

Evaluating Collaborative Institutions in Context: The Case of Regional Water Management in Southern California

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Abstract

Regional collaborative institutions are seen as tools for improving collaboration and for reducing the inefficiency of fragmented management and planning. However, recent research has shown that the ability of new regional institutions to achieve these aims is contingent upon their relationship to the existing institutional landscape. This paper uses network analyses of six newly created Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) subregions in southern California to examine how their introduction intersects existing water management systems and whether the patterns of interaction in water planning have changed as a result. The results further our understanding of collaborative governance and regionalism by showing that the ability of regional institutions to facilitate new interactions can vary widely across a given institutional landscape. Further, while IRWM has helped to strengthen the water management network in southern California, it has not replaced existing watershed planning efforts. Interviews with water managers reveal there is support for IRWM but it is still too early to evaluate its effectiveness. Further research should explore the drivers and consequences of heterogeneity in IRWM and whether the incentives for participation are sufficient.

Keywords

[collaborative institutions](#), [regional governance](#), [integrated regional water management](#), [network analysis](#), [southern California](#)