

## Special Session:

# Policy dynamics beyond crises: The case of water

ISEE 2010 Conference  
Advancing Sustainability in a Time of Crisis  
22-25 August 2010  
Oldenburg/Bremen, Germany

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### Theme

We are far removed from the days of naturalistic explanations in our understanding of policy dynamics. Whereas in the past natural disasters were often logically connected to a particular change in policies, we currently see them as focusing events (Birkland, 1997) inviting 'framing contests' with different groups pushing different explanations and thus potential solutions ('t Hart et al., 2009). Furthermore, whereas in the past there was pessimism about policy change without major 'external shocks' to the policy subsystem (Sabatier, 1993), we currently witness an increasing interest in the role of policy learning and agency in policy dynamics, as the 'adaptability' of governance structures (Young et al., 2006) and the importance of policy entrepreneurs (Huitema and Meijerink, 2009) is increasingly scrutinized. This panel is based upon the notion that it is time to better understand the phenomenon of policy dynamics. Policy dynamics encompass processes of policy change taking into account context influences such as crises, societal drivers and innovation. Four critical factors often implied in explanations of policy dynamics are crises/focusing events, institutions, policy entrepreneurs or other agents of change, and policy learning. The present special session raises the issue for a better understanding of the relation/influence of each one of those factors in producing and/or changing policy dynamics in water governance, at the local, national, international or river basin levels. Such dynamics may be substantial (actual policy changes) or processual (changes in the way policy is being made), and actual policy implementation is part of the focus here.

The session invites papers that aim at contributing to one of the following research questions:

- What is the relation between focusing events such as crises and policy dynamics in water governance systems?
- What is the relation between existing institutional arrangements and institutional change on the one hand and policy dynamics in water governance systems on the other?
- What is the role of policy learning vis-à-vis policy change?
- What is the relation between the activities of policy entrepreneurs or agents of change and policy dynamics in water governance systems?
- How are focusing events, institutions and institutional change, policy learning, and the activities and strategies of policy entrepreneurs interrelated?

To summarize, our special session welcomes papers that can contribute to an understanding of policy dynamics by bringing in insights and knowledge from empirical and theoretical/conceptual explorations of water governance systems in different countries. Cases on policy dynamics in water governance systems that focus on regional or national level are mostly welcomed.

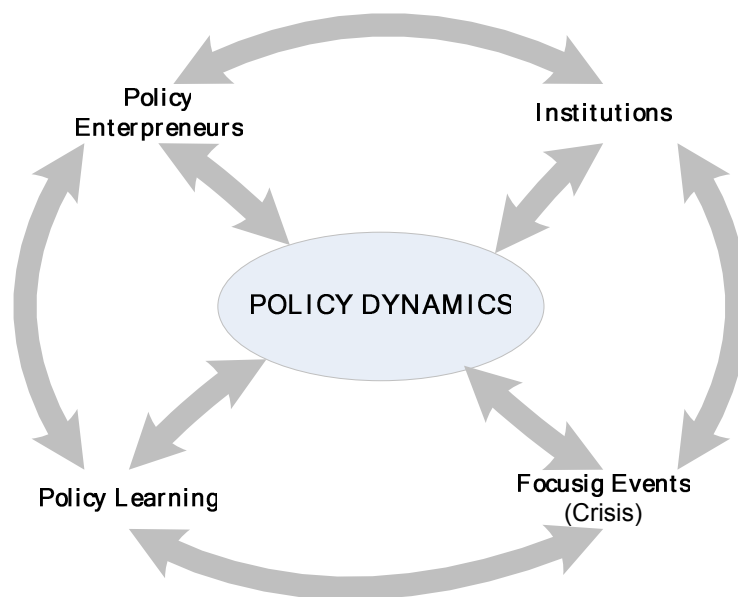


Figure 1: Policy dynamics and critical factors constellating them.

#### Literature cited

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