NGI101x - 3.6C - Actor analysis step 6

Hi, I am Bert Enserink your teacher in this course.

In the previous step we filled out the matrix, distinguishing the critical and dedicated from the non-critical and non-dedicated actors; now we have to think about what we learn from these distinctions.

Well, looking at the implications of our newly acquired insights we will have to look at three different aspects:

The Problem formulation; is the problem indeed the right problem or do we have to reconsider the way it is phrased and framed?

The Interaction with the other actors, who do we have to involve in what kind of activities? And what are the issues that may need further research, what are the possible research questions and activities?

What are the consequences for the problem formulation?

We can look at this issue in at least two different ways; by taking into account important concerns and issues and the means of our critical actors and secondly by taking these along in reconsidering the systems diagram.

So we turn to our wind at sea case and we see that the important allies or economic affairs also want wind at sea, but they don't agree on the 'how'. Moreover we want that banks and investors get engaged and will start investing in windparks at sea.

We also noticed that most opponents are non-critical, but they can cause delays and we should be careful not to offend the shipping industry and the important harbours, like Rotterdam.

So for the Ministry of Economic Affairs it is important to look for locations that are near shore and not close to shipping lanes and it is important to share costs, to find investors and to safeguard subsidies.

When we look at the systems diagram we see that the above insights imply that there will be a change in the policy measures; we will start looking for near shore options and there will be new financial means when we include the banks in our supporters network.

The Interaction with the other actors, who do we have to involve in what kind of activities?

Finding out who are your friends and foes will help you design a strategy for problem solving. It generates information on what coalitions might win the game; it shows you who are the competitors and with whom you might cooperate. And you can anticipate or even prevent potential conflicts!

And of course you can make a process design that allows for sound and effective policy design.

Let's take a side step at this latest subject: whom to involve? A nice way to determine whom to involve in what way is by returning to the power/interest grid. But you can also use "the" matrix with dedicated and critical actors that we showed you before. Typically in a power/interest grid we distinguish four categories of actors: 1) the players who might have high power/the means and a high interest; 2) the crowd with little or no means and low interest; 3) the subjects who have a high interest only and 4) the context setters who have important means but little interest.

Typically you try to actively involve the players and you try to keep the context setters satisfied because you may need them at a later moment. The crowd you ignore for now and the subjects you keep informed as they are the potential allies or opponents. That is something the future will learn. When we would fill out this power interest grid for our wind at sea case we will see the ministry of infrastructure and environment (I&E), TenneT and the Energy companies appearing in the players list with a + sign behind their names to indicate they are allies, while the Harbour authorities and Shipping sector are in the same quadrant with a minus sign, indicating they are opponents. In this way we can fill this schedule. Banks and Private equity show up as context setters. The subjects are environmental NGO's, NWEA, knowledge institutes, construction companies, windmill producers, Ministry of Econ Affairs (Fisheries) and the Oil and Gas industry. The crowds than are formed by the Ministry I&M DG Environment & International, Ministry of Finance, the Provinces, Dredging companies and Local authorities. They can be ignored for now.

Finally, what might be the consequences for organising our research activities?

Well, you may have found new parties, whose objectives and means might need to be explored. You found new factors in the system, which are influencing the outcome or discovered new relations between factors that impact the outcome and which need further study.

Your new insights may lead to adaptation of the system and its delineation, which requires new modelling, while new issues that you discovered with other actors and new coalitions pressing for different solutions may spur the need for additional research too.

Finally I want to look at the limitations. I want to warn you that doing this kind of actor network studies and the sustainability of the outcomes of these analyses, can be problematic.

There are limitations of actor analyses. The first thing you should realise is that you are making a snapshot in time. Actor networks and the relation between actors are dynamic. Moreover people and parties change position as they get new insights and they do so by learning both about the content of problems but also by learning about the perspectives and motives of other actors in the network.

A danger of making these tables is that these tables and graphs are abused for polarization, explicating the points of difference and conflicts, and not focusing on how to bridge these differences.

There is a severe risk of 'self-fulfilling prophecy', especially with classification of opponents; once you are considered an opponent, you will remain an opponent and little constructive dialogue is possible.

Finally ethical considerations, they may be lost with a strategic focus on 'critical' actors. You don't look at the actors with limited resources. The fact that local inhabitants or environmental NGO's have few resources does not mean that their concerns are not justified.

I now try to summarize what we have learned in this second part of the lectures on how to do an actor network analysis. We looked at how to analyse their (inter-)dependencies by focusing at their resources and their willingness to use these resources, their dedication to solve this issue or problem. In that way we were able to distinguish the so-called critical actors. We introduced to you the matrix in which we distinguished the dedicated critical actors form the non-dedicated ones and the non-critical ones.

We also discussed how we can use these insights in the way we deal with different kind of actors; how we do or do not involve them in our process and we discussed how this knowledge impacts your understanding of the problem situation. Finally we discussed the dangers and limitations of making this kind of actor network inventories; the snap-shot character and the danger of self-fulfilling prophecies.