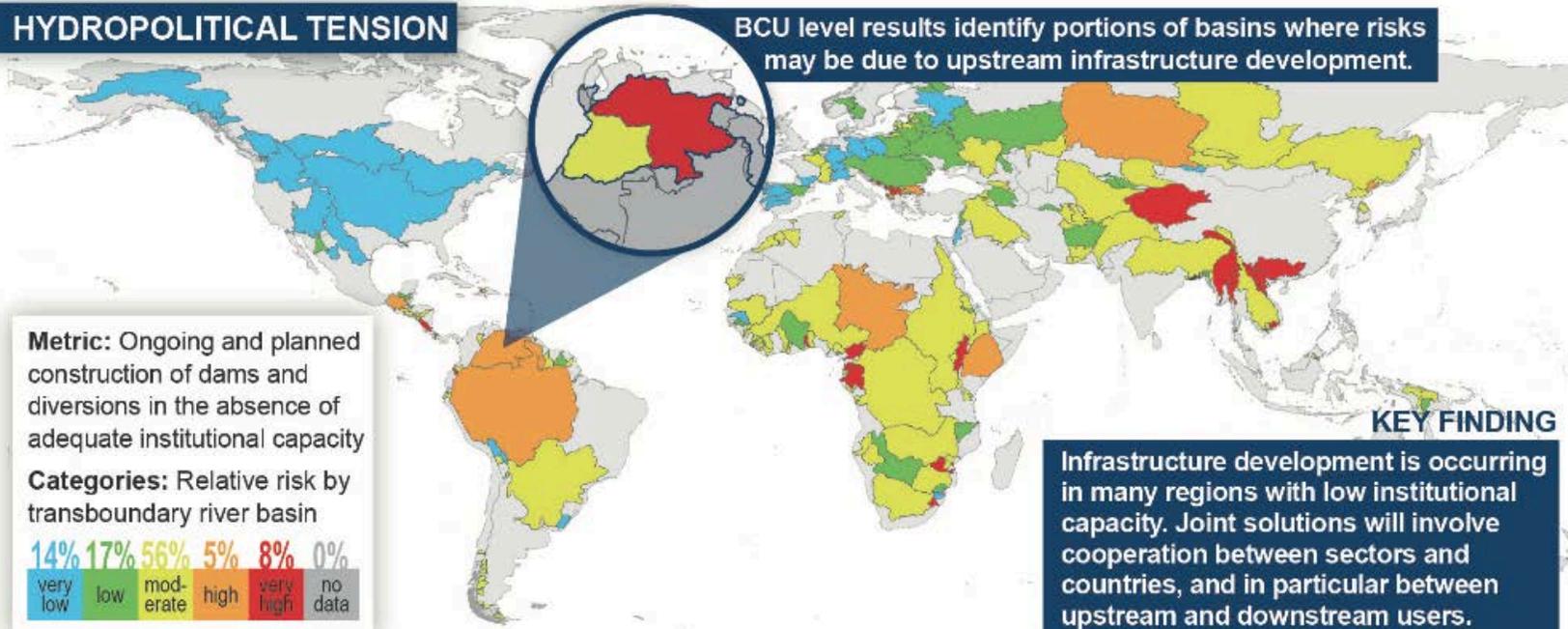
PRESSURES: INFRASTRUCTURE



Governance

The **Hydropolitical Tension** indicator shows that the construction of new water infrastructure is in progress or planned in many transboundary basins, including in areas where international water cooperation instruments are still absent or limited in scope. Cooperation will inevitably involve joint solutions between sectors and countries, and in particular between upstream and downstream users.

HYDROPOLITICAL TENSION



Human actions such as infrastructure development (e.g. hydro-power dams) amplifying the pressure
→ Links to population growth and urbanisation

Very high relative risk transboundary river basins for Hydropolitical Tension: Bei Jiang/Hsi, Benito/Ntem, Ca/Song-Koi, Drin, Irrawaddy, Lake Turkana, Ma, Mira, Mono, Ogooue, Red/Song Hong, Sabi, Saigon, Salween, San Juan, Sanaga, Tarim, Thukela, Vardar.

Source: *Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme GEF TWAP*
(<http://www.geftwap.org>)

PRESSURES: HYDRO-POLITICAL INTERACTION

F. Farinosi et al.

Global Environmental Change 52 (2018) 286–313

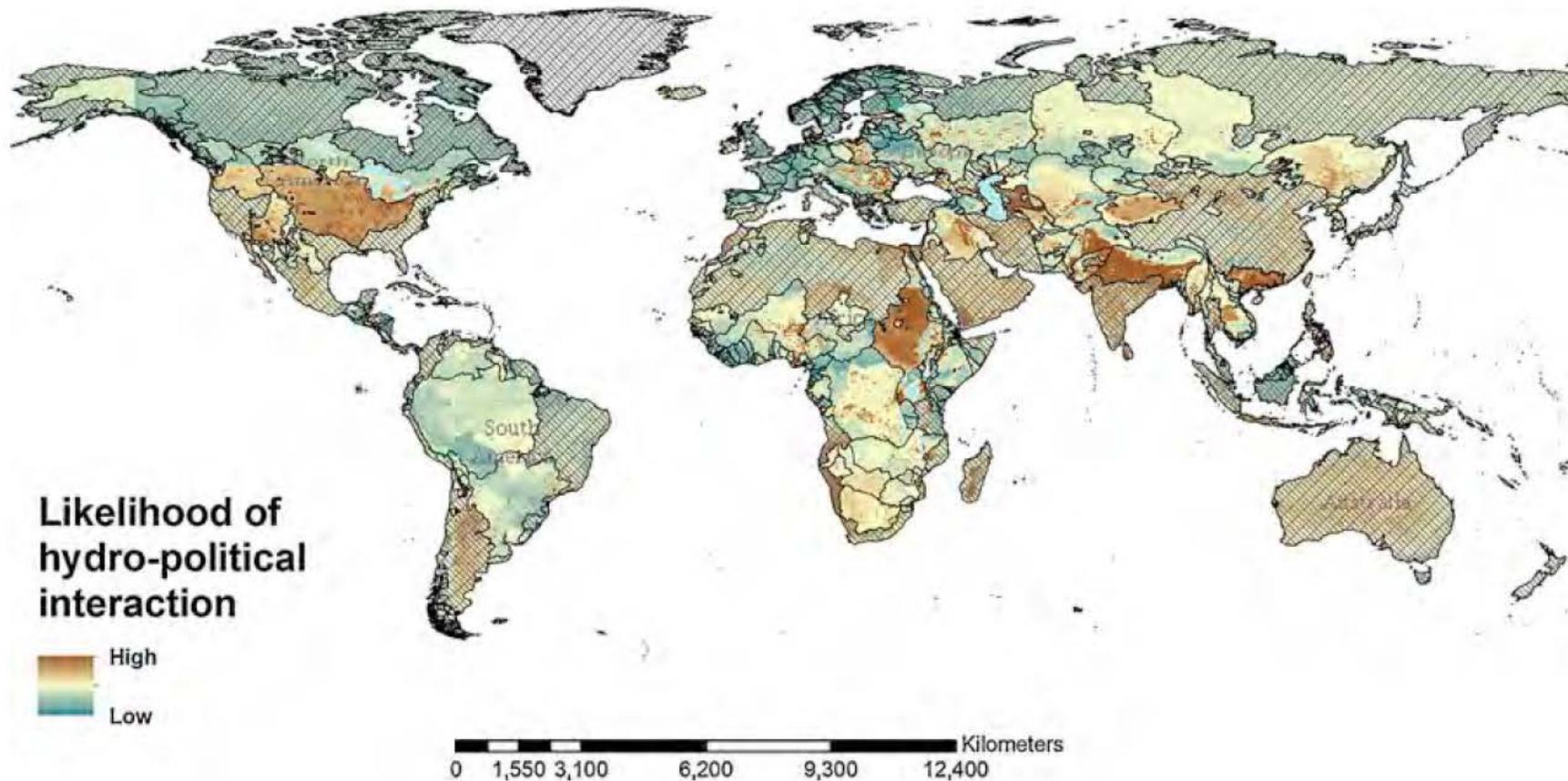


Fig. 2. Global distribution of the current likelihood of hydro-political issues among the main transboundary basins (transboundary basin borders in black, non-transboundary areas shaded).

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS:
governance i.e.
key institutions and actors

TRANSBOUNDARY GOVERNANCE

- Water governance and management in transboundary water bodies involves always several countries
 - Water special = the only natural resource crossing borders in easily measurable manner. Also typically publicly owned.
 - Much more challenging than normal water governance: include upstream-downstream impacts, differing geographical scales (regional, national, local) + geopolitics
- Transboundary water governance has therefore particularly close link to politics as well as (economic) development
 - Regional cooperation, water-energy-food security nexus...
 - Hence also to the concept of water diplomacy (more later)

KEY ACTORS

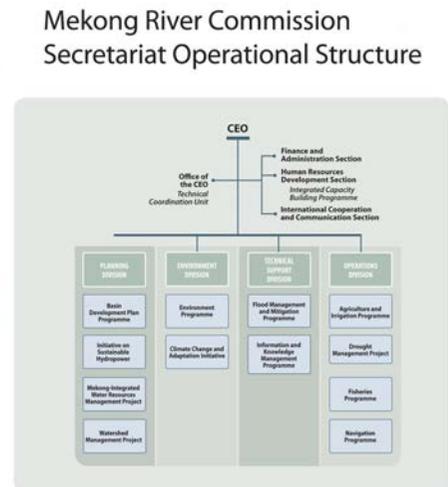
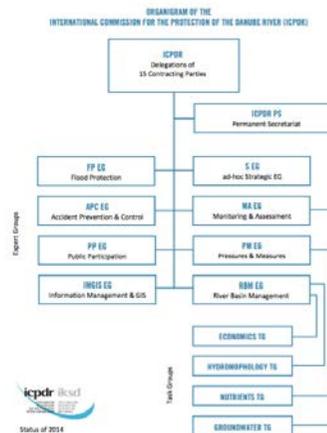
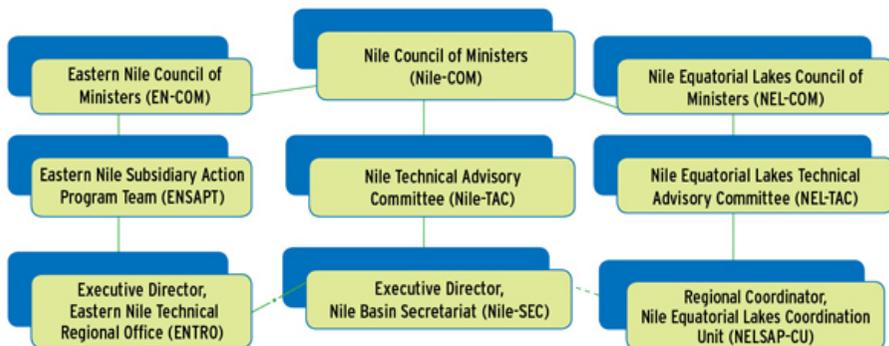
- Key actors are the riparian countries and their governments
 - Transboundary governance often formal and state-orientated: through joint organisations such as River Basin Commissions RBOs
- Other actors important too, as water use and infrastructure development is often largely done by
 - i) communities & individual citizens
 - ii) private sector companies

Challenge: these often guided by differing national legislation and policies, not regional ones

 - Emphasises stakeholder engagement (e.g. into RBOs' work) + other institutional arrangements, such as multi-stakeholder platforms (*Warner 2007*), civil society networks, and water stewardship activities (*Sojamo 2016*)
- Also development banks and other donors, investors (e.g. hydropower, agriculture) + INGOs play an important role as well

RIVER BASIN COMMISSIONS

- Key organisations dealing with transboundary water governance: usually established through a regional agreement
 - Typical organisational structure = council (between the states) + secretariat (coordination) + different types of working groups
- Also alternative forms of governance, such as different types of multistakeholder platforms (e.g. Warner 2007, Dore 2012)



RIVER BASIN COMMISSIONS: examples

- Many different types of commissions and their secretariats:
 - **Mekong River Commission MRC** = very large (100+ people) secretariat: also about capacity building of riparian countries + filling the capacity gaps between the countries. Focus on sustainable water use.
 - **Nile Basin Initiative** bit similar than MRC (rather large and donor-darling), but clearly more focused on water-related investments – and not working...
 - International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River **ICPDR** has 14 European countries + EU as members, but its secretariat has only 10 people. ICPDR thus builds heavily on countries' own capacity and organisations = secretariat just coordinating forum + review platform.
 - **Vuoksi River**: no secretariat, but all cooperation organised bilaterally through working groups and existing Finnish and Russian organisations, from central government i.e. ministries to regional scale i.e. ELY centers.

PROCESSES OF COOPERATION

- Different forms of transboundary cooperation:
often technical and political tracks co-exist
 - Also, cooperation and conflict can co-exist! (*Mirumachi 2010*)
- Impact assessment and models having a central role
 - Impact assessment important part of transboundary management:
what kind of impacts other countries will feel from a project (e.g. dam)
 - Model results provide the basis for (non)cooperation:
water engineering skills often at the core of RBOs work
- But other forms of knowledge important, too
 - River is more than a hydrograph: a source of life and livelihoods
+ a plethora of social and cultural meanings

COOPERATION vs. CONFLICT?

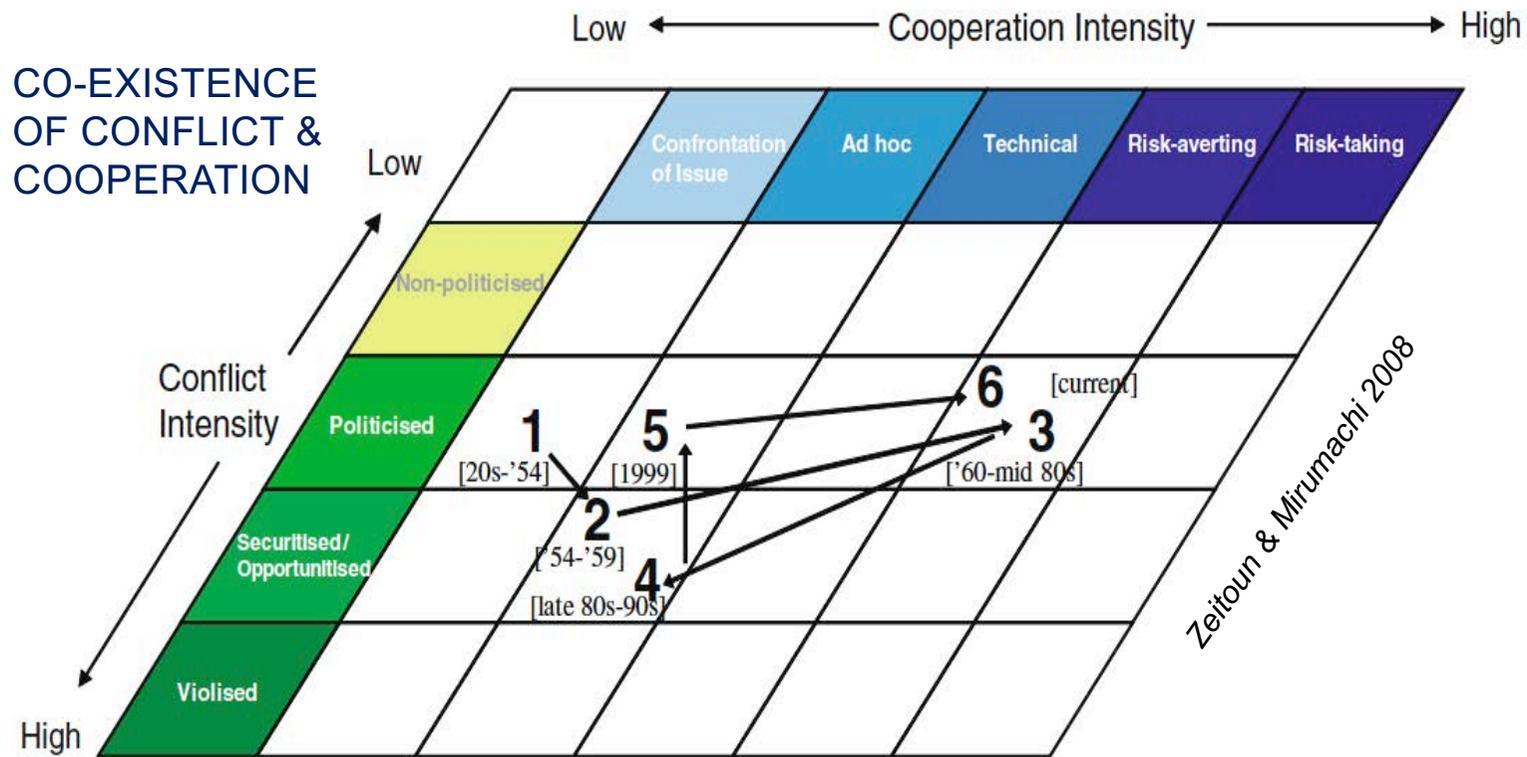


Fig. 3 The TWINS matrix of conflict and cooperation, applied to hydropolitical bilateral relations over time between Sudan and Egypt

KEY INSTITUTIONS: global



- Two key international conventions on transboundary waters: both having a major Finnish contribution!
 - **UN 1997 Watercourses Convention** i.e. New York Convention
(*Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses*, <http://www.unwatercoursesconvention.org>)
 - Entered finally into force on 17.8.2014
 - **UNECE 1992 Water Convention** i.e. Helsinki Convention
(*Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*, <http://www.unece.org/env/water>)
 - The amendment of the convention opened it to all UN member states (not just UNECE countries) in 1.3.2016
 - UNECE Convention has a well-functioning organisational structure, including secretariat and working groups (unlike UN 1997 Convention)

WATER AT THE UN

- So does having two UN conventions on transboundary waters mean that all UN member states have an agreement on how we should cooperate over shared waters?

No, because:

- i) only some countries have actually ratified the conventions
(currently 45 countries for UNECE 1992 and 40 countries for UN 1997)
 - ii) there have from the beginning also been strong resistance towards both conventions and their principles that promote sustainable and equitable use of shared waters
- Continuing battle within UN about how to manage our shared waters (and more broadly about multilateral approaches)

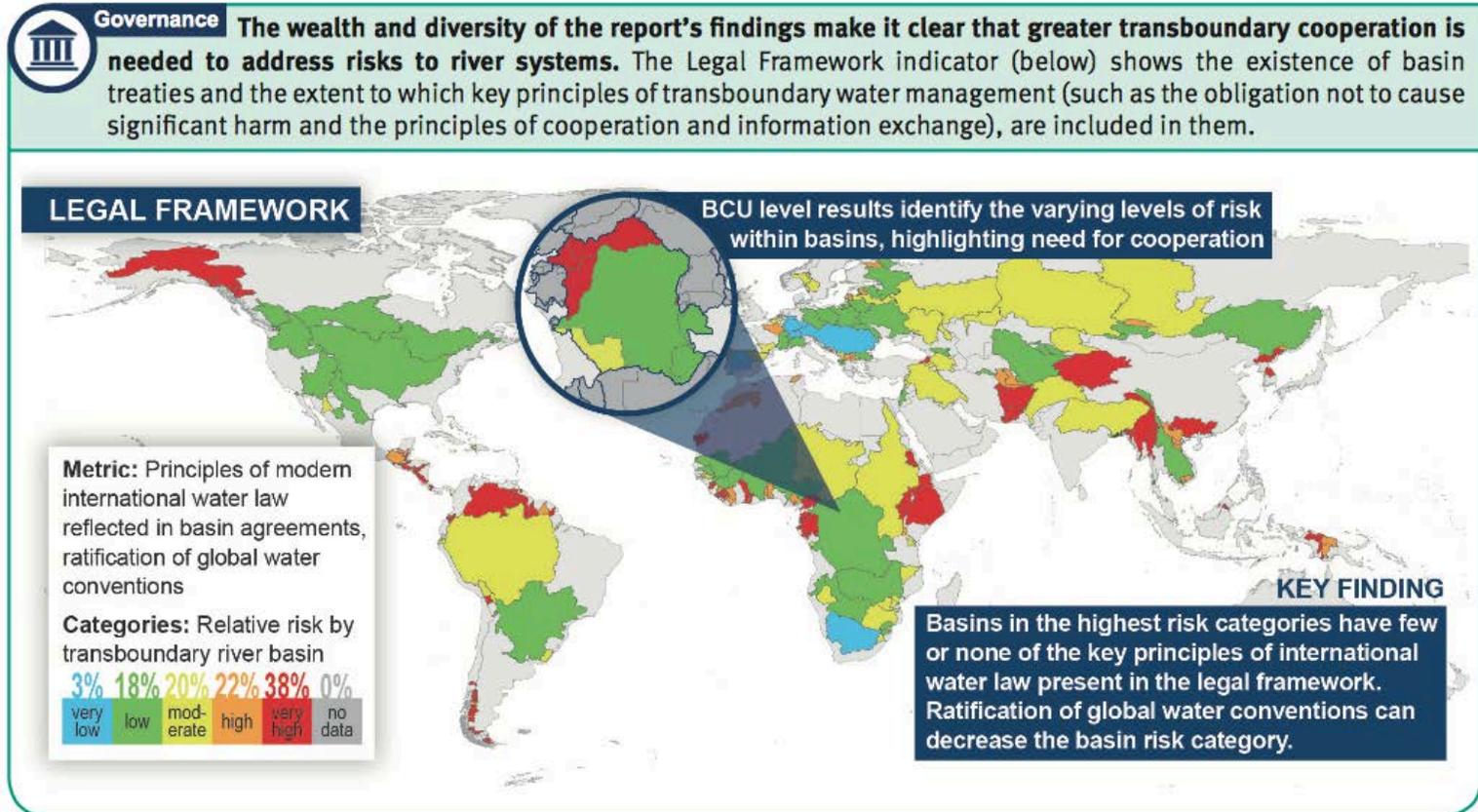
For more, see:
<https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/status-ratification>

KEY INSTITUTIONS: regional & national

- The two UN conventions have the same main point:
the **duty for riparian countries to cooperate**
...to ensure the use of transboundary waters **in reasonable and equitable manner** i.e. do not cause significant harm
- Yet, these are 'only' general global frameworks
 - Actual cooperation usually defined by **regional agreements** and also through informal cooperation and networks: multiple diplomacy tracks (not only formal Track 1)
 - **National laws & policies** guide water use and development, too!
- Hence, multiple scales of governance: tricky and often confusing...

DIFFERING INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Differing institutional settings building on basin agreements and regional and national policies
 → Legal framework for cooperation may exist, or not



Very high relative risk transboundary river basins for Legal Framework: Alsek, Atui, Awash, BahuKalat/Rudkhanehye, Baker, Baraka, Bei Jiang/Hsi, Benito/Ntem, Cancoso/Lauca, Catatumbo, Coco/Segovia, Corantijn/Courantyne, Coruh, Dasht, Digul, Essequibo, Gash, Hamun-i-Mashkel/Rakshan, Han, Helmand, Irrawaddy, Juba-Shibeli, Kaladan, Komoe, Kowl E Namaksar, Nyanga, Ogooue, Oiapoque/Oyupock, Orinoco, Patia, Salween, San Juan, Sanaga, St. Paul, Stikine, Tami, Tarim, Tumen, Yalu, Yukon.

Source: Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme GEF TWAP (<http://www.geftwap.org>)

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS: water diplomacy

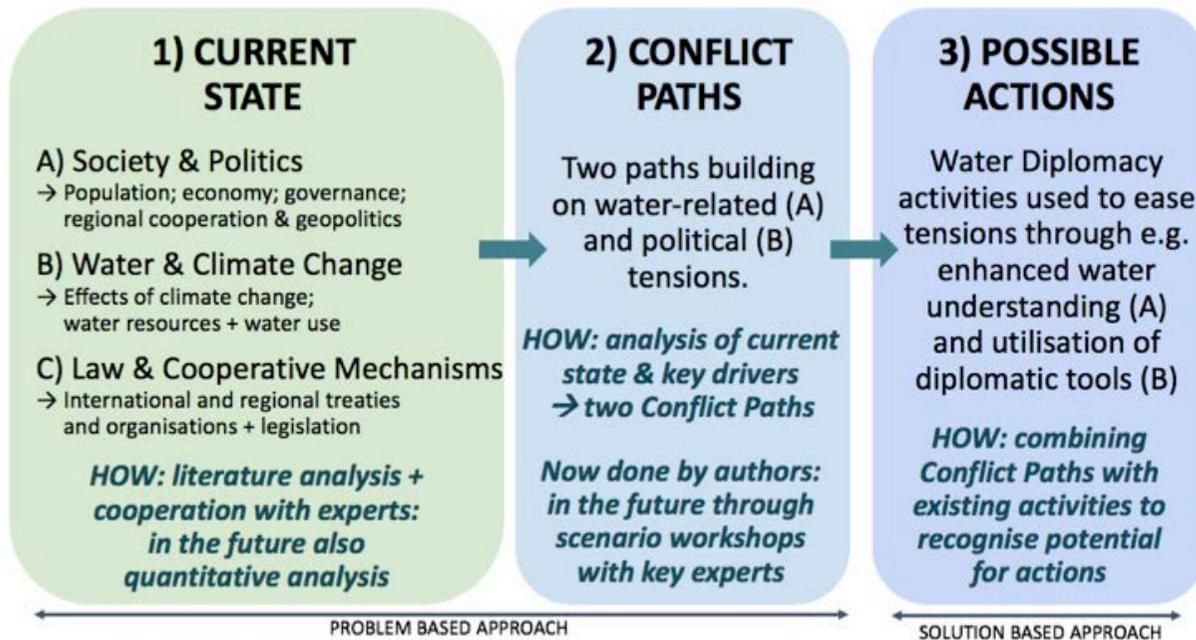
WATER DIPLOMACY

- Emerging concept to complement transboundary cooperation: puts more emphasis on political as well as diplomatic and peace mediation approaches to solve tensions in shared waters
- Provides a means to prevent and mitigate water-related political tensions by making **simultaneous use of water know-how and diplomatic tools** and mechanisms across multiple diplomacy tracks.
 - *Water diplomacy complements water cooperation through its focus on the 'political' and acknowledgement of the differing interests.*
 - *Combines key aspects of foreign and security policy with development policy and peace mediation, with focus on water and related resources*

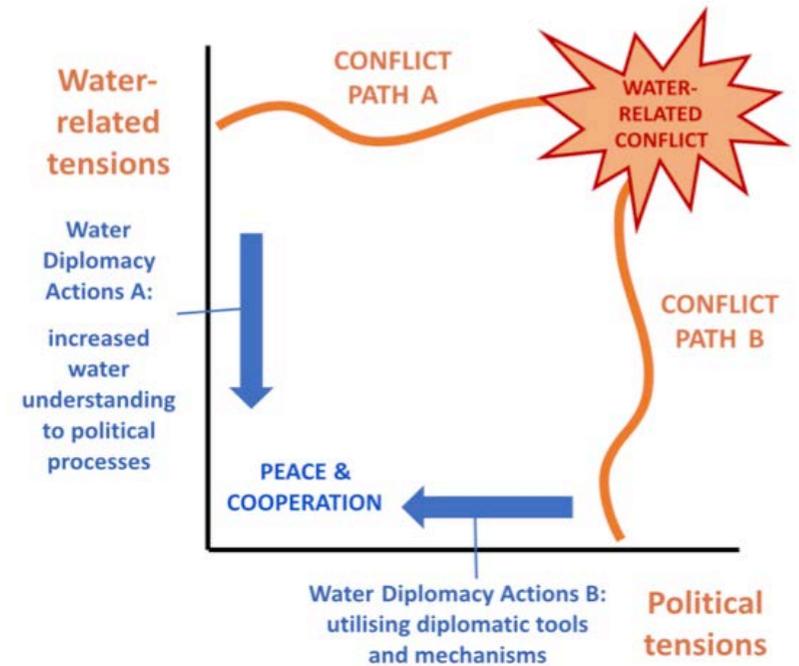
Salminen, Honkonen, Belinskij & Keskinen 2019

See our Water Diplomacy reports for Finnish MfFA + Erik Salminen's Master's Thesis (MyCourses) as well as EU Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy

WATER DIPLOMACY PATHS



Salminen, Honkonen, Belinskij & Keskinen 2019



Salminen, Honkonen, Belinskij & Keskinen 2019

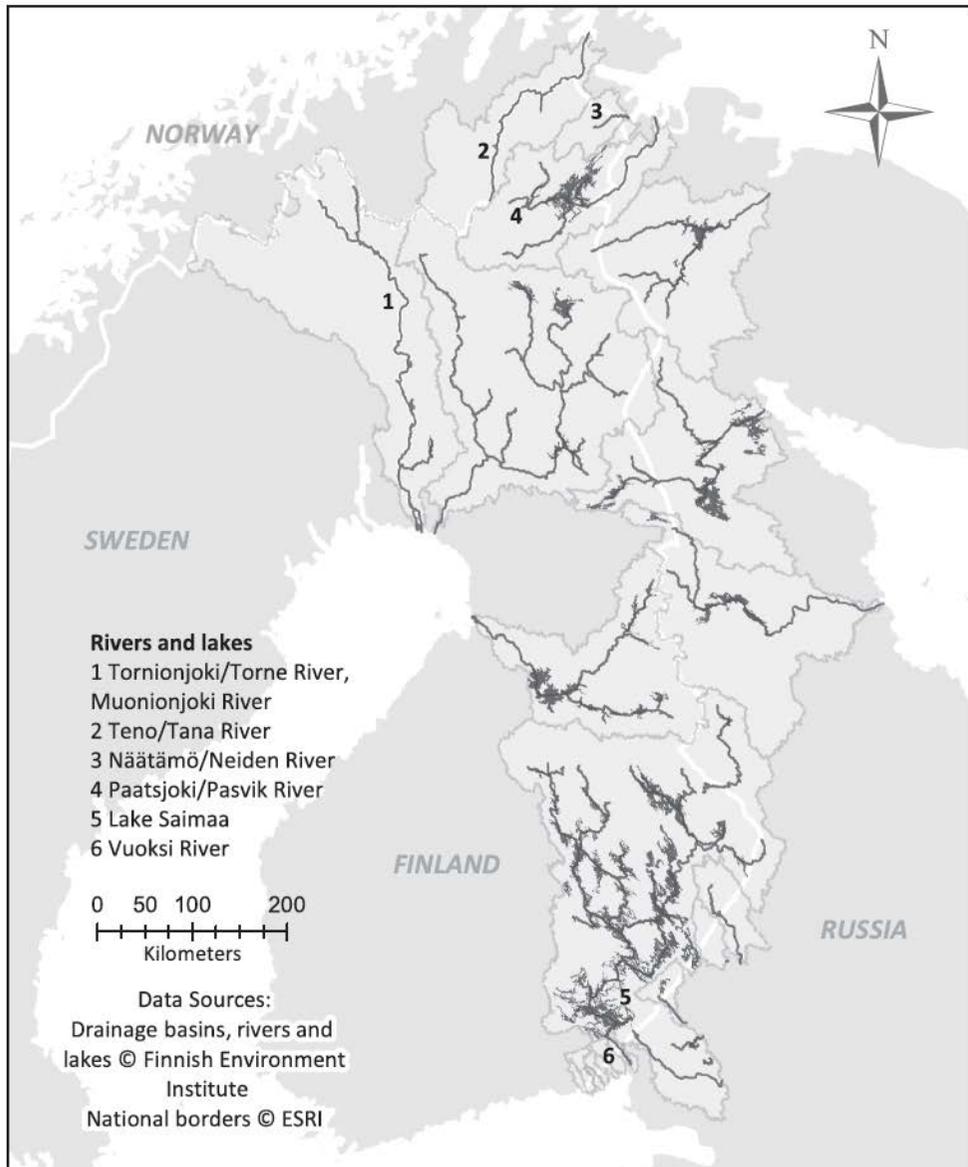
The so-called Water Diplomacy Paths approach under development by our research group, in collaboration with the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and others

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS:
Finland as a transboundary champion 

TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS IN FINLAND

- Finland shares long borders and thus also many rivers with Sweden (e.g. Muonionjoki, Tornionjoki), Norway (e.g. Tenojoki, Näätämöjoki & Paatsjoki) and Russia (e.g. Vuoksi, Saimaa & Paatsjoki)  Links also to the EU, including the implementation of EU-WFD
- Transboundary river agreements and joint Commissions/bodies with all three countries: bodies rather 'localised'
- Cooperation on various issues, often at rather practical level: issuing permits, monitoring water quality, fisheries...
- Vuoksi River the most important river: has a discharge rule, with Finland paying compensations to Russia if those are violated and Russia compensating for hydropower losses = unique arrangement
- Finnish-Russian cooperation selected among the best in the world!





The transboundary rivers shared by Finland and their basin areas.

Journal of Hydrology 567 (2018) 320–331

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Journal of Hydrology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhydrol

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Research papers

Finland's cooperation in managing transboundary waters and the UNECE Principles for Effective Joint Bodies: Value for water diplomacy?

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
UNECE principles
Joint bodies
Transboundary waters
Water agreements
Water diplomacy

ABSTRACT

Water diplomacy may be understood broadly as the measures that may be taken to prevent or peacefully resolve conflicts over water resources concerning their availability, allocation or use between and within states. The concept is preventive in nature as well as offering an approach for conflict resolution. Instruments of international water law, among them notably conventions and soft law developed on that basis – which promote equitable and reasonable use of transboundary waters and prevention of transboundary impact – can serve as tools for water diplomacy. The obligation to establish agreements on shared waters and joint bodies to govern them has contributed to gathering important experience, and some of this has been synthesized into the Principles for Effective Joint Bodies which were adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water Transboundary Water Cooperation Convention in 2015. The Principles are intended as a resource to increase the effectiveness of joint bodies in water cooperation.

This paper analyses Finland's cooperation arrangements in the light of the Principles and assesses the extent to which Finland's transboundary water commissions reflect the good practices specified in the Principles. Taking a wider perspective, the paper also examines the elements of the principles and their practical realisation with a view to understanding better their promotion of water diplomacy. Relevant features include, inter alia, participation is permitted, and the cooperative mechanisms in place. Naturally the underlying transboundary established joint bodies often play a significant role, specifically in the equitable use and management of the shared water resources, but even beyond, in the prevention and settling of conflicts, and in the general promotion of cooperation and security at a regional level.

Available in your Additional Reading Material in MyCourses, similarly to our Vuoksi report for the World Bank



Lake Saimaa, Vuoksi Basin. © cnsa/jrme/stock.

FINLAND & TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

- Finland has a strong international profile on transboundary water cooperation and water diplomacy
 - Own successful transboundary cooperation (and strong motive for it)
 - Initiating both UN Conventions on shared waters + active at UN & EU
 - *Links to our general support for multilateral cooperation*
 - Long-term (although radically reduced) support for transboundary cooperation through our development cooperation
 - *Mekong, Nile, Central Asia + support to UNECE Water Convention*
 - Finnish actors' role in transboundary cooperation and water diplomacy
 - *Water diplomacy network; the work by Aalto, UEF, Syke and others*

Finland =
a small
trans-
boundary
water hero!

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS: SDGs and IWRM

SDGs, IWRM & TRB WATERS

SDG target 6.5: “By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate”

→ 6.5.1: Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (0-100)

→ 6.5.2: Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation

SDGs directly promote transboundary cooperation – and link this to the concept of Integrated Water Resources Management IWRM

IWRM

The Paradigm for water resources management currently

- Binding agreement (SDG 6.5), not just a promise or an academic approach
- Close link to sustainable development and its three pillars

”IWRM is a **process** which promotes **coordinated** development and management of **water, land and related resources**,

in order to maximize the resultant **economic and social welfare** in an equitable manner without compromising the **sustainability** of vital ecosystems”

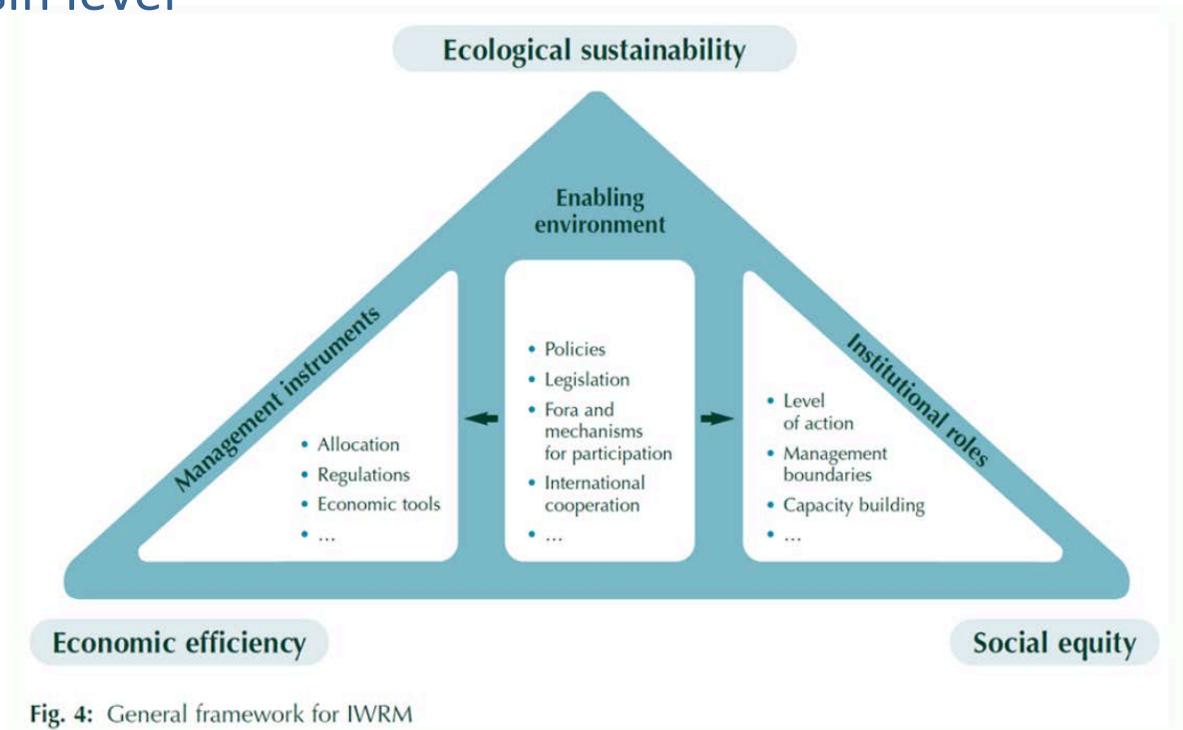
GWP 2000



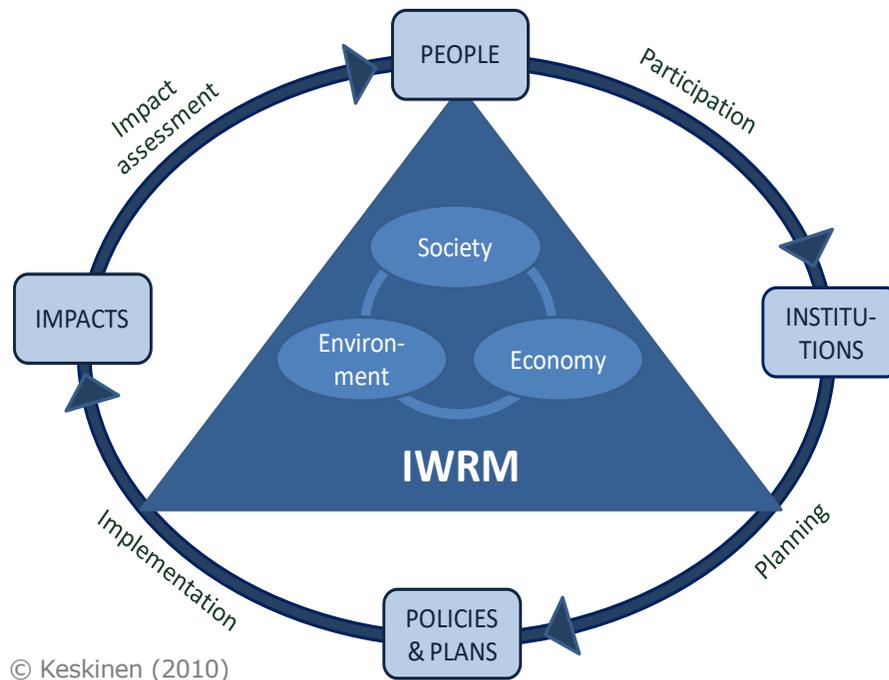
IWRM in practice

- IWRM applied in variety of settings, from small water bodies to transboundary rivers like the Mekong River
→ Yet, focus typically on a basin level

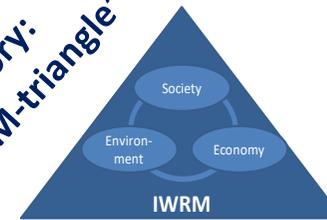
- While focus is largely thematic (people, food, nature, industry), IWRM emphasises also governance, including key institutions & instruments



Theory vs. practice



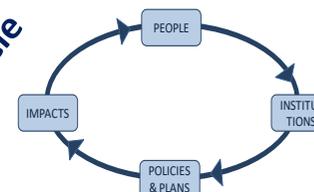
Theory:
'IWRM-triangle'



= ideal, objective,
passive, consensual

vs.

Practice:
Mgt cycle

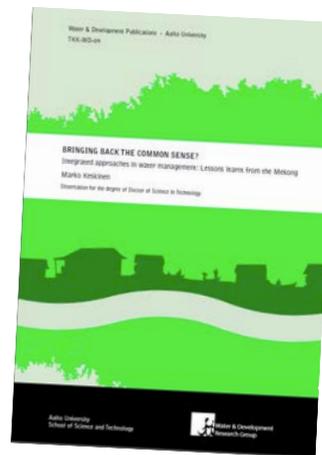


= practical, subjective,
active, contested

→ Even the most elaborate theory needs to be implemented in practice
– and it must also address the politics and power relations...

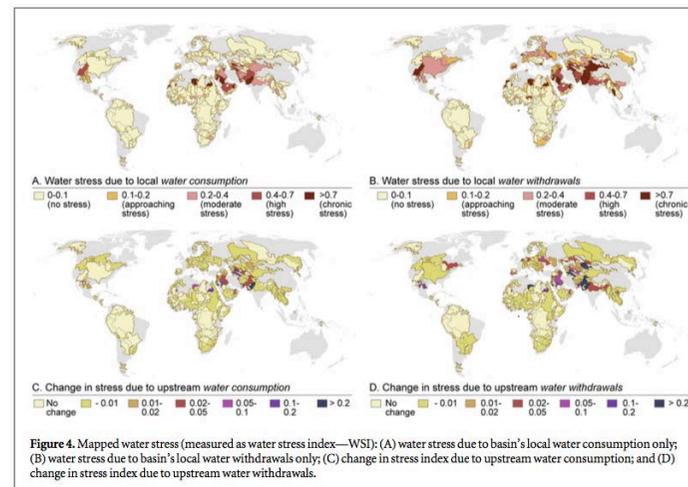
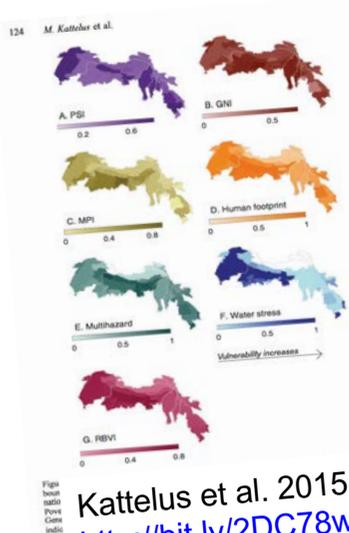
MORE ON IWRM

- Several websites, e.g. www.gwp.org
- Our Water & Development Research Group WDRG has also studied IWRM intensively
 - See e.g. Dr Theses of Mizanur Rahaman, Marko Keskinen & Virpi Stucki:
www.wdrf.fi/publications/theses



MORE ON TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

- Several websites, e.g. <http://www.geftwap.org>, <https://www.thebluepeace.org>, <http://upwcd.org>
- We at WDRG have also studied this theme quite intensively
→ See e.g. these publications + the links in MyCourses



TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS: my key points

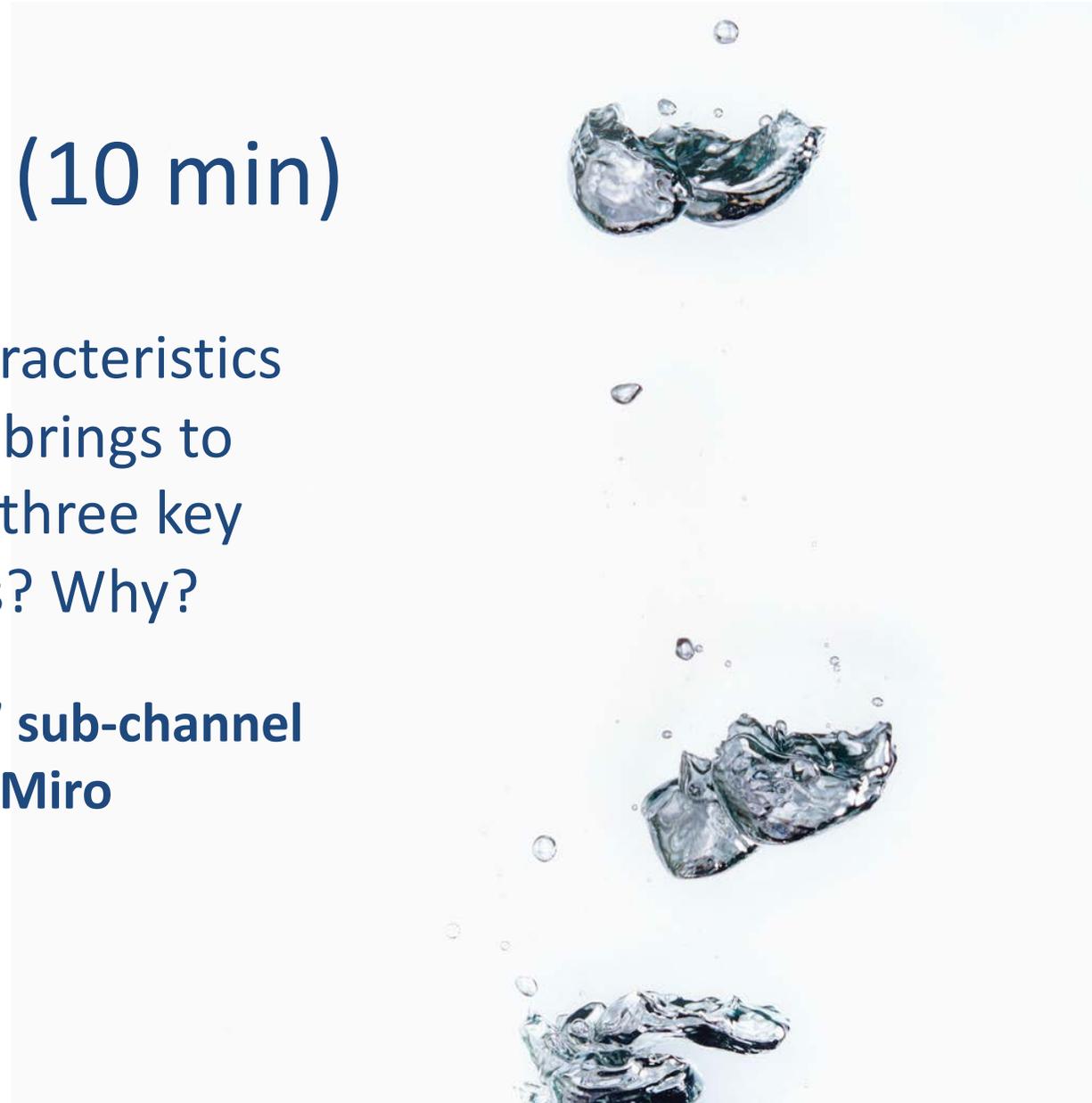
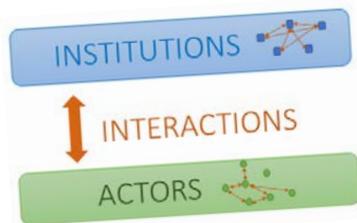
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due to differing interests and scales as well as geopolitics
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transboundary water cooperation
 - Link to SDG6 implementation, too
- 3) Finland is a small transboundary water hero! 



Group discussion (10 min)

What kind of special characteristics transboundary setting brings to water governance and three key governance elements? Why?

→ Discussion in your Teams' sub-channel
+ documentation in Miro





Break

dropnerblog.com

PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

1. Transboundary waters

- Setting the bio-physical basis
- Governance i.e. key institutions and actors
- Water diplomacy
- Finland as a transboundary champion 
- SDGs & Integrated Water Resources Management IWRM

2. Mekong River as a case

- Mekong as a river and as a governance context (MRC and beyond)
- Mekong development: the role of IWRM, impact assessment & transboundary cooperation to address the hydropower boom

MEKONG RIVER: my key points

- 1) Mekong River Basin is a global hotspot in terms of hydropower development and its impact to food security and livelihoods
- 2) Transboundary water cooperation in the Mekong has a long history, with MRC as a key actor and institution
→ Increasing role of other actors, most notably China-led LMCM
- 3) Despite major efforts in impact assessment and hydrological modelling, sustainable management and development of water resources still tricky: governance major factor





'Mekong Region'

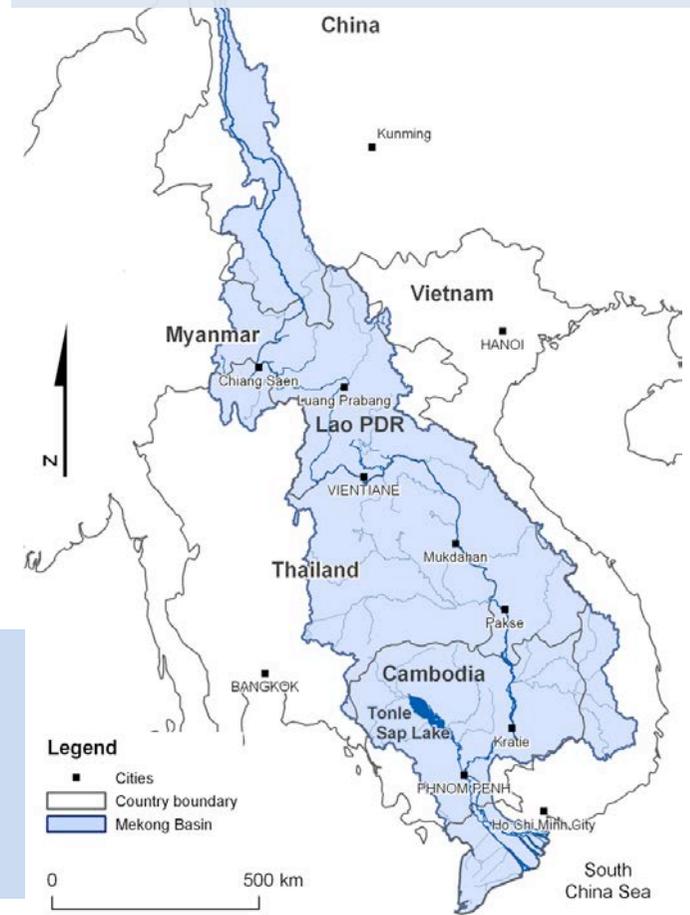
- This is what decision-makers and economists consider
- The main context of 'Mekong water governance'

WHAT IS MEKONG?

- Also note that Mekong is not the only major river in the 'Mekong Region'
- Many rivers under intensive development, yet Mekong the most

'Mekong River'

- This is what modelers and water-related planners focus on
- The context of 'Mekong water development & management'...



Mekong River

'Mae Nam Khong, Menam Khong, Mekongk, Cuu Long, Lancang'

- The hydrological wonder of Southeast Asia
 - World 10th largest river in terms of flow (475 km³) and length (4900 km)
 - Strongly influenced by monsoon climate:
clear differences between wet & dry season flow
 - Large floodplains + unique flood pulse system
 - Remarkable fisheries, wetlands and water-dependent agriculture



Mekong = more than a river

- The lifeline of many riparian people, particularly in the downstream in Cambodia and the Mekong Delta of Vietnam
 - 6 countries with differing interests, ~70 million people in the basin
 - Transboundary river with all its twists and (geo)politics
 - River = food, livelihoods, route, energy, cultural values...
 - Major sources of livelihoods (and food security): fish & rice
 - Fish particularly important for the poor

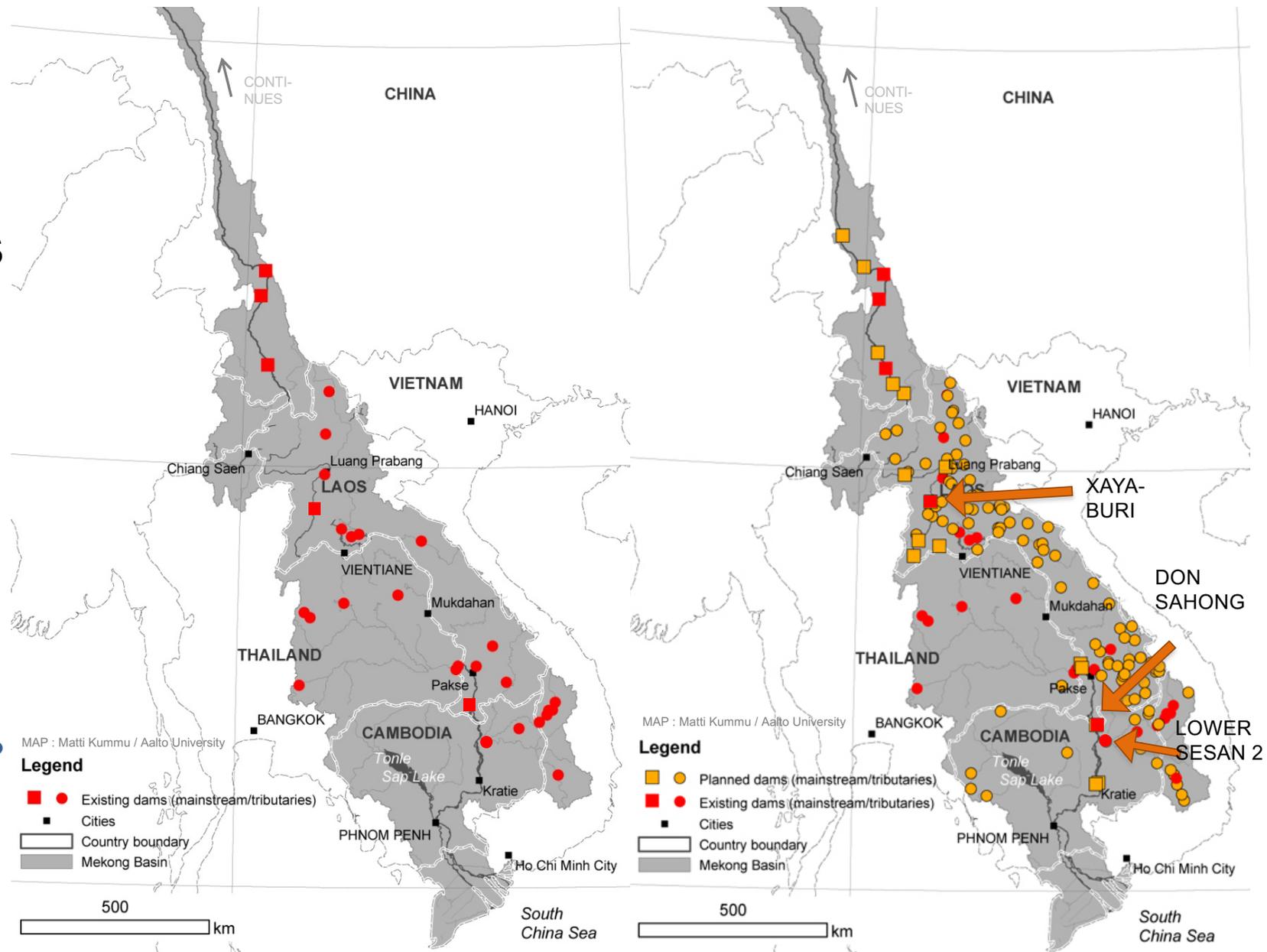


The issue: hydropower and its impacts

Mekong seeing
one of the most
intensive hydropower
developments
in the world

→ But its impacts not
evenly distributed:
who benefits and who
suffers (both within and
between the countries)?

→ How the impacts are
assessed critical, too



Dams planned to both mainstream and tributaries

→ Differing impacts, both matter

LMB MAINSTREAM DAMS

Remarkable energy and \$\$\$

Moderate / no flow alterations, but changes longitudinal connectivity

Water quality changes (sediments)

Remarkable fish migration block

TRIBUTARY DAMS

Moderate to remarkable energy and \$\$\$

Remarkable flow alterations, connectivity changes not clear

Water quality changes (sediments)

Moderate to remarkable fish migration block

- All in all tributary dams likely to have more radical cumulative changes due to remarkable changes in flow, and thus in downstream flood pulse
- On the other hand a single mainstream dam at very downstream may have very severe consequences on fish migration & hence food security
- With both options fisheries will suffer big time: value ~11 billion US\$/year!



Mekong mainstream dams

- China has several dams under operation, while up to 12 dams planned to the Lower Mekong River, mainly by Laos
- Run-of-river dams without proper reservoirs: enabled by China's dams
- These are first mainstream dams by MRC countries, so changes (and challenges) the MRC's functioning
- Dams built by Mekong countries, but through BOT arrangements with private / semi-private investors & developers: benefits flowing often out of the countries...

Mekong River Commission

- The transboundary water management organisation
 - Members = four lower Mekong countries, China missing
 - Strongly supported by (Western) donors, incl. Finland
 - Big expectations, moderate achievements: particularly hydropower remained for long completely neglected
 - Now in challenging position due to Laos' mainstream dams
- Greatest achievement: regional planning and assessment processes, approved by MRC countries
 - Also strong link to IWRM:
MRC's Basin Development Strategy is **IWRM-based**





= KEY REASON WHY IT DOESN'T SUCCEED
(as the main aim largely imposed from outside)?

- MRC was for long a 'donor-darling' and a kind of exemplary super-star in transboundary water cooperation
→ Yet, increasing questions about its actual ownership in the riparian countries & failure to address the tensions related to hydropower
- Challenged by Chinese-led and more economy- and hydropower-focused **Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism** LCMC and its LM Water Resources Cooperation Center
→ Interesting governance dynamics...

Recent developments

- Laos finished two mainstream dams i.e. Xayaburi dam in North and Don Sahong in South in 2020: more in the pipeline
- Cambodia: Lower Sesan 2 tributary dam started in 2018, while the plans for Mekong mainstream dams postponed in 2020
- Vietnam: concerned about the dam development as well as slowness of MRC, so increasingly pushing its own way
 - Information: own studies on hydropower impacts
 - Institutions: joined UN 1997 Watercourses Convention in 2014
- Changing dynamics: China-led and more economy- and hydropower-focused Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism LMCM, with high-level meetings & resources...

Developing the Mekong: two questions

Two different but interlinked questions under debate

1) Where to go?

- Countries' development plans (incl. energy policy),
and related views on the river and water-related resources
→ *Very political (although in general development seen crucial)*

2) How to go there (preferably in sustainable way)?

- Planning processes, including energy planning & impact assessment
→ *Basically technical and apolitical: in reality political, too*
- Mekong in many ways a forerunner in cumulative impact assessment
and transboundary water cooperation, yet plenty of challenges as well
- Finland (MfFA) and Finnish researchers and consultants
have been rather active on this, often in collaboration with MRC



Developing Mekong: the process

- It seems clear that Mekong will be developed
 - Hydropower the key
- Yet this can be done in many different ways
 - At the moment coordination is weak, and hydropower planning & implementation proceeds fast and separately
 - Existing cumulative impact assessments not really used for coherent hydropower planning (incl. mainstream vs. tributaries)
 - Assessments focus on flow, beyond that it's very vague
 - Participation: decisions still made without proper consultations with those impacted by the decisions (PNPCAs were improvement). Links also to the challenges with representation in the countries.

Developing Mekong: impacts

- Current hydropower development plans would change radically the flow of the river and, thus, the benefits derived from the river
 - Increasingly centralised, government-led utilisation
 - Emphasis on non-agricultural sectors + urban areas, with greatest negative impacts on fish and delta
 - Simplified: upstream (and rich) benefit, downstream (and poor) suffer
- If the countries' and MRC's objective is poverty reduction (as is said), the development of rural areas is the key
 - Conflict thus both between and within the riparian countries about the development of the Mekong - and its impacts

Main point: hydropower

Mekong will be developed, but sustainability would require better plans & impact assessment – and simply better decision-making

- Hydropower very likely a part of the countries' energy plans
 - So the question is not so much 'Hydropower or not?', but 'How to ensure sustainable hydropower development?'
- Cumulative impacts remain a particular challenge
 - Current piecemeal approach and project developers' mix not providing comprehensive and coherent picture of dams' impacts
 - Proper cumulative IA and related comprehensive planning would most likely lead to more 'selective' dam development
- Positive news: plenty of knowledge & assessments exists already, they should 'just' be recognised and utilised better

Main point: transboundary cooperation

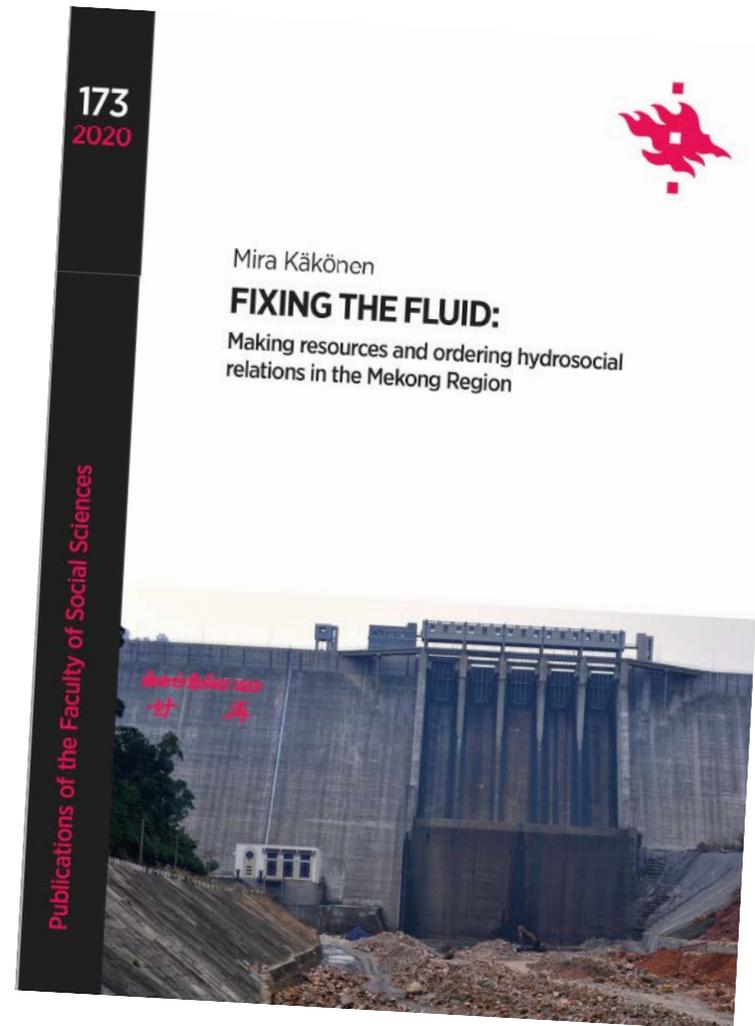
Transboundary cooperation & water diplomacy

- Finland and other donors (countries and banks) have for long been strong supporters of MRC and other multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as GMS Program
- Yet it seems that uni- and bilateralism + strong economic incentives largely defining the development agenda
- Donors getting fed up, and China-led LMCM is getting an increasingly strong role in the region: shift in power balance and also scaling up the cooperation (beyond water)?
- Also challenges the role that Finland and other so-called third party facilitators can have in water diplomacy

One interesting view on the Mekong

Why, despite all the efforts in hydrological modelling, impact assessment, transboundary water cooperation etc., we are not seeing more sustainable hydropower development in the Mekong?

→ One excellent viewpoint provided by our colleague Mira Käkönen in her recent PhD Thesis about hydrosocial relations in the Mekong:
<https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/321946>



MEKONG RIVER: my key points

- 1) Mekong River Basin is a global hotspot in terms of hydropower development and its impact to food security and livelihoods
- 2) Transboundary water cooperation in the Mekong has a long history, with MRC as a key actor and institution
→ Increasing role of other actors, most notably China-led LMCM
- 3) Despite major efforts in impact assessment and hydrological modelling, sustainable management and development of water resources still tricky: governance major factor



Questions?
Comments?

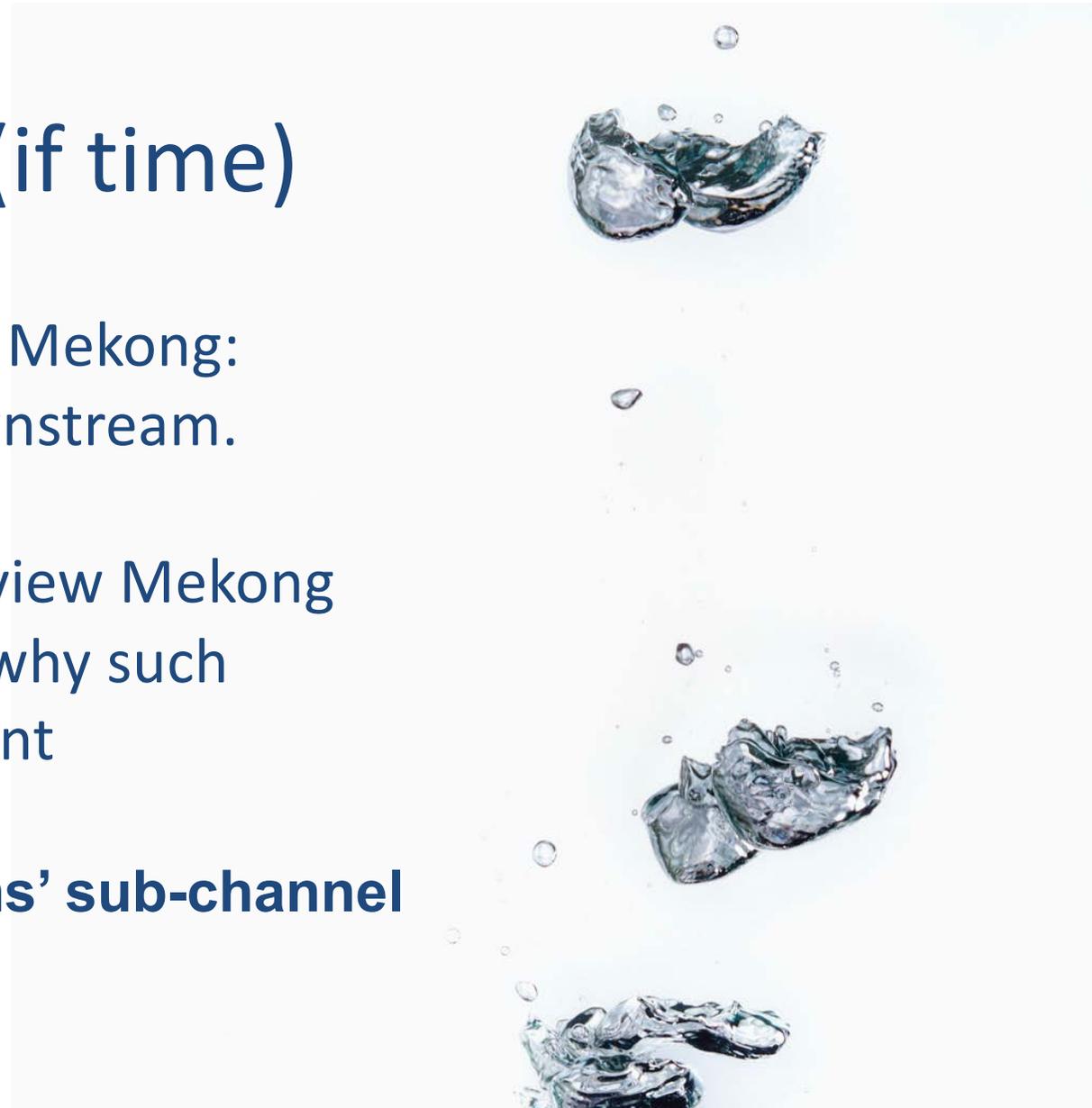


Group discussion (if time)

Pick two countries from the Mekong:
one upstream, another downstream.

Discuss how the countries' view Mekong
and its development – and why such
views are likely to be different

→ **Discussion in your Teams' sub-channel
+ documentation in Miro**



PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

1. Transboundary waters

- Setting the bio-physical basis
- Governance i.e. key institutions and actors
- Water diplomacy
- Finland as a transboundary champion 
- SDGs & Integrated Water Resources Management IWRM

2. Mekong River as a case

- Mekong as a river and as a governance context (MRC and beyond)
- Mekong development: the role of IWRM, impact assessment & transboundary cooperation to address the hydropower boom

NEXT STEPS IN THE COURSE

1. Your group meeting in your Teams' sub-channel

- Working on your case, following the steps & deadlines given
- Your mentor will visit you as well + Marko for Mekong Group

QUESTIONS?

2. Remember to submit your tasks

- Personal Take Home-Messages from Tue & Thu to MyCourses by Sunday
- Reading Circle Summary as a document to your Teams' sub-channel Files tab by Tuesday (i.e. before next Reading Circle starts)

3. Read the Reading Material before Tuesday's Reading Circle

- We start together at Teams' General channel at 9.00: then to sub-channels
→ Remember to write your comments to Miro (facilitate the RC summary, too)!

THANKS!



More information + publications: wdrg.aalto.fi