

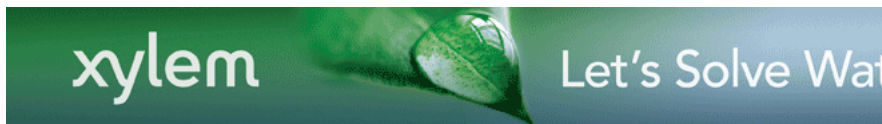
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## FEATURES



### Interview: Michele-Lee Moore on Global Water Governance

Posted on January 7, 2013  
Written by Kerry Freck

*The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance's 'Creating a Blue Dialogue' webinar series kicks off 2013 with a session on global networks and governance innovation for resilient watersheds. Water Canada spoke with University of Victoria's Michele-Lee Moore, an emerging scholar in this area, who will draw on her research from the Prachinburi River basin in Thailand and the Murray-Darling basin in Australia during the webinar.*

**Water Canada: Your work explores the way transnational relationships benefit watershed-based organizations. What does that mean? What did you learn?**

When I got into my research in the Murray-Darling and Prachinburi River basins, I learned quite quickly that there were indeed extensive global network actors engaging people and supporting change processes in watersheds.

One of the big findings that I'll be discussing during the webinar is that the really innovative strategies emerging in water governance are created locally. I expected ideas to be coming from elsewhere. But it wasn't that straightforward. A lot of strategies were developed locally to suit local context.

The global network became important when adopting the strategies—when these watershed organizations grappled with technical issues, for instance, and when they were reconciling that change processes are difficult or controversial and sometimes require external support. Local innovation is being supported by global network of actors.

**Interesting. I noticed the same during a trip to the Philippines last May. The Canadian Urban Institute is part of the global network working with the Tigum-Aganan watershed group in the country's Iloilo province. Devastation as a result of Hurricane Frank was the impetus for the local people to reevaluate their strategies around water and climate change.**

Yes, a crisis event often stimulates people to do things differently. In both basins where I researched, events triggered the change in strategy. In Australia, it was the severe drought and water shortages that peaked in 2006. In Thailand, there was a severe fish kill—more than 100 different species were dying.

Thailand is working on very basic things now. For instance, there is no legal water allocation framework there. At the national level, they've established that there need to be watershed committees that include the private sector, NGOs, and government. The Prachinburi River basin is an important area for attracting export-oriented businesses, so the watershed needs to cope with different needs to solve quality and quantity issues.

**How are people using innovative approaches in Thailand?**

At first glance, it may not seem that there is much capacity for governance innovation there, but there are lots of small-scale experiments in which both villagers and people involved in basin committees have engaged. They're trying to make do with what they have, but they're also tapping into different resources. For instance, in fish restoration projects, they've had a successful model for recreating habitat, and it is now scaled up to 18 different places within the basin. To do this, they're finding funding from companies trying to funnel money to CSR initiatives—that way they can gain access to private capital rather than waiting for government funding.

There's also a fundamental shift in who is able to engage in watershed protection and the resources they're able to bring towards supporting change in that governance arrangement. They're shifting norms and beliefs about who can be involved in decision-making processes, who can be involved in or leading projects. Typically, there's an expectation that government would do it.

International actors engaged there—the Global Water Partnership, the Food and Agriculture Organization, et cetera—provide frameworks for thinking about some of the challenges associated with implementing these new approaches.

**What about the Murray-Darling basin?**



Michele-Lee Moore

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- January 31, 2013: Eco-Business Breakfast: Conservation
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In Australia, we see government as a clear actor within the governance arrangement. Major basin policy pieces are significantly different from Thailand—their law places a priority on water for environment before allocation for human use. It's a shift in mindset around how we think about our relationship to water.

All the same, they're grappling with complex problems—there's no clear way to solve the issues. International actors have provided reassurance that they're not the only basin experiencing these issues. They provide a context for remembering that what you're doing is difficult, and that there are other ways to do things. If nothing else, it helps them think through the process of implementation. How do you navigate resistance? How do you ensure new policies reflect what is meaningful for the basin community? Enable participation?

What you get from the global networks is sort of intangible. It's not easy to copy or transfer.

**What is a "resilient" watershed? Who is close to achieving this goal? What jurisdictions in Canada (and beyond) are doing innovative, creative work in this area?**

By definition, a "resilient" watershed is one that can respond and adapt to disturbances. To be resilient, it must go through periods of stability, but there must also be the willingness and capacity to go through change.

The answer to your second question is part of what I'm doing with Oliver Brandes [of POLIS]. We co-founded the Water, Innovation, and Global Governance (WIGG) Lab, which is housed at the University of Victoria. We want to build answers to questions about resilient watersheds, about governance, and about how innovation plays a role in improving resilience.

**What are a few "tools" or tips for creating resilient watersheds?**

I'd say experimenting, firstly. We need more support for small-scale governance experiments that suit local problems and capacities. Next, learn about effective processes for innovation that recognize a problem's complexity. Also, develop helpful evaluation metrics so that we know if any of those experiments are successful.

None of this is easy work! Research shows that when you're trying to do something innovative or novel, it's not a linear process. You're trying to make change.

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