

Governing Urban Water Infrasystems: A Case Study of Los Angeles in the Context of Global Frameworks

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Abstract : Now that global frameworks for sustainability governance (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Climate Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) are in place, the question is how these aspirations that represent major transitions can be put into practice. Water 'infrasystems' can play an especially significant role in strengthening regional sustainability. Infrasystems include both hard and soft infrastructure, such as pipes and technology for delivering water, as well as the institutions and governance models that direct its delivery. As such, an integrated infrasystems view is crucial for Integrative Water Management (IWM). Due to frequently contested ownership of and responsibility for water resources, these infrasystems can also play an important role in facilitating conflict and catalysing community empowerment, especially through participatory approaches to governance. In this paper, we analyze the water infrasystem of the Los Angeles region through the lens of global frameworks for sustainability governance. By complementing a solid overview of governance theories with empirical data from interviews with water actors in the LA metropolitan region (including NGOs, water managers, scientists and elected officials), this paper elucidates ways for this infrasystem to be better aligned with global sustainability frameworks. In addition, it opens up the opportunity to scrutinize the appropriateness of global frameworks when it comes to fostering sustainability action at the local level.

Keywords : governance, transitions, global frameworks, infrasystems

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