

Polycentricity, Perception, and Markets: Governance of Blue Urban Commons in Colonial Mysore

Hita Unnikrishnan

Harini Nagendra

It is recognized that institutional regimes of environmental governance are products of social and ecological path dependencies, over long time periods. However, pathways of institutional emergence and change have been little studied, particularly from the point of view of how they are influenced by market dynamics. The colonial Indian state of Mysore (circa 1799 - 1947) offers a very good example within which to explore this question. Polycentrically governed by British and native rulers, previous research has shown how perceptions regarding governance and appropriation of blue urban commons (lakes) differed between dually governed and native cities, and across primary and secondary cities. In this paper, we examine historical financial records between 1799 and 1947 within the region – we focus on changes in investments made and revenue obtained from lakes and associated infrastructure (agriculture, horticulture, fisheries) in this time period and across the categories of cities mentioned above. Given that urban processes often subsume use of urban blue commons, we juxtapose this long term financial data with records of investments made on other public infrastructure as well as historically changing perceptions of water infrastructure to demonstrate pathways by which urban social-ecological systems develop across cities, and their implications for contemporary urban governance.

Hita Unnikrishnan is a Newton International Fellow at the University of Sheffield, UK, specializing in urban ecology, urban sustainability, and the governance of social-ecological systems. Her multimethod work has been published in numerous peer-reviewed journals. h.unnikrishnan@sheffield.ac.uk

Harini Nagendra is a Professor of Sustainability at Azim Premji University, India, specializing in climate change and urban sustainability. She recently published *Nature in the City: Bengaluru in the Past, Present and Future* (Oxford University Press, 2016). harini.nagendra@apu.edu.in