

Conceptual Frameworks of Sustainability

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Aims of discussion

- ◆ **Beyond:**
**“Urban Water Governance,
Technological Change and Paradigm
Shifts”**
- ◆ **Towards:**
**“The Sustainability of Urban Water
Service Reform”**

Smith et al. (2005)

- ◆ Transition between socio-technical paradigms as change “mediated by the resources, interests and expectations of *institutionally embedded networks of actors*”
- ◆ Role of actors in socio-technical regime reproduction is determined by actors’ regime membership and strategic influence
- ◆ Regime transformation as function of:
 - 1) shifting selection pressures; 2) coordination of resources within/without the regime
- ◆ Transition contexts: a) endogenous renewal; b) re-orientation of trajectories; c) emergent transformation; d) purposive transitions

Limitations of Smith et al. (2005)

- ◆ They develop a model of sustainable socio-technical transitions without discussing sustainability
- ◆ They have little to say on how assessments of the sustainability of paradigms are made
- ◆ They overlook the significance of non-core regime members (e.g. social movements) as agents of regime change

“Urban Water Governance, etc”

- ◆ **Conceptualisation of sustainability, IWRM/IUWM and water service governance as a wicked problem**
- ◆ **Governance as networked government-beyond-the-state**
- ◆ **Institutional legitimacy as precondition to paradigm shifts**
- ◆ **Advocacy coalitions, policy learning and policy diffusion as determinants of paradigm shifts**

“Urban Water Governance, etc”

- ◆ Offers a conceptual framework of social factors enabling and inhibiting paradigm shifts in urban water services
- ◆ Paradigm shifts: radical changes in water service metabolism informed by ethos
- ◆ Paradigm shifts as function of: 1) agency of paradigm advocacy; 2) institutional legitimacy of competing paradigms
- ◆ Multigroup assessments of competing paradigms are informed by aspirations to normative coherence under bounded rationality

Towards “The sustainability etc”

- ◆ Conceptual frameworks understood as operational definitions of general notions aimed to guide further inquiry
- ◆ Definitions of sustainability abound, but relatively little work has been done on the conceptualisation of sustainable public services (Otley, 2003) and sustainable water services (Biswas, 2004)
- ◆ Is it possible to operationalise the notion of sustainability?



Sustainability operationalised

- ◆ **Sustainability as socially constructed norm defining: a) communal aspirations to equitable development; b) the repertoire of socially legitimate actions around the realisation of equitable development objectives**
- ◆ **Normative coherence clarifies the purpose and hierarchy of sustainability-oriented interventions: process is instrumental to achieving outcome**
- ◆ **Sustainable water operations conciliate justice with the PESTE metabolism of the governance subsystem in which services are performed**



Sustainability operationalised

- ◆ Sustainable water operations as high level punctuated equilibria
- ◆ Sustainable water operations as the result of multiple equilibria of agents' strategies whose outcome is the attainment of multiple, interdependent and hierarchically ordered equitable development objectives
- ◆ Sustainability as a social welfare function in relation to which the merits of feasible and alternative organisational modes and discrete reform interventions are comparatively assessed



Equitable development objectives

- ◆ **Green vs. Brown development**
- ◆ **Capability and capacity**
- ◆ **Adaptive efficiency: Flexible vs. Inflexible**
- ◆ **Multi-Principal Agency and the coordination of sustainability-oriented interventions**



Paradigms and conceptual frameworks

- ◆ Paradigms as ideal type policies, practices and ethos defining water service management
- ◆ Paradigms as the vertices defining the perimeter within which alternative institutional trajectories are feasible
- ◆ Multiplexity of paradigms compounds the bounded rationality of paradigm assessments; importance of identifying the conceptual boundaries of overlapping and competing paradigms



Paradigm development

- ◆ Paradigms of water service management developed along three dimensions (plus ownership)
 - Teleological:
Profit vs. Output maximisation
 - Policy making:
Technocratic vs. Responsive
 - Regulatory:
Ex Ante vs. Ex Post



Paradigms of water management

- **Weberian public administration**
- **Private management**
- **Privatist public management**
- **Eclectic public management**

