

Conference Agenda

Session

1-SP001: Water Governance and the Rise of Global Hydro-hubs as Developmental Actors

Time: Monday, 05/July/2021: 3:30pm - 4:45pm

Session Chair: Dr. Farhad Mukhtarov, ISS, Netherlands, The

Session Chair: Dr. Corinne Ong, Singapore

Session Chair: Prof. Des Gasper, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Netherlands, The

Session Abstract

This panel discusses the rise of Global Hydro-Hubs (GHHs) as part of an on-going scramble for new water-related markets and considers the implications for global solidarity for development. With climate change effects on the rise, demand for water governance expertise soars around the world. This demand offers lucrative business opportunities and various countries have sought to brand themselves as GHHs. GHHs often receive policy support from their home nations and cities, which lend legitimacy to their existence and purpose. However, as GHHs seek to expand their influence, possible tensions between global solidarity for development, geopolitical and economic incentives remain understudied and require attention through the lens of critical policy research.

GHHs are nations and cities that brand themselves as centers of excellence in water engineering, management and governance and, by implication, as a natural choice for future clients to turn to with water-related problems. Countries such as USA, UK, The Netherlands, Israel, China, South Korea and Singapore have sought to be seen as GHHs. Aggressive branding, extensive networking and implementation of projects on the ground are some of the strategies that GHHs use to set foot in the new markets. A key narrative that enables the rise of GHHs is the possibility of a "triple-win", that is, a) promote development by helping client countries solve water issues; b) bring profits to a GHH; and c) advance the geopolitical profile of a GHH as a reliable development partner. Whether the "triple-win" is possible in practice remains an empirical question. We invite conceptual and empirical contributions that reflect any of the issues raised above. More specifically, we invite future panelists to submit papers and/or prepare presentations that react to one or more of the following questions.

1. Are the triple goals of achieving economic spin-offs, asserting a geopolitical stature and advancing global public goods, such as sustained peace and social justice, compatible with each other?
2. What are the major elements, processes, and mechanisms through which GHHs brand their water sector internationally? Such strategies may include but are not limited to: presenting external demand for GHH services as "natural", packaging past domestic achievements as globally relevant, asserting universality of the GHH expertise, stressing political neutrality of a GHH
3. What are the processes and outcomes of water planning and management projects on the ground that have been implemented with support and/or funding by GHHs as part of a larger strategy of branding and merchandising their water sector?
4. What are the larger implications of the rise of GHHs for water governance expertise and its mobility, especially with regard to achieving the water related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Presentations

Seoul and Its Tap Water: Public and Private Entrepreneurship Across Scales

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While cities gain international momentum, they increasingly connect to innovate and learn from each other. The attraction of resources, talent, and attention lies beneath the economic reasons that drive most of the international entrepreneurship of city governments.

In parallel to common marketing strategies, cities also harness their key internal policies as value-added elements to share among peers in order to enhance their transnational reputation. While, arguably, both approaches are ultimately geared towards improving the reputation of the urban fabric of the city as a whole, there is an inherent difference. Contrary to business-friendly initiatives that are embedded in an economic rationality, this second type of transnational entrepreneurship revolves around the perceived reputation of local policy-making actors in their own right. It targets different types of institutional actors, pursues political objectives, and connects with different sources of legitimacy.

The current article explores this double dimension by introducing the transnational entrepreneurship of Seoul Metropolitan Government in the arena of policy learning and decentralized cooperation through the promotion of its water management policy. The promotion of Seoul's tap water, Arisu, is presented as an empirical case of policy boosterism.

Bring in The Dutch! Dutch Water Authorities Going Global

Farhad Mukhtarov, Des Gasper, Kseniia Biruikova

ISS, Netherlands, The

Policies travel across various boundaries moved by donors, bureaucrats, consultants and other agents. Apart from being an essential part of an inter-connected world, the travel of policies is a multi-billion business for public and private actors alike. The Netherlands, for example, exported of water technology and expertise of 8,1 billion USD in value in 2016, and an important part of this export are policy models such as urban development plans, integrated water management plans, surface water flooding plans and suchlike. This paper interrogates the processes through which the Dutch Water Authorities (DWA), a public institution with a local (sub-regional) mandate in The Netherlands, set out to pursue international activities in 2018 through a partnership with two Dutch Ministries. This case study is intended as an illustration of a broader theme: the Dutch water sector's state-sponsored, well-coordinated, and multi-pillar branding and marketing campaign to help Dutch businesses and other actors to penetrate global markets and/or increase their political standing. I pose four questions in this paper, two specifically with regard to the Dutch Water Authorities and two broader ones:

- why do organizations with a local mandate, such as the Dutch Water Authorities, pursue international visibility and involvement – the why question?
- what are the mechanisms and processes by which the Dutch Water Authorities frame themselves as internationally relevant and capable, in this case, through the Blue Deal Framework document – the how question?
- what are the potential dangers of commercial water policy transfer for recipient localities and for The Netherlands – the what if question?

-- what are broader implications of commercialization of water policy transfer to the emerging field of "policy travel studies" – the so what question?

We conduct applied discourse analysis techniques to major policy documents, reviewed extensive secondary literature and interviewed diverse stakeholders in The Netherlands in order to shed light to these four questions. We find that the local political environment pushed the DWA to claim their relevance in a highly neo-liberal and collaborative context of the Dutch water sector. Techniques used to claim the DWA's global relevance included framing the global water crisis as one of poor collaboration of the Global North and South and drawing on various sources to claim the capacity and expertise of the DWA to contribute to the solution of the problem through being a reliable partner. A number of dangers are present in the current trends that the DWA illustrate and a research programme to critically investigate those trends is outlined at the end of the paper.

Deconstructing GHHs: A Critical Proposal

Arda Bilgen

Clark University

For the past few decades, critical approaches to development have challenged the ways in which development is conceptualized, practiced, and studied around the world. Particularly since the 1990s, post-development and post-colonialism perspectives have turned their focus on the discursive dimension of development and highlighted how overly technical, highly apolitical, and almost "power-blind" ways of thinking and practice dominate the field.

In recent years, an increasing volume of studies in the relevant literature(s) have also criticized water governance in general, and water resources development projects in particular, for mostly overlooking the socio-political realities, environmental concerns, and cultural sensitivities of the recipients of developmental policies. Drawing on a framework of depoliticization, these studies have explored the structures and practices of water governance in a wide array of countries from Spain to Germany, India, Jordan, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Turkey. They have examined the history, mechanisms, and consequences of water projects implemented in different parts of the world, criticizing and challenging the dominance of expert knowledge as well as the "technicized" and "economized" understanding of development imposed by a neoliberal governmental rationality.

Based on this line of critical scholarship, this presentation seeks to deconstruct the concept of "Global Hydro-Hub" (GHH) and problematize the way the concept is used in academic and policy circles. The presentation aims to discuss whether or how the discourses that present GHHs as panaceas to ensure efficient water management, rapid economic growth, geopolitical benefits, and many other similar gains actually conceal various political and contested issues such as those concerning water security, access, and equity. The presentation intentionally refrains from focusing on a particular region or country and takes a broader perspective instead, specifically to better trace the spread, impact, and universalizing implications of GHH-related discourses across the world. In this way, the presentation is expected to present a more critical, power-sensitive, and politically-conscious assessment of GHHs and prompt a discussion on their meaning(s) and function(s) vis-à-vis the politics of water and global solidarity for development.

What Motivates Policy Transfer in Coastal Management? A Historical Review of South Korea's Land Reclamation and Restoration Policies

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In the literature on coastal land reclamation and ecological restoration policies, the role of policy transfer has gotten limited attention vis-à-vis domestic political factors. This paper addresses this knowledge gap by clarifying the role of Dutch actors in developing South Korea's coastal land reclamation and restoration policies. In order to do so, we first develop an analytical framework that operationalizes 'policy transfer' into distinguishable factors. This framework is used in the analysis of the two Korean coastal development cases.

The first case is Korea's land reclamation policy pursued from the 1960s. South Korea has been one of the most active countries worldwide in terms of land reclamation and the Saemangeum Reclamation Project with the longest seawall in the world is regarded as the highlight of Korean land reclamation history. While the development of the reclaimed land in Saemangeum is still in progress, however, wetland restoration of previously reclaimed lands started to receive attention in the 2000s. Several restoration projects have been undertaken or announced mainly by provincial governments. In both cases, there have been long-established policy transfer activities, especially with Dutch engineers and political leaders.

The analysis is based on collected data including policy documents, media reports, and semi-structured interviews. Our analysis reveals that no full-fledged policy transfer has occurred in both cases but powerful actors use elements of foreign policy in order to shape the national discourses. Based on our analysis we discuss under what conditions what modes of policy transfer are likely to happen. We conclude that existing literature has hitherto somewhat downplayed the inherently political nature of policy transfer. Our paper makes a case for a more combined and integrated assessment of foreign and domestic factors in the study of coastal management projects. This requires that public policy literature and policy transfer literature are linked more systematically.