

The Workshop in Institutional Analysis of Social-Ecological Systems (WINS) at Humboldt University Berlin

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1 Background

One of the most promising achievements in the area of institutional analysis of natural resource systems is the recognition that human-environment interactions that are mediated by linked social and ecological systems, often via specific technologies and infrastructure, require a high degree of institutional diversity and polycentric governance. Sustainability of social-ecological systems crucially depends on actors' individual and collective behaviour and is guided by adequate institutions (sets of rules) and governance structures (forms of organisation). The scientific communities involved in institutional analysis of linked social-ecological systems have often developed their own and sometimes very specific analytical frameworks using quite different heuristics and languages. This diversity reflects the wide spectrum of physical transaction and transformation activities through which humans interact in social-ecological systems. Such activities include, for example, conversion of entire resource systems, withdrawal of resource units, production, provision or consumption of goods and services based on ecological and biological processes, or using the absorption capacity of ecological systems for waste deposit and pollution. Specialisation of scientific communities on a limited range of activities explains the emergence of different framings. Although necessary, such specialization should not prevent the building of a common understanding across the above mentioned communities.

2 Objectives

This observation explains the rationale behind the initiative to establish a multidisciplinary and international centre, the "Berlin Workshop in Institutional Analysis of Social-Ecological Systems" (WINS) under the umbrella of "IRI THESys", the Integrative Research Institute at Humboldt University Berlin devoted to "Transformations of Human-Environment Systems". WINS aims at stimulating communication, research and education across the boundaries of scientific communities. In that integrative role, WINS is conceived as a space for self-organization for scholars from local and international network to engage in multidisciplinary knowledge generation and dissemination. Accordingly, WINS will be open to relevant topics of problem-oriented research in the area of socio-ecological institutional change and governance reform. Shedding light on the complexity and diversity that are characteristic of socio-ecological systems is urgent in view of pertinent global food problems, increasing scarcity of natural resources, growing degradation of the natural environment, and the future challenges of climate change and energy provision. This is a fundamental concern in IRI THESys that the initiators of WINS share. By organizing processes of discourse, research and education on such issues, WINS aims to profit from and contribute to the interdisciplinary design and practice of IRI THESys.

3 Strategy

WINS will develop an integrative bridging strategy across scientific communities. To this end, it aims to engage with a corresponding agenda in all three relevant areas of activity: communication, research and training. WINS is expected to become a forum for both advanced and

young scholars interested in discussing and working together on existing or future problems by using analytical frameworks, theories and methodologies contributing to their understanding and solution. It aims to stimulate integrative discourses across scientific communities approaching social-ecological systems from similar or contrasting analytical perspectives. It will engage in new forms of academic education, create a stimulating environment to launch interdisciplinary research projects, and inform the policy dialogue based on problem-oriented analysis. This requires building capacity for collective action which will also facilitate professional fundraising by emerging research groups of the WINS affiliated faculty.

4 Structure

The core activities of WINS, i.e. discourse, research and education, will draw on both an international and a local network of scholars from various schools and disciplines, having in common their interest in institutional analysis of social-ecological systems. The association of scholars to WINS will be in the shape of affiliated faculty coming from different organisations such as HU-based faculty, other German or foreign universities and research institutes. A visiting scholar programme is intended to serve as one major mechanism to attract scholars and to integrate them into joint research and advanced academic education. Special attention will be paid to integrating young academics into the affiliation structure, for example by means of a WINS Young Researchers Club. A Deliberation Circle of affiliated scholars will support the WINS organisers in designing and developing the Workshop. The constitutional understanding of WINS is not to form a cluster of individuals working in the bondage of narrow rules and inflexible procedures. In contrast, the vision associated with the WINS initiative aims at making the Workshop lively by developing a culture of openness and thus welcoming everybody, provided that he or she may contribute to the WINS objectives.

5 Programme

Establishing creative discourses, cooperative research projects and advanced teaching modules will require a cumulative process involving scholars mainly from the WINS network. This will be achieved by organising a combination of *Integrative Discourses* for institutionalising communication between members of several research communities, *Interdisciplinary Research* based on multiple theoretical and empirical approaches and an *Advanced Studies Programme* addressing the particular interests of both junior and senior researchers. The visiting scholar programme will serve as a main tool for enhancing the internal quality of WINS performance and building international reputation. This needs a context of institutionalised discussion opportunities, such as seminars, research colloquia and special graduate courses. Decisions on the choice of research topics will be made as the WINS process unfolds, in particular building on the research interests and academic expertise of active members of the affiliated faculty. International centres working in a similar area of research and education, such as the Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University have shown great interest in the foundation of WINS under the umbrella of IRI THESys and have offered their support. After WINS will have been successfully established, a triennial Workshop on objectives and activities, experience and future development of WINS will take place to contribute to its quality and sustainability.