

Driving Transforming Environmental Governance (TRANSFORM)

Abstract

The TRANSFORM project will investigate how civil society actors drive change towards transformative environmental governance. Current scholarship claims that such a change is a crucial element to improve our responses to climate change, biodiversity loss and the host of daunting challenges these pose. This viewpoint is shared by key actors in global environmental governance as well as civil society actors (CSAs), and all converge in underlining the need to shift away from the existing system of environmental governance rooted in understandings of the 'environment' as a set of resources. While emerging work on transformative environmental governance focuses on the fundamental elements that will characterise this governance model, there is less detail available about how such a transformation will come about. Although CSAs are seen as key drivers of transformative change, questions about how their actions will drive change remain.

The TRANSFORM project will unpack how different CSAs are driving changes towards transformative environmental governance by conducting multi-method, holistic case studies of actors working towards such change at multiple levels of governance. It will focus on the Italian context and investigate cases at the local, national and international levels. It hypothesises, on the basis of the emerging literature, that CSAs of different types can challenge the overarching norms that currently shape environmental governance through bottom-up paths where they encourage and enact innovative changes to social-ecological systems, and through demands for change at multiple institutional levels. After a period dedicated to conceptual work to deepen the hypothetical understanding of how transformative environmental governance may be driven by CSAs, case studies will be carried out following a participatory and multimethod approach in line with the expertise of the research units. The case studies will then be placed in complex contexts via political process and qualitative network analysis. Using the claims of the case studies as a starting point, the project will then conduct an innovative content analysis to trace transformative impacts in different sites of environmental governance.

The project will also pay attention to impacts on CSAs themselves, seeking to support them to continue driving transformative change in environmental governance. Findings will also be shared with policy makers.

The project & the position in brief

The central objective of TRANSFORM is to investigate how and where civil society actors (CSAs) are driving the transformation of environmental governance. The core hypothesis is that change towards transformative environmental governance requires external impetus. Discussions of transformative environmental governance point to different CSAs as an important source for driving transformation. The project will unpack if and how CSAs drive changes towards transformative environmental governance in Italy and beyond with a focus on two different paths ('doing' and 'demanding'). CSAs are understood to span a variety of forms: local grassroots groups, formally organised NGOs, informally organised social

movements, social movement organisations and more. It will investigate how CSAs' strategies interact and overlap and whether this occurs in synergistic ways by tracing CSA networks and contexts, and evaluate the extent of their impacts at local, national, and international levels of governance.

The TRANSFORM project will include case studies of CSAs at the local, national, and international levels. It will adopt an innovative multimethod approach based on recent advances in the study of the impacts of collective action. The central research question is how do CSAs drive transformative environmental governance? Drawing on the literature on collective action, other questions are necessary to answer this. What actions and frames do CSAs use to challenge dominant norms? What contexts do they deploy these actions and frames within? What networks for alliances and collective action do CSAs form and use? Where and under what circumstances do they directly and indirectly impact on environmental governance in transformative ways? What is the extent of their impact on dominant governance norms?

The project contains four work packages. WP1 covers conceptual development, WP2 the local, national, and international case studies, WP3 the situating of cases in complex contexts and networks, and WP4 the tracing of (transformative) impacts of civil society on environmental governance.

The Trento research unit, and the researcher who will join the Trento team, will be involved in supporting the conceptual development of the project, in case study selection, in the empirical investigation of two local case studies and the empirical investigation of an international case study focused on the Convention on Biological Diversity. In the analysis of the cases, the Trento unit will be involved in analysis of political (and legal) contexts for cases, and in tracing impacts through attention to claims and frames by CSAs and to the decisions of governance actors.

Knowledge of theoretical approaches to the study of social movements, of literature on environmental governance from various social scientific disciplines, and of the Convention on Biological Diversity, would be ideal for this position. Ideal candidates would also have some experience in developing research projects in participatory approaches and with qualitative empirical fieldwork, and with mixed methods approaches to content/frame analysis. The researcher will be responsible for leading empirical fieldwork missions both locally and internationally with support from the research team and involved in presenting project findings at national and international conferences, and in publications. The researcher will also provide support to organise meetings and events within the project and contribute to outputs for CSAs and policymakers.