

Visions, beliefs and transformation: Methods for understanding cross-scale and trans-boundary dynamics in the wider Mekong region

Alex Smajgl, Tira Foran, John Dore, Silva Larson, John Ward

Panel: Participatory modeling: A way to promote collaborative learning in multilevel governance

Policy and investment decisions involving the management of natural resource management can have implications far beyond their initial objective. Local decisions that aim for trajectories towards desirable local futures can alter drivers that are determined at higher scales. Such alterations of regional drivers can create feedbacks for the initial local decision making situations and result in undesirable outcomes. In addition to such cross-scale dynamics, multi-level governance aspects have to be considered. The ability to realise desirable local futures diminishes if decision making processes are not coordinated with other influencing governance levels. Consequently, it seems adequate for providing effective support across multiple levels of decision making to (a) identify desired outcomes at the relevant levels of decision making, (b) improve the understanding of complex interactions that link to potentially transforming decisions, and (c) contrast desired outcomes with likely outcomes. Coordinating research implemented in a participatory mode can facilitate relevant system learning among decision makers and decision influencers. This paper conceptualises a context-specific learning process for the Mekong region, where decisions that are contemplated at national or state levels have the potential to transform the wider Mekong region. The participatory process this research employs combines the development of holistic scenarios and agent-based simulation.