

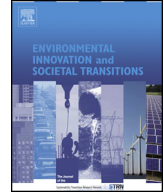


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# Building networks and coalitions to promote transformational change: Insights from an Australian urban water planning case study



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### ABSTRACT

Innovation in governance for inducing transformative societal change is widely promoted in academic literature, yet there remains a lack of detailed prescription for successfully operationalising these new approaches. Drawing on an Australian urban water planning case study in Sydney, Australia, which resembles the prescriptions of transition management, this paper details the approach undertaken to generate transformative change in urban water management practices. This empirical case reveals key processes related to developing and sustaining multiple, actor-networks, which through coordinated activity built key social, political and technical coalitions in support of changing urban water management practices. Building on insights from transition management literature, and the outcomes of this transformational case study, the paper proposes five design considerations which provide a starting point for policy-makers, or relevant actors, who are seeking to generate transformative change, irrespective of whether a policy mandate for a dedicated programme of change exists.

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## 1. Introduction

Sustainability challenges persist across many policy domains (Pereira, 2012). To address these persistent, complex societal problems scholars have long advocated for a shift in governance approaches, away from traditional, hierarchical, command-control mechanisms, towards adaptive co-management which embraces multi-actor learning processes to account for uncertainty, to enhance resilience and support adaptation (Folke et al., 2005; Olsson et al., 2004; Pahl-Wostl, 2009). Drawing on current scholarship from the fields of adaptive management and sustainability transitions, shadow networks and/or tracks, and alternative arenas are considered important for developing and supporting coalitions for new practice. The establishment of such networks require self-organised, participatory, poly-centric approaches, underpinned by a learning agenda, and facilitated through bridging organisations and leadership (Bos and Brown, 2012; Folke et al., 2005; Grin et al., 2010; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Olsson et al., 2006; Ostrom, 2010; Rotmans et al., 2001). Recent attempts have been made to develop governance frameworks in support of advancing sustainability transitions, focusing on among other areas, polycentric governance and the important role of networks (see e.g. Van de Meene et al., 2011; Huntjens et al., 2012). However, despite the important descriptive academic insights, such frameworks often lack the required level of prescription for successfully operationalising these new approaches (Anderies et al., 2006).

Conceived of as a tool for governance, transition management resonates with the contemporary discourse on governance for achieving transformative change in a sustainable direction (Loorbach, 2007, 2010). As a prescriptive governance framework, transition management promotes the development of a shadow track which operates parallel to mainstream decision-making processes; this thinking closely aligns with adaptive management discourse regarding shadow networks (e.g. Olsson et al., 2006; Van der Brugge and Van Raak, 2007). While the overarching propositions of transition management have been substantiated (e.g. Frantzeskaki et al., 2012; Van Eijndhoven et al., 2013) “whether transition management ‘works’ has not been ‘proven’” (Neuens et al., 2013 p.121). Furthermore, questions remain regarding how to operationalise certain transition management prescriptions; in particular, how to create powerful arenas so that they coalesce and become networks for change.

Against this background, and through the lens of a governance intervention aimed at purposively generating fundamental change within an urban water catchment in Sydney, Australia, this paper will explicate the processes involved in developing and sustaining successful arenas and shadow networks to build themed coalitions for generating fundamental change. Drawing on transition management prescriptions and insight generated from the case-study, the paper then provides a process pathway for creating change in the absence of a prescribed transition management policy approach. Although transition management prescriptions were not explicitly adopted in this case study, the authors considered this governance intervention to be a sufficient transition management proxy process, given the aims, attributes and processes closely align with transition management prescriptions. In addition, the research insights derived from this self-emerging, but purposive process closely aligned to the processes involved in the application of transition management and helped to unpack key steps in supporting and sustaining networks, which in turn built a coalition for change. Overall, this case illustrates how concepts such as transition arenas, coalitions, transition agendas, the role of visions and multi-actor learning work.

The next section describes the conceptual underpinnings of this paper, transition management, and the methodological approach undertaken. Section 3 describes the case study context, while Section 4 presents the evolution of the urban water catchment planning process drawing on transition management as a guiding framework for presentation and analysis. Following this, Section 5 discusses the alignment of this emergent planning process with the prescriptions of transition management and reveals the important role of a diversity of coalitions in building an overall, powerful coalition for change. Building on this discussion, Section 6 proposes key policy design considerations for future change programmes; this is followed with concluding remarks.

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