



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

# watersustainabilityproject

## ***Creating a Blue Dialogue Webinar Summary:*** **Global Networks and Governance Innovation:** **Tools for Resilient Watersheds**

**Webinar Date:** January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**Attendance:** Approximately 90—academics, NGOs, community water and advocacy groups, local and provincial government, private industry, First Nation organizations and representatives.

### **Introduction**

When it comes to watershed governance, interest is growing in the role that innovation can play in building resilience and capacity to solve the complex problems being faced in watersheds around the globe. In this webinar, the guest speakers discussed challenges and opportunities for building resilience within watersheds. Michele-Lee Moore, an emerging scholar in global water governance, discussed the importance of global networks for driving new innovation processes and improving resilience in our domestic watersheds. Drawing on her research from the Prachinburi River basin in Thailand and the Murray-Darling basin in Australia, she explored the growing linkages between these watersheds and the challenges and benefits that transnational relationships bring for watershed-based organizations. Respondent Frances Westley, a leading social innovation researcher, focused on the role of social “traps” during disasters and how they can affect the capacity to build resilience across sectors within a watershed.

### **Guest Speakers**

#### **Michele-Lee Moore**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, University of Victoria  
Director, Water, Innovation, and Global Governance (WIGG) Lab  
Research Associate & Strategic Faculty Advisor, POLIS Water Sustainability Project

#### **Frances Westley**

JW McConnell Chair in Social Innovation, University of Waterloo

### **Key Points from Webinar Presentations**

- Resiliency is about being able to withstand disturbances while still maintaining a certain level of functionality; it is based on the ability to learn, adapt, and transform. Two factors can help us understand whether a watershed organization is resilient:
  - **Innovation** is about how to create solutions, and comes down to making changes in how we govern water.
  - **Networks** allow for access to different forms of knowledge and resources, which can help generate new ideas and innovations. Dealing with the challenges of governance innovation requires interaction between people working on watershed governance, across a variety of organizations.
- One major barrier to resilient watershed governance is crisis, yet crisis can also create opportunities for transnational networks to connect basin organizations with each other to foster peer-to-peer learning and create innovative governance strategies. Crisis can thus be seen as both a barrier and opportunity for innovation.
- Often, there is significant tension when trying to innovate a system that has just undergone a crisis or disaster. Although networks are never able to remove tensions entirely, there is evidence that networks might help groups to move through tensions towards innovation.

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### **About the Series**

Hosted by the POLIS Water Sustainability Project at the University of Victoria, *Creating a Blue Dialogue* brings together expert water practitioners and thinkers, as well as emerging water leaders, to engage with innovative ideas on water policy and governance in Canada.

By creating an online community of interest, the webinar series serves to strengthen the national capacity to engage with and solve problems, and raises awareness about emerging Canadian water issues, best practices, and policies.

- Three paradoxes for resilient outcomes exist when managing crises:
  - **Paradox of time:** Quick responses tend to address particular issues, not wider issues. As such, rapid responses often result in the *Murphy Waterbed Syndrome*, where actions addressing one area of a crisis cause problems to surface in another area.
  - **Paradox of accountability:** In a crisis response, the need for accountability is extremely high. Yet, it prevents learning from happening; learning is vital for general resilience. If you don't learn from one crisis, how can you increase your social capacity to deal with multiple crises? During the SARS epidemic in Toronto, the more resilient hospitals were those with good-quality workers, porous hierarchy, communication between all levels, and decentralized decision-making with a strong learning culture. Networks can help build resilient individuals, develop cultures of learning, and empower more self-governance.
  - **Paradox of deliberate versus emergent response:** Most of the best solutions to crises are emergent and develop locally; people use their own experiences and learning to determine solutions. Yet, the onus is often on governments to plan for crises and have a quick response that can undermine local solutions and approaches.

## Key Concepts from Discussion Period

- The role of individuals (as opposed to entire organizations) is critical to building and maintaining networks. If key individuals leave their positions, network ties often vanish as well.
- It remains to be seen how to use networks once they have been mapped out. A current challenge in governance is using existing networks in creative and strategic ways.
- When trying to make change happen, it is important to see innovation as a process—with distinct stages and actions. It is critical that the root of the problem is clearly understood. Then, it can be decided which innovation process to use (through a selection process).
- Pilot projects must be evaluated and resources must be leveraged through networks to assist in the implementation of innovative ideas.

## Interested in More Webinars?

To view past webinars in the *Creating a Blue Dialogue* series visit [www.youtube.com/POLISWaterProject](http://www.youtube.com/POLISWaterProject). Previous topics include “Water Policy in Western Canada,” “What Canada Can Learn from EU Water Governance,” “The Public Trust Doctrine,” and “Recognizing Aboriginal Rights: Towards a New Water Ethic in Canada.”

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