

Risk governance as a new approach

The term “governance” in its widest sense refers to the capacity of actors, social groups and institutions to build an organizational consensus, to agree on the contribution of each partner also as on a common vision (University of Valencia: ESPON Project 2.3.2 - GOVERNANCE OF TERRITORIAL AND URBAN POLICIES FROM EU TO LOCAL LEVEL. 2nd Interim Report).

Today, modern social systems are characterised by complex patterns of interdependencies between actors, institutions, functional activities and spatial organisations. Controlling, managing or even steering the complex, fragmented and often competing societal interests is beyond the capacity of the state as an agent of authority. This is important for dealing with risks, in particular in cases of high uncertainty and ambiguity.

Aiming at the development of integrative models and concepts that link the different phases of risk governance, attention has to be paid to the given differences in characteristics of the several risk types, both on the collective level and the individual perception of risk. These factors might contribute in each single case in a different manner to the perception and estimation of risk. In addition, they are strongly interlinked with more collective social-political factors (German Advisory Council on Global Change: World in Transition – Strategies for Managing Global Environmental Risks Berlin 1999, p. 158). In consequence, the involvement of all social groups into a stakeholder dialogue was regarded as crucial for the envisaged MIDIR risk governance concept.

Such a discourse-oriented decision process combined with an intensive and active participation and information guarantees in most cases an effective implementation of decisions made by national policy or public administration by the government as well as private actors. In those cases, a consensus is not achievable, the participants, involved in decision-making, come at least to a better understanding of the different interests and values.