

Beyond Institutional Diversity: Studying Governance & Leadership in the Social-Ecological System of  
Urban Lakes in Bangalore, India

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This dissertation seeks to explain how the lakes, in the Indian city of Bangalore, have been governed over time. The different chapters of this dissertation are bound together by a single, cross-cutting theme - a desire to understand whether diversity is a hallmark of the human-condition – irrespective of whether it is in the form of institutional diversity as discussed in Ostrom (2005) or diversity in modes of governance (Chapter 5), diversity in mechanisms of governance (Chapter 6) and diversity in leadership structures (Chapter 7). This dissertation begins with an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) which provides a broad overview of what the dissertation is all about. The next chapter (Chapter 2) constitutes the theoretical section of this dissertation. This chapter conceptualizes a framework of variables for the governance of urban lakes by integrating ideas from diverse streams of literature. Chapter 3 marks the beginning of the empirical section of this dissertation. It characterizes the contextual settings within which Bangalore's lakes are governed, by using variables from the framework of variables conceptualized in Chapter 2. The next three chapters answer three governance-related questions about the lakes of Bangalore. In Chapter 4, I seek to understand why Bangalore is unable to govern its lake system. I do so by conceptualizing the lake system of the city as a social-ecological system and then draw on ideas from the literature on urban governance & ideas from the literature on social-ecological systems to characterize the governance modes which shape the conservation challenges being faced by the city. The research questions that I seek to answer in this chapter are – What are the different modes of governance which characterize the governance of lakes in the Indian city of Bangalore? An analysis of city governance reveals that three different modes of governance (managerial, clientelist and populist) characterize the lake system. Conflict between these different modes of governance, acting at cross-purposes of each other, explains why the lakes of Bangalore are in such dismal condition. In the past, these lakes have been governed by

mechanisms which were state-dominated & top-down in nature. But over time, the lakes have begun to be governed by mechanisms in which local communities have a much larger say. Chapter 5 seeks to explain the process by which the above transition took place. Therefore, the research question that I seek to answer in this chapter is – “How has the governance of Bangalore’s urban lakes changed over time?” I seek to answer this question by developing an integrated approach using the concepts of actor interactions, power dynamics, mental models, learning, linked action situations, level-shifting, and turbulence in strategic action fields. Chapter 6 analyzes and characterizes the leadership of citizen groups involved in the governance of Bangalore’s lakes. The research presented in this chapter illustrates the idea of ‘leadership as a continuum’ with different groups exhibiting different forms of leadership. Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation by summarizing the research findings discussed in Chapters 4, 5 & 6. It also provides a snapshot of my long term research agenda.