

Case studies of intermediaries in seven urban regions

Having compiled a detailed data-base of some 100 intermediaries in six European countries, the "Intermediaries" project is currently conducting in-depth analyses of selected intermediaries in seven urban regions: Berlin, Newcastle, Manchester, Copenhagen, Volos (Greece), Budapest and Sofia. Each case study focuses on key issues that are emblematic of water management in the region, enabling the project to explore diverse dimensions of intermediarity in water supply and wastewater disposal services. The topics are (working titles):

1. Environmental entrepreneurs and the creation of intermediary spaces
2. A non-commercial eco-entrepreneur: bridging top-down and bottom-up
3. Intermediaries as a product of utility restructuring: expectations and realities
4. Making water work: intermediaries in-between regional strategy and local practice
5. Networked intermediaries and action learning in the shadow of hierarchy
6. The greening of the social housing sector: intermediaries and the reframing of environmental issues
7. Intermediaries as networks around an urban redevelopment project: emergence and disappearance
8. Emergence of new types of social organisation and the development of new forms of intermediaries: meters, money and markets
9. Intermediaries communicating images of water



The partnership

The project brings together expertise from the fields of urban planning, technology studies, political science, sociology, economics and environmental management at the following research organisations:

- Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, Erkner (D) – Coordinator
Dr. Timothy Moss, mosst@irs-net.de
- University of Salford, Centre for Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures (UK)
Prof. Simon Marvin & Dr. Will Medd,
s.marvin@salford.ac.uk; w.medd@salford.ac.uk
- Urban Alternatives Association (BG)
Dr. Vesselina Penevska, vpenevska@operamail.com
- Panteion University, Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources (GR)
Prof. Panagiotis Getimis, pget@panteion.gr
- University of Newcastle, Centre for Urban Technology (UK)
Prof. Simon Guy, s.c.guy@ncl.ac.uk
- Technical University of Denmark, Department of Civil Engineering (DK)
Dr. Birgitte Hoffmann, bh@byg.dtu.dk
- Metropolitan Research Institute (HU)
Dr. Jozsef Hegedüs, hegedus@mri.hu

Complementary technical and business expertise is provided by Assistant Contractors engaged or interested in intermediary activity in the water sector:

- Hungarian Professional Association of Water and Sewerage Companies (HU)
- Copenhagen Environment and Energy Office (DK)
- Environmental Industries Federation (UK)
- Sustainability North West (UK)
- Greater Volos Municipal Enterprise for Water and Sewerage (GR)
- ucb Management Consulting GmbH (D)
- BULPLAN (BG)
- International Office for Water (F)

Briefing Paper



Research Project:

New intermediary services and the transformation of urban water supply and wastewater disposal systems in Europe

- In what ways is the management of urban water and wastewater systems transforming across Europe?
- To what extent are new organisations emerging in the water sector to address changing relationships and responsibilities?
- How does the concept of "intermediarity" help us better understand these changes?
- What kinds of "intermediary space" are emerging and how are they being used?
- What intermediary organisations operate in-between the utilities, consumers and regulators and what kinds of services do they provide?
- What impacts can and do they have on the efficient use of water resources and effective urban water management?

This EU-funded research project provides the first in-depth investigation of the contribution of intermediary organisations to the sustainable management of urban water resources in Europe. It maps the development of intermediary services and organisations in water supply and wastewater disposal systems, examines how they facilitate the application of new resource-saving technologies and social practices and assesses their impact on the environment, economic efficiency and infrastructure management. In so doing, the project contributes to the more rapid implementation of key objectives of EU water policy.

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www.irs-net.de/intermediaries



NEGOTIATING CHANGE

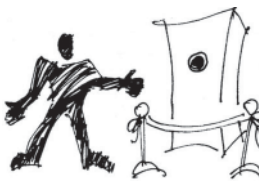


Where and how do intermediaries emerge?

Recent shifts in the way utility services are organised and provided – in response to regulatory, environmental, social and commercial pressures – are making utility markets more differentiated and utility services increasingly diverse. As a result, relationships between utility companies, consumers and regulators are changing, creating openings for both new and existing organisations to take on intermediary functions in the provision of water and wastewater services.

This **intermediary space** has several dimensions. In the first instance it relates to space in between key actors of the water sector, revealing new forms of interaction. It can also be applied to different territories of the water sector to investigate how certain intermediary organisations emerge to span the diverse natural, institutional and economic geographies which characterise water supply and wastewater disposal. The third dimension of intermediary space is in between technologies and social contexts, in which intermediary actors can play an important role in advancing technology uptake in specific environments. The emergence of intermediary space and organisations, being heavily contingent, varies enormously across Europe and would not appear to follow a clear pattern. Our research demonstrates clearly, however, that the variety and importance of intermediary organisations in the water sector is increasing across Europe.

PROMOTING TECHNOLOGIES



Who are the intermediaries and what do they do?

In order to capture this rich variety of intermediary activity we conceptualise intermediaries in broad, inclusive terms and research them with several complementary methods. We use the following **working definition**:

"Intermediaries are organisations that act in-between the traditional relationships between utilities, regulators and consumers to enable the uptake of new technologies and changed social practices within the production-consumption relationship to reshape the intensity, timing and level of water use and wastewater production".

Mapping exercises, statistical analysis and case studies conducted in six European countries have so far revealed an extraordinary range of organisations performing intermediary tasks. Here are a few examples:

REORDERING RELATIONS



~ NJK Partnership (UK)

NJK is a commercial company in the North East of England providing tailored services for improved water and energy efficiency to a broad range of non-domestic consumers. It applies expertise in engineering and construction to design customised technical solutions for clients, enabling them to save costs and water and meet increasingly stringent environmental targets, for example through leakage detection.

~ Copenhagen Energy and Environmental Office – KMEK (DK)

KMEK – a high-profile, non-profit consultancy promoting sustainable development – has been instrumental in advancing water saving and clean water agendas in the Copenhagen region. It offers advice (e.g. green accounting), initiates innovative environmental projects, provides training programmes and organises exhibitions targeted primarily at consumers and housing associations but also at local politicians and utilities.

~ Lancashire Business Environment Associations – BEA (UK)

BEA is a charity that incorporates the project Sustainable Water Environment in Lancashire (SWEL). SWEL engages BEA in demonstrating to small businesses the benefits of improved water management, providing advice, water audits, helplines, seminars, newsletters and site visits directed at reducing water use, recycling water, minimising pollution, introducing Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) and conducting flood risk assessments.

~ Berlin Centre of Competence for Water – KZW (D)

The KZW is a regional innovation network comprising the city's universities and research institutes, water utilities and city authorities. A product of the recent partial privatisation of the Berlin Water Company, it operates as a forum which draws on the combined expertise of the network's members to provide strategic direction to water policy in the region, promote innovation in the water sector and strengthen Berlin's economic profile as a provider of water-related knowledge and technology.

What functions do intermediaries perform?

Looking across the range of intermediary organisations investigated we can identify a variety of different functions. Intermediarity exists in diverse forms. We use a number of terms to help categorise this diversity. Some intermediaries operate as bridge-builders, mediators, go-betweens or brokers. Others are rather facilitators, building and leading networks or initiating dialogue. Some act primarily as educators or knowledge providers – so-called 'info-mediaries'. Others function as lobbyists, advocates, campaigners, gatekeepers or image-makers for particular causes. More commercially oriented intermediaries are often pioneers, innovators, promoters, or – when targeting environmental protection – so-called 'eco-preneurs'. Many intermediaries perform several of these functions.

It is important to understand that organisations of this kind are often unaware of the intermediary services they are providing. Cases of deliberate and exclusive intermediarity are rare. Intermediarity is often unintentional – or, at least, not fully appreciated – and can be provided by organisations otherwise engaged in non-intermediary activities or in policy fields beyond water management. We also need to appreciate that intermediary activities are not always beneficial. They can be highly selective, missing important opportunities, and are subject to failure, resulting in wasted resources.

ADVOCATING REFORMS



ADVANCING UNDERSTANDING



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CONNECTING PEOPLE



BRIDGING SPACES

