



Bring in the Dutch? An exploration of factors accounting for the success in translating the Dutch Delta Approach to the Vietnamese Mekong Delta

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Abstract

Deltas cover less than 0,5% of the global land area, but are home to over 500 million people globally (Arto et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2019). All over the world, deltas are popular settlements, due to their fertile soils which support intensive agriculture and expanding cities. However, deltas belong to the most vulnerable coastal environments and currently face multiple environmental and climatic threats. The increasing pressure of expanding populations and intensifying climate risks in deltas, stimulated the exchange of knowledge about climate change adaptation and water management solutions on a global level. The Netherlands actively promotes their Delta planning knowledge, as they have a long experience of living with water and in a delta. This process of sharing knowledge between countries is also known as policy translation. This study explores the success factors for Dutch actors in policy translation. The object of translation is the policy model known as the Dutch Delta Approach (DDA). In this thesis, the international collaboration between the Netherlands and Vietnam and the creation of the Mekong Delta Plan (MDP) is considered as a prime example of policy translation. By conducting fourteen in-depth interviews and analyzing seven policy documents, the policy translation process is dissected and challenges and success factors are identified. The results show that the translation was partly successful, in terms of programmatic success and policy success. Additionally, the factors contributing to the success are identified: actor relations, conveying ability and ability to change the policy process. Moreover, by conducting the in-depth interviews, an additional success factor is identified: ownership.

Keywords

Policy translation, Policy transfer, Dutch Delta Approach, Vietnamese Mekong Delta, Mekong Delta Plan, Success factors.

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List of abbreviations

DDP	Dutch Delta Program
DDA	Dutch Delta Approach
MDP	Mekong Delta Plan
VMD	Vietnamese Mekong Delta
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
ADB	Asian Development Bank

1 Introduction

1.1 Deltas at risk

Deltas cover less than 0,5% of the global land area, but are home to over 500 million people worldwide (Arto et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2019). All over the world, deltas are popular settlements, due to their fertile soils which support intensive agriculture and expanding cities. Therefore, their social and economic value extends well beyond borders (Dunn et al., 2019). However, deltas are one of the most vulnerable coastal environments and are dealing with multiple environmental and climatic threats. Due to increasing urbanization, agricultural intensification and industrialization, many deltas are threatened by both human interests (competing claims for water and land use) and the consequences of climate change (sea-level rise, increased temperatures and rainfall, subsidence) (Arto et al., 2019; Seijger et al., 2019). These drivers operate at multiple temporal and cross-boundary scales, which makes these issues very complicated (Arto et al., 2019).

The problems deltas face are considered *wicked problems*, 'due to the exposure to extreme changes that will be exacerbated in the future' (Triyanti et al., 2020, p. 11). Traditionally, infrastructural and technical measures, such as building dikes, were taken to protect deltaic areas. However, these infrastructural solutions often turn out to be not sufficient and not sustainable (Minkman, 2021). Therefore, new solutions are needed to transform delta management. In order to transform current delta management, the attention shifts to delta governance. The governance of deltas face several challenges, such as, conflicting interests; ineffective regulatory instruments or adverse policies that marginalize local communities (Triyanti et al., 2020). These challenges stress the importance of additional research on the development of governance strategies, focusing on deltas.

1.2 Learning from each other: policy translation

As discussed in the previous paragraph, the governance of deltas faces several challenges. Therefore, countries are in need of novel sustainable solutions to improve their delta governance and protect deltas against future threats (Minkman, 2021). Ideas and policies to protect deltas can be created within the deltaic country itself, however, governments can also look to other similar deltas for inspiration (Minkman, 2021). The increasing pressure of humans and the intensifying climate risks in deltas, stimulated the exchange of knowledge about climate change adaptation and water management solutions globally (Laeni et al., 2020). Over the years, the number of global policy platforms on water management related issues (e.g. OECD Water Governance Initiative and Global Water Partnership) have increased, which has stimulated international learning and collaboration. In addition, these policy platforms aim to provide policy inspiration across the globe (Laeni et al., 2020). Particularly the Netherlands is very active in sharing water management knowledge (Laeni et al., 2020; van Buuren, 2019). The OECD described the Netherlands as an 'international reference for dealing with water and climate challenges effectively and innovatively' (Laeni et al., 2020, p. 17). In order to protect the delta, the Dutch realized massive infrastructural measures and established a legal framework for flood protection. In addition, they have 'a powerful institutional regime of a semi-autonomous national implementation agency (Rijkswaterstaat, the executive agency of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment), dedicated regional water boards, and a well-developed expert community' (van Buuren, 2019, p. 201). As a result, the Netherlands is one of the best protected deltas globally. The knowledge that the Dutch have on water management is transferred over the world, known as the Dutch Delta Approach (DDA). The travel of policies and ideas can be studied through the concept of *policy translation* (Laeni et al., 2020). This is a process in which 'knowledge from one place and/or time

is used to formulate policies in other jurisdictions at different moments in time' (Minkman, 2021, p. 27).

In scientific literature, policy translation is defined as 'the process of modification of policy ideas and creation of new meanings and designs in the process of the cross-jurisdictional travel of policy ideas' (Mukhtarov, 2014, p. 6). So, policy translation is used to implement policies from other countries or areas in new or different settings. Policy translation differs from other concepts of policy spreading, due to its specific attention to policy actors in the transfer process (Mukhtarov, 2014). Mukhtarov (2014) describes policy translation as an actor based approach, as actors play an important role in modifying the policy so that it fits into the host context of application. He emphasizes the important role of policy actors, non-state actors and experts as well as organized and non-organized citizens. So, the main assumption of policy translation is that the travel of policy ideas happens because of people, who are engaged or have stakes in the translation (Hasan et al., 2020).

1.3 The Dutch Delta Approach as object of translation

In this thesis, the object of translation is the policy model known as the DDA. As mentioned before, the Dutch are very active in sharing their water management, as they have a long experience of living with water and in a delta. In the last two decades, the Netherlands developed its water management in order to make it 'future proof'. The Dutch realized that a single focus on infrastructural measures to protect the Netherlands was not a sustainable solution. Therefore, the delta approach shifted from infrastructural measures towards more adaptive delta management (ADM) and risk assessments (Minkman, 2021). This shift in policy resulted in a specific Dutch program, called the Dutch Delta Program (DDP) which 'combines 'hard' infrastructure with 'soft' governance measures' (Minkman, 2021, p. 31). These novel development that originate from the Netherlands have also inspired policy ideas and travels over the world known as the DDA (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). 'The Dutch government considers the DDA an export product that could aid other countries in updating their delta management as a form of development cooperation' (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019, p. 114). Already several projects took place in which DDA-inspired master plans were developed by the Dutch and presented to foreign governments. Examples of these countries are: Vietnam, Bangladesh and Myanmar. All these examples are based on close collaboration and knowledge exchange by Dutch experts and the receiving country (Minkman, 2021).

In this thesis, the international collaboration and the creation of the Mekong Delta Plan (MDP) in Vietnam is considered a prime example of policy translation. The Vietnamese Mekong Delta (VMD) can be considered as one of the most vulnerable deltas of the world. The VMD is located in the far south of Vietnam (see figure 1). The surface of the delta is around 3,9 million ha, starting from Mỹ Tho in the east to Châu Đốc and Hà Tiên in the north-west, then, down to Cà Mau at the most southern tip of Vietnam (MDP, 2013). The VMD is administratively divided into 13 provinces, with the city of Cần Thơ as the centre of the delta. About 50% of the delta gets seasonally flooded, which affects the lives of more than 2 million people (MDP, 2013). Due to climate change, it is expected that the dry season will become longer and hotter. Climate change leads to negative impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems, due to changes in salinity levels, acidity, turbidity, loss of habitat and increase in temperature. This affects community livelihoods in the area (Anh et al., 2018; IUCN, 2013; Triet et al., 2020). In addition, the agriculture located in the VMD is an important economic driver for the country, since it produces 90% of the rice export and the majority of the aquaculture exports. Therefore, the protection of the delta is crucial for the economic development of the country. The increasing stress which is put on both the economy and the environment of the delta, asks for good governance. From 2011 till 2013, a partnership between the Netherlands and Vietnam resulted in the development of

the MDP. Within this collaboration, Dutch actors, such as Dutch researchers and consultants, played a prominent role. The goal of the MDP was to ‘contribute to realizing and maintaining a prosperous delta both economically and socially, in which its population can thrive in a vigorous and dynamic economy that is founded on sustainable use of its natural resources, and well adapted to changes in water resources and climate’ (MDP, 2013, p. 7). The MDP is an interesting and relevant object for research, since the creation of the plan is considered the first successful effort in the translation of the DDA to another context (Hasan et al., 2019).



Figure 1 - Map of the Vietnamese Mekong Delta (MDP, 2013)

1.4 Problem definition

The DDA presents itself as a tool to provide developing aid in adaptive delta planning. As a consequence, the Dutch generate business opportunities for their water sector (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). As translating the DDA seems a promising tool for delta governance, it is not guaranteed that the translation of policies will be successful. The translation of policies may shape policy change, but it may also result in implementation failure or inappropriate translations (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Minkman et al. (2019) point out that many studies show that processes of translation stagnate after decision-making or result in implementation failure. Translating the DDA to different contexts also shows various results. Where the transfer of the DDA-inspired plan to the VMD was considered successful, in Jakarta impasses occurred and actors no longer agreed on core problems and solutions (Minkman et al., 2019). Often, there is little consensus on what to do or what not to do, when

stakeholders have divergent or different perspectives (Stone, 2017). In conclusion, it is becoming clear that policy translation can also lead to policy failure. So, in order to improve the translation of the DDA to other deltaic countries, it is necessary to explore the relationship between policy translation and policy success or failure (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). In this way, decision makers in the future get an idea on what policy paths are promising, and which are not (Stone, 2017).

1.5 Knowledge gap

This section gives a brief overview of the existing knowledge gap in the literature, structured in theoretical, analytical and empirical relevance of this study.

First, the theoretical knowledge gap in scholarly understanding of policy translation will be discussed. As presented earlier, many research has been done on the threats of climate change in the VMD (Anh et al., 2018; IUCN, 2013; Triet et al., 2020) (85 hits on Scopus). However, only limited research is done to delta governance in the VMD (14 hits on Scopus). This shows the need for more research on delta governance in the VMD, in order to protect the VMD from climate threats. Policy translation in the VMD has only limitedly been researched. The literature search engine Scopus only presents two hits for the search term 'policy translation' AND 'Vietnamese Mekong Delta' (Laeni et al., 2020 & Hasan et al., 2019). Laeni et al. (2020) aim to create an understanding of the role of language and meaning-making in the travel of ideas across borders. Hasan et al. (2019) describe the different waves that took place in the policy translation process of the DDA to the VMD.

Second, in terms of analytical relevance, more research towards policy translation is crucial. Scholarly literature on the spreading of policies, mostly focuses on the concept of policy transfer. Policy transfer is understood as the 'process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 344). Policy transfer differs from the concept of policy translation, as it neglects the importance of actors (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Mukhtarov, 2014; Stone, 2004). The focus on policy transfer in the literature is therefore surprising, as conceptual and empirical research showed evidence that policies cannot be copy-pasted from one context to another, due to the risk of inappropriate translation (Minkman, 2021). And therefore, emphasizes the importance of actors.

Third, in terms of empirical relevance, both Stone (2017) and Minkman et al. (2018) emphasize that there is limited empirical evidence of the process of policy translation. Current literature mainly addresses 'the translation of policy models to other contexts and hardly paid attention to how these policies were mobilized in the first place' (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019, p. 114). In addition, 'an evidence based understanding of how actors modify ideas to fit these to the receiving context is limited' (Minkman, 2021, p. 34). Additionally, research is often focused on the reception by the receiving country, rather than the launch of the object by its sender (Minkman, 2021). Therefore, as the DDA is an important object of translation for the Dutch, it can be argued that research is needed to understand and identify the success factors for the sending actor in policy translation. 'As such, empirical studies can shed light on how actors actually interpret the transferred knowledge and the role of the (political) context in which they do so' (Minkman, 2021, p. 34).

1.6 Research objectives and relevance

This study aims to reduce the existing knowledge gap presented above, by identifying the success factors for Dutch actors in policy translation. This section discusses the research objectives of this study. In addition, the societal and scientific relevance of this study is presented.

The goal of this thesis is divided into multiple objectives. The first objective is to create an understanding of success in policy translation by exploring causal factors for policy translation described in scientific literature. The second objective is to assess the characteristics of the DDA, which is the translated object. The third objective is to understand the process of translation, in which Dutch actors play an important role. Therefore, this objective is to identify which Dutch actors were involved in the process of translation and what their role was. The last objective is to study to what extent the translation of the DDA to the VMD was considered a success. Lastly, this study aims to give recommendations to policy makers for future processes of policy translation.

In terms of societal relevance, the exploration of success factors is important. The knowledge gained from this study can be used for future projects of policy translation. The Dutch consider their delta knowledge as an export product, and are planning on having many partnerships in the future (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). For example, a relatively new project of knowledge sharing of the Dutch Water Authorities is the Blue Deal, in which they 'aim to expand the assistance in the Mekong Delta in order to enable more authorities in Mekong Delta to implement integrated water resources management' (Dijkstra et al., 2019, p. 5). The findings of this thesis could be applied or be used as a guidance during this project, in order to make policy translation processes from the Dutch more effective. In addition, the Netherlands consider their water knowledge as one of their 'top sectors' and has high economic value. Therefore, exploring the DDA as an object of translation is interesting, due to its diplomatic and economic importance (Minkman, 2021). Lastly, the findings from this study are, besides water knowledge export, also useful for other processes of translation, as the worlds gets more internationalized every day.

As regards the scientific relevance, 'there is a need to open the black box of policy translation by exploring how actors actually connect new ideas with existing knowledge and practice' (Minkman, 2021, p. 34). This thesis aims to fill the existing knowledge gaps presented above, by deepening the scholarly understanding of the success factors for Dutch actors in policy translation. In addition, literature on deltas is often largely based on the biophysical side of delta's. By studying deltas from a governance perspective, this will complement the already existing biophysical scientific data (Minkman, 2021). Therefore, this study attempts to reduce this knowledge gap by exploring the role and successfactors of Dutch actors in policy translation in delta governance. Lastly, this study contributed to the complex and multidisciplinary nature of the sustainability problem by attempting to improve delta governance through policy translation.

1.7 Research questions

In order to attain the objectives, the following main research question is developed:

What factors account for the success of Dutch actors in translating the DDA to the VMD?

The main research question is supported by the sub-questions presented below. The first three sub-questions are considered 'review questions', and aim to create a conceptual understanding of success in policy translation based on existing scientific literature. The other three sub-questions are 'empirical questions' and study policy translation over the whole process, starting from the object of translation and ending with the reception and success of the translated policy.

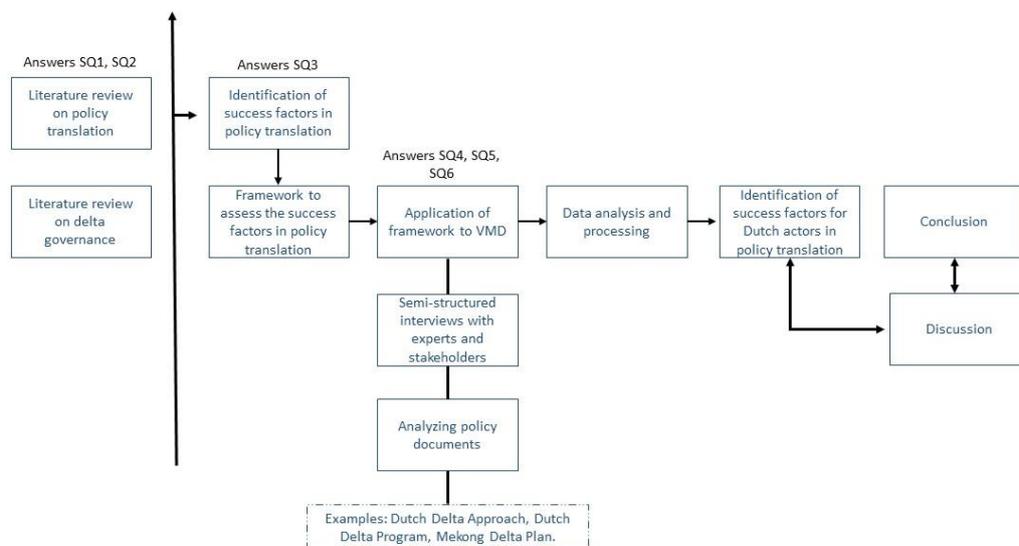


Figure 2 – Research framework

The research framework above (figure 2) presents the structure of this study. This section explains the research framework from left to right. Firstly, in order to answer sub-question 1 and 2, literature will be collected to gain an understanding on policy translation and how success is perceived in policy translation. Secondly, in order to answer sub-question 3, the factors accounting for success in policy translation will be identified and integrated in an analytical framework. The intention of this study is to identify what factors contributes to the achievement of certain goals in policy translation. The success factors for the translation of the DDA to the VMD will be identified during the study in two ways: conceptually by answering sub-question 3, and empirically by answering sub-question 5 and 6. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews will be held with experts and stakeholders involved in the translation process of the DDA. In addition, policy documents will be analyzed. This data will be used to answer sub-question 4, 5, and 6. Fourthly, the collected data will be analyzed and the success factors for Dutch actors in translating the DDA to the MDP will be identified. Lastly, the concluding remarks and recommendations will be given.

Review questions:

1. How is policy translation defined in scholarly literature?
2. What is considered a success in policy translation based on scholarly literature?
3. What factors account for a successful policy translation based on scholarly literature?

Empirical questions:

4. What are the key characteristics of the DDA?
5. To what extent can the translation of the DDA to the VMD be considered a success?
6. To what extent are the theoretical success factors present in the translation process of the DDA to the VMD?

1.8 Outline of the report

In this section, the outline of the report will be discussed. This thesis consists of 7 chapters. In the next chapter the theoretical background of this study will be discussed. In Chapter 3 the assessment framework will be presented, which is derived from the literature review in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the review questions (SQ1 t/m SQ3) will be answered. In Chapter 4 the methodological approach of this thesis is discussed, containing information on the data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the final results of study and an answer will be formulated on the empirical questions presented above. In Chapter 6 the results will be interpreted and discussed. Lastly, this study will be finalized with the conclusion in Chapter 7. In this chapter, the main research question will be answered and recommendations for future policy translation processes and suggestions for future research will be given.

2 Towards a theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the review questions (SQ 1 t/m SQ3) will be answered. These questions include:

1. *How is policy translation defined in scholarly literature?*
2. *What is considered a success in policy translation based on scholarly literature?*
3. *What factors account for a successful policy translation based on scholarly literature?*

In order to create the assessment framework, a review of conceptual and theoretical literature is needed. The necessary data will be collected by performing a literature review. In order to obtain scientific literature, the search engines Google Scholar and Scopus are used. First, the concept of policy translation will be explained in paragraph 2.2 (SQ1). In addition, section 2.3 elaborates on the role of actors in policy translation, to create a better understanding of the process of policy translation. The key-words used to find literature for this section are: *policy translation, policy spreading, policy transfer, politics of knowledge, transnational governance* and *knowledge transfer*. Second, in paragraph 2.4 it will be discussed what is considered a *success* in policy translation (SQ2). The key-words used to find literature to define this concept are: *policy effectiveness, policy success, policy translation/transfer success, policy translation/transfer effectiveness, defining policy success* and *policy success and failure*. In addition, role and importance of actors will be discussed. Lastly, in paragraph 2.5 the factors that are responsible for policy success will be identified (SQ3). Key words to find literature are: *dimensions of policy success, policy mobilities, policy success factors, framework policy translation/transfer, transnational governance factors* and *policy translation/transfer drivers/constrains*. The main findings resulting from the literature review will be used to create the assessment framework.

The search for policy translation literature showed many results. Therefore, in order to keep the search strategy as efficient as possible, an excel sheet was created with all the key-words useful for this study. In the excel sheet the results of every key word was shortly discussed. Useful literature was downloaded into the reference program Mendeley to manage. The excel sheet was a useful tool to keep the researcher from searching the same key words.

2.2 How do we define policy translation?

In this section, an overview of the concepts of policy spreading is presented, in order to formulate an answer to the first sub-question. The spreading and travel of policy ideas is a common phenomenon, especially in public policy (Mukhtarov, 2014; Mukhtarov & Daniell, 2016). In the water sector, many policy models have traveled across jurisdictions, such as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), River Basin Organizations (RBO) and Water User Associations (WUA) (Mukhtarov & Daniell, 2016). These travels happened with the assistance of ‘international intermediaries and interest from adopting parties’ (Mukhtarov & Daniell, 2016, p. 1). Conventional approaches to study the travel of policy ideas are known as *policy transfer, policy diffusion* or *lesson-drawing* (Mukhtarov, 2014). However, these conventional approaches have some shortcomings, essentially in the assumptions made about the engagement of actors in the travel of ideas and its process. For example, conventional approaches often make the assumption that actors are perfectly rational in executing the policy transfers. Whereas in practice, ‘policy transfer is often ‘unsystematic’ and ‘uncoordinated’, and the transfer is more about the ‘policy triggers’, or ideas that inspire development of a policy in a certain direction’ (Mukhtarov, 2014, p. 74). In addition, the words *transfer* or *diffusion* ‘become highly questionable when a transferred policy tool or institution from Country A looks completely different

from Country B (and then again in countries C and D) and when it is operationalized in substantively different fashion than originally conceived' (Stone, 2017, p. 9). So, translating policies is not just a matter of copy-pasting, but the policies need to be modified into the receiving context, considering cultural and environmental differences.

An alternative approach is *policy translation*, which will be the concept used for this study. Policy translation is understood as 'the process of modification of policy ideas and creation of new meanings and designs in the process of the cross-jurisdictional travel of policy ideas' (Mukhtarov, 2014, p. 6). Policy translation differs from the conventional approaches, due to its specific attention to policy actors in the transfer process (Mukhtarov, 2014). So, policy translation is understood as an actor based approach, 'as ideas do not travel by themselves, nor are they pushed around by forces such as regionalization, neoliberalism or globalisation' (Mukhtarov, 2014, p. 76). Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol (2013) emphasize the relative importance of actors. They state that transfers between both similar and dissimilar settings are more likely to be effective when powerful receivers are involved, who are convinced that the new policy is useful. Thus, analyzing a policy translation process starts with understanding how policy actors engage in the complex process of the travel and (re-)embedding of ideas. Actors play an important role in modifying the policy so that it fits into the host context of application. In addition, actors play a crucial role in creating and generalizing the policy model based on the original ideas (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). Analyzing the travel of ideas in terms of translation 'draws attention away from what is transferred to the actors and their efforts in making transfer possible' (Hasan et al., 2020, p. 162).

In conclusion, policy translation is defined as the modification of policy ideas by actors in the process of cross-jurisdictional travel of policies, in order to fit the policies in the adopting context. 'The translation model conceives the spread of a policy model in space and time to be in the hands of people, each of whom may act in many different ways to modify, deflect, betray add on to or appropriate it' (Hasan et al., 2019, p. 1586).

2.3 The role and power of actors in policy translation

As stressed in the previous section, actors play an important role in the translation of policies. In order to translate policies, collaboration between multiple actors from different countries is required, since all of them possess unique resources (Minkman, 2021). To create a better understanding of the process of policy translation, this section elaborates on the different types and roles of actors included in modifying and translating policies.

Both international actors and organized and non-organized citizens are involved in policy translation (Mukhtarov, 2014). Within the development of the MDP, several international actors were involved, including the Dutch. International actors are distinguished in three groups: (1) *International organizations*, (2) *state actors*, (3) *non-state actors* (Breslin & Nesadurai, 2018; Stone, 2004). In literature, the focus on actors have mostly been on *official agencies*, such as *politicians*, *civil servants* and *governance experts*. However, 'key actors in the mechanics of policy transfer are international organizations and non-state actors such as *interest groups and non-governmental organizations (NGO's)*, *think tanks*, *consultant firms*, *law firms* and *banks* (Stone, 2004, p. 550).

All these actors have different roles in the process of policy translation. First, international organizations help to develop common policy responses in some fields (Stone, 2004). This group contains actors with both formal power (e.g. EU or UN) and informal power (e.g. GWP, the World Water Council) (De Boer et al., 2013). Moreover, international organizations are responsible for encouraging exchanges of ideas between countries, both formally and informally (Vinke-de Kruijf &

Özerol, 2013; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). However, international organizations remain dependent on the 'client state' for the implementation of new policies. Therefore, their main tool of transfer is persuasion, since their capacity and powers to impose sanctions is limited (Stone, 2012).

Second, state officials are more involved in the *hard transfer* of policy translation, in which they focus on legislation, regulation and formal decision making (Stone, 2004). Governmental actors include political parties, civil servants and elected officials (Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). The power structures in a country, can affect the process of policy implementation. For example, both Vietnam and Bangladesh are governed highly hierarchical and have a planned economy. Therefore, the government was able to take decisions top-down. As a result, this facilitated the translation of policies, since 'there was limited opposition possible once the plans were embraced by the central government' (Minkman et al., 2021, p. 176).

Third, non-state actors take up an important role in the process of policy translation. Stone (2004) points out that non-state actors in transnational networks are better at the *soft transfer* of policy ideas and are recognized as *soft actors*. Which means, they focus on influencing public opinion and policy agendas. Non-state actors can facilitate the exchanges between actors in several countries. 'Think-tanks or research institutes, consultancy firms, philanthropic foundations, university centers, scientific associations, professional societies, training institutes and so forth help to transfer the intellectual matter that underpins policies' (Stone, 2004, p. 556). Dolowitz & Marsh (2000) point out that policy makers on multiple levels rely on the advice of consultants. Consultants offer advice based upon what they experience as *best practice* elsewhere, paying little attention to the differences of the context of both the receiving and source country. The fact that these soft actors are non-governmental, forms a constraint to their role in policy translation, since they are dependent on national organizations and governments to see policies get implemented. Soft actors lack the power to implement policies on their own (Stone et al., 2020). However, 'while government organizations – ranging from line departments to quangos or specialized office within a ministry – are central to the *hard transfer* of policy tools, legislation or structural adjustment programs through formal decision-making procedures – the *soft transfer* actors are often essential to legitimizing and normalizing policy practices with foreign origins' (Stone et al., 2020, p. 8). Stone (2012) identified three essential support services non-state actors undertake for decision makers: '(1) acting as financiers for the spread and articulation of policy ideas; (2) as resource banks, researchers and advocates of articulation of policy ideas and (3) as coalition builders and network conveners' (p. 494).

Fourth, it should be recognized that policy translation takes place in a network setting which are realized through the interactions between many actors (Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). These networks function as a *vehicle* for knowledge transfer and policy translation (Stone et al., 2020). One of the reasons that many actors are involved in processes as policy translation, is that various resources are needed, owned by different actors (Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). So, policy translation is shaped by multiple actors, who all fulfill a different role. These roles are distinguished in: 'source (donor or exporting actor), receiver (host or importing actor), facilitator (bringing various actors together) or producer (supporting the transfer process by developing knowledge)' (Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013, p. 24). Actors can fulfill multiple roles.

Lastly, according to Bressers & de Boer (2013), the characteristics of the actors are the ultimate driving forces in the translation process. By understanding the 'how, where and why these actor characteristics are influenced by the external context', lessons can be learned related to the effectiveness of policy translation in water governance (Bressers & de Boer, 2013, p. 37). There are three core characteristics mentioned in the literature: (1) motives, (2) cognitions and (3) resources

(power) (Bressers & de Boer, 2013). Motives describe the motivations of the target groups and authorities (Bressers, 2004). Cognitions refers to the information actors are having. Whether those involved have sufficient information, is crucial for the success of policy instruments (Bressers, 2004). In addition, resources describe both power and providing capacity. Power considers 'who is empowered to apply the instrument and how far does this power go?' (Bressers, 2004, p. 294). All the actors identified above have different characteristics, often determined by the group or organization they are part of. It is important to consider the characteristics of actors, since 'ultimately determine the success of any policy and thus policy transfer' (Bressers & de Boer, 2013, p. 37).

2.4 What is considered success in policy translation?

In this section, the different understandings of success are discussed and an answer will be formulated to SQ2. Success is understood in different ways in scientific literature. Multiple scholars address the fact that rather than outright *failure* or *success*, there are multiple dimensions of success in policy translation (Marsh & McConnell, 2010; McConnell, 2010; Stone, 2017). McConnell (2010) introduces the *spectrum of success* ranging from *process success* to *process failure*. Marsh & McConnell (2010) also mention the dimensions of success, distinguished in *process*, *programmatic* and *political*. *Process success* refers to the different stages a policy-making process goes through, such as: exploring, interests consulting and decision-making. *Programmatic success* is more likely to be achieved if sufficiently powerful coalitions are involved and their interests are reflected. Lastly, *political success* discusses whether the policy is successful for the government or governing parties. For example, if the policy is beneficial for their reputation or electoral prospects (McConnell & Marsh, 2010).

Moreover, other understandings of success have been identified in the literature. Stone (2017) identifies that success is qualified by the 'extensiveness of hybridity, synthesis, tinkering with models, adaptation and localisation' (p. 9). Minkman et al. (2018) refers to success in policy translation in terms of (non-) adoption. This is distinguished in three different forms of adoption: *successful adoption*, *formal adoption* and *non-adoption*. A policy adoption is considered successful if the transfer process is completed and the received policy is adopted. We speak of non-adoption if policies that 'were considered but never initiated, or that were initiated but aborted along the way' (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 235). Lastly, policy adoption is considered formal if the policy was adopted, but never enforced or implemented (Minkman et al., 2018). Moreover, McConnell (2010) and Dolowitz & Marsh (2000) both understand policy translation as successful, when the goals that proponents set out are achieved or are perceived as a success by key actors in the political domain. In addition, most policies have numerous goals, in most cases some will be achieved, but not all of them (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Stone, 2017).

Policy translation is often considered a success if it achieves the goals that proponents set out at the beginning. However, it should be noted that 'only those who regard the original goal as desirable are likely to perceive its achievement in this way' (McConnell, 2010, p. 351). Opponents are likely to perceive the policy translation as a failure, disregarding the outcome, because they did not support the goals from the beginning (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). So, it is important to ask 'for whom?' the introduced policy is a success. We should not expect the policy translation is considered a success by all actors, such as governments, politicians or citizens (Park et al., 2014). For example, government actors would already perceive a policy as a success if it assists their reputation, electoral prospects or governance project (Fawcett & Marsh, 2012). Fitzgerald et al. (2019) states that the best measure of success or failure is to identify whether 'support for the policy is durable and few, even erstwhile opponents, would seek to overturn the policy' (p. 8). Lastly, it is important to remember that whether we regard policy translation as a success, is not an objective fact.

In conclusion, success is distinguished in multiple dimensions, rather than outright success or failure. McConnell (2010) elaborates on the spectrums of success, ranging from process success to process failure. Marsh & McConnell (2010) distinguish success in three different dimensions: process success, programmatic success and political success. Minkman et al. (2018) describes success in terms of policy (non-) adoption, which can uptake three different forms: successful adoption, formal adoption and non-adoption. However, it should be noted that it is important to ask 'for whom?' the policy is a success, as we should not expect that the policy translation is considered a success by all actors. An important measure to identify success is the amount of support exists for a certain policy (Fitzgerald et al., 2019).

2.5 Factors accounting for successful policy translation

In order to identify the success factors for Dutch actors in translating policies to the VMD, it is important to understand what factors account for successful policy translation. This section attempts to formulate an answer to SQ3.

Whether a policy succeeds or fails, depends on many factors. In literature, both enabling and constraining factors for policy translation are discussed. The concepts discussed in this section are largely based on the framework developed by Minkman et al. (2018) and is complemented with additional literature. Minkman et al. (2018) are one of the few authors that address the factors that influence the process of policy translation and thereby the outcome. The author points out that 'the framework can also help identify challenges in policy transfer that can be used to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness transferring policies, thus reducing the risk of inappropriate, incomplete or uninformed transfers' (p. 236). The framework exists of five building blocks that will be discussed in this paragraph: *The Environment, Transferability, Process design and Adoptability*.

2.5.1 The Environment

According to Minkman et al. (2018), the first building block in which policy translation takes place, is the 'Environment'. Three different environmental factors are distinguished: the *policy arena*, the *subsystem* and the *general context*. The policy arena describes the space and time in which the policy translation takes place. In addition, it considers the political climate. Following, the subsystem is related to the availability of substitute policies and the political and institutional context. So, the process of policy translation is dependent on the absence or availability of alternative suitable policies (Minkman et al., 2018). Lastly, the general context contains conditions for the policy translation actors and is determined by biophysical, cultural and socio-economic factors.

2.5.2 Transferability

The second building block in which policy translation takes place is *Transferability*, and is determined by several factors. These concern the transferability of the transfer object. First, transferability is determined by the *ability of actors to convey policies*. The image a certain actors has of the source actor, plays an important role in stimulating or discouraging the policy adoption from this actor. For example, for the translation of the DDA in Jakarta Bay, the strong reputation of the Netherlands acted as a legitimate source when the transfer was initiated in 2007 (Minkman et al., 2019). In addition, the legitimacy of actors to transfer or translate policies plays an important role in its context (Minkman et al., 2018).

Second, the *existence of relations* between source, adopting and third party actors can establish a policy translation process more easily. The familiarity with policies elsewhere could increase through existing relations or memberships of international organizations (Minkman et al., 2018). Over the years the DDA has become an international label, and Dutch delta experts have been sharing their

knowledge all over the world, which could increase their publicity (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). In the case of delta governance in Bangladesh, the project was based on years of collaboration and friendship between the Dutch and the Bangladeshis (Hasan et al., 2019).

Third, transferability is determined by the *tolerance* of the actor that is adopting the policy. Tolerance is determined by two factors: the *receptivity* and *decision-making power* of the actor. The receptivity is about the openness of the receiving actor to adopting foreign policies. If such openness is lacking, the translation process will be limited from the start (Minkman et al., 2018). However, in order to adopt policies, having *decision-making power* is crucial.

Fourth, the last factors to determine transferability are *policy features* and *normative fit* (Minkman et al., 2018). Flexible and low context dependent policies increase the extent of success of a policy translation, since they can more easily be applied. However, on the other hand it is important that the policy matches with the political objectives and values of the receiving country (Minkman et al., 2018). Fitzgerald et al. (2019) point out that policies should have clear and achievable goals in order to be successful.

2.5.3 Process design

The process of policy translation is determined by the *process design*, which concerns the ‘set up of interaction between actors exchanging knowledge and in adopting and implementing the transferred policy’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 231). Firstly, the involvement of *actors*, both key actors and coalition building, is crucial for the process design (Hasan et al., 2020; Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). Actors play a key role in the success of the translation. ‘An adopted policy can fail in the final implementation phase as well, because support from executive officials was not secured in earlier phases’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 231). So, as described in the previous chapter, support for the policy is an indispensable factor for achieving success (McConnell, 2010).

Secondly, actors involved in the translation process ‘need to be open to *mutual understanding of and adaptation to values*’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 232). Two way communication is therefore key to achieve success in policy translation (Park et al., 2014). Hasan et al. (2019) also point out that the mutual trust was a crucial ingredient for the transfer of the DDA to Bangladesh. Moreover, many actors emphasize the importance of localizing the policies and including local knowledge (Compton et al., 2020; Stone, 2017; Ugyel & Daugbjerg, 2020). Inappropriate policy translation can occur if policies are insufficiently adapted to the local context (Minkman et al., 2018; Ugyel & Daugbjerg, 2020; Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). In the case of the Great Garuda Sea Wall project, mutual understanding was lacking between the Indonesian government and the Dutch. The lack of progress for this project resulted from a difference in priorities from actors (Colven, 2020).

Thirdly, the *management of the transfer network* is crucial. The transfer can be constrained if a clear hierarchy in the process is lacking. In addition, the availability of a dense policy-network is important for the success of the transfer. A dense network exists of face-to-face interaction and informal relations. In addition, the availability of a dense network ensures the mobilization of resources (Minkman et al., 2018; Stone, 2012). As, Stone et al. (2021) point out, a network functions as the ‘vehicle’ for knowledge transfer.

Lastly, during the process design, the transfer evolves into a certain *transfer type*. Three different adaptation mechanisms can be distinguished: *imitation, adaptation and inspiration*. Imitation can be understood as a ‘quick fix’ for policy makers who urgently need a solution for certain problems. However, imitation is often associated with forms of failed transfer (Minkman et al., 2018). Adaptation incorporates the basic model, but with changes to the receiving context. Inspiration is used to create

new policies, which are based on (elements of) existing foreign policies. In conclusion, the level of coercion plays a role in the translation of policies. 'External pressures can enhance the acceptance of certain policy norms by other countries, for example, when these norms are part of a trade agreement, but may initiate transfers that are inappropriate for the objectives of the adopter or transfers are not completed' (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 232).

2.5.4 Adoptability

The final building block is related to the adoptability of the policy to be transferred. This building block consist of four factors. First, the *suitability* of the transferred policy is crucial in policy adoption. In the context of suitability, we talk about the institutional fit, instead of the normative fit. A more flexible policy can be easier adopted and can reduce the mismatch of policy adoption to a certain degree (Minkman et al., 2018; Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). Complex policies are more likely to stagnate the translation process. 'Simple or simplified policies will require less organizational capacity and are therefore less prone to failure in this phase' (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 233). Moreover, Ugyel & Daubjerg (2020) point out that the establishment of institutions to support the policy translation process is an important factor for enabling translation. In the case of Jakarta, the lack of progress was resulting from the lack of institutional capacity within the national and provincial governments (Colven, 2020).

Second, the *adopting capacity* is necessary for the process. Adoption capacity refers to 'the expertise to search and implement external policies and the organizational capacity to evaluate policies' (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 233). The evaluation of policies is necessary to make sure that only policies with a good fit will be translated to the receiving context. Third, in order to transfer the policies, sufficient *resources* are required. Necessary recourses could be: time and human or financial resources (Minkman et al., 2018). In the translation process of the DDA to Jakarta, there was a limited amount of human resources and time. As a consequence, Dutch consultants took up policy-advising tasks of their Indonesian counterparts to compensate (Minkman et al., 2019).

Lastly, actors should be able to *adapt to change the policy course* in any case. Policy decisions that are previously made, can influence the process of policy translation of new policies, by creating path dependency. Path dependency can be both a beneficial or constraining factor for policy translation, since it affects the ability to change the policy course (Minkman et al., 2018). Here, support is again an important ingredient, since a lack of support from decision makers can result in failure in the final phase. Not the process may be hampered by the lack of support, but the outcome of the policy translation (Minkman et al., 2018).

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter forms the theoretical basis of the assessment framework presented in the Chapter 3. Firstly, policy translation is defined by using scientific literature. Policy translation can be understood as an actor based approach for the travel of ideas. According to Mukhtarov (2014, p. 6), policy translation is defined as 'the process of modification of policy ideas and creation of new meanings and designs in the process of the cross-jurisdictional travel of policy ideas'. In addition, to emphasize the importance of actors in policy translation, a separate paragraph discusses the role of actors in policy translation. Four different roles are distinguished by Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol (2013): source, receiver, facilitator or producer.

Secondly, several understandings of success are obtained from scientific literature. Success can be understood in a spectrum or dimensions of success, rather than outright success or failure. In addition, success can be understood in terms of whether the policy is adopted or not.

Lastly, the potential factors that account for the success of policy translation are defined by using the literature of Minkman et al. (2018). These factors are distinguished over three different building blocks: *the environment*, *transferability*, *process design* and *adoptability*.

3 Assessment Framework

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, the literature on policy translation and success factors for policy translation is explored. In this section, an assessment framework is developed in order to identify the success factors for Dutch actors in the translation process of the DDA to the VMD. In addition, several assumptions are developed based on the success factors in this framework.

3.2 Presenting the assessment framework

In Chapter 2, potential success factors for policy translation are identified. In addition, the different actors and their potential roles are described. These variables form the basis of the assessment framework presented in the figure below (Figure 3). This framework is suitable for this study since, besides success factors, it also recognizes the importance of actors, which is one of the key elements of policy translation.

The framework exists of five building blocks: The Environment, Transferability, Process design, Adoptability and Policy (non-) adoption. First, the environmental factors create the context in which the other building blocks are embedded. Second, transferability discusses the transferability of the policy and the sending actor itself. Third, process design discusses the interaction between the sending and receiving actors. Lastly, the adoptability of the policy is discussed and eventually whether the translated policy is adopted or not. The arrows indicate that the outcomes of these factors influence other building blocks (Minkman et al., 2018).

The framework includes both dependent and independent variables. The independent variables are the success factors distinguished over the three building blocks: Transferability, Process design and Adoptability. The dependent variable is whether the policy will be adopted or not (building block policy (non-) adoption). For this research, the independent variables are central and will be further explored. The framework is slightly modified from the framework of Minkman et al., (2018). One variable has been added in the process design building block: *actor characteristics*. The framework of Minkman et al. (2018) excludes internal characteristics of actors, and mainly focus on relations between actors. According to Bressers & de Boer (2013), the understanding of actor characteristics is crucial to understand the success of policy translation, and therefore indispensable in the framework. The difference between the variables *actor characteristics* and *actor engagement*, is that the focus of *actor characteristics* is on the motivations, cognitions and resources of the involved actors. The variable of *actor engagement* looks more into what actors are involved and their support for the translated policy. As discussed, resources is mentioned as a core characteristics for actors. However, resources in terms of decision-making power and human resources are already included in other factors of the framework. Therefore, only motivations and cognitions will be further explored within the factor *actor characteristics*.

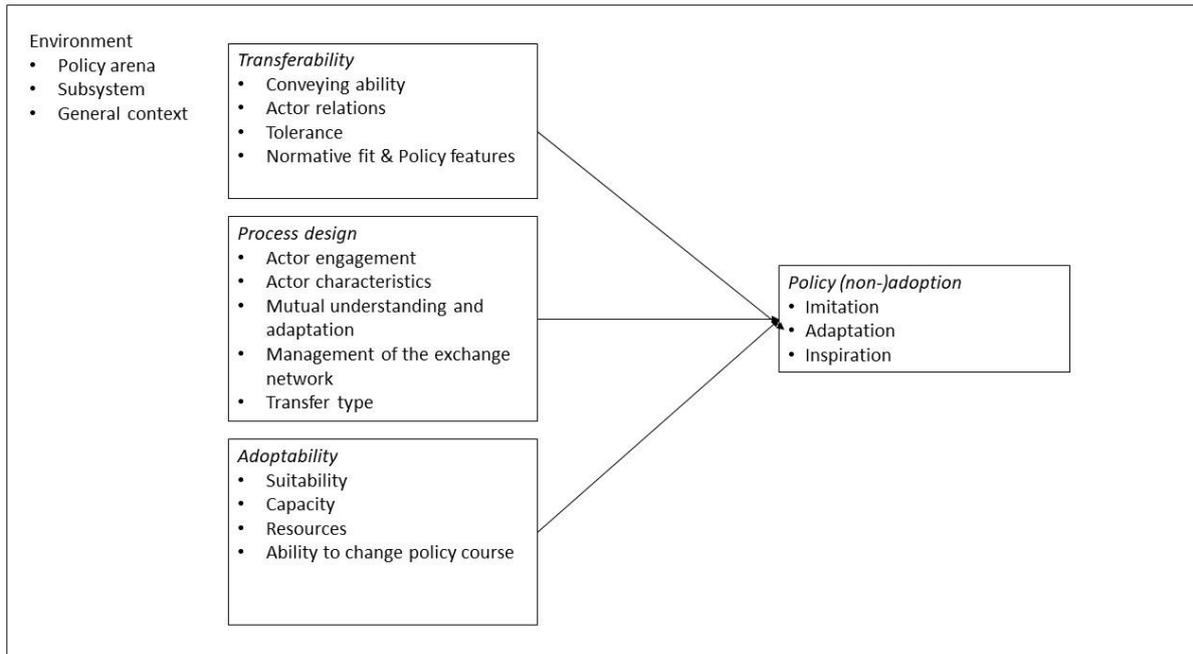


Figure 3 – Assessment framework modified from Minkman et al. (2018). The framework presents the potential factors that account for success in policy translation.

3.3 Assumptions

In the sections below, several assumptions are developed based on the theoretical framework presented in figure 3. In the discussion chapter of this thesis, it will be checked whether the assumptions where true or not.

3.3.1 Assumptions Environment

1. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy is introduced at the right time at the right place.
2. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are no alternative policies in the adopting country.
3. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is limited difference in cultural, socio-economic and biophysical factors between the adopting country and the source country.

3.3.2 Assumptions Transferability

4. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the adopting actors have a positive image of the source actor.
5. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are existing actor relations.
6. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the tolerance of the adopting actor is high.
7. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy is flexible and simplified.

3.3.3 Assumptions Process design

8. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case all stakeholders are engaged and coalitions are built.
9. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case actors are familiar with the local context.

10. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case actors of both countries are open to each other's values, practices and beliefs.
11. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is a clear hierarchical structure in the network.
12. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the Dutch policy is adjusted to the local context.

3.3.3 Assumptions Adoptability

13. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy fits in the institutional context of the adopting country.
14. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the adopting actor has the capacity to search, implement and evaluate external policies.
15. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are sufficient resources available.
16. The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the adopting actor is able to change the policy course.

3.4 Conclusion

The framework presented in Figure 3 resulted from the literature review in Chapter 2. The framework presents 13 independent variables and 3 environmental contextual variables for the success of policy translation. Based on these variables, 16 assumptions are developed. These assumptions will be guiding in the analysis of the policy translation process of the DDA to the VMD.

4 Methods

In Chapter 3 the assessment framework is presented and several assumptions are deductively derived from the literature. The research strategy for this study is built on a combination of empirical and theoretical elements: a literature review, analyzing policy documents and conducting interviews. In this section, an extensive description of the used methods for this study will be presented. First, the method for data collection will be presented. Second, the method of data analysis will be discussed. Lastly, the operationalizations of the variables is presented. The unit of analysis of this thesis is the translation process of the DDA to the VMD.

4.1 Data Collection

In Chapter 2 an extensive literature review is given based on scientific literature. Based on the framework, several assumptions are derived. By analyzing policy documents and conducting interviews, data will be collected in order to test the assumptions presented in Chapter 3.

First, primary data such as policy documents have been collected, e.g. the Mekong Delta Plan (MDP), the Dutch Delta Approach (DDA) and the Dutch Delta Program (DDP) (see Table 1). These documents are analyzed to gain a better understanding of the Dutch-Vietnamese collaboration. The selection of primary data is based on the literature of Laeni et al. (2020), who analyzed several policy documents. In addition, interviewees recommended or mentioned policy documents, such as the Resolution 120. These policy documents are obtained by requests to companies or by doing internet research.

Second, empirical data have been obtained by doing in-depth semi-structured interviews. A list of the interviewees is presented in Table 2. The interviewees are distinguished in four groups: Dutch Government, Dutch Consultants, Dutch Researchers and the Vietnamese Researchers. The distinguishment in this group is made after the interviews were conducted, based on the type of interviews that were collected. The search for interviewees started by contacting the involved consultancy firms, the Dutch embassy in Hanoi and researchers who study the topic of policy translation or the MDP. Thereafter, a snowball-sample strategy was used to gain additional interviewees. A snowball strategy is defined as 'sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants' (Noy, 2008, p. 330). Due to time constraints and a language barrier, it was difficult to involve many Vietnamese interviewees, such as government officials or locals. Using semi-structured interviews increases the reliability of the study, since the method can easily be reproduced. The interviews will be used to collect qualitative data focused on both actors in the Netherlands and Vietnam. In order to increase the construct validity of the interview, the questions are based on the framework presented in Chapter 3. The operationalization of the variables and examples of interview questions can be found in paragraph 4.3. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams under the same circumstances, which increases the internal validity. Moreover, all interviews got the same questions. However, it should be noted that the list of questions slightly changed during the process. By conducting the interviews, it appeared that not all questions were clearly formulated. Also, some questions were added or removed depending on the interviewee, meaning the questions were modified to policy makers, researchers or governmental officials. In addition, the external validity of the interview is high, as interviewees are carefully picked. Furthermore, the data collected by conducting interviews is recorded and transcribed. Permission is asked to the interviewees to record the interview. In addition, the transcriptions are sent to the interviewees, to check whether they agree with the information perceived from the conducted interview.

Table 1 – List of reviewed policy documents and organizations that authored these documents.

Policy document	Organization
Tackling major water challenges: Policy review of Dutch development aid policy for improved water management (2000 – 2016)	IOB (2016)
The Delta Approach	Netherlands Water Partnership (2007)
The Mekong Delta Plan	MARD, MoNRE, Dutch Government, RoyalHaskoning DHV, WUR, Deltares, Rebel, Water.nl (2013)
Strategic watercards: international opportunities for the Dutch water sector	Netherlands Water Partnership (2002)
Working with Water: Dutch Delta Program (DDP)	Delta Commission (2008)
Dutch International Water Ambition	Dutch Government, Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (2016)
Resolution 120	Vietnamese Government

Table 2 - List of interviewee category, number of respondents and organizations that they respondent and in-text references.

Category	# of respondents	Represented organization	In-text references
Dutch consultants	5	Royal HaskoningDHV, Deltares, Dutch Water Authorities	#1, #2, #3, #4, #5
Dutch researchers	4	Wageningen University, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Delft-IHE, Utrecht University	#6, #7, #8, #9
Dutch government	3	Dutch Embassy Hanoi, Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)	#10, #11, #12
Vietnamese researchers	2	Researcher Can Tho University	#13, #14

4.1.1 Data collection empirical sub-questions

The remaining sub-questions are categorized as empirical sub-questions (SQ 4 t/m SQ6). These have been answered by conducting semi-structural interviews and analyzing policy documents. This section shortly describes per sub-question the goal of the sub-question and how the empirical data, necessary to answer the sub-question, was collected.

The **fourth sub-question** is: *What are the key characteristics of the DDA?* This sub-question helps to gain a better understanding of what is translated towards the MDP. This sub-question has been answered by analyzing primary data, such as policy documents. In addition, in the interviews, questions are asked about how the respondent perceives the DDA.

The **fifth sub-question** is: *To what extent can the translation of the DDA to the VMD considered a success?* In order to identify the success factors and answer the main research question, it is necessary to understand if the translation of the DDA to the MDP can be considered a success. This sub-question has been answered by conducting interviews.

The **last sub-question** is: *To what extent are theoretical success factors present in the translation process of the DDA to the VMD?* In order to answer the main research question, it should be studied to what extent success factors identified in the literature are also present in the translation process of

the DDA to the VMD. This sub-question has been answered by conducting interviews and asking questions on this topic. In addition, the MDP, DDA and DDP are analyzed and compared.

4.2 Data analysis

This study is a qualitative thematic research. By analyzing data and supplying empirical evidence, this study has an inductive approach. This section describes how the collected data will be analyzed.

The data collected by doing a literature review have been incorporated in the analytical framework. In addition, the data collected by conducting interviews is recorded and transcribed. Additionally, the transcripts have been organized and coded by using the qualitative research program Nvivo. The codes are distinguished in several themes, linked to the variables presented in the analytical framework. Moreover, in order to give an overview of the results, it is scored whether the factors comply with the preferred conditions for policy translation. The compliance of the success factors is distinguished in three degrees: green, orange and red. Green presents that the factor complies with the preferred conditions for the translation process. Orange presents that the factor only limitedly complies with the preferred conditions for the translation process. Red presents that the factor none to limitedly complies with the preferred conditions for the translation process.

Lastly, 16 assumptions are derived from the assessment framework. These assumptions will be guiding in the analysis of the policy translation process of the DDA to the VMD. In the discussion section, it is discussed whether the assumptions are relevant or not. If necessary, the assumptions are revised.

4.3 Operationalization of the variables

Table 3 presents the operationalization of the variables presented in the assessment framework in Figure 3. For every success factor, an description is given. In addition, the indicators present how the factors will be measured, and example interview questions are presented. Moreover, the type of data collection is added for every factor. The final questionnaire can be found in Appendix-I.

Table 3 – Operationalization of the variables in the assessment framework

Environment			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Data collection</i>
1. Policy arena	Space and time in which policy translation takes place	Was there any competition with peers and how was the political climate designed?	Policy documents, interviews
2. Subsystem	Availability of substitute policies and availability of alternative suitable policies	Where there any alternative policies available, rather than the DDA?	Policy documents, interviews
3. General context	Cultural, socio-economic and biophysical factors that determine the conditions for policy translation actors	What are the main differences between the Vietnamese and Dutch context?	Policy documents, interviews
Transferability			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	
4. Conveying ability	The image of the source actor;	How did the image of the Dutch actors perceived by	Interviews

	legitimacy of the source actor.	the Vietnamese influence the process of translation?	
5. Actor relations	The availability of existing relations between actors	How did the already existing relations between the Dutch and the Vietnamese influence the translation process?	Interviews
6. Tolerance	The receptivity of the actor; decision-making power of adopting actor	How did the openness of the actors influence the translation process? Did adopting actors have decision-making power?	Interviews
7. Normative fit & policy features	The extent of matching values and political objectives; Flexibility of the policy	What are the main characteristics of the DDA? Was the policy considered as flexible?	Policy documents, Interviews
Process design			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	
8. Actors	Involvement of key actors: 1) international organizations, 2) non-state actors, 3) state actors; Coalition building	What actors were involved in the development of the MDP? What roles were designated for the involved actors?	Interviews
9. Actor characteristics	Motivations and cognitions	Does the policy translation of the MDP contribute to the interests and goals of the involved actors? Was the target group sufficiently informed of the potential benefits of the instrument?	Interviews
10. Mutual understanding and adaptation	Understanding and adapting to the values/beliefs of other actors	Were there differences in understanding to values, practices and beliefs between the Dutch and Vietnamese actors? Was the local context sufficiently considered in the MDP?	Interviews
11. Management of the exchange network	Understanding the organizational structure of the network; density of the network; informal relations	How was the network/exchange of knowledge organized? How did this influence the translation process?	Interviews
12. Transfer type	Three different transfer types: imitation, adaptation or inspiration	Where the Dutch ideas adjusted to the Vietnamese context?	Policy documents, interviews
Adoptability			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	
13. Suitability	Institutional fit	Could the MDP be implemented in the VMD? Was the DDA sufficiently simplified?	Interviews

14. Capacity	Expertise to search and evaluate external policies	Does the Vietnamese have experience with projects like the MDP?	Interviews
15. Resources	The availability of human resources, time and/or budget	Where there sufficient resources available for the development of the MDP?	Interviews
16. Ability to change policy course	Ability to deviate from path dependency; Support for the translated policy	What is the next step in delta governance and how is it going to be achieved?	Interviews

5 Results

5.1 Introduction

In this section, the empirical sub-questions (SQ 4 t/m 6) will be answered:

4. *What are the key characteristics of the DDA?*
5. *To what extent can the translation of the DDA to the VMD be considered a success?*
6. *To what extent are the theoretical success factors present in the translation process of the DDA to the VMD?*

First, it will be discussed whether the policy translation of the DDA to the VMD can be considered a success. Second, possible explanations for this outcome will be presented along the potential success factors in the building blocks of the assessment framework: The Environment, Transferability, Process design and Adoptability. The results will give an interpretation of the process of the translation of the DDA to the VMD.

5.2 A successful policy translation?

In order to identify the success factors of the MDP, it is important to understand to what extent the MDP was a success. In addition, it is necessary to identify the key characteristics of the DDA and the MDP. By using policy documents, scientific literature and interview results, an overview of the key characteristics of the DDA is given below.

5.2.1 The Dutch Delta Approach

As discussed previously, the object of translation in this thesis is the DDA. In the last two decades, the Netherlands changed its water management in order to make it 'future proof'. After the flood of 1953, the Dutch realized that infrastructural measures to protect the Netherlands were highly path-dependent and not sustainable. Twenty days after the floods, a Delta Committee by the Dutch government was established, to give advice on the protection of the delta against future flooding (van Buuren, 2019). The delta approach shifted from infrastructural measures towards more adaptive planning and risk assessments (Minkman, 2021). This shift in policy resulted in the DDP, which is an attempt to create path creation rather than path dependency (van Buuren, 2019). This program 'combines 'hard' infrastructure with 'soft' governance measures' (Minkman, 2021, p. 31). Until now, the Dutch have been successful in protecting the country against flooding. As a result, the DDA is world-example of flood protection in low-lying delta areas (van Buuren, 2019).

The Netherlands aim to lead in the area of delta management. International water-oriented collaboration already started to take place in 1990. Initially, the Dutch shared water-expertise as 'development by cooperation', later, this extended to trade (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). In 2011, water management was designated as one of the Dutch 'top sectors', which are sectors in which Dutch companies and institutions are world class (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). In order to stimulate the export regarding water knowledge, the Dutch business community insisted on 'international positioning and branding of the water sector by the Dutch government' (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019, p. 117). As a result, the DDA originating from the DDP, was captured in a policy model called the DDA, which offers an adaptive and integrated way of planning, thinking and acting. The DDA for delta governance is considered to be innovative, since long-term adaptive planning is exceptional in delta management (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019). This approach aims to be suitable for various cultural, social and economic contexts. The main characteristics of the DDA can be summarized as follows:

overall, the DDA (1) provides a broad range of solutions to challenges that deltas face, (2) is an integrated approach, (3) supports multi-level governance, (4) is an adaptive planning approach (Adaptive Delta Management (ADM)), and (5) building upon experience and knowledge which supported risk-based decision making (National Water Partnership, 2014).

When the DDA is translated to another context, it has four main features: (1) it combined a long-term perspective with short term measures, (2) within the adopted approach, resilience and sustainability are integrated with additional needs, (3) it recognizes the importance of social and cultural embedding in the adoption and (4) focusses on the implementation from the outset (National Water Partnership, 2007). While solutions for all delta challenges may be different, the approach for achieving sustainable deltas are the same. In order to target foreign governments, the Netherlands developed the ‘twelve building blocks for a delta approach’ (National Water Partnership, 2014, p. 13) (see figure 4). These are considered as the ‘must haves’ for sustainable delta management, and can be applied to other deltas in other contexts (Minkman & van Buuren, 2019; National Water Partnership, 2014).



Figure 4 - Building blocks of the Dutch Delta Approach. These are the necessary conditions for sustainable delta management (National Water Partnership, 2014).

5.2.2 The Mekong Delta Plan

The Mekong Delta Plan (MDP) was developed as a policy response to socioeconomic and climate change in the VMD. The main goal of the MDP was to contribute to ‘realising and maintaining a prosperous delta, both economically and socially, in which its population can thrive in a vigorous and dynamic economy that is founded on sustainable use of its natural resources, and well adapted changes in water resources and climate’ (MDP, 2013, p. 7). Originally, the translation of the DDA towards the VMD was based on the assumption that the Netherlands and Vietnam face similar

problems regarding climate change, because both are countries with large deltas. So, the problem diagnosis for Vietnam was that the Mekong Delta was not sufficiently prepared to deal with the apparent effects of climate change (Hasan et al., 2019). The MDP was part of the 'Strategic Partnership Arrangement' between Vietnam and the Netherlands, which was signed in 2010. This was a long term collaboration to work on water management and climate change adaptation (Weger, 2019).

In the MDP, the uncertainties and challenges that the delta face between 2013 and 2100 are listed. The MDP presents a long-term vision on agro-business Industrialization as a promising strategy for the future delta. The MDP can be used as a reference document by the Vietnamese government agencies and organizations at different levels. 'As such it provides a tool to support the review, coordination and integration of present and future master plans as well as a guideline towards implementation' (MDP, 2013, p. 7). In addition, the MDP is considered non-binding (Hasan et al., 2019).

Initially, the Terms of Reference for the MDP was based on the principles of the DDA. However, soon it became visible that this was not feasible, and the project stagnated. All involved parties from the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, Dutch Embassy, RVO) were able to be flexible and to adjust the process to make the end product more suitable for Vietnam. However, some characteristics of the DDA can still be recognized in the MDP. The starting point of the development of the MDP were the twelve buildings blocks presented above, which present twelve characteristics of the Dutch work approach (Dutch Government, #11). However, not all characteristics are feasible in another context, e.g. a delta commissioner in Vietnam would be unlikely (Dutch Government, #11). Moreover, some characteristics of the DDA can be recognized in the MDP, such as the long term vision, integrated approach, using scenario's and sustainability, flexibility and solidarity. One of the elements that is not translated is 'finance and implementation', as the MDP does not contain a chapter on the finance and implementation on the plan. Interviewees are also critical about the missing element of 'cooperation with other government levels and all stakeholders'. One of the interviewees stated that "an important element for policy translation is including all stakeholders, well if one thing failed in developing the MDP, it is engaging all stakeholders" (Dutch Consultant, #1). In addition, the DDA also contains some hard elements, but the MDP is mainly based on non-binding "soft" principles, norms and planning ideas' (Minkman, 2021, p. 162).

5.2.3 The success of the MDP

The translation process of the DDA to the VMD is remarkable, as the process did not proceed very smooth (see Table 5). Therefore, it can be argued that the translation from the DDA to the VMD was partly successful. The process of translation faced several challenges. However, the MDP was successfully developed and triggered multiple events after it was finished. Nevertheless, it is difficult to prove whether these multiple events were direct consequences of the MDP. Therefore, it can be argued that the policy is formally adopted, but never enforced or implemented (Minkman et al., 2018). The MDP was inspired by the DDA, as it resulted in 'new policies that are based on elements elsewhere' (Minkman et al., 2018). In the following sections, the translation process will extensively be described in order to support and explain the statement made in this paragraph.

5.2.4 Presence of the success factors

In Table 5 the performance and presence of all factors is analyzed, which will also function as a summary of the results. The compliance of the success factors is distinguished in three degrees, which are explained in Table 4. In the following paragraphs, the choice for green/orange/red per factor will be justified. The justifications will be based on the data retrieved from scientific literature and interviews.

Table 4 – Degrees of presence of the success factors

	Factor is present in the translation process
	Factor is present in the translation process, but only limited
	Factor is none to very limitedly present in the translation process

Table 5 - Presence of the Success factors

Building Block	Factor	Assumption	Present?
Environment	Policy Arena	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy is introduced at the right time at the right place.	
	Subsystem	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are no alternative or policies in the adopting country.	
	General Context	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is limited difference in cultural, socio-economic and biophysical factors between the adopting country and the source country.	
Transferability	Conveying ability	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case the adopting actors have a positive image of the source actor.	
	Actor relations	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case there are existing actor relations.	
	Tolerance	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case the tolerance of the adopting actor is high.	
	Normative fit & Policy features	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case the policy is flexible and simplified.	
Process design	Actor engagement	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case all stakeholders are engaged and coalitions are built.	
	Actor characteristics	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case actors are familiar with the local context.	
	Mutual understanding and adaptation	The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case actors of both countries are open to each other's values, practices and beliefs.	
	Management of the exchange network	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is a clear hierarchical structure in the network.	

	Transfer type	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy is adapted to the local context.	~
Adoptability	Suitability	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy fits in the institutional context of the adopting country.	~
	Capacity	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the adopting actor has the capacity to search, implement and evaluate external policies.	✗
	Resources	The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are sufficient resources available.	✗
	Ability to change the policy course	The chance for a successful policy translation are higher in case the adopting actor is able to change the policy course.	✓

5.3 Environment

The first building block concerns the environmental factors, which play a role during all phases. This building block is distinguished in three different indicators: the policy arena, the subsystem and the general context (Minkman et al., 2018).

5.3.1 Policy arena

It can be argued that **this factor limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions. The policy arena during the development of the MDP was two-folded. On the one hand, the suggestion of the Dutch to develop a delta plan came at the appropriate time. Vietnamese respondents point out that the challenges presented in the MDP were not new, and already identified by other scholars. However, their voices were not strong enough, which resulted in a lack of interest of the Vietnamese government. In addition, the problems became more severe every year, so the Dutch came at the appropriate time with their suggestions to develop a delta plan (Vietnamese Researcher, #14).

On the other hand, the political climate was challenging. The Dutch consultants were teamed up with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). However, these ministries had limited interest in the development of the MDP, which stagnated the translation process.

5.3.2 Subsystem

The sub-system discusses whether there were alternative policies available and the political and institutional context. A policy transfer can be disturbed when there are also other alternative policies available (Minkman et al., 2018). It can be argued that **this factor limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions for the translation of the DDA to the VMD. The development of the MDP is an interesting case as it resulted from a push of the Dutch government, rather than from a request of the Vietnamese counterparts (Minkman et al., 2020). It resulted from the existing bilateral relationship between the

Dutch and the Vietnamese. Therefore, there were no alternative policies on the table. The MDP could be an alternative policy to other programs that have been developed in order to improve the governance of the water system in the VMD (MDP, 2013).

5.3.3 General context

The general context contains conditions for the policy translation actors and is determined by biophysical, cultural and socio-economic factors (Minkman et al., 2018). The political arena in Vietnam is much different than in the Netherlands. Vietnam has a communistic regime, with a very different infrastructural and economic planning system in comparison to the Netherlands. Therefore, **this factor does not comply** with the preferred conditions. The Vietnamese government works with a plan-economy, and creates new plans every five years. In addition, the ministries work with a sectoral approach, which means that all ministries create their plans separately without aligning them with the other ministries (Dutch Consultant, #4). This means that there is no synergy between the plans of the different ministries. The ministries are very powerful, but the prime minister can overrule every decision. Below the national level, there are provincial levels. In the VMD, there are 13 different provinces. The sectoral working approach is also used by the provincial actors. So, the plans developed for the Mekong Delta by one province are not aligned with the plans of other provinces. In addition, there exists competition between the different provinces. For example, almost all provinces located at the coast of the river want to build a harbor as an economic advantage.

5.4 Transferability

The second building block discusses the transferability of the translation object: the DDA. Elements of transferability occur at the early stage of the translation process (Minkman et al., 2018).

5.4.1 Conveying ability

The conveying ability discusses the image of the source actor, perceived by the adopting actor (Minkman et al., 2018). It can be argued that the conveying ability was high during the development of the MDP, and therefore **this factor complies** with the preferred conditions. The Dutch are seen as an important knowledge partner for Vietnam. Other countries, such as Japan and Korea, invest much more money in infrastructural projects in Vietnam. However, despite the limited funding coming from the Netherlands, there is still cooperation between the Netherlands and Vietnam on many levels. For example, there exist many partnerships between Dutch and Vietnamese universities. It is a common phenomenon that Vietnamese researchers are doing their PhD research at Dutch universities, e.g. Wageningen University or Utrecht University (Dutch Government, #12). Moreover, before developing the MDP, the Vietnamese government representatives were invited to the Netherlands to see the Dutch Delta Works (Hasan et al., 2019). By showing the Delta works, the Vietnamese already became familiar with the effectiveness and usefulness of the DDA. These activities results in familiarity of the Vietnamese with Dutch practices, universities and actors. Since the Dutch are not a big donating country for infrastructural projects, they are seen more as a 'knowledge broker' or 'facilitator' (Vinkende-Kruijf & Özerol, 2013)(Dutch Government, #12). A knowledge broker or facilitator is someone who 'moves knowledge around and create connections between researchers and their various audiences' (Meyer, 2010, p. 118).

5.4.2 Actor relations

Existing relations are proven to be beneficial for the process of translation (Minkman et al., 2018). The presence of existing relations had a positive effect on shaping the MDP, and therefore **this factor complies** with the preferred conditions. The Dutch and Vietnamese have a bilateral transnational relationship, which dates back to 1975. One important result of the cooperation between the Dutch

and the Vietnamese is the development of the Mekong Master Plan in 1993 (MDP, 2013). In 2009, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed, to broaden the existing cooperation between the Netherlands and Vietnam in the field of integrated river basin management and coastal management (MDP, 2013). As Vietnam became a middle-income country, the Dutch were looking for a way to reshape the bilateral relationship. So, in 2010 the prime ministers of both countries agreed that they would draft a delta plan for the Mekong Delta together, following the example of the Dutch Delta Program (Minkman, 2021).

5.4.3 Tolerance

The tolerance of the adopting actor refers to the receptivity and decision-making power of the actor. A lack of openness of the receiving actor can limit the policy translation from the start (Minkman et al., 2018). During the development of the MDP, the openness of the Vietnamese actors was only limited, and therefore **this factor only limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions. In general, the Vietnamese are very pragmatic and interested in new ideas. However, they will never blindly copy ideas, and will modify it in their own way. The policy will only be adopted with the support of the prime minister, as other actors lack decision-making power.

During the development of the MDP, the receptivity of the Vietnamese actors was arduous. Initially, the Dutch would assist the Vietnamese in developing the delta plan. However, as described in the *process design* section, it was difficult to form working groups from the Vietnamese side, which stagnated the process. In Vietnam, there was a lot of disagreement between the two involved ministries: the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Therefore, it could be questioned to what extent the Vietnamese actors were open to the ideas of the Dutch, as there was limited interest, resources and ownership from the Vietnamese side to develop the MDP (Dutch Researcher, #8).

5.4.4 Normative fit & Policy features

The normative fit and policy features are determinants for the transferability of a policy. The range of possibilities are increased when a policy is flexible and low context dependent (Minkman et al., 2018). As the DDA is high in flexibility, but low in transferability, it can be argued that **this factor is only limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions. The MDP was developed because the Mekong Delta is facing vulnerability from natural changes. “Not only global climate change, but also negative impacts from flow changes of the Mekong, due to developments in the upstream countries” (Vietnamese Researcher, #13). Initially, the DDA would be the basis of the translation. The DDA is seen as an export product, that could help other countries to develop their delta management (Minkman, 2021). However, during the development of the MDP, the objectives of the DDA were ambiguous. The DDA is presented as an approach which ‘offers new perspectives for protecting and developing delta regions’ (NWP, 2007). It is presented by the Dutch Government as a package which contains of several aspects to offer to foreign parties.

Most respondents are sceptic about the DDA: “I don’t think there is a standard DDA, this also explains why the Dutch Delta Program, Bangladesh Delta Plan and the Vietnamese Delta Plan are all so different, with very different processes. Therefore, there is no universal definition for the DDA” – (Dutch Researcher, #7 & #8). In every country, there is a different local context, different political challenges and different interpretations. It can be questioned whether there exists an DDA, if the processes in all cases are very different. “For that matter, the DDA is just a label” (Dutch Researcher, #8). “The Dutch have been exporting water knowledge for decades now, so the DDA is actually based on experience from the last decades, but then with a new label” (Dutch Consultant, #4). Another interviewee described the DDA as the “coat rack for an integrated approach and inter institutional cooperation, you can’t use a one size fits all approach, but you can use general principles” (Dutch

Government, #12). In addition, the credibility of translating the DDA to the VMD is questioned by several respondents. The challenges for countries as Vietnam and Bangladesh are related to flooding. The Dutch do not have that much experience with floods in the delta, since they are very rare since the flood of 1953. While countries as Vietnam and Bangladesh have much experience with floods and preparedness, and therefore much more knowledge about these situations (Dutch Consultant, #4). In addition, the DDP is developed with the idea that we need to protect what we have. While countries as Vietnam do not want to protect what they have, but they want to develop. “So, this is a critical perspective you could have on concepts coming from western countries, they are focused on integrated water management, rather than integrated water development” (Dutch Researcher, #8). An additional note is the content of the MDP, which is very different from the DDA. Initially, the MDP was going to be primarily water oriented (Hasan et al., 2019). However, in reality the plan is more focused on a sustainable approach for the Vietnamese agro-business. Moreover, one of the respondents argue that this is a logical consequence. “Also in Vietnam water management is needed, but there is always someone who is using the water. So, if you make an integrated water management plan, you should take into account what it means for the users” (Dutch Researcher, #6). If a plan was developed which neglected agriculture, the Vietnamese would possibly have lost interest.

Not all respondents have a negative image of the DDA, as the long term vision and the ‘polder’ approach of the Dutch is unique and very important in delta planning. A positive note of the abstract level of the DDA is the low context dependency, which increases the range of possible applications (Minkman, 2021). In general, the DDA is low context dependent, as it is not tailored to specific biophysical conditions. However, the transferability of the DDA is low in terms of matching values, as the political context of Vietnam is much different, and is not familiar with regional planning.

5.5 Process design

This section elaborates on the process design of the translation. It takes a deeper look into the interactions between translation actors (Minkman et al., 2018). ‘Process design concerns the set-up of interaction between actors exchanging knowledge and in adopting and implementing the transferred policy’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 231).

5.5.1 Actor engagement

The engagement of all actors and the building of coalitions is crucial in the process design (Minkman et al., 2018). In addition, support of all actors is important for the success of policy translation (Minkman et al., 2018). In this study, it is argued that the factor of actor engagement **only limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions, as it was very difficult to include Vietnamese actors.

The Dutch actors can be classified into three groups: government parties, private companies and knowledge institutes. At the government level, the Dutch embassy in Hanoi, the Delta Commission, Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO) and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management were involved. In addition, consultants from private companies were involved, such as Deltares, Royal HaskoningDHV and to a smaller extent Rebel. Lastly, Dutch knowledge institutes were involved, such as Wageningen University. The government parties were accountable for creating the Terms of Reference, and putting the Dutch international water management ambitions into practice. Thereafter, Dutch consultants and experts are hired to work within the scope that is set out by the government parties.

On the Vietnamese side, the ministries MoNRE & MARD were involved. The initial idea was that these two ministries formed a working group to write the MDP together, and the Dutch would

assist them. However, these ministries have a long history of conflicts, and were not very pleased to work together. MoNRE and MARD have overlapping interests. For example, MoNRE is accountable for the water management in the Mekong River, whereas MARD is responsible for the irrigation of water, which is coming for a large extent from the Mekong River (Dutch Researcher, #8). The two ministries displayed little enthusiasm for the idea, and failed in creating working groups. In addition, as the long-term vision of the MDP did not fit in their planning structure, their efforts were very minimum. The Dutch experts who were interviewed, already knew beforehand that it would be difficult to work with these two ministries. One of the Dutch experts mentioned “we knew beforehand that we were working with the wrong ministries. If we were working with another ministry, the process could have been a lot different, but this is the political reality you have to work with” (Dutch Researcher, #7). As MoNRE and MARD seem logical partners to work with due to their area of expertise, initial attempts to mobilize financial resources and create interest failed, partly due to the animosity existing between the two ministries. In addition, these sectoral ministries lack decision-making power to introduce integrated plans (Minkman et al., 2021). Another reason for the lack of interest of the Vietnamese parties, is the lack of funding available for the project. Vietnamese civil servants already have high workload, and did not feel the urgency to do an additional project for which they did not get any extra payment. In addition, they are often not willing to take the responsibility and leadership for such projects, as they will be held accountable if something goes wrong. This resulted in a lack of ownership for the plan. The difficulty in creating working groups, lack of ownership and funding slowed down the whole process. This point could be marked as the event where the process stagnated and a shift needed to be made, since the Dutch were under high pressure of the Dutch government to make the plan a success. Within the Dutch team, a number of changes were implemented, and existing actors were exchanged for new actors. This event was also the moment where the role of the Dutch changed: from assisting the Vietnamese in developing the MDP, towards taking the lead and responsibility for creating the MDP. In order to still involve Vietnamese actors, the Dutch consultants used their personal networks in Vietnam. Eventually, they managed to create a group of Vietnamese actors, also referred to as the ‘retired reformists’. These new actor were individuals of higher age and seniority, who are well known with the system and had contacts in higher levels of the ministries. In Vietnam, older pensioned men who used to have high positions, have an important status and can function as ambassadors to create support for developments such as the MDP.

After finishing the MDP in 2013, there was little support coming from the Vietnamese government. They didn’t quite understand the usefulness of the plan, as it was much different from the plans they knew. For the Vietnamese, a plan was often a series of projects with funding, whereas the MDP was a document with a long term vision. To get support for the MDP anyways, the Dutch embassy played a crucial role in building coalitions with partners. By presenting and explaining the importance of the MDP to big donor parties such as the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the MDP gained much more status. The World Bank saw the MDP as a promising guideline for future investments in the VMD. “In this way, it became not only the story of the Dutch, but also the story of important partners such as the World Bank” (Dutch Government, #11). Vietnam is always looking for investors, and therefore the interests of the World Bank were very important. The mediation of important parties turned out to be crucial for the success of the MDP.

In conclusion, in the beginning of the process it was difficult to build a coalition with domestic stakeholders. Eventually, stimulated by the pressure from the Dutch government, the Dutch actors managed to create progress by compiling a focus group with the ‘retired reformists’. After the MDP was finished, a coalition was built from external support from international organizations such as the

World Bank, JICA and the ADB. The support of these international organizations was crucial for the success of the MDP.

5.5.2 Actor characteristics

By taking a closer look at the motives and cognitions of actors included in the process, the role of actors in policy translation can be better understood. By understanding the ‘how, where and why these actor characteristics are influenced by the external context’, lessons can be drawn related to the effectiveness of policy translation in water governance (Bressers & de Boer, 2013, p. 37). In addition, this section creates an understanding of the roles actors have in translation processes. **This factor limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions for the translation process, as the Vietnamese were very positive cognitions of the Dutch actors. However, the motives of translating the policy were debatable.

Motives describes the motivations for the target groups and authorities (Bressers & de Boer, 2013). According to the MDP (2013), the Vietnamese requested the Dutch to assist in developing a Delta plan for the Mekong Delta, with the goal to protect the delta against the consequences of climate change. However, some of the interviewees suggested that the cooperation between the Dutch and the Vietnamese to develop the MDP resulted more from a push from the Dutch government in order to promote their water sector (Hasan et al., 2019; Minkman, 2021). The Dutch are well known for their knowledge to live and work with water, and they defined the ambition (International Water Ambition) to export this knowledge to other deltaic countries (see chapter 5). “The Dutch promote the DDA as *the best practice*” (Dutch Researcher, #8).

Cognitions refers to the amount of information actors have. The Vietnamese respondents were very positive about the familiarity of the Dutch experts with the VMD: ‘I think sometimes they know our Delta better than we know the Delta ourselves’ (Vietnamese Researcher, #13). The Dutch have been doing research in the VMD for years, which results in much knowledge about the region. Due to the familiarity of the Dutch with the VMD, they had the ability to develop a plan concerning the challenges in Vietnam.

Vinke-de-Kruijf & Özerol (2013) identified four different roles for actors in the process of policy translation: ‘source (donor or exporting actor), receiver (host or importing actor), facilitator (bringing various actors together) or producer (supporting the transfer process by developing knowledge)’ (Vinke-de Kruijf & Özerol, 2013, p. 24). Actors can fulfill multiple roles. During the development of the MDP, the role of the embassy is to represent the Dutch government on the local grounds. So, they are the switch between the Dutch government and the Vietnamese government. The embassy played an important role in creating support for the MDP and living up to the expectations of the Vietnamese side. As the DDA is coming from the Netherlands, the Dutch are seen as the ‘source actor’ (Vinke-de-Kruijf & Özerol, 2013). The Dutch consultants occupy two different roles: facilitator and producer. The Dutch played an important role in gathering stakeholders. In addition, they possessed the knowledge to execute the translation and develop the MDP. Lastly, the consultants played an important part as coalition builders and network conveners (Stone, 2012). From the Vietnamese side, the ministries MoNRE, MARD and the prime minister were involved. In addition, the retired reformists took part in the process. The actors from the Vietnamese side are the ‘receiving actors’ (Vinke-de-Kruijf & Özerol, 2013).

5.5.3 Mutual understanding and adaptation

In order to succeed in policy translation, mutual understanding and adapting to values and beliefs of all actors is of importance (Minkman et al., 2018). **This factor only limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions for the translation process, as mutual understanding was narrow. Dutch

respondents argued that in a foreign context it is crucial to be patient and listen to the counterparts. In addition, it is important to have an understanding of the concerned cultural context. However, within the development of the MDP, there were some difficulties in understanding and adaptation. Strategic documents such as the MDP are developed with a long term vision, which does not suit in the Vietnamese planning structure. Employees of the provinces people committee are looking for funding and projects for the short term, and not for over 20 years. So, conceptually they might see the importance of the vision document, but it is still not relevant for people who are crucial to make the change. There was a high chance that Vietnamese actors took measures that are relevant on the short term, but do not fit in the long term strategy of the MDP. If their term of office ends after five years, it is not their problem if things did not happen in a sustainable way, it is the problem of their successor. So, careers are built in a very different dynamic than in the Netherlands and the way the MDP is developed, which makes implementation very difficult. In addition, Vietnam is often looking for international cooperation to attract investors for the VMD. However, with the cooperation for the MDP, the Dutch brought very little funding, which resulted in loss of interest from the Vietnamese side.

5.5.4 Management of the exchange network

The management of the exchange network is important for the translation of policies (Minkman et al., 2018). **This factor only limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions, due to the difficulty to mobilize Vietnamese actors. The development of the MDP was an assignment within the bilateral relationship between the Vietnamese and the Dutch. The assignment was led by the Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO), who set out the Terms of Reference and hired consultants to develop the plan. The Dutch Embassy was the link between the Dutch Government and the Vietnamese counterparts. Initially, the Vietnamese and Dutch would work together on the plan, but as discussed previously, it was difficult to mobilize Vietnamese actors. Eventually, Dutch actors informed their personal networks to create a focus group with the ‘retired reformists’.

It was difficult to gather information on the management of the exchange network during the interviews. On the basis of the available information it can be argued that there was a hierarchy in the network as there was a clear distinction between the assigning party and the consultants.

5.5.5 Transfer type

During the process design, the type of transfer evolves into a certain form. It can be argued **that the factor transfer type limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions for the translation process. The plan was adapted to the local Vietnamese context, however the Vietnamese counterparts were hardly involved in the development of the content of the MDP. The type of transfer can take three different forms: imitation, adaptation and inspiration (Minkman et al., 2018). As mentioned previously, at the beginning of the process the Terms of Reference was based on the principles of the DDP. The Dutch experts relatively soon noticed that these kind of plans would not be suitable for the VMD. Fortunately, all Dutch actors were relatively flexible in adapting the process so that it would suit in the Vietnamese context more. However, it should not be neglected that there were many challenges along the process. In addition, it should be noticed that the Vietnamese involvement in the content of the MDP was very limited. In that sense, their ideas have not been included as much as they could have been. According to one of the interviewees, the MDP is really adapted to the Vietnamese context and the problems they are facing. “There is nothing Dutch about the plan, also no Dutch solutions, no typical Dutch infrastructure for which we are famous worldwide” (Dutch Researcher, #7). Adapting the MDP to the local context was the only way to get support from local parties. “If this didn’t happen, the MDP would end up as a document on a bookshelf. Then it would not be as well-known as it is today” (Dutch Researcher, #7).

After all, the DDA was an inspiration for the MDP, as it resulted in ‘new policies that are based on elements elsewhere’ (Minkman et al., 2018). Some years after finishing the MPD, the Vietnamese government accepted a new law: the New Law on Planning. In addition, they started to develop a new regional plan. The follow-ups of the MDP will be further discussed in paragraph 5.4.4.

5.6 Adoptability

This section discusses the adoptability of the transferred policy. These factors often occur at a later stage of the policy-making process (Minkman et al., 2018). It takes a deeper look into the institutional fit of the policy, the capacity of the receiving actors and the resources. Lastly, this section elaborates on the ability to change the policy course in Vietnam.

5.6.1 Suitability

Suitability discusses the institutional fit rather than the normative fit, which was discussed in the first building block. The institutional fit of a policy plays an important role, as the policy need to be adopted into a different institutional context (Minkman et al., 2018). However, as discussed in the previous section, the MDP was never a plan in the Vietnamese institutional context, it was solely a vision document which was never implemented. Therefore, **this factor limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions in the translation process, as there was no hard implementation. Due to the flexibility of the DDA, it was possible to develop an integrated long-term vision document, adapted to the Vietnamese context. The flexibility of the DDA reduced the mismatch of the policy in the Vietnamese context (Minkman et al., 2018).

In terms of implementation, a distinction can be made between ‘soft’ implementation and ‘hard’ implementation. Hard implementation is ‘assessed by the extent a plan can be directly linked to outcomes predetermined by it’ (Seijger et al., 2019, p. 2). Soft implementation considers the changed minds and influence on people’s thinking about how challenges in deltas should be addressed. The case of the MDP presents that minds have changed in various levels of the Vietnamese planning system. Furthermore, one of the consultants argues that the development of an integrated vision such as the MDP is important, due to the need to manage the delta as one, rather than in sectors (Dutch Consultant, #4). Therefore, it can be argued that the MDP is ‘softly’ implemented.

5.6.2 Capacity

This factor none to limitedly complies with the preferred conditions for the translation process, as the Vietnamese actors were hardly involved. In order to achieve success in translating policies, it is important to have the local capacity in order. Local capacity refers to the ability and expertise to search, implement and evaluate external policies (Minkman et al., 2018). The Vietnamese counterparts need to understand the new concepts and need to be able to apply these. To achieve this, it is very important for Dutch consultants to work together with local parties. By collaboration, development of policies that lack a good basis or are not suitable in the local context can be prevented (Dutch Government, #11). However, as there was very little collaboration, the capacity was not in order.

5.6.3 Resources

Resources are crucial for the adoption and integration of a translated policy (Minkman et al., 2018). **This factor none to limitedly complies** with the preferred conditions for the translation process, as for the development of the MDP, there was a limited availability of resources. The development of the MDP is entirely financed by the Dutch, which made the amount of funding very limited. In the initial terms of reference, the Dutch and Vietnamese decided to co-fund the project. They would both pay

for their own input. However, as it was difficult to mobilize the Vietnamese ministries, finance was only coming from the Dutch side. Only after the MDP was developed, the World Bank offered investments for further developments in the VMD.

In addition, the amount of human resources was also limited. One of the respondents explained that the team who developed the MDP was relatively small. However, there was always political support coming from the Dutch government. If the process stagnated, a Dutch government official traveled to Vietnam to offer help.

Lastly, due to the stagnation and arduous character of the process, there was very limited time to develop the final MDP. When the team changed on the Dutch side, there was only a month left to develop the first draft of the MDP (RoyalHaskoning DHV, #1). Fortunately, all respondents were pleased with the result of the MDP, even with limited funding, as it was the start of a change in the delta management approach of the Vietnamese.

5.6.4 Ability to change the policy course

It is argued **that this factor complies** with the preferred conditions in the process of adoption, as support was gained for the MDP, and several subsequent events were triggered by the MDP. Adopting actors should have the ability to change the policy course. The lack of ability to change the policy course could lead to the abortion of the translation at any time (Minkman et al., 2018). As the MDP was ‘softly implemented’, it led to a series of changes. First, the World Bank and other donor parties (ADB, IUCN, IFAD and development cooperation agencies of Australia, Finland, Germany and Japan) showed interest in the MDP, and offered to keep investing in the Mekong Delta with the MDP as a guideline. In 2013, the Vietnamese acknowledged the MDP as a ‘reference document for reviewing and revising their socio-economic, spatial and sectoral master planning in future’ (MDP, 2013, p. 13). The support of these international organizations was crucial, as a lack of support from these crucial actors could have led to implementation failure (Minkman et al., 2018). In addition, many interviewees emphasize the importance of support from all actors as a crucial factor for success.

Second, in October 2017, the Vietnamese government approved the New Law on Planning, which ‘establishes a new system of national plans, regional plans and urban and rural plans, and sets down a number of planning principles’ (MekongDeltaPlan.com, n.d.). With the arrival of the New Law on Planning, planning periods would last ten years, rather than five years. In addition, plans need to correspond with the developed socio-economic strategy, and engage a vision of 20-50 years (MekongDeltaPlan.com, n.d.). The New Law on Planning was the first step to make the implementation of integrated long-term planning possible. In November 2017, the Vietnamese government presented the ‘Resolution 120’, which integrated the principles of the MDP (Hasan et al., 2019). One of the suggestions made in the Resolution 120, was to create a new master plan for the sustainable development of the delta. This plan is known as the Mekong Delta Regional Integrated Plan (MDIRP), and is still in development. The development of the MDIRP started in 2019, and is the first master plan under the New Law on Planning. To develop the MDIRP, the Vietnamese government presented a tender, which was won by Royal HaskoningDHV. The development of the MDIRP is much different than the MDP, as the call was now coming from the Vietnamese government. Therefore, in contrast to the MDP, the MDIRP is a Vietnamese plan rather than a Dutch plan. The main goal of the MDIRP is to break through the sectoral planning system which is currently the situation in Vietnam. As discussed before, in a sectoral planning system, national, provincial and sectoral plans are developed parallel and do not take into account other plans. The goal of the MDIRP is to function as the assessment framework in which all projects of ministries and provinces must comply. “This is a drastic reform, in which all ministries reluctantly go along, but they know that they have to” (Dutch Researcher, #7). However, one of the Dutch consultants still have some concerns about the implementation of the MDIRP, as it

introduces a new regional level between the existing provincial and national institutions. “Currently, it is not clear who the owner is of the plan. If it is not clear who is responsible for the plan and who is testing projects within the regional vision, implementation is very difficult” (Dutch Consultant, #2). In addition, such a radical change in governance structure is not easy. “Changing the governance structure is difficult, as people still work in sectors and in silos. I think this will be a trajectory of many years” (Dutch Government, #12).

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This study contributes to the literature on policy translation, by finding empirical evidence for the mobilization of policies. The travel of policies is studied through the concept of policy translation. Policy translation differs from other approaches, due to its specific focus on actors in the transfer process (Mukhtarov, 2014). This study shows that policy translation is a suitable approach for studying the travel of policies, as actors played an important role in adopting the DDA to the VMD. Interview respondents argue that the DDA differs in every context, and therefore the policy travels not by itself, but is modified by involved actors to fit the adopted policy in the host context. This is linked to Mukhtarov (2014), who states that ‘ideas do not travel by themselves, nor are they pushed around by forces such as regionalization, neoliberalism or globalisation’.

In this section, first, the extent of success of the MDP is revisited. Second, the assumptions will be revisited, and their relevance will be argued. Lastly, the limitations of this research will be discussed.

6.2 Success revisited

In order to identify the success factors of the MDP, it is important to understand to what extent the MDP was a success. In this section, the degree of success of the MDP is revisited. It can be argued that the translation from the DDA to the VMD was partly successful. The process of translation was very arduous and faced several challenges. Four main challenges were identified in the translation process of the DDA to the VMD. First, the MDP was the result of a ‘policy push’ from the Dutch, rather than a voluntary translation. Second, it was difficult to mobilize Vietnamese actors, as the assigned ministries MoNRE & MARD failed to create working groups. Third, after finalizing the MDP, there was very little support for the plan from the Vietnamese counterparts. After efforts of the Dutch embassy, support for the MDP was gained by powerful donor organizations such as the World Bank. This was very important, as the importance of the MDP was now backed by the World Bank, rather than only by the Dutch. Without the support of the big donor organizations, there was a plausible risk that the translation of the DDA to the VMD would have resulted in translation failure. Fourth, the content of the MDP also gains a lot of critics from the respondents. Critical respondents argue that the content of the MDP is questionable, as the final product is primarily focused on agro-business rather than on strategic planning for climate resilience. However, as agro-business is crucial for the economy of Vietnam, this topic could not be neglected in the MDP.

Despite the arduous translation process, the MDP was successfully developed and triggered multiple events after it was finished. Nevertheless, it is difficult to prove whether these multiple events were direct consequences of the MDP. The argument that the translation process was only partly successful, emphasizes that there are multiple dimensions of success, rather than outright success or failure (Marsh & McConnell, 2010; McConnell, 2010; Stone, 2012). Therefore, using the dimension of success of Marsh & McConnell (2010) – *process success, programmatic success and policy success* – might be suitable for this research. These dimensions are expected to be relevant for this study, as they are also used by Fawcett & Marsh (2012) to explore the success of policy transfer in Australia. As can be seen in Table 5, the process design of the development of the MDP was arduous. This stagnated the process of translation as ‘factors related to the process design play a crucial role in policy transfer processes and the ultimate success or failure of such a process’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 235). Therefore, it can be argued that in terms of the dimensions of success of Marsh & McConnell (2010), the translation of the DDA to the VMD is a programmatic and political success. The translation was a

programmatic success, as the policy reflects the interests of a powerful coalition, namely the one of the prime minister. By gaining the support for the World Bank, possibilities for additional investments for the VMD arise. In addition, a new vision was developed for the future of the MDP. For the same reason, the translation process was a political success, as additional finance for the VMD resulted from the project. Lastly, it should be questioned *for whom* the translation is a success, as it should not be expected that all parties agree whether a particular policy is successful (Park et al., 2014). So, for the Vietnamese counterparts the development of the MDP can be seen as a success, as it lead to interests and investments for the VMD from important parties. In addition, the development of the MDIRP with a new governance perspective for the delta, is of high importance to protect the delta from future threats. For the Dutch, the MDP is considered successful, as this was the first successful attempt in translating the DDA to a foreign context. This resulted in additional projects, such as the Bangladesh Delta Plan.

6.3 Assumptions revisited

This section discusses the relevance of the assumptions presented in chapter 3. By analyzing the results, the relevance of the assumptions is argued.

A1: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy is introduced at the right time at the right place.

This assumption is relevant, as the introduction of the MDP at the right time and at the right place had a positive impact. Vietnamese researchers already identified the challenges the VMD was facing in a much earlier phase, but their voices were not strong enough. This resulted in a lack of interest from the Vietnamese government. The problems in the VMD became more severe every year, so when the Dutch identified the problems in the VMD, interest was gained from the Vietnamese government. The voices of the Dutch were stronger, which made them heard.

A2: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are no alternative policies in the adopting country.

The relevance of this assumption is difficult to argue in the case of the MDP. The development of the MDP differs from most translation processes, as it resulted rather from a push from the Dutch government, than from a request of the Vietnamese counterparts (Minkman et al., 2020). Therefore, there were no alternative policies on the table, and the transfer was not disturbed by this. However, it is argued by Minkman (2021) that policy translation that result from a policy push are more likely to lead to a translation failure. However, due to the lack of alternative policies during the development of the MDP, the assumption is considered relevant.

A3: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is limited difference in cultural, socio-economic and biophysical factors between the adopting country and the source country

This assumption is considered relevant, as the difference in cultural, socio-economic and biophysical factors between the Netherlands and Vietnam disturbed the translation process. Vietnam has a communistic regime, with a very different planning system in comparison to the Netherlands. So, the prime minister can overrule every decision, where others lack decision-making power. In addition, in Vietnam there is no synergy between the plans of the different ministries, as they work with a sectoral approach. Therefore, the long-term and integrated vision of the MDP did not fit in the planning structure of Vietnam.

A4: The chance for successful policy translation will be higher in case the adopting actors have a positive image of the source actor.

This assumption is considered relevant, as the positive image of the source actors was beneficial for the translation process. The Vietnamese and the Dutch have already executed several projects together, such as the Mekong Master Plan in 1993. Previous successes resulted in a positive image of the source actor. In addition, before starting the development of the MDP, the Vietnamese were invited to admire the Dutch Delta Works. This had a positive effect on the Vietnamese counterparts, as it showed the expertise of the Dutch in water management. In conclusion, these two processes contributed to mutual trust between the Dutch and Vietnamese.

A5: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case there are existing actor relations.

This assumption is considered relevant, as existing actor relations were an important factor of success for the MDP. Due to a long lasting bilateral relationship between Vietnam and the Netherlands, both the source and the sending actors were already familiar with each other. Laeni et al. (2020) also emphasizes the importance of actor relations, as he states that: 'engagement of, and communication with, local stakeholders over a longer period of time is a prerequisite for implementing the translated concepts in practice and thus ultimately for contributing to sustainable delta management' (p. 28). In addition, since Dutch consultants involved in the development of the MDP already worked in Vietnam before, they had the ability to consult their personal networks in Vietnam.

A6: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case the tolerance of the adopting actor is high

This assumption is considered relevant, as this study shows that high tolerance is an important factor to smoothen the translation process. Due to the limited tolerance of the Vietnamese, the translation process was stagnated. It was difficult to mobilize Vietnamese actors, due to the animosity between the two involved ministries: MoNRE & MARD. In addition, the MDP did not really fit into the planning structure of Vietnam, which resulted in limited efforts from their side. Therefore, it could be questioned whether the Vietnamese were very open to the ideas of the Dutch.

A7: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case the policy is flexible and simplified.

This assumption is relevant, as it is proven in this study that a flexible and simplified policy model such as the DDA has a higher chance of success. The DDA as a policy model gained a lot of critics, however, it resulted in the development of the MDP. The transferability of the DDA is low in terms of matching values, as the political context of Vietnam is much different, and therefore the plan did not fit in the Vietnamese planning structure. However, the DDA can be understood as a flexible policy, as it is low context dependent and not tailed to specific biophysical conditions. Due to the low context dependency of the DDA, the range of possibilities for applications are increased (Minkman, 2021). However, it could be questioned to what extent the DDA can be considered a policy model, if the outcome and the focus for all cases (e.g. Bangladesh Delta Plan) is very different. Stone (2017) argues that 'viewing policy translation as a combination of art, episteme and judgement entails a different set of reflections upon policy diffusion and transfer: it means that we will never see some form of perfect 'cloning' of a policy between different places. Instead, policy translation embraces deviation and difference' (p. 12). So, this argument shows that policy models are always bound to change, depending on the context they are in.

A8: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case all stakeholders are engaged and coalitions are built.

This assumption is considered relevant, as it can be argued that the engagement of key actors is a crucial factor for success in policy translation. According to Minkman (2021), the engagement of all key stakeholders is essential in the process of policy translation (Minkman et al., 2018). In the development of the MDP, the engagement of the Vietnamese counterparts was very limited. One of the respondents argued that “if one thing failed in developing the MDP, it is engaging all stakeholders” (Dutch Consultant, #1). As a consequence, the role of the Dutch shifted from assisting the Vietnamese in developing the MDP, towards taking the lead and the responsibility for the process. Due to the limited engagement of key actors, there was limited ownership for the MDP from the Vietnamese counterparts. Several interviewees emphasize the importance of ownership for the success of policies. In addition, the inclusion of local actors is crucial. One of the interviewees states that if there is limited ownership or inclusion from local actors, projects are often not proceeded.

A9: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case actors are familiar with the local context.

This assumption is relevant, as the familiarity with the Vietnamese context was necessary to adapt the DDA to the local context. Several interviewees argue that the Dutch are very familiar with the context of the VMD. For many years, Dutch researchers are involved in studies about the VMD. In addition, it is a common phenomenon that Vietnamese researchers are doing their PhD research at Dutch universities, e.g. Wageningen University or Utrecht University.

A10: The chance for a successful policy translation will be higher in case actors of both countries are open to each other’s values, practices and beliefs.

This assumption is relevant, as high mutual understanding might result in more ownership. During the development of the MDP, mutual understanding and adaption was limited. With the development of the MDP, there were some difficulties in understanding and adaptation. As described before, a long-term vision document as the MDP did not fit in the planning structure of Vietnam. The dynamics and culture around careers in Vietnam are much different in comparison to the Netherlands. Moreover, Vietnam is often looking for international cooperation to attract investors for the VMD. However, with the development of the MDP the Dutch brought very little funding, which resulted in a lack of interest from the Vietnamese side. Therefore it could be argued that during the development of the MDP, the mutual understanding of the values, practices and beliefs was limited.

A11: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there is a clear hierarchical structure in the network.

This assumption is considered relevant. It can be argued that there was a dense policy network, containing face-to-face interaction and informal relations. The involved consultants consulted their informal networks to create the group of ‘retired reformists’. In addition, there was a clear distinction between the assigning party (RVO) and the consultants. The embassy functioned as an intermediary agent between the Dutch government and the Vietnamese government.

A12: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the Dutch policy is adjusted to the local context.

This assumption is considered relevant, as the adaptation to of the policy to the local context was crucial for the success of the MDP. Previously, the Dutch tried to translate their knowledge into the concerned context, whereas in the last decade the Dutch are combining local knowledge with Dutch

knowledge and experience. “Starting with *bring in the Dutch* and telling people how they should approach their water management, towards combining local knowledge and local challenges with Dutch knowledge and experience” (Dutch Government, #12). This shift is an interesting change over the last years. However, as much knowledge the Dutch water experts might have, they never have the same knowledge about the local systems as the local experts. The adaptation of the policy to the local context is crucial for success. Minkman (2021) emphasize that the choice for a particular policy issue related to the challenges of the concerned context ‘could make or break’ the success of the policy translation (Minkman et al., 2021, p. 177). In the case of the MDP, the adaption of the delta plan to the challenges in the VMD was crucial for the success of the MDP. The World Bank recognized the importance of the MDP, and proposed to use the MDP as the guidelines for future investments in the VMD.

A13: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the policy fits in the institutional context of the adopting country.

This assumption is partly relevant, and will be revisited at the end of this chapter. Due to the flexibility of the DDA, it was possible to develop an integrated long-term vision for the VMD. However, the MDP was never a plan in the Vietnamese institutional context, it was solely a vision document which was never implemented. The MDP is only ‘softly’ implemented, as it changed and influenced the minds of people about the governance of delta. This is not surprising as the involved Dutch consultants are *soft actors*, who focus on influencing public opinion and policy agendas. As hard implementation was not possible, it can be argued that the MDP did not fit in the institutional context of the adopting country. However, it could be questioned to what extent this is problematic, as Vietnam was in desperate need of a change in the governance approach of the VMD. If the MDP was developed within the institutional context of Vietnam, it would have been difficult to make a long-term vision document with an integrated approach. However, this integrated long-term vision was exactly what Vietnam needed in order to improve their delta governance. So in conclusion, implementation is probably easier if the policy fits in the institutional context. However, it could be questioned whether that always leads to the wanted change.

A14: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case the adopting actor has the capacity to search, implement and evaluate external policies.

This assumption is considered relevant, as it could be argued that in order to implement policies, it is crucial to have the capacity of the local actors in order. The capacity of the Vietnamese actors during the translation process was limited. The Vietnamese counterparts had difficulty in understanding the usefulness of the MDP. As the development of the MDP was mainly executed by the Dutch, the Vietnamese were only very limitedly involved in the process of policy translation. This resulted in a lack of ownership. Therefore, it could be questioned to what extent the destinations actors were sufficiently equipped ‘to organize the process of searching and implementing external policies’ (Minkman et al., 2018, p. 233).

A15: The chance for a successful policy translation is higher in case there are sufficient resources available.

This assumption is relevant, as lack of resources stagnated the development of the MDP. During the development of the MDP there were very limited resources available. There was very limited funding, as only the Dutch mobilized financial resources. In addition, due to the arduous process, there was very limited time in the end to create the MDP. Several interviewees argue that more financial resources would smoothen the process, as it could be helpful to mobilize Vietnamese actors if their efforts could be rewarded. Therefore, it could indeed be argued that the chance for a successful policy

translation is higher in case there are sufficient resources available. However, the development of the MDP showed that also with limited resources, change can be made.

A16: The chance for a successful policy translation are higher in case the adopting actor is able to change the policy course.

This assumption is relevant, as this study shows that this factor was very important in order to achieve the predefined goals for the VMD. The MDP was partly a success due to the ability of the Vietnamese to change their policy course. Because of to the support from important actors for the MDP, such as the World Bank, also the Vietnamese actors recognized the importance of the MDP. This led to a change in policy course, as the Vietnamese initially use a sectoral approach. By adopting the New Law on Planning, the Resolution 120 and the development of the MDIRP, they are making progress towards a more regional and integrated approach for delta management. The importance of support of all actors was also mentioned as a crucial success factor by the interviewees. As one of the creators of the MDP stated: 'without support, the MDP remained a document on a bookshelf' (Dutch Researcher, #7). This is also in line with the finding of Fitzgerald et al. (2019, p. 8), who stress that 'the simplest and perhaps best available measure of success or failure is whether support for the policy is durable and few, even when erstwhile opponents, would seek to overturn the policy'. Therefore, the ability to change the policy course was crucial to steer the governance of the VMD towards a more integrated long-term vision.

6.3.1 Conclusion

In the section above, it is discussed whether the assumption derived from the framework are relevant or not. In general, all assumptions are proven to be relevant by exploring the translation process of the DDA to the VMD. However, two factors show surprising results: Suitability and Resources. First, the factor Suitability shows that even if a policy model does not fit in the receiving political context, the plan can still trigger change. As the MDP was not implemented in Vietnam, it still triggered subsequent events which resulted in a changed governance perspective of the Vietnamese for the development of the VMD. In addition, the factor resources shows that even with little resources, change can be made. Limited resources were available during the development of the MDP, however, the Dutch experts still managed to develop a delta plan, which changed the minds of the Vietnamese.

6.4 Limitations of the research

This study has several limitations: the perspective of the study, the identification of success factors, the choice of case study, the recall bias and the justification of the results. In this section, these limitations will be discussed in more detail. In addition, the analytical framework will be revisited.

First, Minkman (2021) states that research on policy translation should take into account the perspectives of both the sender and the receiver. However, in this study the perspective of the receiving side is only limitedly involved, due to time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it more difficult to gather Vietnamese respondents. In addition, only Vietnamese respondents who speak English could be involved in the study, which biases the study. Local Vietnamese actors are excluded from the study, while their perspective would be very valuable for this study.

Second, Hasan et al. (2019) point out that policy translation is a process of trial and error, therefore it is difficult to define (and generalize) contextual factors. In addition, effective policy translation can not be explained by one single factor. Success in policy translation results from a combination of different factors. Factors that play an decisive role in this case, may be insignificant in another case (Minkman, 2021). Additionally, it could be questioned to what extent the development

of the MDP was a suitable case study for the exploration of success factors. As described in this study, the process was very arduous and the process was only partly successful. However, the outcomes of this study are still relevant for future research or to derive recommendations as they provide interesting insights.

Fourth, as the development of the MDP is already some years ago (in 2013), this sometimes led to a recall bias. Some respondents had difficulties with remembering details about the policy translation process. As a result, it could be possible that things are missing in this study.

Fifth, the justification of the results of this study would be stronger if also other cases were included, e.g. Bangladesh Delta Plan and the National Capital Integrated Coastal Development project in Jakarta. The framework could be applied to multiple cases, in order to see which factors were successful in all cases. However, due to time constraints it was not possible to include additional cases.

Lastly, the modified framework of Minkman et al. (2018) also has some limitations. For example, the framework used is based on literature on transfer in western countries. However, it proved to be still useful for analyzing policy transfers of the DDA to Asian countries. In addition, some indicators of the framework can be interpretative, despite the explanation of the factors in Minkman et al. (2018). What I understood as tolerance can be understood differently by another researcher. However, the framework was a very useful guideline for analyzing the process of translation. Moreover, during the development of the framework, the focus was on 'voluntary transfers' (Minkman et al., 2018). It could be questioned whether the translation from the DDA to the VMD was a voluntary transfer, as it resulted from a policy push (Minkman, 2021). Therefore, the suitability of this framework for the case study of the MDP could be further explored. Some suggestions for the improvement of the framework can be made. For example, clear measurable indicators could be added in order to prevent misinterpretations of the variables. In addition, by conducting the interviews, 'ownership' was emphasized as an additional success factor, and could therefore be included in the framework. The arduous process of the translation of the DDA to the VMD was partly the consequence of lack of ownership from the Vietnamese side. Ostrom et al. (2002) already emphasized the importance of ownership in international aid and trade relations in 2002. Lastly, I am the only researcher who scored to what extent the factors complied with the preferred conditions for policy translation (Table 5). In a more ideal scenario, additional independent researchers would also score the success factors.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study aims to reduce the knowledge gap in the literature by exploring the process of policy translation. The goal of this study is to explore the success factors and feasibility of the translation of the DDA to the VMD. This study answers the following research question: *What factors account for the success of Dutch actors in translating the DDA to the VMD?* In order to formulate an answer to the research question an analytical framework is derived from the literature. In addition, fourteen in-depth interviews are conducted and seven policy documents have been analyzed.

In this section, an answer is formulated to the research question presented above. In addition, recommendations for policy makers and future research are suggested

7.2 Success factors for policy translation

The results have shown that actors play an important role in the translation of policies, by modifying the policies in the receiving context. By analyzing the translation process of the DDA to the VMD, three crucial factors for success are identified: **(1) actor relations**, **(2) conveying ability** and **(3) the ability to change the policy course**. By conducting the interviews, also an additional success factor is identified: **ownership**. During the development of the MDP, there was a lack of ownership for the plan from the Vietnamese side. This resulted in an arduous process and a lack of involvement of Vietnamese actors. Several interviewees argued that ownership is a crucial factor for achieving success in developing delta plans.

The factors mentioned above proved to be crucial for the success of the development of the MDP. Moreover, it should be noted that the remaining success factors explored in this study are also of high importance. However, these played a less decisive role during the development of the MDP.

7.3 Recommendations and future research

This section proposes several recommendations for policy makers who are involved in policy translation processes. In addition, suggestions for future research are made.

First, the Dutch are actively promoting their water expertise by introducing new programs. One of the most recent projects is the Blue Deal Program, which is waiting to get started after the dangers of COVID-19 has passed. The exploration of the success factors in the translation of the DDA to the VMD, can provide lessons learnt for upcoming projects, such as the Blue Deal. The results from this study have shown that in order to increase policy success, translation processes should be based on voluntary transfers. In addition, maintaining actor relations is crucial for creating trust. Moreover, the conveying ability of actors contributes to increasing trust of the adopting countries. A suggestion to increase conveying ability for a certain policy, could be to show how the policy works in the sending country. Before developing the MDP, the Vietnamese counterparts were also invited to the Netherlands to see the delta works we are famous for. Lastly, it is crucial that the receiving country has the ability to change the policy course, as a lack of support in the final phase can result in policy failure (Minkman et al., 2018). A suggestion to increase the ability to change the policy course of the receiving country is to offer 'aftercare'. After the development of the MDP, aftercare of the Dutch embassy resulted in support by powerful donor agencies that were essential for the success of the MDP. A last recommendation is to increase ownership, which can be done by including local actors and develop the plan in cooperation.

Second, in order to improve future processes of policy translation, some suggestions for future research can be made. To begin with, the importance of context in policy translation needs more research. As the translation of the DDA to different contexts (Vietnam, Bangladesh and Jakarta) gave very different processes and results, studying the influence of context is relevant. In addition, an interesting case for future research would be to what extent the strategic choices made in the MDP will be included in the MDIRP, which will function as the assessment framework for projects in the Mekong Delta (Seijger et al., 2019). Lastly, future research could be done about the success and usefulness of the MDIRP.

In conclusion, this leaves us with the question whether to bring in the Dutch? This study shows that Dutch policies can function as an inspiration for policies elsewhere. However, copy-paste is never the answer. Adaptation to the local context and including local partners is indispensable to achieve success.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Questionnaire

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Question</i>
General		In what way have you been involved in developing the MDP?
		What was your role in developing the MDP?
Process design	Actors	What actors were involved in the development of the MDP? Both Dutch and Vietnamese What was the role of Dutch actors? Were there also local actors involved?
	Actor characteristics	Did the development of the MDP contribute to the interests and goals of the involved actors? Were the Dutch sufficiently informed about the context/goals/etc in Vietnam?
	Mutual understanding and adaptation	Were there differences in understanding between the Dutch and the Vietnamese? How did this influence the process?
	Management of the exchange network	How was the network of actors organized? Hierarchical or flat? How did this influence the translation process?
	Transfer type	Were the Dutch ideas adjusted to the Vietnamese context?
Transferability	Conveying ability	How were the efforts of the Dutch actors received by the Vietnamese?
	Actor relations	Were there already existing relations between the Dutch and the Vietnamese? Were they helpful for the development of the MDP?
	Tolerance	Were the involved Vietnamese actors open to adopt a policy from elsewhere? Did the involved actors have decision-making power? / How was power distinguished between the group of actors?
	Normative fit	Did the policy match with values and political objectives of the receiving actors? Was the translation of the DDA a flexible approach?
Adoptability	Policy features	Is the DDA a suitable approach for the Vietnamese context? Was DDA a flexible approach?
	Suitability	Could the MDP be implemented in the VMD? Why?
	Capacity	Does the Vietnamese have experience with international projects, similar to the MDP?
	Resources	Were there sufficient resources available for the development of the MDP? In terms of: time, budget, human resources.
	Ability to change the policy course	What is the next step in delta governance and how is it going to be achieved?
Additional		Would you consider the translation of the DDA and the creation of the MDP a success?

What would you consider as the best success factor for the policy translation?

Do you know anyone else who would be interesting for me to interview?
