

A large flock of birds, possibly terns, is captured in mid-flight over a beach and ocean. The birds are arranged in a large, circular, swirling pattern that dominates the center of the image. The background consists of a clear blue sky above a dark blue ocean, with a sandy beach in the foreground. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of blue.

POLYCENTRICITY

**INNOVATIONS IN
CLIMATE GOVERNANCE**

WHAT IS POLYCENTRIC GOVERNANCE?

Polycentric governance systems are those in which political authority is dispersed amongst a range of bodies that operate in overlapping jurisdictions which are not in a hierarchical relationship to one another.

The logical opposite of a polycentric system is a monocentric one which has formalised structures and common strategies - such as the European Union.

Whilst some argue that the Kyoto Protocol was an example of a monocentric approach, our conclusion is that this was not the case. However, the Paris Agreement which superceded the Kyoto Protocol, is now stimulating greater polycentricity.

To understand polycentric climate governance, five key propositions are drawn from polycentric theory :

- 1) Local action
- 2) Mutual adjustment
- 3) Experimentation
- 4) Trust
- 5) Overarching rules

Elinor Ostrom defined polycentric systems as those that **“have multiple governing authorities at different scales rather than a monocentric unit. Each unit...exercises considerable independence to make norms and rules within a specific domain.”**

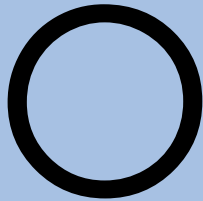


Elinor Ostrom was a political economist who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 for her analysis of governance of the environment.

Ostrom, E. (2010) Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change. *Global Environmental Change*, 20(4), 550–557.

1. LOCAL ACTION

Governance initiatives are likely to take off and prosper at a local level, through processes of self-organisation.



strom hypothesised that actors will come up with their own innovative solutions to secure co-benefits such as improved human health, lower energy costs and better local air quality.

The changing landscape of climate governance suggests that more non-state actors are making a rational calculation to act against climate change. They are not waiting to be told what to do by an external authority; they are, it seems, taking matters into their own hands.

2. MUTUAL ADJUSTMENT

Actors are likely to freely develop collaborations with one another, which over time produce more trusting relationships.

Polycentric theory suggests that actors will interact with one another in a spontaneous and bottom-up manner. INOGOVI has discovered that climate governance actors have 'mutually adjusted' in ways that have helped to plug gaps in the UNFCCC framework.

3. EXPERIMENTATION

The willingness and capacity to experiment is likely to facilitate governance innovation, which in turn leads to learning about what works best.



strom believed that a polycentric approach allows - even encourages - actors within domains to experiment with a range of approaches. By experimenting, they are able to ascertain what works in particular settings, facilitating upscaling and innovation

INOGOV has revealed that many actors are indeed engaging in policy experiments, particularly in urban areas.

4. TRUST

Units are likely to freely and spontaneously develop collaborations with one another, which over time produce more trusting relationships.

Climate change is often regarded as a wicked problem which states struggle to govern because of high uncertainty and low trust. However, Ostrom argued that trust is more likely in a polycentric setting, because of actors' ability to interact directly with one another.

INOGOV has uncovered much evidence of collective self-organisation born of trust.

5. OVERARCHING RULES

Local initiatives are likely to work best when bound by a set of overarching rules that enshrine the broader goals to be achieved and allow any conflicts to be satisfactorily resolved.

By definition, polycentric systems do not have a central authority. But Ostrom referred to the rule of law, and a set of 'overarching rules' which provide a means to settle disputes between individual actors, and thus prevent any one or any thing from dominating.

INOGOV has revealed that the UNFCCC is a key source of significant rules, norms and values; it clearly defines the broad goals of climate governance which in turn provide a clear signal to investors. As most countries participate in the UNFCCC, its claims to legitimacy enjoy strong authority.



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