



## The Stalled Transition In The Upper Tisza River Basin: The Dynamics Of Linked Action Situations

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Transition to a new river management regime can reset the basin's development path on a qualitatively different trajectory. However, such transition is rare. The same strength by which regime components reinforce each other to set a trajectory can also induce inertia and path dependency. Regime change often requires profound shifts in the institutions (especially policies), technologies, and personnel as well as the ecological, economic and social processes they influence in setting the basin's trajectory. If tinkering and minor adjustments to policy are insufficient to address major challenges such as climate change, then regime change becomes an urgent issue in river management. Regime change has become an issue in Hungary following repeated failure of conventional management policies to handle a series of floods starting in 1997. Since then several cycles of public participation have pushed water management regimes in Hungary toward transition by increasing the scope of policy options beyond conventional strategies of defensive river engineering. The first cycle centered in the Bodrog region of the middle Tisza basin initially appeared successful in institutionalizing innovative floodplain management strategies in the New Vasarhelyi Plan (VTT). Public participation gathered and harmonized a diversity of perspectives to provide a convincing counterpoint to conventional strategies at a critical stage in policy formulation. However, as policy begins to be implemented under VTT in the middle Tisza, this first cycle appears to have ended in failure. Policy is still mostly focused on strengthening conventional paths and public participation effectively eliminated from policy formulation or implementation. The second cycle in the Bereg region near the Ukrainian border appears unlikely to succeed. The question becomes what key elements act alone or in combination to foment transition to new management regimes? Transition may be arrested due to a lack of one, several or many hypothetical causes: 1. biophysical urgency (recent flood/drought disasters), 2. election pressure forces politicians to new and unprecedented levels of commitment, 3. Champion to provide leadership, 4. Participatory processes, 5. Kingdon, 6. International economics, EU ag policy CAP reform, 7. Inertia of sunk costs in infrastructure, 8. Parliamentary process hijacked by old guard engineering fraternity (related to Champion hypothesis), 9. No clear picture of rights, benefits, transfers, adaptation options (related to Kingdon), 10. Failure to include in the dialogue all the critical social solidarities (egalitarians, hierarchists, and individualists sensu Cultural Theory). We report here on efforts to examine these hypotheses through the lens of Institutional Analysis using the MTF (management transition framework).