

Title: *Public management and the environment: Governing for sustainability or square pegs in round holes?*

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Topic: Environmental issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the spread of plastics have profound social, economic and ecological consequences. If such consequences are to be avoided or mitigated, governance must become ecologically sustainable and socially just. However, environmental governance efforts often fail due to the complexities, uncertainties and contestation involved. Further, in recent decades public sectors have been the focus of widespread, major and sustained reform, but it is not clear that environmental governance has improved.

This panel invites theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that target the profound challenge environmental governance presents: the use of governance models and practices that are not fit for purpose. The significance of this problem is captured in the expression ‘fitting a square peg in a round hole’: current approaches struggle with the complexity and dynamism of ecological systems. This panel will focus on these challenges and opportunities, through broadly engaging with the following questions: *How does contemporary public management research and practice inform environmental governance, and with what effects?*

Practically, this problem is evident in degrading ecosystems, frequent re-structuring of environmental agencies, and flawed programs. Theoretically, there is limited engagement between major bodies of relevant research, namely public management and environmental governance (notwithstanding Osborne et al 2015, Fiorini 2010, Yenken 2002). Put simply, the public management literature (covering public policy, new public governance, new public management, and public administration) (Pollitt 2016, Greener 2013, Hughes 2012, Osborne 2006, Kooiman 1999, Stoker 1998, Hood 1991) offers limited insight into the governance challenges environmental issues present, while the environmental governance literature (Evans 2012, Walker & Salt 2006, Folke et al 2005; Lemos & Agrawal 2005) offers limited insight into the dynamics of public management. Consequently, there are critical dissonances within, and between, research and practice, which presents a considerable challenge: how to promote public environmental governance that addresses the weaknesses of the public management and environmental governance literature.

Contribution: This panel will provide a new focus for public management research by strengthening the dialogue between public management and environmental governance. It will critically engage with the strengths and limitations of the models and practices provided by the public management and environmental governance literature to develop better models and practices. It is hoped that contributions will provide fresh insights into the forms of governance needed to promote sustainable development, including, but not limited to: service delivery (Alford & O’Flynn (2012); outcomes (Di Francesco 2001); public value (Moore 2002); capacity (Edwards 2009); ‘joined up’ government (Pollitt 2003); partnerships (Pinz et al 2018); and, projects (Sjoblom 2009).

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