

Do policy actors collaborate based on the environmental problems they are to address?

Johanna Hedlund, Örjan Bodin, Daniel Nohrstedt

Environmental problems constitute a growing concern for policy actors, such as politicians, civil servants or non-state representatives of NGOs or industries. Often, environmental problems span multiple challenges, or policy issues, that engage different sets of actors across different policy domains. Policy actors' actions to address any given policy issue can, however, be influenced by efforts other actors undertake to address other policy issues. In this way, policy issues are interdependent. Therefore, if actors concentrate only on one of these interdependent issues, effective and comprehensive solutions to an environmental problem are difficult to accomplish. This suggests that actors need to collaborate when addressing policy issues, but it remains unclear if actors generally choose to collaborate based on the ways in which they engage with different policy issues. Here, we investigate two types of drivers of collaboration: social-oriented and problem-oriented factors. Actors might select partners primarily based on who the other actors are and how they are socially tied to others. Or, actors can prioritise factors that derive from the characteristics of the environmental problem.

We found that in two water councils in Sweden, policy actors' choices of their collaborative partners are less driven by characteristics of the environmental problem, such as policy issues and their interdependencies. Social drivers dominate with whom actors choose to collaborate. This suggests that the ways in which actors interact do not necessarily align with the environmental problem they are to address. Policy actors overlooking policy issues and their interdependencies may therefore collaborate in ways that are less useful for them as individuals and as a collective to address the complexity of environmental problems. Our results provide an important step towards arriving at evidence-based recommendations for more effective collaborative efforts in

addressing complex environmental problems that no actor can address alone.



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