

# Transboundary River Basins and Water Politics: Some perspectives for water and earth system governance

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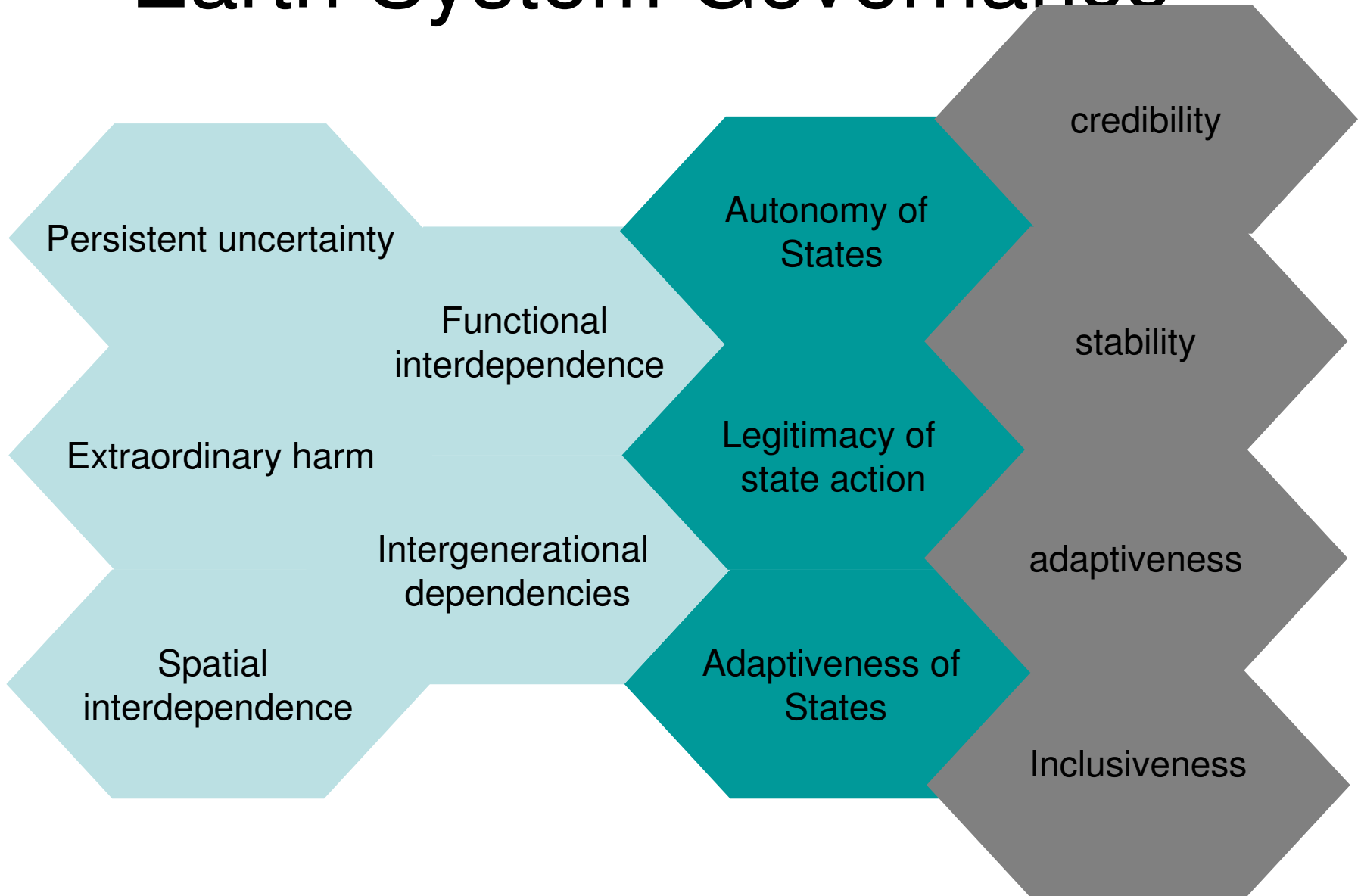
King's College London

2008 European PhD Summer School on Earth System Governance,  
Earth System Governance: Theories and Strategies for sustainability  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 24-31 August 2008

How should governance be considered in the context of water?

# Governance as a guiding 'tool'

# Earth System Governance



Based on Biermann (2007)

# Governance operating in plurality

- Water allocation is a political process
  - Emphasis of ‘allocative politics’ (Allan 2008)
- Moving away from the conflict and cooperation dichotomy

# Conflict and cooperation: Dichotomy



Violence

Absence of violence  
(=peace) (c.f. Galtung 1969)

Bad

Good

Unproductive

Productive

# Governance operating in plurality

- Water allocation is a political process
  - Emphasis of ‘allocative politics’ (Allan 2008)
- Moving away from the conflict and cooperation dichotomy
  - “...if there is conflict over water, then that conflict is the result of a *failure of politics* to negotiate a settlement over the shared use of water [emphasis in original]. The idea that a war over water, or any other resource, is not a war about politics is dubious.”  
(Barnett 2000: 276)

# PLURAL RATIONALITY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROSPECTS

More conforming to social rules

Civil Society

Government

International cooperation prospects:  
*VERY LOW*

International cooperation prospects:  
*LOW*

Less control of social group boundaries

More control of social group boundaries

Industries, private sector

Environmentalists, NGOs

International cooperation prospects:  
*HIGH*

International cooperation prospects:  
*LOW* for intergovernmental cooperation  
*HIGH* for cooperation between citizens

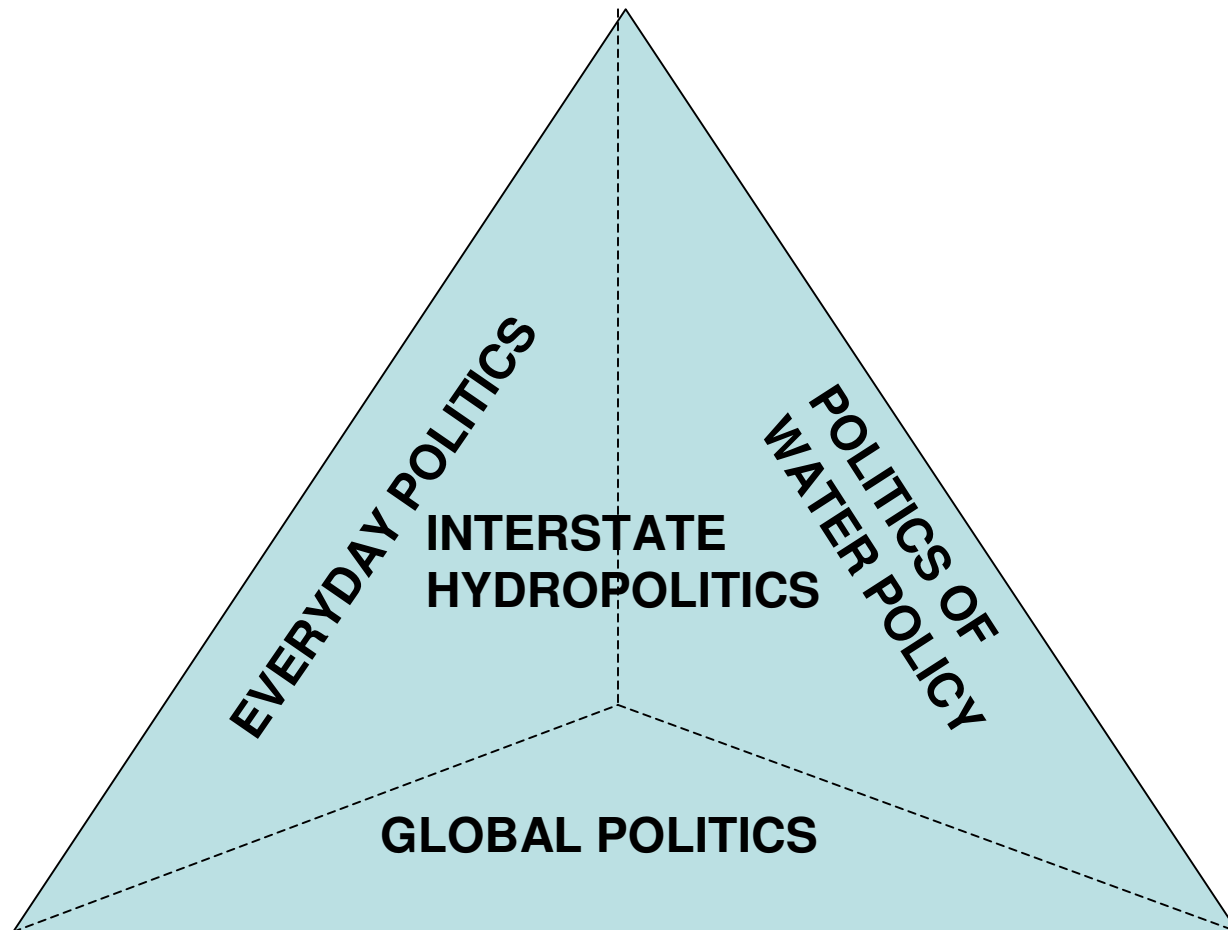
Less conforming to social rules

# Different water politics

Mollinga's (2008) four domains of water politics

- *Global Politics*
  - Global agenda setting on water through WWC, WWF, GWP
- *Interstate Hydropolitics*
  - Negotiations and diplomacy
- *Politics of Water Policy*
  - Policy formulation and implementation battle ground
- *Everyday Politics*
  - Social power relations in focus

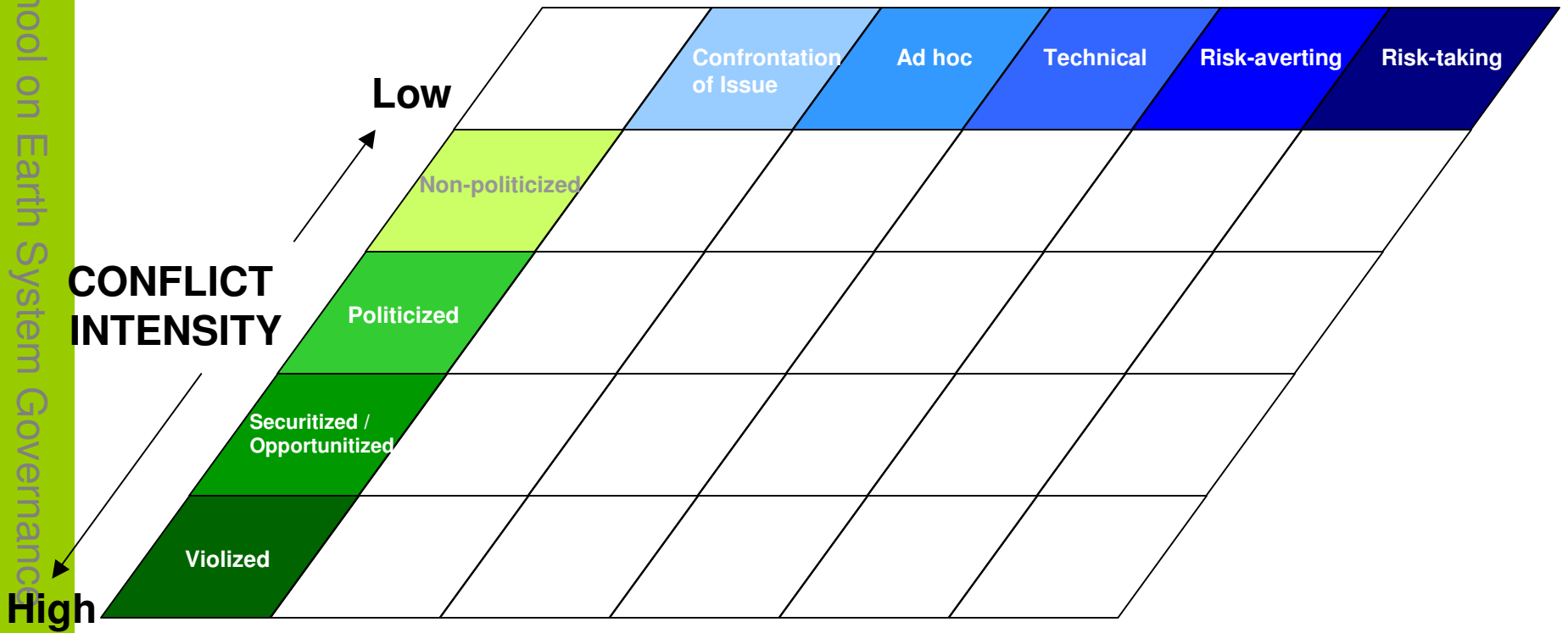
# Different water politics



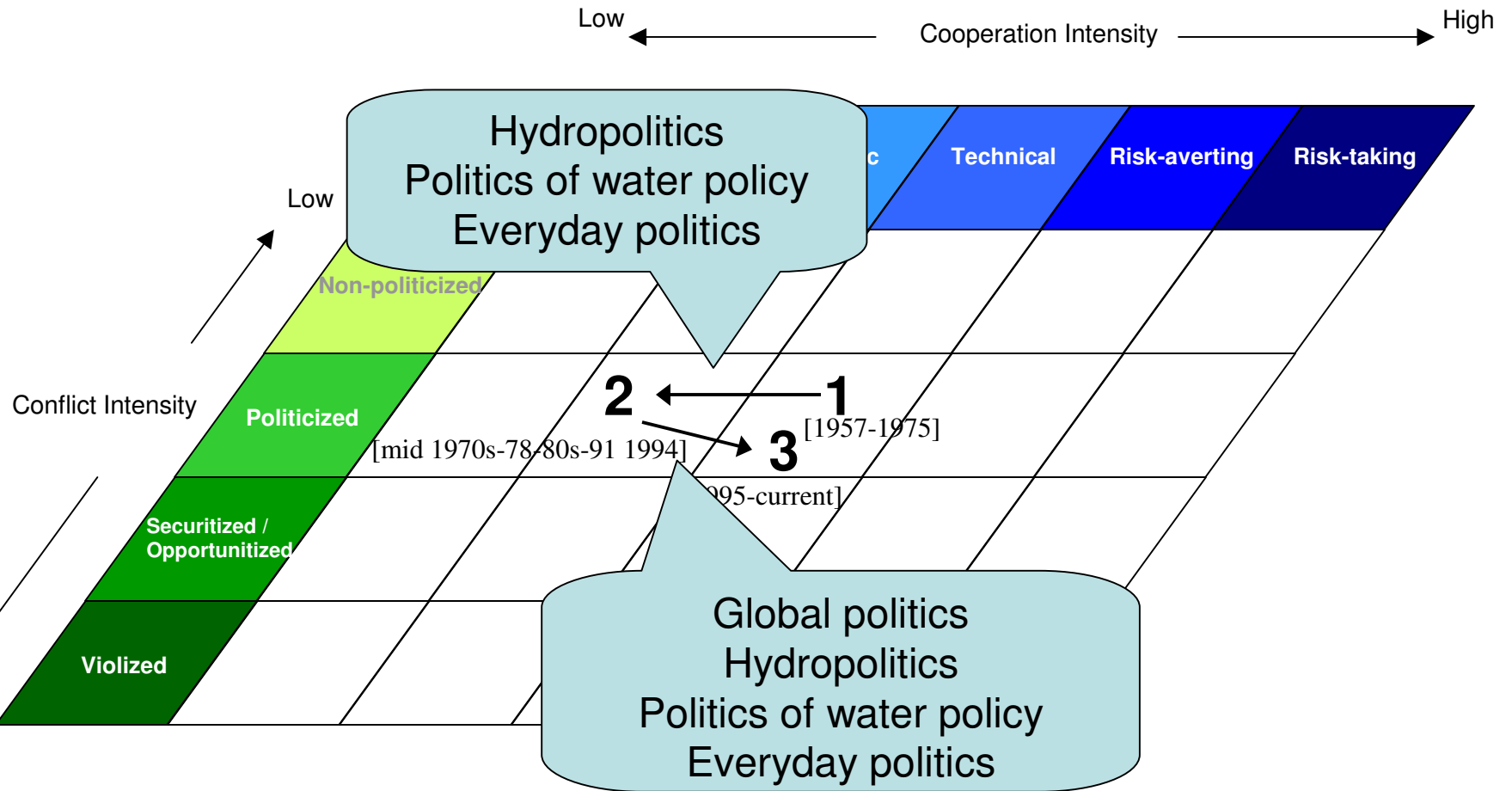
How do you understand dynamism?

# Transboundary Waters Interaction Nexus (TWINS)

Low ← COOPERATION INTENSITY → High



# Inter-state relationship between Thailand and Vietnam (Mekong river) [first approximation]

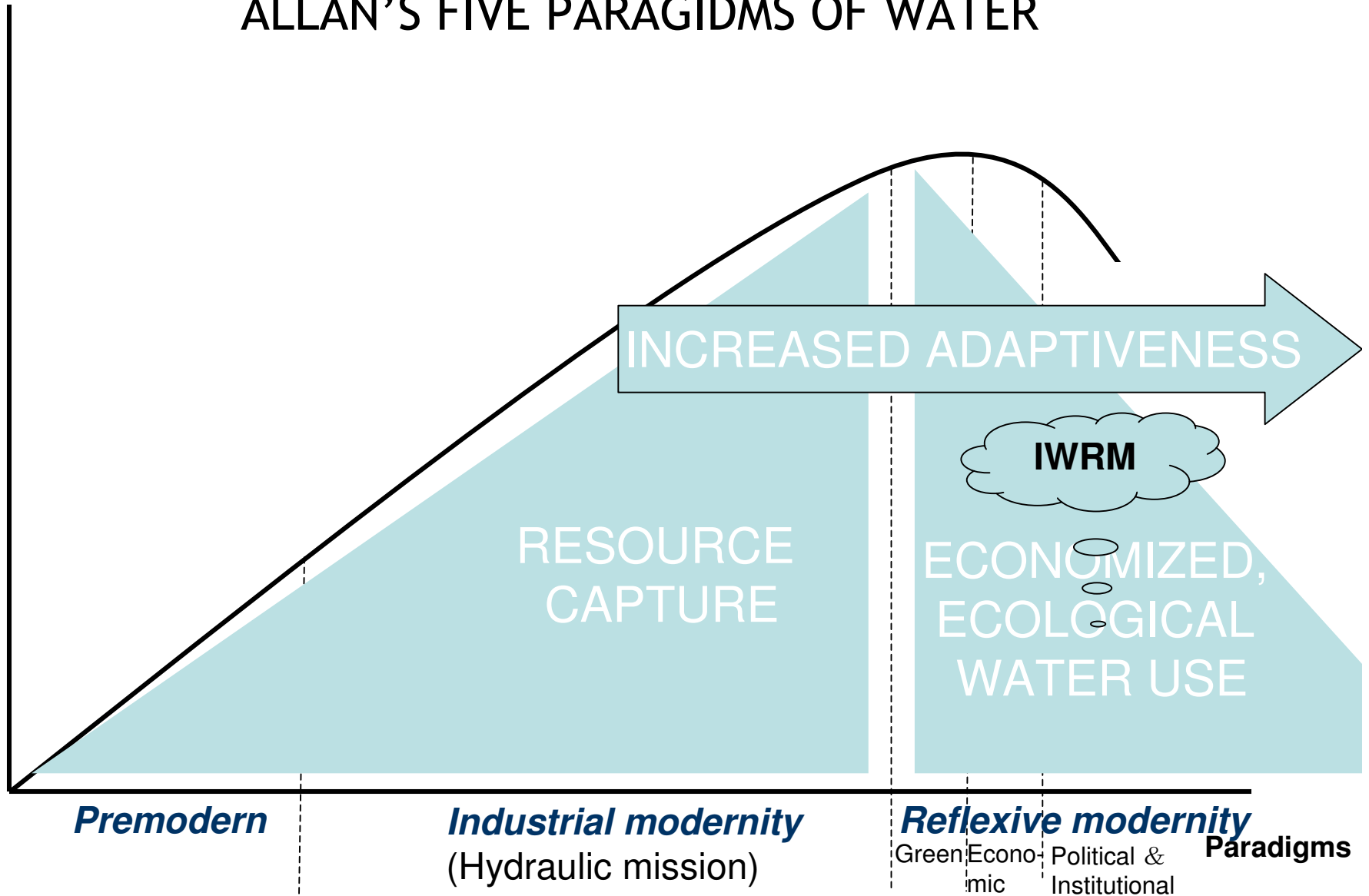


Mirumachi TWINS diagram

# What does adaptiveness mean?

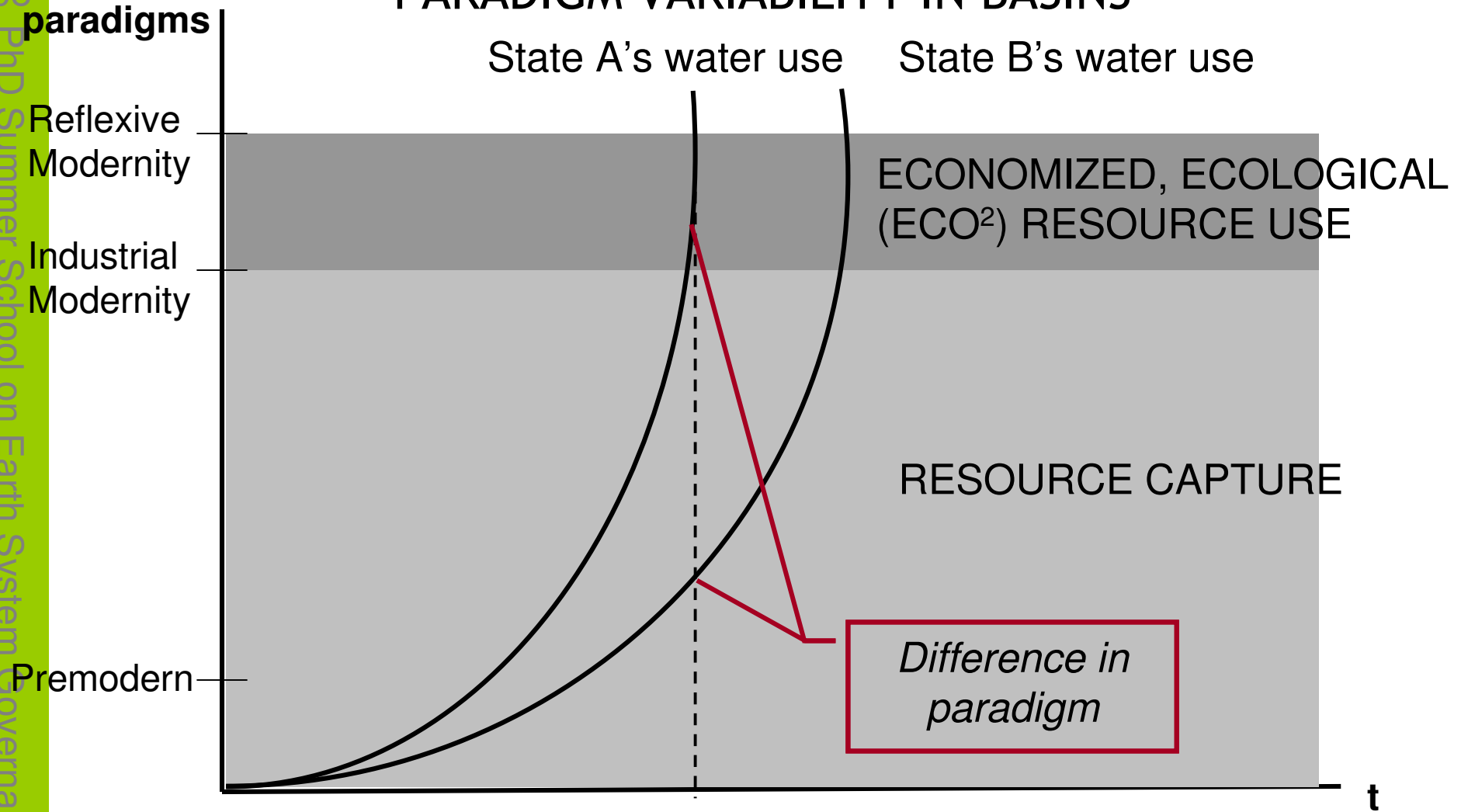
Water Use

# ALLAN'S FIVE PARAGIDMS OF WATER



Source: Adapted from Allan 2003:10

# PARADIGM VARIABILITY IN BASINS

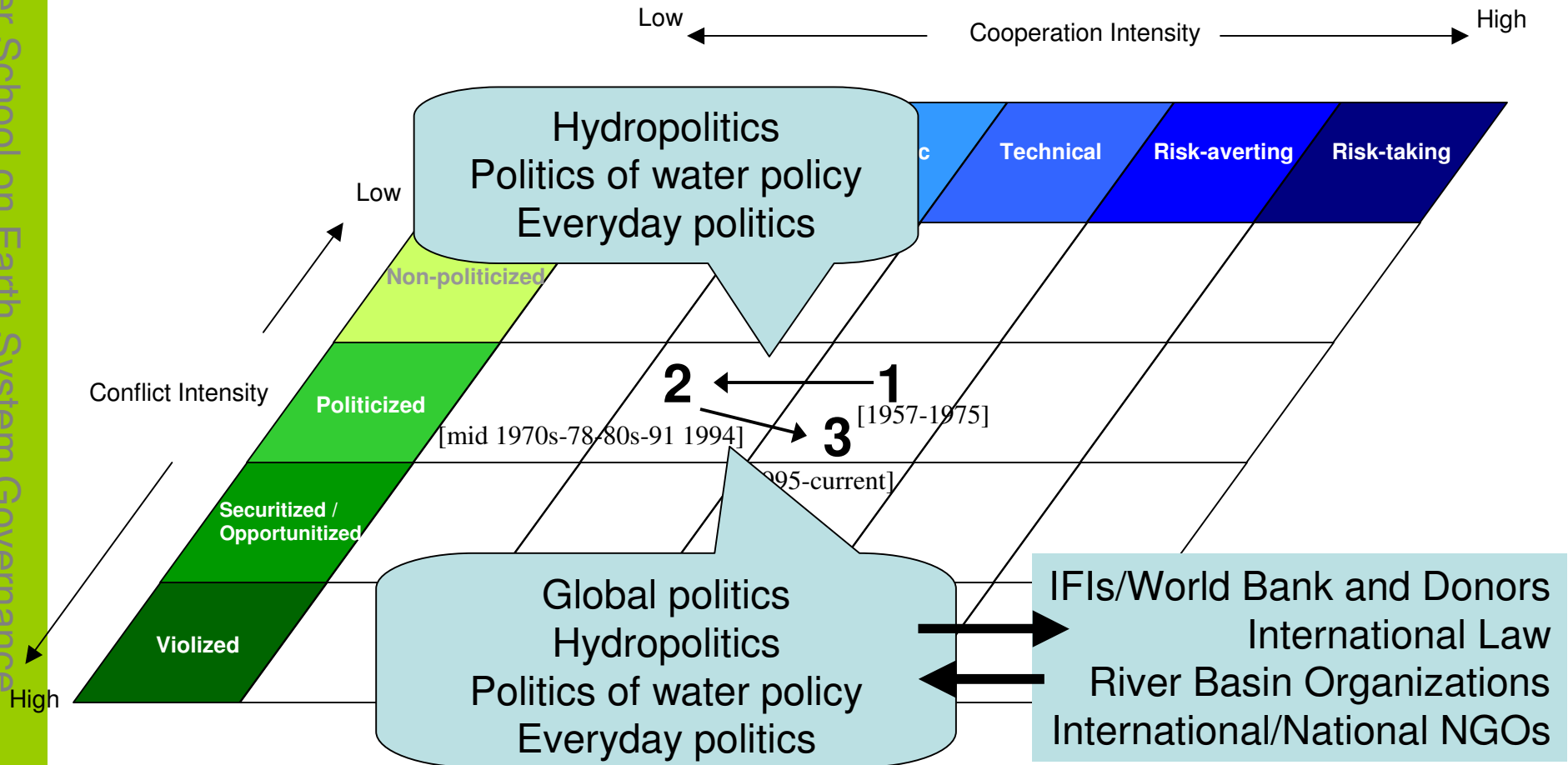


Prioritization of water

Political Stability

Effectiveness of investment in river basins by donors and IFIs

# Inter-state relationship between Thailand and Vietnam (Mekong river) [first approximation]



# Conclusions

*Understanding the big picture...*

- Water allocation is about politics
- Governance inevitably has to take into account this political characteristic
- Water governance must incorporate dynamism in design and operation
  - Adaptiveness is relative to time and to the basin
  - Future task: considerations of power relations and the effect of power asymmetry

# TWINS for Ooij (Warner and Winnubst 2008)

