

Governance innovations for the urban nexus

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Abstract

Cities are locations of intense social, environmental and technical trade-offs, synergies and innovation. The increasing interdependencies and complexities of how separate elements (sectors, natural and built environment) within them interact with each other brings to the fore the politics of urban interconnections (e.g. asymmetries of power).

Governing the water-energy-food-environment nexus calls for innovative approaches, which empower governing capacities across sectors, scales, the public and private spheres. These approaches will facilitate interconnections, minimise destructive trade-offs and inequalities and foster constructive nexus synergies.

Building on Bulkeley et al. (2015) and Stirling's (2015) work, this session considers urban nexus governance in terms of innovative and flexible arrangements (governance innovations), where diverse and uncertain pathways are collaboratively explored by multiple actors, in ways that deliberately challenge the effects of incumbent power across sectors and scales within cities, and build interconnections between institutional, technological and social silos.

The notion of navigational governance (Jensen et al., 2015) for example, captures boundary-crossing activities (between sectors, scales and different types of actors) free from a pre-conceived and commonly agreed strategic vision or pathway, which tends to perpetuate relatively well-established interests, objectives and power-relations among actors.

Such notions recognise that no single actor is capable of identifying and implementing appropriate governance approaches from a privileged position. This suggests moving away from thinking about governance of the urban nexus in terms of 'steering' (by e.g. coordinating short-sighted activities through pathways derived from a shared long-sighted systems imaginary) and 'nudging' (prioritising some practices, technologies and actors over others).

But instead focusing on innovative and inclusive 'governance structures' which enable knowledge-sharing and the ownership of knowledge, and enhancing individuals, communities and collectives' capacity to act; thus empowering citizens and users rather than imposing 'top down' and expert-led arrangements.

This session welcomes both empirical case studies and conceptual contributions that consider innovations in governance of the urban nexus (water-energy-food-environment) that:

- 1) Enable the creation of flexible arrangements; such that a choice of alternatives courses of action are left open in the medium and long-term, in contrast to patterns of early 'lock-in' to a particular policy trajectory, technology and set of interests.
- 2) Facilitate structures, cultures and practices of connecting, relating, interlinking and intermediating across sectors, technologies, actors and scales of governance.
- 3) Include the maximum possible variety and heterogeneity of actors (in terms of position, level and type of expertise and culture) and practices involved in governing the nexus across scales and sectors.

Paper abstracts (200 words max) should be submitted by **Monday 15th February** to the organisers: R.Hiteva@sussex.ac.uk and chiff@plan.aau.dk

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