
Networks and the Nexus: a case study from the Upper Blue Nile

Christian Stein
Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and
Institute of Environmental Systems Research (USF)

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What theories and methods can we mobilize to understand the socio-political dimensions of the nexus?

Conceptualizing the nexus

It is not clear...

- what ‘the nexus’ is,
 - how it differs from other approaches (e.g. IWRM),
 - what it adds compared to existing approaches and
 - most importantly, how it should be put into practice.
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- The nexus is an “***immature concept***” (Allouche et al., 2015)
 - ”Social dimensions of resource [nexus] linkages remain thinly described and ***under-theorized***” (Foran, 2015)

The nexus in inherently relational

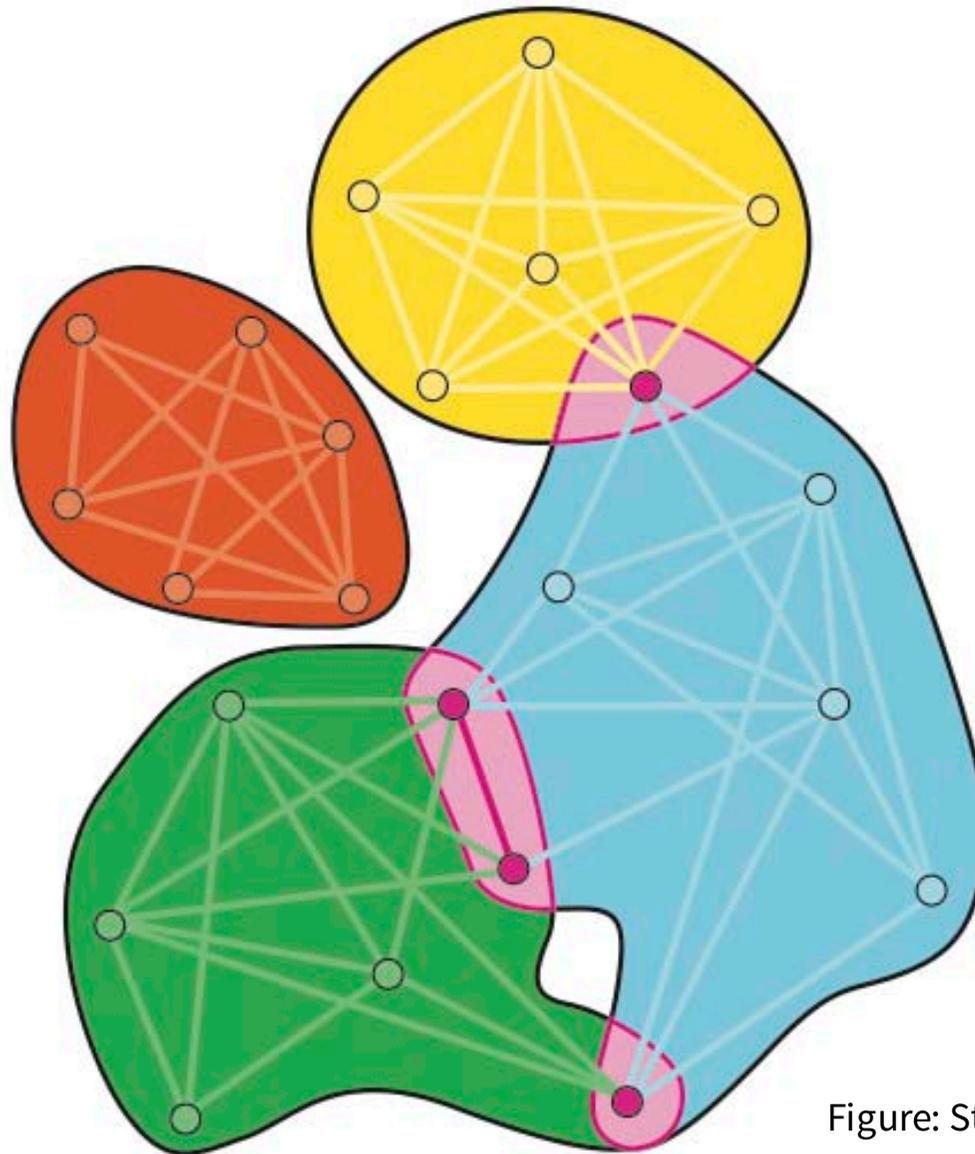


Figure: Stein adapted from Palla et al. 2005

Policy network theory

Three defining characteristics of policy networks:

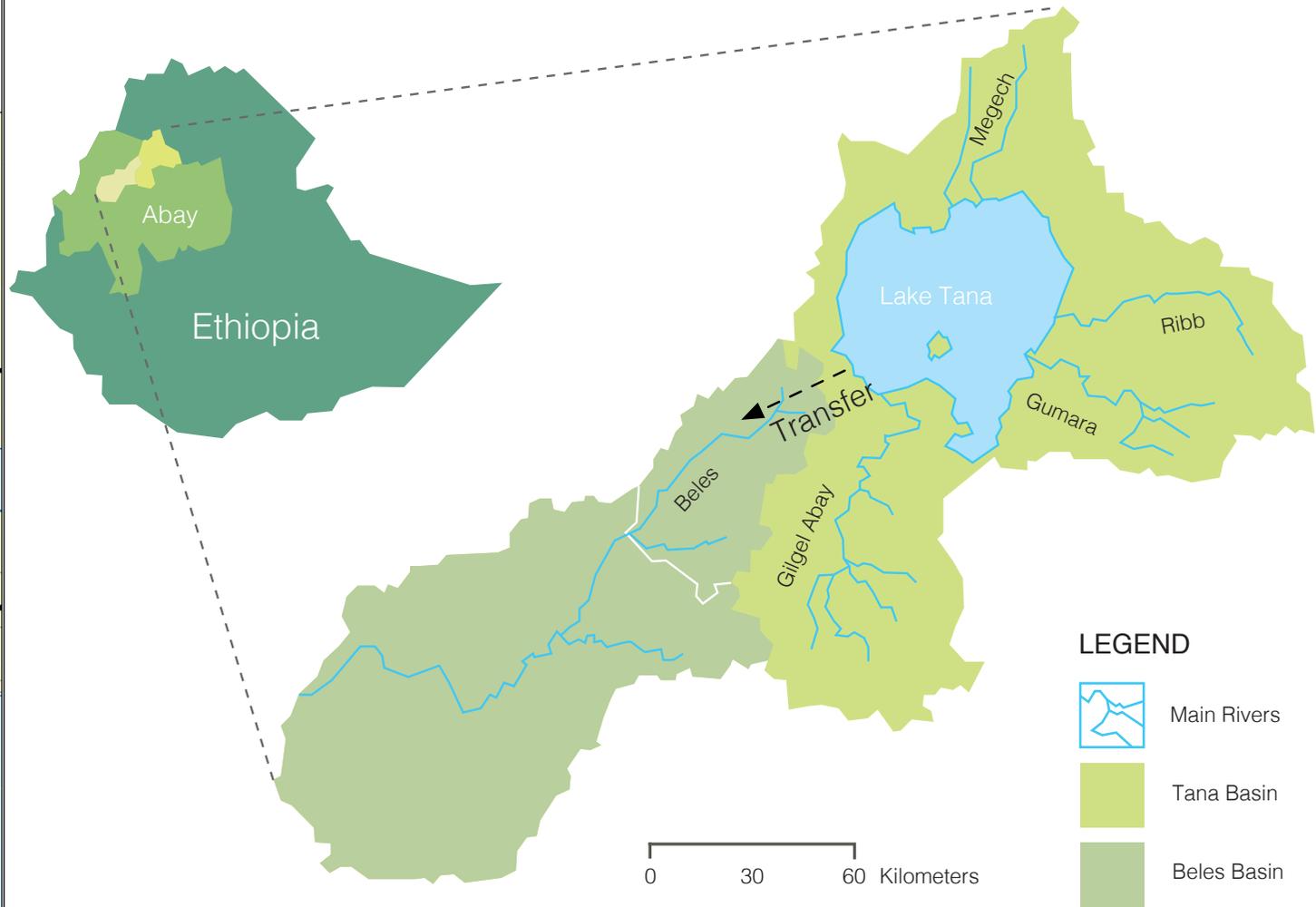
1. Interdependence
2. Coordination
3. Pluralism

No single actor has the resources, knowledge or legitimacy to address complex problems along.

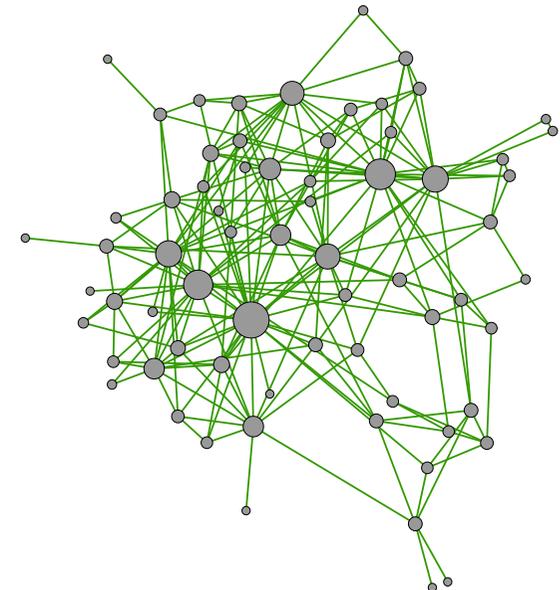
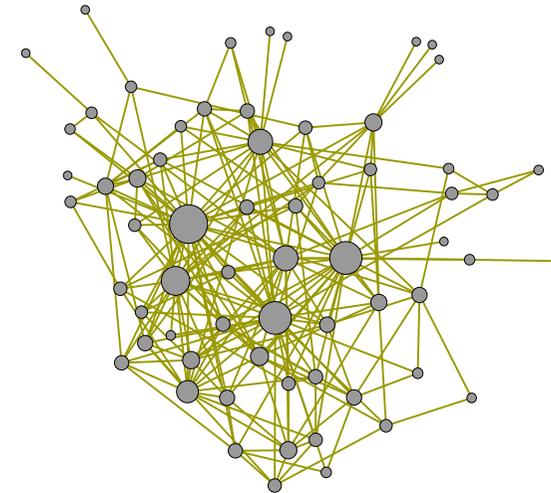
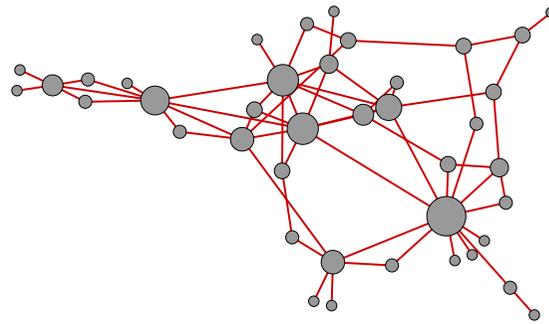
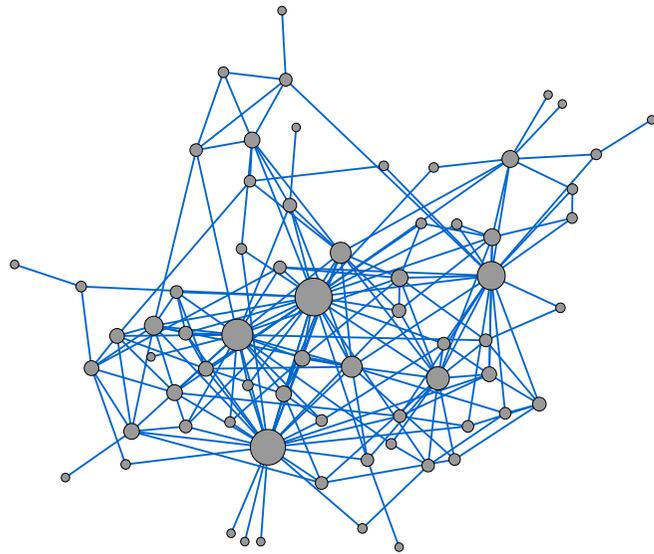
Problemsheds & issue networks

- Threats boundaries as an open empirical question.
- Shifts the problem framing and analysis from predefined sectoral and geographic boundaries to relationships.
- A “process of iterative, retroductive theorisation [...] bounced off against empirical evidence.”

Study context: Upper Blue Nile in Ethiopia



Network structure



Four issue networks

- Who is involved and how are they connected, i.e. network structure?
- What are the policy narratives?

Participatory network research

Explore with stakeholders:

- Embeddedness of key actors
- Specific nexus challenges

Focused on:

- Meaning of relationships
- Network narratives



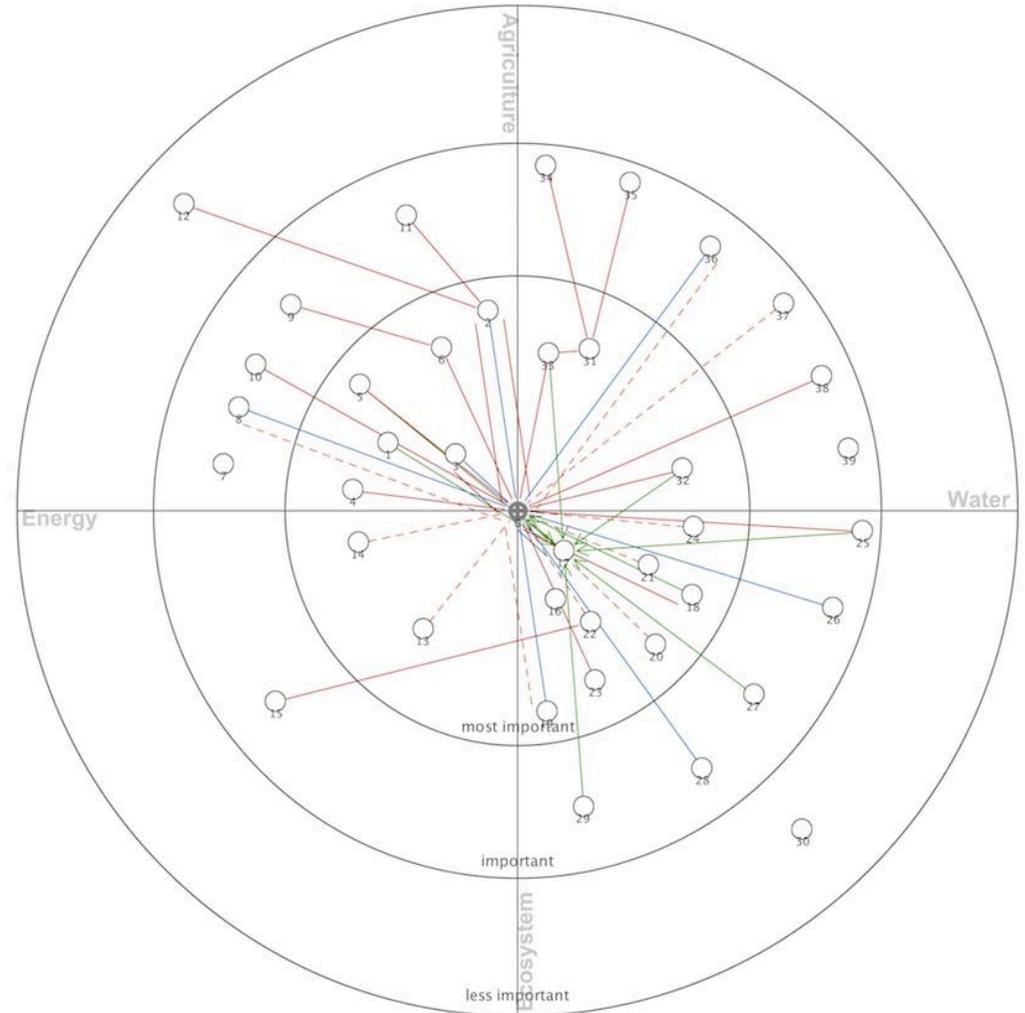
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“Environmental protection is considered as a counteract to development by some.”

Reflections

- Helpful to think in terms of specific issues (and relations) instead of abstract sectors.
- Network maps can act as 'boundary objects' to co-generate knowledge with stakeholders.
- Should draw on existing knowledge, actor relations and procedures, instead of creating new 'ideal' ones.
- More attention needs to be paid to the political economy of the nexus.
- Need to balance reducing complexity, against premature 'closure'.

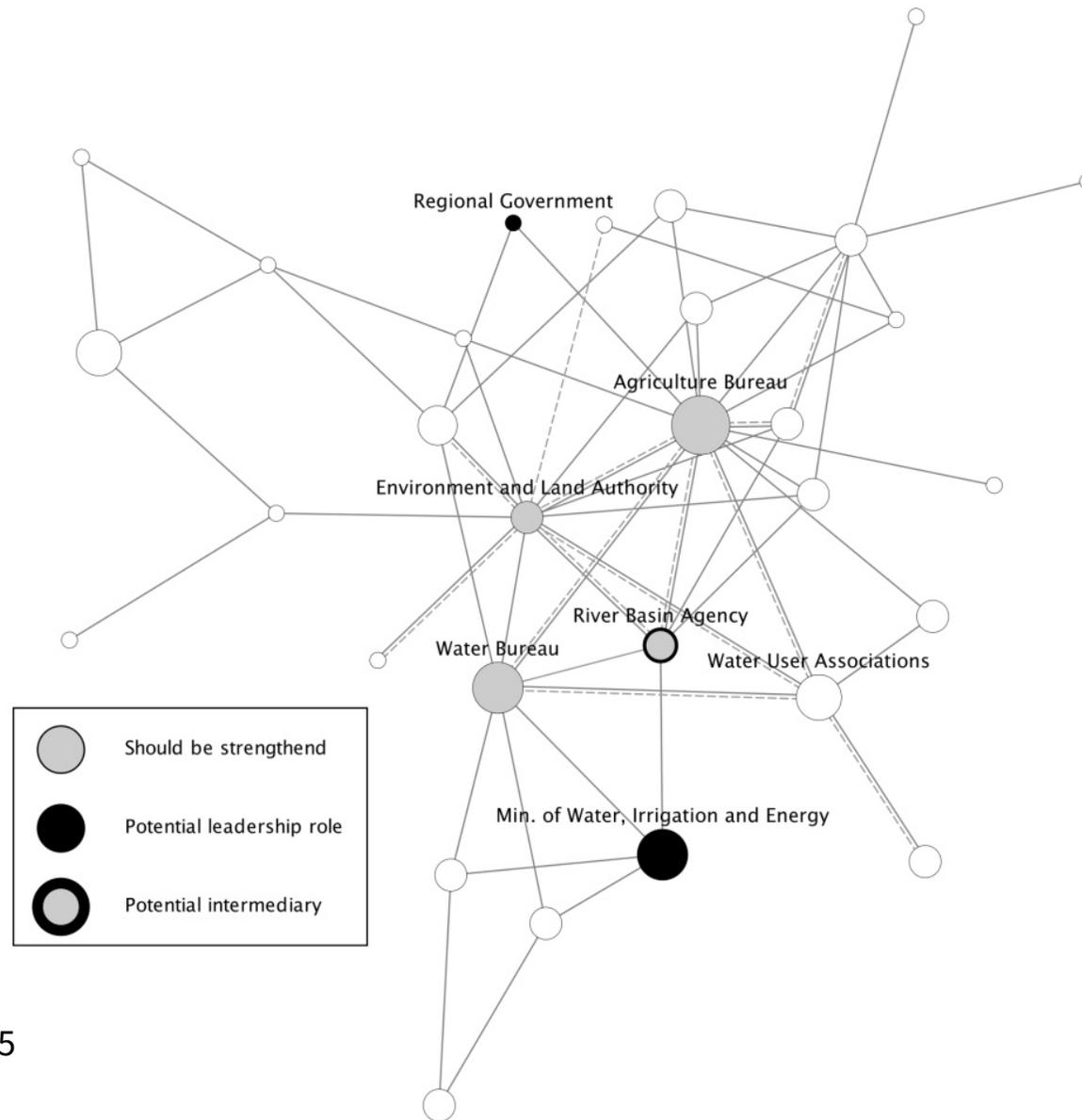
Thank you for your attention!
Questions?

Contact: christian.stein@ecointerfaces.net

References

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Agricultural water management linkages



Source: Hauck et al. 2015

Who's nexus?

