

International Research Workshop

**Territoriality of the Commons:
Spatial Perspectives on the Governance of Public Goods
in Past and Present**

29-30 September 2011

Erkner, near Berlin

CALL FOR PAPERS

Rationale for the workshop

The governance of public goods such as water, landscapes or infrastructures has undergone dramatic change since the 1980s. Traditional models of public ownership and provision have – in the wake of global trends of liberalisation, privatisation, technological innovation, land-use change and environmental regulation – given way to a patchwork of organisational structures, policy frameworks and local practices. These changes and the assumptions on which they are based are often highly contested in terms of the benefits they generate, the stakeholders they favour and the issues they advance. As disillusionment with neo-liberal forms of provision grows and memories of the inadequacies of state interventionism persist, interest is increasingly directed at alternative modes of governance at local, regional and national levels for those resources we use collectively. Research by social scientists and historians on suitable institutional arrangements is becoming very topical.

Within this scholarly debate on the governance of public goods the issue of spatiality is curiously under-researched. Whilst many studies refer to the importance of place for the effectiveness of the institutions investigated, few submit this general assumption to critical ap-

praisal and even fewer put the spatiality of the commons and its social construction centre stage in their analysis. The importance of space is generally taken as given and not subjected to systematic scrutiny. This is surprising given that institutions regulating the provision and use of public goods invariably affect spatial structures and dynamics. Conversely, the social, economic and physical characteristics of a city or region can substantially frame the choice of institutional arrangements. The importance of space to the governance of the commons has, moreover, increased as institutional arrangements become more international and local practices more diversified. New international regimes and supranational reforms by the EU are generating a spatial re-ordering of particular commons, characterised in particular by the need to work across territorial boundaries and scalar levels. This, in turn, is requiring stakeholders to develop more spatially-aware strategies to benefit from the changes. At the same time local actors are developing their own, place-specific solutions for managing the commons.

The purpose of the international research workshop is to explore the multiple, emergent geographies of the commons as a step towards developing a more systematic and fine-grained conceptualisation of the spatial dimensions to their governance. The workshop promotes a dialogue between three strands of research identified as particularly relevant to the territoriality of the commons:

1. *Action arenas as loci for organising regional commons*
2. *Rescaling the commons and the reordering of power geometries*
3. *Reconnecting the physical and social geographies of the commons*

The relative strengths and weaknesses of these three research strands as well as their resonances and dissonances will be critically appraised with a view to advancing new ways of theorising and analysing the spatiality of commons governance. Particular attention will be paid to historical debates on the spatial organisation of the commons and their relevance for today's challenges.

The organisers invite papers addressing one or more of the three themes elaborated below. They are looking primarily for papers which contribute to the debate on concepts and analytical frameworks and their connectivity. Empirical studies of regional commons (e.g. water resources, infrastructures, cultural landscapes, as well as "social" or "virtual" commons) are welcome if they address and add to this knowledge, as are papers with an historical focus. At the workshop each theme will be introduced by a keynote speaker who will survey the state-of-the-art of research, elaborate key concepts and raise core questions for discussion. There will follow 4 papers on each theme, submitted as full papers (4,000-8,000 words) in advance. At the workshop the authors will summarise their submitted papers which will be collectively co-commented by an invited participant.

Themes of the international research workshop

1. Action arenas as loci for organising regional commons

Action arenas are the focal unit of analysis of the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Ostrom et al.), comprising actors interacting in social spaces. Defining action arenas, studying interactions there and using them to improve the provision and use of particular public goods have proved important ways of understanding how institutional arrangements work in specific local or regional contexts. Of particular interest to spatial research are contributions on resolving problems of spatial fit (between the territories of a resource or service and of the relevant institutions) and problems of horizontal interplay (between sectoral institutions of divergent territorial remit). A classic example is tailoring the spatial organisation of water management to fit the hydrological boundary of a river basin. Key questions addressed by the workshop are:

- How can the concept of action arenas be qualified for a better understanding of the spatial dimensions of commons governance?
- How can spatial fit and horizontal interplay be optimized in existing institutional contexts? What problems are thereby encountered and how can they be dealt with?
- What can historical experience tell us about the opportunities and limitations of tailoring institutional arrangements to fit the territorial unit of a public good?

2. Re-scaling the commons and the reordering of power geometries

The human geography debate on the politics of scale is increasingly being applied to environmental governance. Here, public goods – rather than the private goods and services of globalised trade – are the focus of attempts to explain how shifting patterns of resource provision, use and regulation have distinct scalar dimensions and how processes of rescaling environmental governance are reordering power constellations from local to global levels. The literature highlights the scalar strategies developed by well-positioned and resourceful actors working across multiple scales to advance their particular interests, often to the exclusion of others. Key questions addressed by the workshop are:

- How can the rescaling concept raise understanding of the dynamics and politics of the multi-level governance of the commons?
- What lessons for the scale debate can be derived from grounded empirical analysis of rescaling processes relating to public goods?
- What fresh light can past cases of rescaling shed on current research and policy debates?

3. Reconnecting the physical and social geographies of the commons

Recent calls to “re-materialise” human geography and “bring technology back in” to science and technology studies (STS) are indicative of the ambivalent role of physical-technical artefacts in social science research on the commons. The general critique is that social constructivists, in deconstructing the technological and geophysical determinism inherent to many earlier studies, have sidelined materiality, according it significance purely as a social construct. Contributions from the fields of socio-technical systems, socio-ecological systems and urban political ecology are seeking to rectify this imbalance by exploring the complex interactions between physical and social systems, building on relational or co-evolutionary notions of human-environment relations. The spatial dimensions of these approaches remain, however, under-researched. Where progress has been made – as at the interface between STS and urban studies – public goods and their institutional arrangements have generally been addressed only implicitly. Key questions addressed by the workshop are:

- How can the complex interdependencies between the physical and social geographies of public goods be conceptualised and analysed empirically?
- How does materiality frame choices for institutional arrangements in specific socio-spatial contexts? How do institutions contribute to the materialisation of space?
- How has materiality been viewed and treated in past institutional arrangements for governing the (local/regional) commons?

Keynote speakers

Frank van Laerhoven, Utrecht University (Theme 1)

Erik Swyngedouw, University of Manchester (Theme 2)

Matthew Gandy, University College London (Theme 3)

Pre-dinner speech

Rainer Kuhlen (University of Konstanz)

Review Panel:

The organising team at IRS and keynote speakers

Organisation

Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS),
Research Department "Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods"

Responsible: Timothy Moss

Organisation team: Christoph Bernhardt, Martina Leppler, Andreas Röhring

Location

Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS), Flakenstr. 28-31,
15537 Erkner, Germany, www.irs-net.de

Time plan

1 April 2011	Submission of abstracts for papers or posters
15 May 2011	Notification of acceptance
15 August 2011	Submission of full papers
29-30 September 2011	International research workshop

All papers (4,000-8,000 words) will be distributed in advance of the workshop to all participants. It is planned to publish a selection of the papers as a high-profile edited volume.

The workshop language is English.

Abstract submission

All abstracts for papers (400 words plus cv) should be submitted to Martina Leppler (commongoods@irs-net.de)

Proposals for posters of projects for display at the workshop are also welcome.

Workshop fee

The fee for attending the workshop is € 80,00 (including workshop dinner) or € 40,00 (excluding workshop dinner). The fee includes meals, refreshments and the workshop documentation. Participants are expected to bear expenses for transportation and accommodation themselves.

Sponsorship

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