

WAT-E2080

Politics & power in water governance



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Outline and *learning objectives* of the lecture

PART I: The environment and water as a policy problem

- The nature of environmental issues
- Environmental issues are political and complex

PART II: Governance: Polity, Politics and Policy

- What does governance encompass?
- Three dimensions of governance:
 - *Polity – the institutional context*
 - *Politics – the actors (groups) influencing polity and policy*
 - *Policy – the rules for action*

PART III: Power in governance

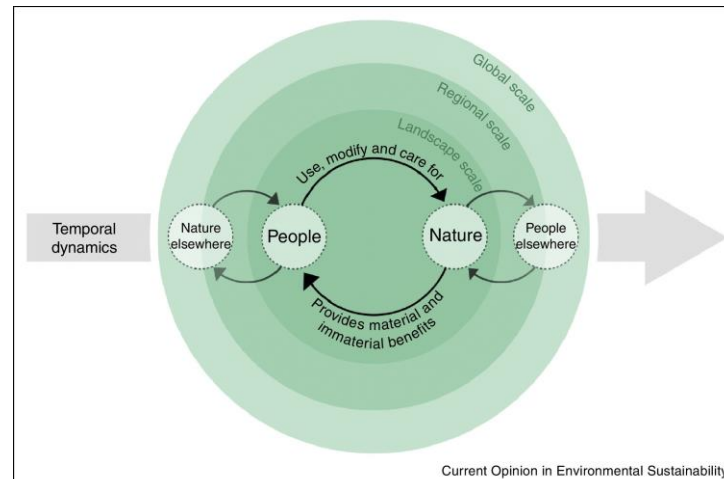
- Forms of power: different perspectives
- Polity, politics and policy and power

The nature of environmental issues: they cross policy and administrative boundaries

- Environmental problems are caused by and affect various (almost all) sectors. This is especially valid for water.
- Another example – Climate change – Greenhouse gas emissions, caused by human activities (energy production, transport, mining, forestry, food production, etc.). Has a direct impact on water.
- The consequences are many: rising sea levels, disrupted ecosystems, famine, species extinction, water scarcity, human migration, etc.
- Complex problems ('wicked problems') – characterised by complexity (interconnectedness), uncertainty, the need for prioritisation between different values and goals.

Environmental issues are political

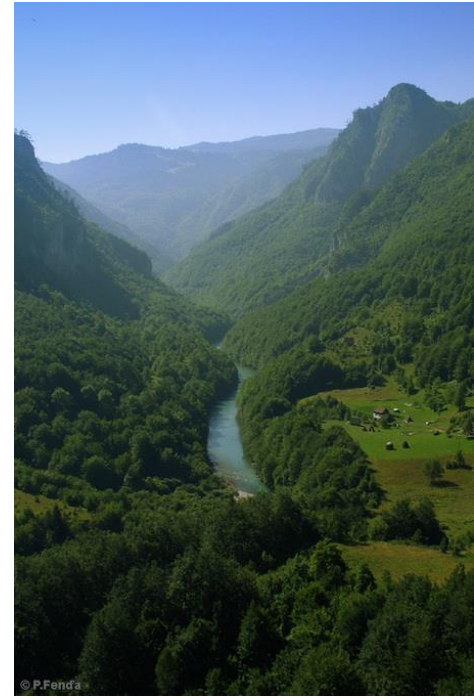
- They are socially constructed problems and the political solutions are also socially constructed.
 - Perceptions of problems – what do we consider the problem is?
 - How we perceive and believe we can solve them best?
 - What are we ready to sacrifice (how much can they cost us)?
- Environment and Society are interconnected in so-called socio-ecological systems



Source image: Joern Fischer, J., T. Gardner, E.M. Bennett, P. Balvanera, R. Biggs, S. Carpenter, T. Daw, C. Folke, R. Hill, T.P. Hughes, T. Luthé, M. Maass, M. Meacham, A. Norström, G. Peterson, C. Queiroz, R. Seppelt, M. Spierenburg, J. Tenhunen. 2015. Advancing sustainability through mainstreaming a social–ecological systems perspective. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 14:144-149

Environmental issues are political

- Why are we lacking solutions to many of the pressing environmental issues?
- Lack of agreement between political actors and levels on what the problem is and how we can resolve it
- Lack of structures (institutions) that have the power to implement solutions
- Lack of political and social will?



All that means that environmental and specifically water governance:

- Is characterised by complexity
- Should exceed administrative and sectorial boundaries
- Should include multiple actors
- Affects multiple actors and institutions across administrative and sectorial boundaries
- Should be multisectoral and transdisciplinary



Any questions? Comments?

Polity, Politics and Policy

What does “governance” encompass?

"Governance is a social function centered on **steering** human groups **toward desired outcomes**" (*Young, 2013*), e.g., to

- achieve and sustain good ecological status (EU WFD), to manage flood risks (EU FD) or ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (UN SDGs)

Who steers and how?

Three strongly interlinked dimensions of (water) governance

Institutional framework, which defines and sets rules for the game in a given context

- Mode of governance

Polity

Set of plans and actions that have been agreed upon by the actors participating in policy-making

- Political steering

Policy

How policies are made?

How different interests and preferences are translated into (effective) policies?

Politics

Actors involved in (water) governance and power relations between them: e.g., political action of actors using their **power** to set (define), interpret and implement policies

Polity – institutional context

Includes:

- (Constitution and laws determining the administrative structures and rules for politics)
- Administrative structures and rules
- International, supranational and global structures, including binding regulation and agreements

Polity – institutional context

The institutional context determines:

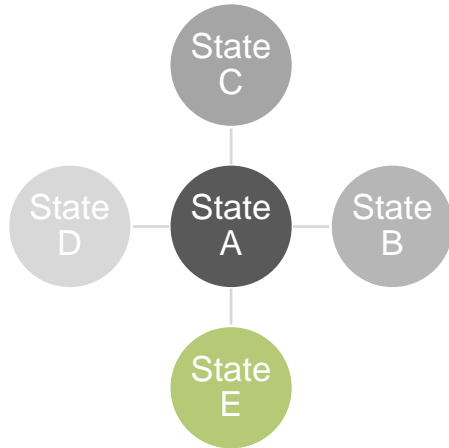
- The governance mode: hierarchy, network, market
- The level of centralisation of state power (centralised unitary state, federal state, etc.)
- Who has decision-making power, who enforces and implements and who monitors and sanctions

Polity: the international, global and supranational level

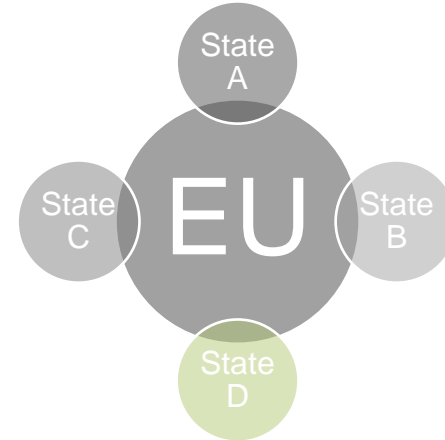
INTERNATIONAL – **GLOBAL** – **SUPRANATIONAL**
(between states) (between actors) (transcends state boundaries)

Polity: the international and supranational level

International organisations:
Cooperation between states
that retain their sovereignty
(decision-making power)



Supranational organisations:
Cooperation between states that
have delegated part of their
sovereignty (decision-making
power) to supranational
institutions



Politics – actors (groups) influencing decision-making and the relations between themselves

Includes:

- Politics at various levels of government: global (international, supranational), state, local and individual (micro) politics
- Ideologies: liberalism, capitalism, socialism, nationalism, etc.
- Party politics
- The rules of how politics can be made: party systems (non-partisan; one-party, etc.), corporatism, who is included etc.

Policy – the rules

Includes:

- (Laws), regulation, plans and actions that have been agreed upon by the actors with decision-making power
- Steering – steering human groups towards desired outcomes (Young, 2013)

Policy instruments

Policy is implemented through so-called "policy instruments":

- Regulation: soft and hard law
- Economic instruments: negative (punishment) or encouraging (incentives)
- Voluntary agreements
- Information
- Physical planning/infrastructure

Politics are an integral part of policy

- This implies that scientific knowledge and expert advice are not simply transferred into effective policies
- Instead, policy formulation and implementation are affected by
 - different (often conflicting) beliefs, values and interests of those involved in the process and
 - by the surrounding societal (historical, economic and social) conditions and context

*“Politics in a democratic society, (...), is a **struggle for power** played out in significant part through **arguments** about the ‘best story’” (Fischer, 2003)*

Any questions? Comments?

Power in governance

What is power?

- **Many different theories/definitions of power (rooted in different scientific fields and traditions)**
 - Key similarity between them:
power is unevenly distributed and socially contested, which affects the creation and distribution of resources, opportunities and well-being

What is power?

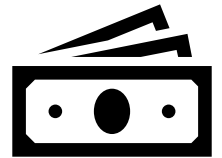
- **Power as authority:**

Deciding the rules, punishments and incentives, designing the institutional context, controlling.



- **Power as resources:**

Attaining and distributing financial resources, information and knowledge; developing and using technology.



- **Power as discourse:**

Setting the agenda: what is important and should be prioritized and what not; having a voice; setting the norms; giving a voice and influence to certain actors or type of knowledge.



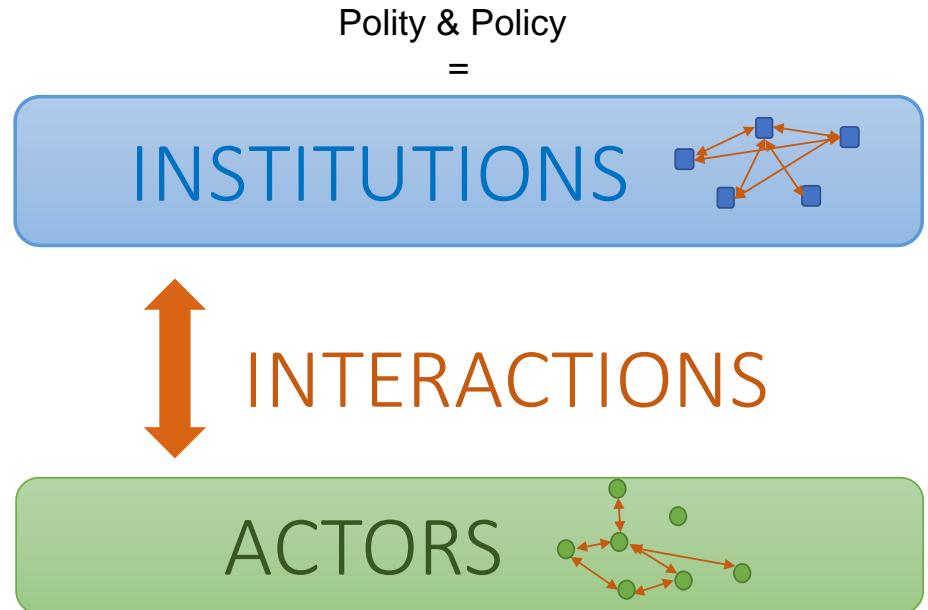
Polity and power

The institutional context determines who has power:

- To set the political agenda: what issues should be prioritised
- Participate in decision-making: who has decision-making power (monarch, parliament, municipality, voters, NGOs, etc.)
- Participate in implementation: who implements decisions (public authorities, private actors, etc.)
- Participate in the evaluation: who can monitor and control the effectiveness of the decisions
- To decide on and revise the polity, as well as the actors and rules of politics

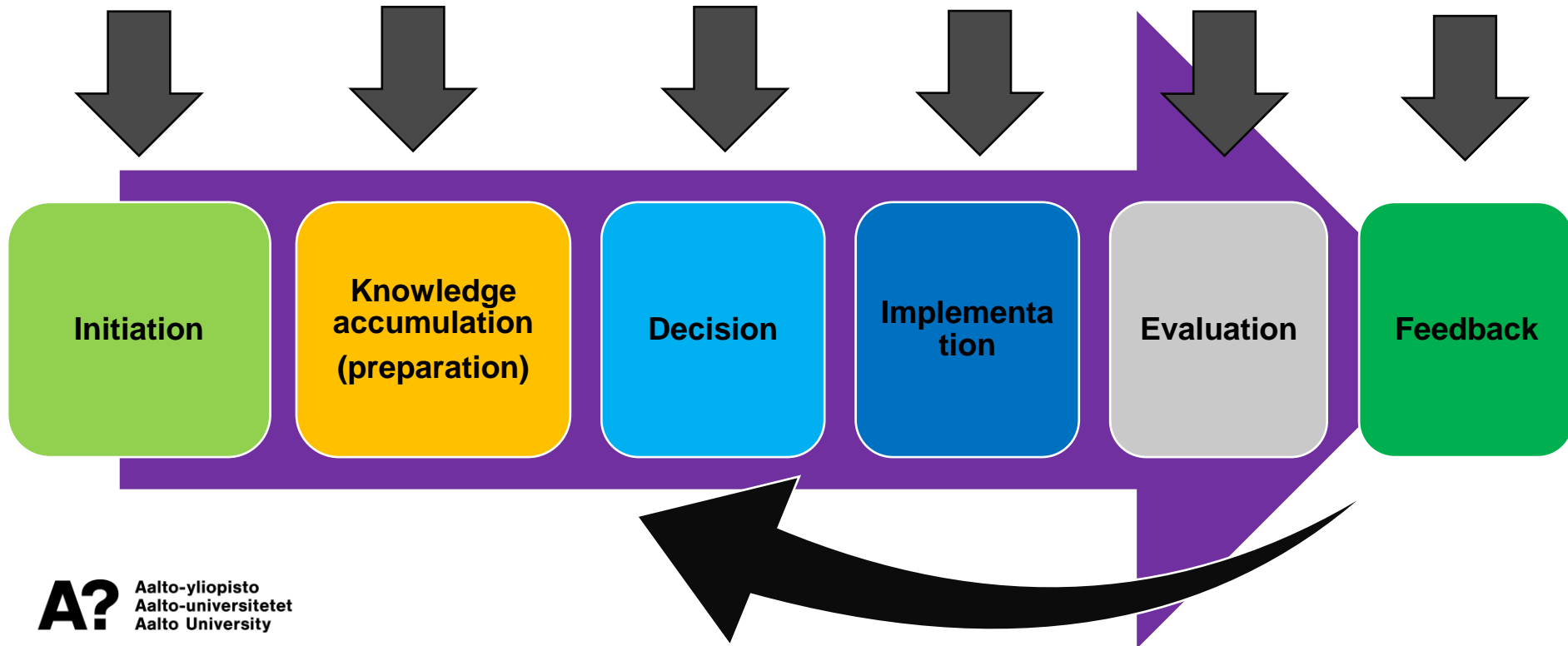
Politics and power

- **Politics is about the political actions of actors**
 - Thus, it is embedded in the interactions between actors and between actors and institutions
 - The polity (the institutions) impacts on who has power in politics (what interactions actors are allowed to have and what outcomes they can lead to)



Policy and power

The policy process:



Power in international relations

In international politics (e.g., transboundary water governance) power is about the ability to influence another to act in ways in which they would not have acted otherwise

“**Hard power**” = capacity to **coerce** through economic or military force

“**Soft power**” = capacity to **persuade** other to act in certain way

“**Smart power**” = capacity to **combine** elements of hard and soft power to advance one’s interests

These used *mainly* in respect to power relations between countries, but may also be applicable in other contexts as well

Any questions? Comments?

GROUP DISCUSSION

How was politics visible in your Case Study?

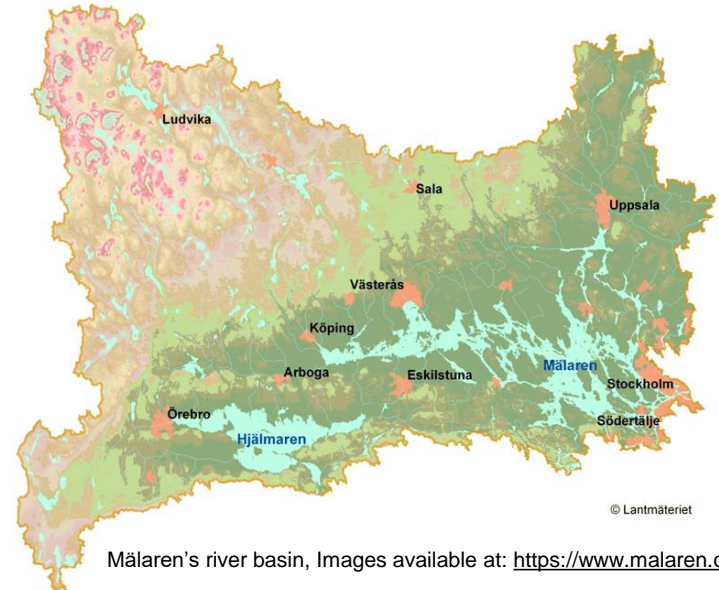
What about power?

Who is the most powerful actor in your Case Study? Why?

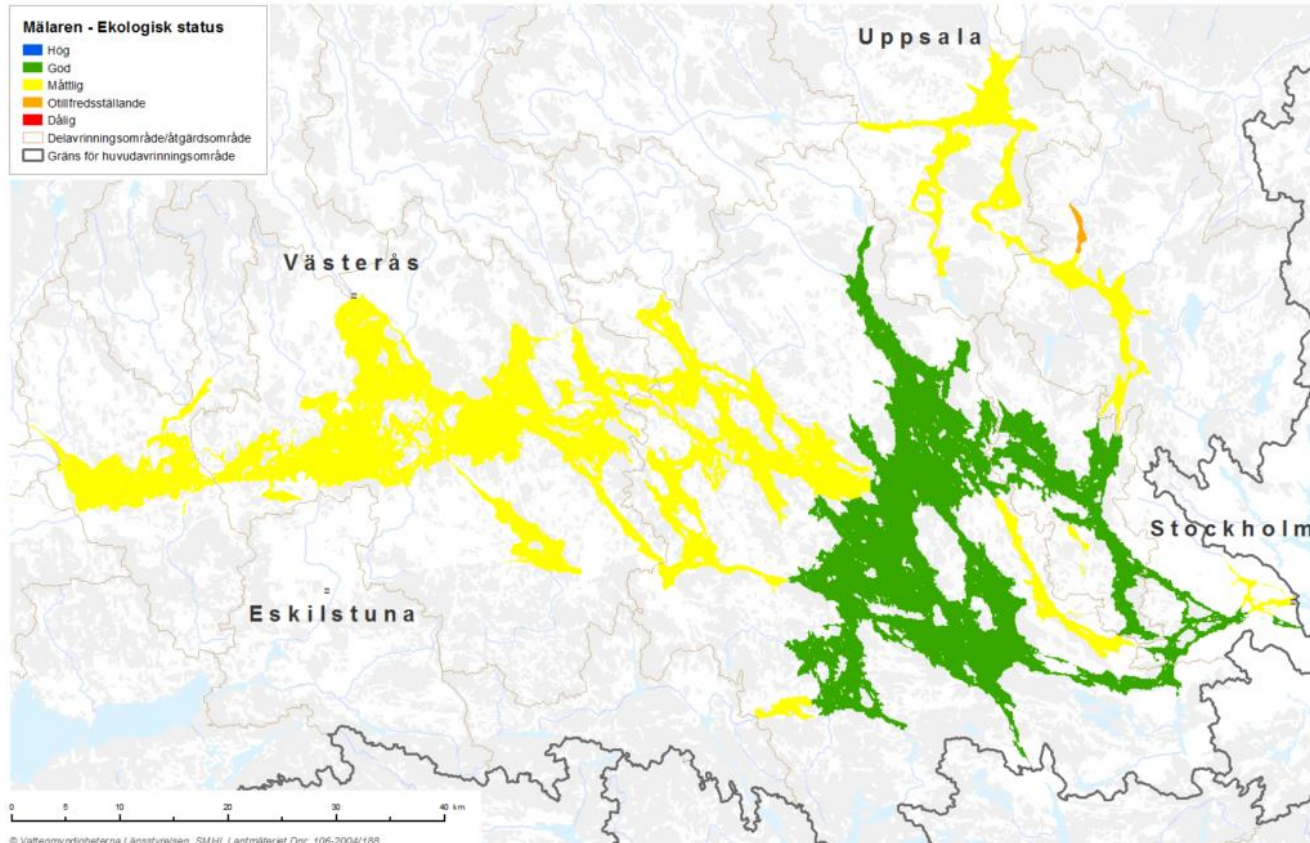
Examples of how polity, politics and policy affect water governance

Example 1: Water Use and Water Pollution - Mälaren, Sweden

- 72 km, 1,122 km² (river basin 22 650 km²)
- ~1 000 000 people (in ~40 municipalities and 6 counties)
- Drinking water supply to 2 000 000 people
- Sewage receiver for 1 100 000 people (includes urban wastewater)
- Hydropower production
- Industries
- Important transport route: ~ 4,500 vessels pass through with a freight volume of just over 4 million tonnes. Most of the freight is constituent goods of oil and chemicals.



Example 1: Mälaren, Sweden



Example 1: Mälaren, Sweden

What polity, politics and policy affect the governance of Mälaren:

- UN SDGs
- EU Legislation (some examples):
 - ✓ EU Water Framework Directive
 - ✓ EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive
 - ✓ EU Flood's Directive
- Swedish regulation and policies (some examples):
 - ✓ Swedish fundamental laws (constitution)
 - ✓ National laws regulating ownership, municipality planning, hydropower
 - ✓ Regional management of river basins, municipal planning, hydropower production...

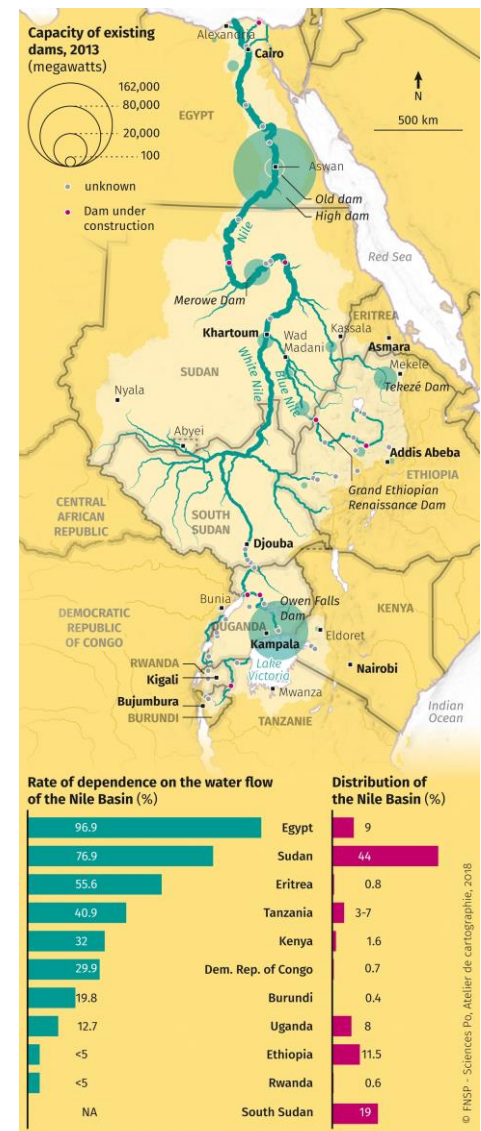
Example 1: Mälaren, Sweden

Conflicts of goals:

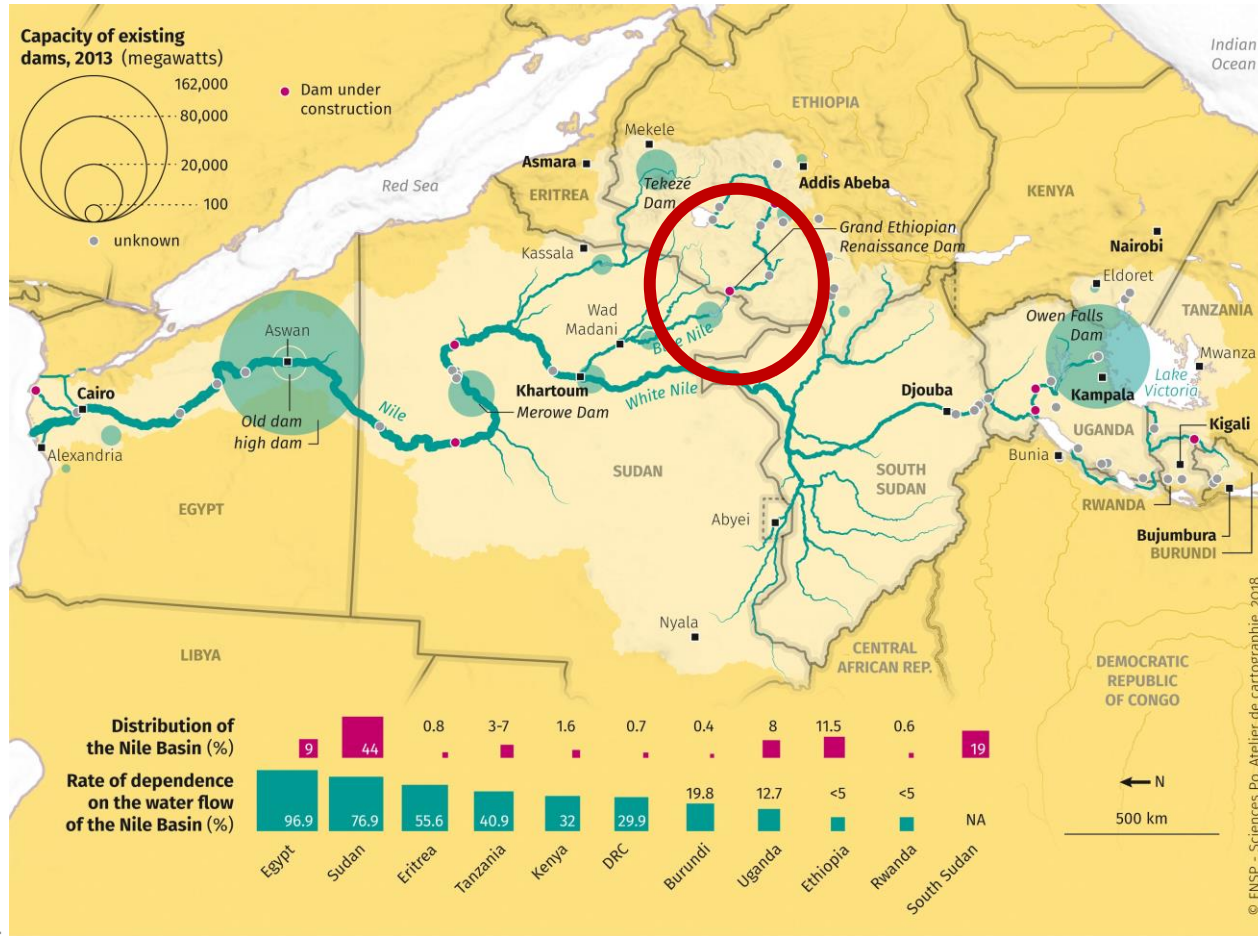


Example 2: The Nile

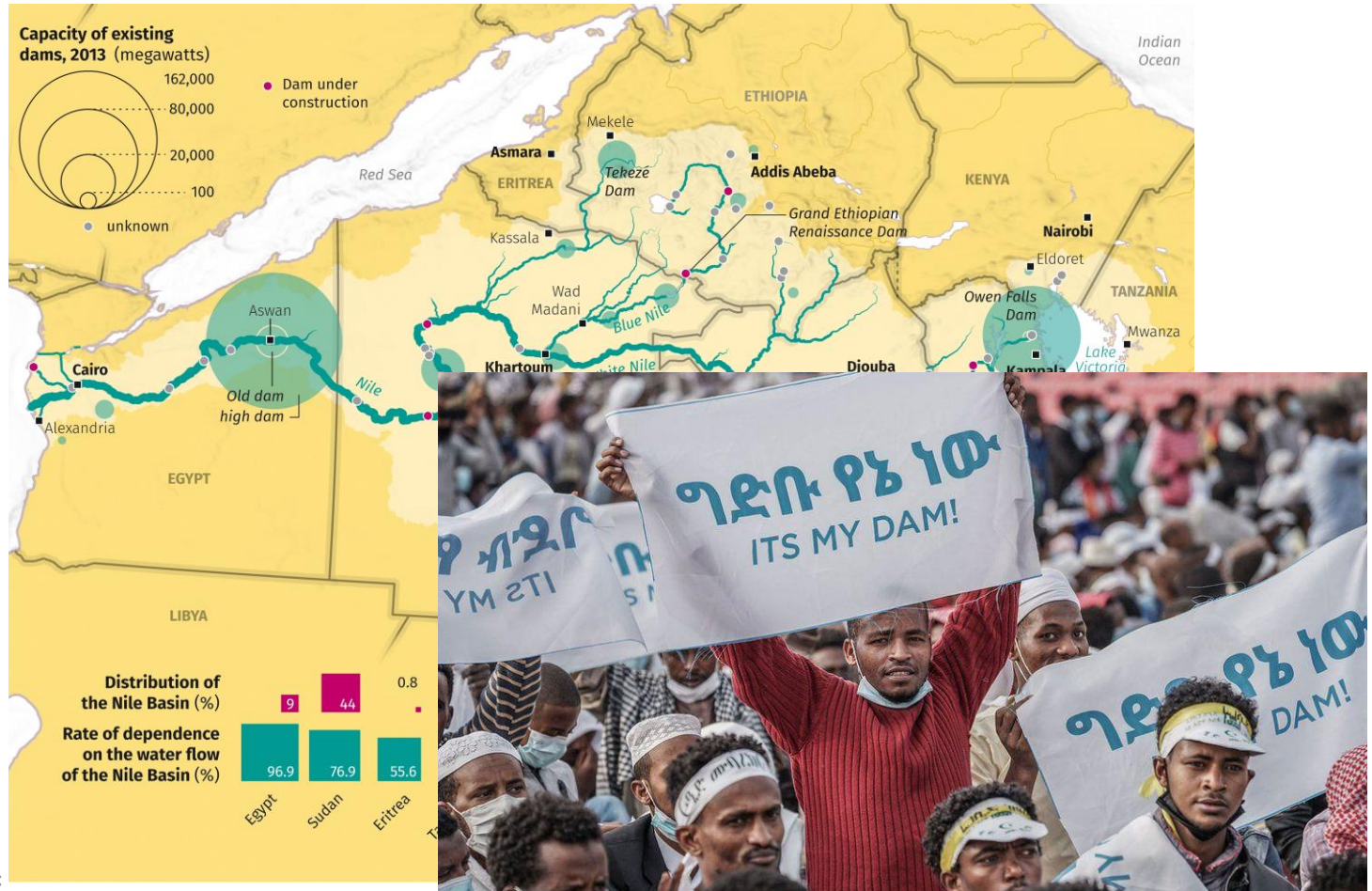
- The Nile River basin (Blue Nile and White Nile) includes Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Dem. Rep. of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan.
- Egypt is almost entirely reliant on the Nile for its water use and supply (97%). Sudan and Eritrea also are dependent on the Nile (77% and 55% respectively).
- Many dams are constructed along the river Nile (more than 10 of very different capacities) supplying energy to millions of people.



Example 2: The Nile



Example 2: The Nile



Example 2: The Nile

Discussion – what goal conflicts do you see?

THE GLOBAL GOALS For Sustainable Development

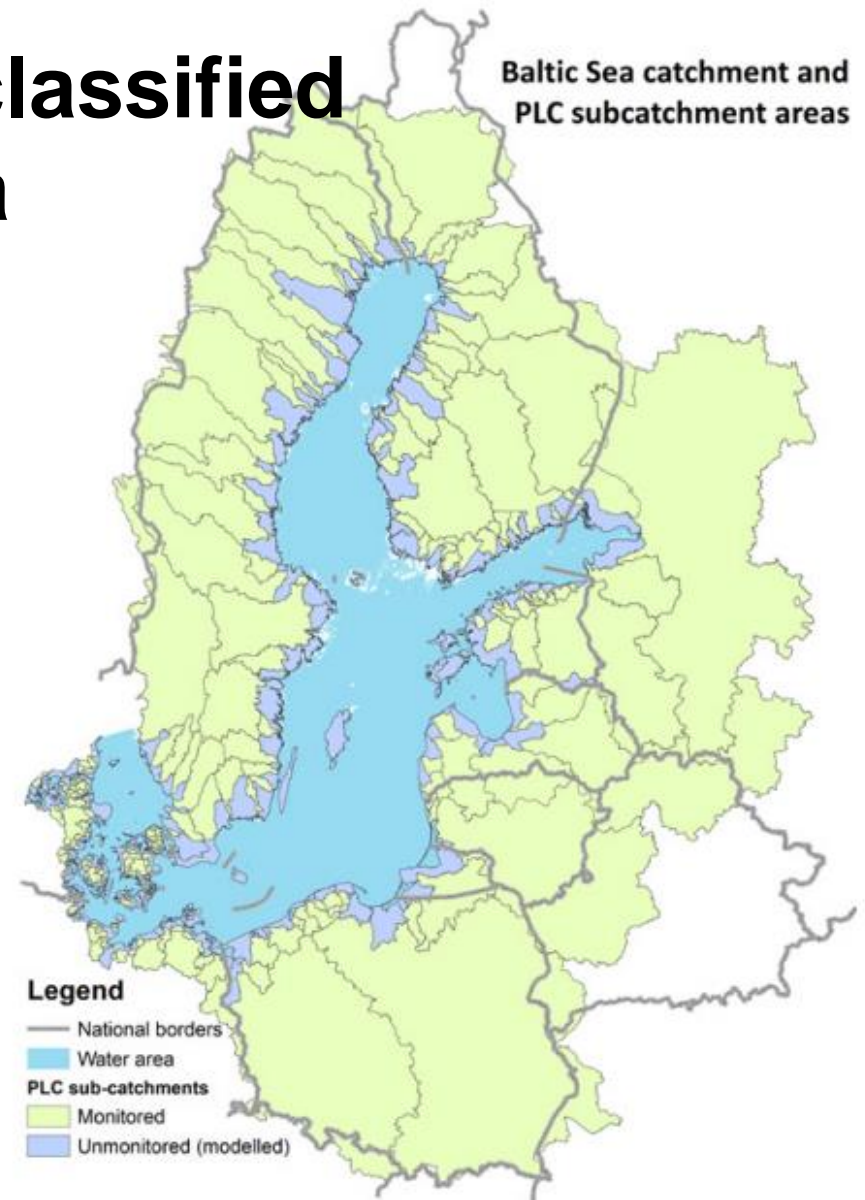


Example 3: EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD), (1991)

- **Aims to protect the environment from the adverse effects of urban waste water discharges**
 - Identification of areas sensitive to eutrophication caused by nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) input
 - Requires 70% of N and 80% of P removal from wastewater collected in towns of > 10,000 people
- **EU has enforcement power:** failure to comply with the Directive may lead to sanctions
- However, the implementation of a directive can be disputed!
 - interpretation and argumentation – who has the best argument?

Example 3: Baltic Sea classified as highly sensitive area

- The whole sea suffers from eutrophication
 - Caused by anthropogenic nutrient input from large catchment area
- Sweden and Finland the “front-runners” of water protection
 - Both remove more P than required by the UWWTD, but



Example 3: EU Urban Waste Water Treatment

Environment: Commission takes Finland, Sweden and Portugal to Court over waste water treatment

The European Commission is taking Finland, Sweden and Portugal to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for failing to ensure proper treatment of urban waste water in a significant number of towns and cities. The failure of Finland and Sweden to systematically remove nitrogen when treating the waste water of their inland cities and towns is contributing to the environmental problems of the Baltic Sea. Portugal has failed to respect a special decision on urban waste water discharges from Estoril, near Lisbon, and the surrounding area.

News 6.10.2009 20:33 | updated 28.5.2012 16:32

Finland Beats EU Commission in Waste Water Dispute

The European Court of Justice on Tuesday dismissed the EU Commission's waste water treatment case against Finland.

WHY DID FINLAND WIN?

- 1) FI argued that nitrogen from inland wastewater discharges does not accelerate eutrophication
 - 2) The Court ruled that the Commission was not able to prove that the N coming from those UWWTPs in question contributed significantly to the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea
- Thus, FI and the Commission interpreted the Directive differently, and the FI's interpretation prevailed

Waste water: Commission refers Sweden to the Court for its failure to treat urban waste water

Page contents

[Top](#)

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Today, the European Commission decided to refer Sweden to the Court of Justice of the EU over its failure to ensure that urban waste water from a number of agglomerations receives adequate treatment, as required under EU rules ([Council Directive 91/271/EEC](#)). Untreated

Sweden has failed to ensure that urban waste water is subject to appropriate treatment before it is discharged back into the environment. Although there has been progress towards compliance, Sweden is still failing to meet its obligations under EU law. Four agglomerations that discharge into sensitive areas (*Borås, Habo, Skoghall and Töreboda*) should have been in compliance since December 1998, and 6 more agglomerations (*Lycksele, Malå, Mockfjärd, Pajala, Robertsfors and Tännålen*) should have achieved compliance by December 2005.

Example 3: What explains the reluctance of FI & SE to remove N from UWWTPs?

1. Scientists have not agreed on the role of N in Baltic Sea eutrophication

- Some (nowadays the majority) say both nutrients (P & N) should be reduced
- Others say that only P should be reduced
- Who will the authorities listen?
- May relate to their own background, but also:

2. Biological removal of N is expensive

- While chemical removal of P is by far cheaper

Summary

- **Politics is about the beliefs, values, interests and actions of governance actors, and the division of power between them**
 - Politics are an integral part of governance (in a democratic society)
- **Many different perspectives on power**
 - Power over authority, resources and discourse
 - Power is not distributed equally: upstream – downstream; different stakeholders, institutions, structures, ...
- Policy formation and implementation is affected by polity and politics!
 - Effectiveness of governance can be as much about enforcement power as it is about societal acceptability

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Thank you for your attention!
Questions?