P243 / Conflict and Collaboration as Entangled Phenomena in Environmental Governance

Topic : Governance, Policy Networks and Coalition

Chair : Owen Temby (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley)

Second Chair : Meike Fienitz (Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research, Germany)

Third Chair : Katrin Pakizer (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH Zurich))

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In research on environmental governance, conflict and collaboration have tended to be conceptualized as opposing conditions. Conflict appears either as the problem that collaboration is meant to resolve or, in more recent scholarship, as a productive force that collaborative processes can harness. In both accounts, however, the two remain analytically distinct. This framing obscures much of what occurs when collaborative and participatory processes convene actors with competing claims to shared resources and, at times, incompatible understandings of what is being governed. In such settings, collaboration may be sustained amid substantial disagreement, and the absence of collaboration need not indicate conflict. Conceptualizing conflict and collaboration as entangled rather than opposed phenomena allows these dynamics to be examined directly. Building on the 2026 Ottawa workshop, this panel brings together researchers examining these dynamics across diverse contexts and levels of administration. It gives particular attention to horizontal or diagonal conflicts, in which responsibilities and power endowments are distributed across multiple, independent actors. The central question is how conflict and collaboration become entangled in environmental governance and what this entanglement means for policy processes and democratic functioning. Six questions guide the discussion. Conceptually, the panel asks: What conditions allow for the healthy coexistence of conflict and collaboration in participatory environmental governance? How should conflict be conceptualized when power endowments are horizontal? How are policy narratives developed and transformed as conflict intensifies? How do policy networks of conflict structure collaboration patterns? Methodologically, it considers: Which methods allow researchers to study conflict without exacerbating polarization or compromising trust in research? Which methods can access and produce conflict-related data that are difficult to obtain through traditional approaches? The panel also takes up four propositions developed at the Ottawa workshop: that conflict and collaboration can coexist and catalyze one another; that conflicts can be disentangled into networks of issues; that a holistic understanding of conflict requires different methodological approaches; and that policy narratives in horizontal conflicts strongly build on interpersonal affective conflict. These propositions are open to examination and challenge.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite papers examining the research questions outlined above or related questions concerning conflict and collaboration as entangled phenomena in environmental governance. We are particularly interested in horizontal or diagonal conflicts, in which responsibilities and power endowments are distributed across multiple, independent actors.

Contributions may address the conditions under which conflict and collaboration coexist constructively; the conceptualization of conflict when power endowments are horizontal; the development and transformation of policy narratives as conflict intensifies; or the ways that policy networks of conflict structure collaboration patterns. We also welcome methodological and reflexive contributions examining how to study conflict without exacerbating polarization or compromising trust in research, and how to obtain data that are difficult to access through traditional methods. The panel seeks theoretical dialogue among the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Ecology of Games, Policy Narratives, and Policy Networks. We welcome contributions that connect these approaches with political theories of conflict, including Chantal Mouffe’s work, classical analyses of power, and perspectives from Peace and War Studies and Sustainability Studies. Regarding methodological approaches, mixed-methods contributions are particularly encouraged, alongside qualitative, quantitative, participatory, and arts-based approaches. Approaches may include statistical and network analysis, interviews, ethnography, arts-based methods, games, participatory modelling, and co-production. We also invite reflection on the difficulties, risks, and opportunities involved in researching conflict. Whatever their approach, papers should explain how their theoretical perspective, empirical findings, or methodological approach advances understanding of the relationship between conflict and collaboration.

Papers that test or challenge the Ottawa workshop’s propositions are equally welcome. The panel aims to foster theoretical dialogue and methodological exchange across cases, with attention to practical implications for navigating dissensus, avoiding polarization, and fostering productive governance interactions. Although the panel builds on the 2026 Ottawa workshop, it is open to all researchers, and we particularly welcome new contributors and studies from diverse contexts and levels of administration.