

Key-note Theme 4

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Beyond Panaceas: Understanding the Role of Context in Affecting Institutional Choice and Performance

Elinor Ostrom

Indiana University and Arizona State University
513 N. Park
Bloomington, IN 47408-3895, USA
ostrom@indiana.edu

Abstract

The central task of this presentation will be to outline a method for diagnostic assessments of complex social-ecological systems so as to counteract the presumption that scholars have the tools to make *simple*, predictive models of linked social-ecological systems and deduce the universal solution—a panacea—to problems of overuse or destruction of resources. Past efforts to impose simple solutions to complex problems involving resource systems that vary dramatically in spatial and temporal scales have frequently led to worse outcomes than the problems addressed. Our need today is building a strong interdisciplinary science of complex, multilevel systems that will enable over time a matching of potential solutions to a careful diagnosis of specific problems embedded in a social-ecological context. Further, we need to study institutional arrangements over time as they have helped or hindered officials and resource users to manage resources sustainably. Why are some fisheries dominated by “roving bandits” and other fisheries dominated by “harbor gangs?”