P229 / Knowledge in Motion: Water Governance and Nature-based Solutions Across Places

Topic : Policy Transfer/Diffusion/Learning

Chair : Elena Marie Ensenado (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Second Chair : Ellen Minkman (Delft University of Technology)

Third Chair : David Dolowitz (University of Liverpool)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

A growing body of scholarship has examined how policy ideas, knowledge, and practices travel and transform as they move across institutional, political, and socio-ecological contexts. Research on policy mobility, policy transfer, and city-to-city learning, particularly in climate adaptation and water governance, has highlighted the importance of distinguishing between knowledge acquisition, application, and institutionalization (Ensenado, et al., 2023, 2024, 2025). Rather than being adopted unchanged, policies often undergo processes of translation, adaptation, and rebranding (Raev & Minkman, 2020; Mukhtarov, 2022). Examples include the international circulation of Dutch water expertise, the diffusion of China's River Chief System, and the transfer of Nature-based Solutions (NbS).

This movement involves more than the circulation of technical expertise or best practices (e.g. Dolowitz, & Babamaragana, 2026; Bakker et al, 2024). It frequently entails the co-production of knowledge, as ideas originating elsewhere interact with local ecological knowledge, institutional arrangements, political priorities, path dependencies, and governance practices in interconnected socio-ecological-technical systems. However, important questions remain regarding the political and social dynamics shaping these transformations, the conditions under which transferred approaches become institutionalized, and the extent to which successful policy transfer translates into effective, equitable, and environmentally beneficial outcomes.

The panel’s guiding question is:

How does knowledge about water governance and NbS travel, transform, and become embedded within different socio-ecological and governance contexts?

The panel aims to advance theoretical and empirical understanding of these processes by inviting contributions that explore dimensions related to:

- Politics and water diplomacy: How do diplomatic relations, geopolitical interests, and political objectives shape the circulation, translation, and implementation of water governance policies; and vice versa? What role do political interests play in determining which knowledge and practices travel across contexts?

- Knowledge co-production and social inclusion: How do local ecological knowledge, stakeholder participation, and power relations influence the adaptation of transferred policies? Whose knowledge is incorporated, prioritised, or marginalised during these processes, and with what consequences?

- Policy translation and effectiveness: Under what conditions does successful policy translation lead to intended policy outcomes? How might successful adoption or institutionalisation conceal discrepancies between stated environmental and social objectives and underlying political or economic interests?

- Legitimacy and greenwashing: How can policy transfer serve as a mechanism of political legitimation, greenwashing, or bluewashing? To what extent does the adoption of internationally recognised water governance approaches and NbS reflect substantive environmental change rather than symbolic commitments?

- Institutional and socio-ecological mismatches: How do tensions between transferred policy models, and local conditions reshape implementation and outcomes? Under what circumstances do these adaptations facilitate or undermine long-term institutionalisation and effectiveness?

The panel brings together scholarship on policy mobility, knowledge co-production, water diplomacy, and socio-ecological governance. By examining not only whether policies travel but also how, whose interests they serve, and with what consequences, the panel seeks to develop a more critical and context-sensitive understanding of policy transfer. In particular, it aims to identify the conditions under which the translation

and institutionalisation of different approaches contribute to effective and socially just outcomes, or alternatively reinforce existing inequalities, political interests, and environmental challenges.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites empirically grounded and theoretically informed contributions examining how knowledge, policies, and practices related to water governance, NbS, and climate change adaptation circulate, are translated, and become institutionalised across different socio-ecological and governance contexts.

We particularly welcome papers addressing the following:

? Original empirical research: Studies drawing on original case studies that critically examine the actors, processes, power relations, and institutional conditions shaping knowledge and policy transfer, translation, and institutionalisation.

? Diverse geographical contexts: Research from different cities, regions, and countries, including the Global North and Global South, highlighting how varying political, institutional, and socio-ecological conditions shape transfer processes.

? Different directions of knowledge circulation: Studies examining North–South, South–North, South–South, and multidirectional knowledge exchanges, as well as circulation within countries and across governance scales.

? Different forms of knowledge: Research exploring the circulation and interaction of scientific and technical expertise, policy models, professional practices, local and Indigenous ecological knowledge, and experiential knowledge, including processes of negotiation and co-production.

? Diverse water governance policies and practices: Studies focusing NbS, climate adaptation policies, flood risk management, stormwater management, green infrastructure or, watershed governance

? Successful, unsuccessful, contested, and incomplete transfer processes: Research critically examining how success and failure are defined, by whom, and at what scale. Particular attention is encouraged to discrepancies between policy adoption, institutionalisation, and actual outcomes, including cases where success at national or international levels may coexist with failure or unintended consequences at the local level.

We welcome comparative and in-depth single-case studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, as well as contributions engaging critically with theories of policy mobility, knowledge circulation, institutional change, and environmental governance. By bringing together diverse empirical and theoretical perspectives, the panel aims to advance understanding of how water governance knowledge travels, transforms, becomes embedded in institutions, and produces differentiated outcomes across places, scales, and communities.