Social-ecological innovations and governance experiments for transformative change

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Abstract

Part of the Session: Reinventing, Remixing and Refixing – The Dynamics of Governance "Experiments!" This paper looks at systemic governance experimentation and innovation for sustainability, and how to coordinate and combine innovations across scales at critical junctures. We introduce the concept of social-ecological innovation as a crucial aspect of transformative capacity. A social-ecological innovation is any initiative, product, process, program or design that challenges and over time changes the defining routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the broader social-ecological system in which it is introduced. It fundamentally changes human-environmental interactions and enhances the capacity of ecosystems to generate (bundles of) services. Successful social-ecological innovations have durability, scalability and transformative impact. First we identify key factors that create space for experiments leading to innovations that can reconfigure social and ecological system interactions and feedbacks. Second we draw on a number of case studies, including Marine Spatial Planning, to show the key multi-level institutional factors necessary for spreading social-ecological innovations around the world. Finally, we discuss the role of agency and specifically the role of global networks of system entrepreneurs and the strategies used to scale up innovation and achieve transformative change.

Keywords: Social-ecological systems, governance, innovation, transformation

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