

Collective learning and hierarchical decision structure: Contradictory strategies to cope with the unknown?

Change in Governance as Collective Learning Process.
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An aerial photograph of an industrialized landscape, showing a river, various buildings, and infrastructure. The image is slightly faded and serves as a background for the text.

Revitalization of industrialized landscapes

An issue of environmental policy

- Contaminated landscapes due to industrial, military and mining activities – risk for human health and ecosystems
- Spectacular events in the 1970's (Love Canal etc.) - issue gaining consciousness
- Case by case solution, diverse responsibilities
- Germany 1998: Federal Soil Protection Act– defines procedures for remediation and integrates decision making in the administrative structure

Revitalization of Contaminated Brownfields - Challenges

- Finally proved or complete knowledge on contaminations can not be delivered by preceding investigations
- Unexpected findings of contaminations causes delay and increases costs and can lead to a change of project goals
- Decisions have to be taken quickly

Revitalization Projects - Negotiation

Involved actors

- environmental administration
- community
- investor and land owner
- funding organizations

Central

- definition of project goals
- temporal and financial frame
- definition of what is unknown

Revitalization Projects - Realization

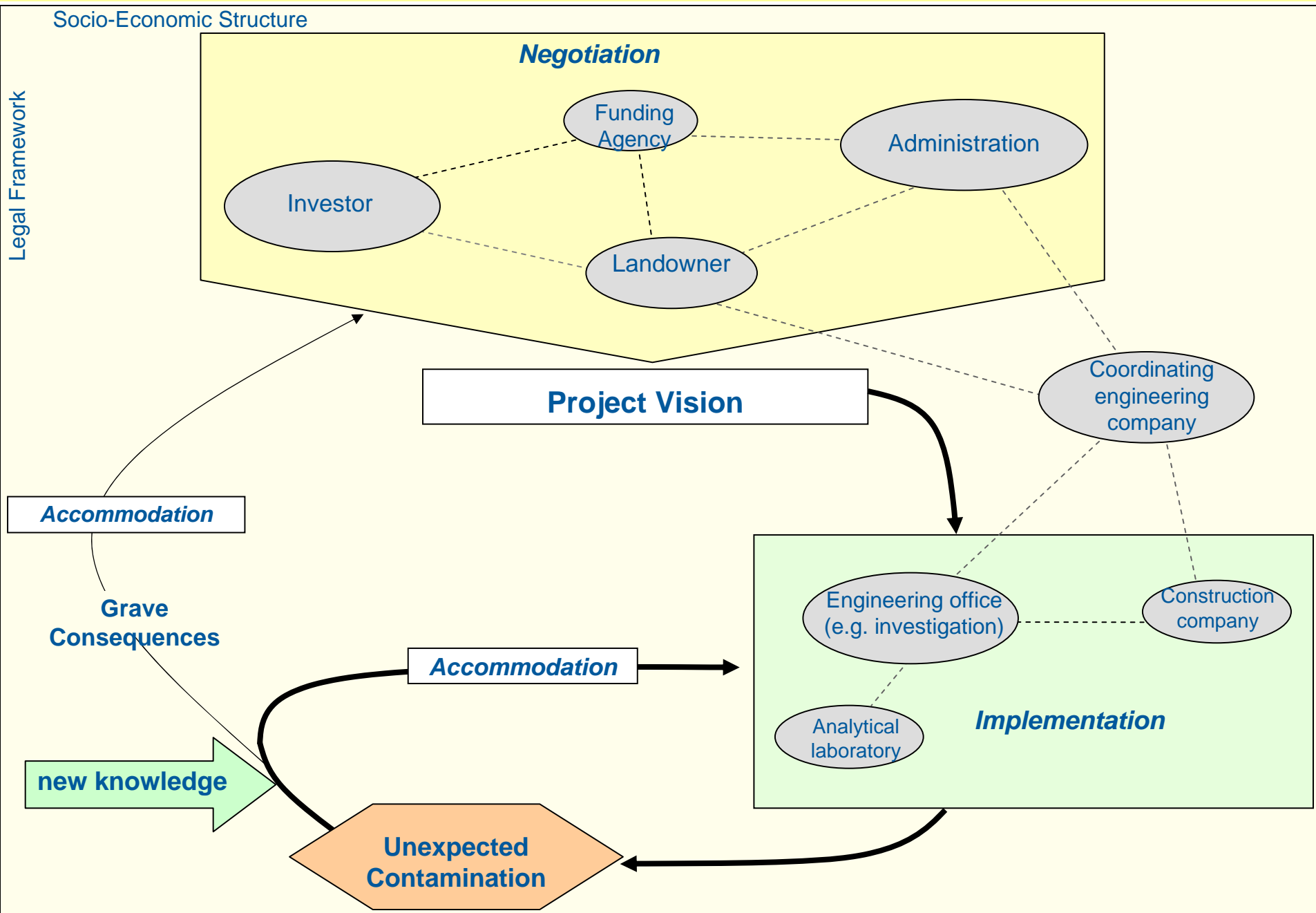
Involved actors

- actors who initiated the project and
- contractual bounded construction, planning and engineering companies

Central

- surprises and redefinition of goals
- flexible and quick decision making
- information flow

Actors and Decisions in Revitalization Projects



Governing Ignorance - Structural Context

- Legal regulations provides minimum of certainty and predictability
- Additional legal instruments, collateral clauses that defines ignorance in contracts
- Binding oral agreements built on trust, enables flexibility
- Clear communication structure

Governing Ignorance - Actors

- Open minded attitude towards the unknown
- Experience and personal structure
- Representatives of administration have to be flexible in their responsibilities and willing to communicate information
- Resources to deal with surprises

Governing Ignorance - Interaction

- Early agreements that takes explicitly into account the unexpected as an option
- Communication of knowledge gaps and the knowledge about the unknown
- Face to face communication
- Permanent trust building

Successful dealing with Ignorance – Clear Structure and Flexibility

- Established legal framework provides orientation, reliability and efficient work
- “bottom-up” patterns enable openness and flexibility of actors in all stages of a revitalization process
- Experts can initiate collective learning process that creates a positive attitude towards ignorance



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