



**VIII** Congreso Nacional y  
**I** Congreso Internacional  
de Riego, Drenaje y Biosistemas  
COMIIR - UAAAN 2023 | Saltillo, Coahuila  
4 al 6 octubre 2023



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## UNPACKING THE STRATEGIES OF POLICY ENTREPRENEURS IN IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT TRANSFER IN MEXICO

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Fecha de presentación: 04 de octubre 2023



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## INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, irrigated areas are essential for agricultural production. It is estimated that irrigation is essential in 63% of the territory, while in 1.5% irrigation is not necessary (Soto-Mora, 2003). The irrigation in Mexico is divided mainly in two types: irrigation districts and irrigation units.

In the 1980s, the Mexican government adopted a vision of privatizing diverse public sectors. In that decade, irrigation districts in Mexico suffered an extreme reduction in the percentage of operation and maintenance costs contributed by users (less than 20%), causing notorious deterioration of the hydro-agricultural infrastructure (Johnson, 1997).



Historically, Mexico has adopted water management ideas from global water discourses, as Irrigation Management Transfer approach.

In 1989, in order to reduce public spending and achieve optimum collection of water fees from irrigation users and to “increase” productivity of irrigated agriculture, the IMT program of the Mexican Irrigation Districts (ID) was started by the Mexican government.

The IMT program consisted of granting responsibilities of managing irrigation districts from the government to irrigation user organizations through WUAs (Vermillion & Sagardoy, 1999).



According to Huitema et al. (2011), a policy change (as the IMT in Mexico) can be incubated and influenced by actions of policy entrepreneurs inside and outside the government,.

Policy entrepreneurs are individuals or entities driven by their agency, who promote ideas and assume positions regarding a policy change, involving themselves in the change process and investing time, energy, reputation, and even economic resources to achieve their goals (Huitema et al., 2011; Brouwer, 2015; Mintrom, 2020).

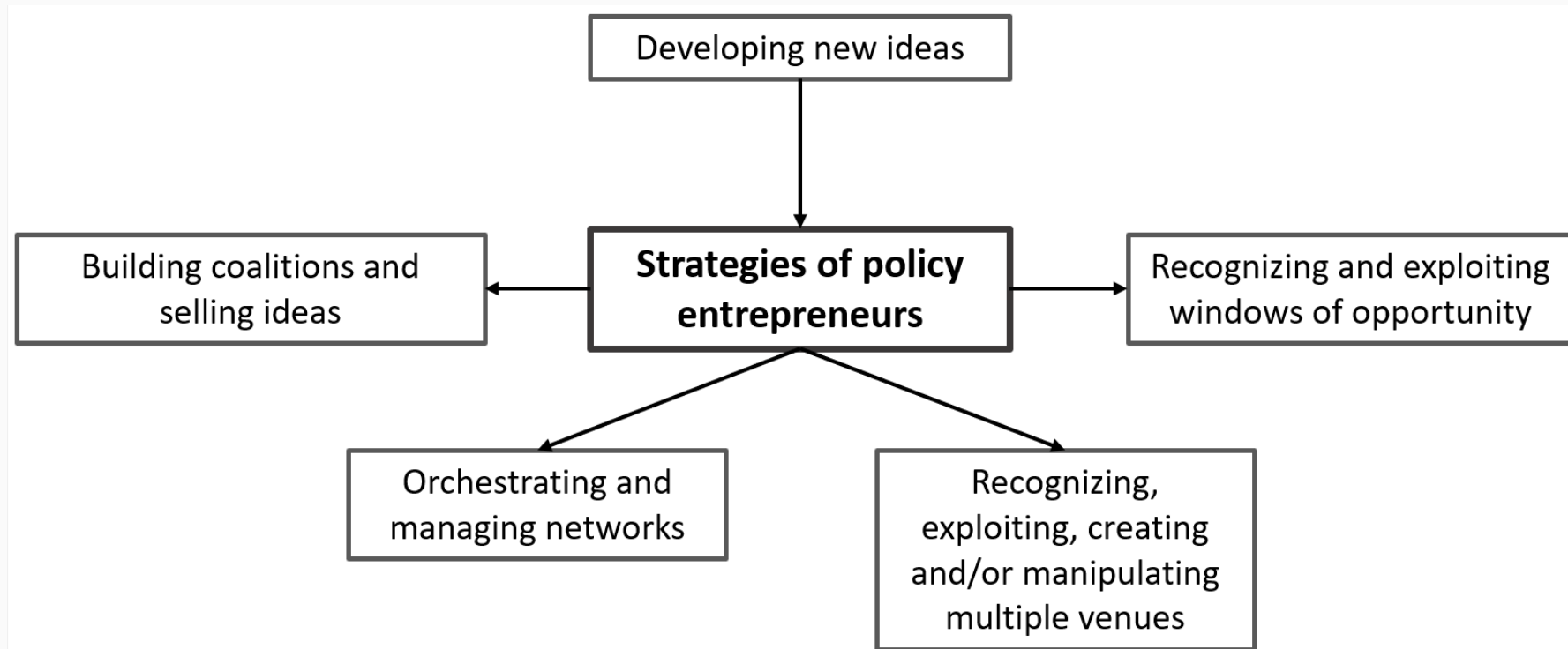


In the present research, it is proposed that the role of policy entrepreneurs represents an important feature in the shape of the Mexican IMT case as a policy transition “success”.

Through the theoretical framework developed by Huitema et al. (2011), the possible used strategies used by policy entrepreneurs to establish Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT) in Mexico are explored and analyzed in the climax of the policy change (between 1989 and 1994).

# METHODS

Strategies of policy entrepreneurs: theoretical framework (Huitema et al., 2011).

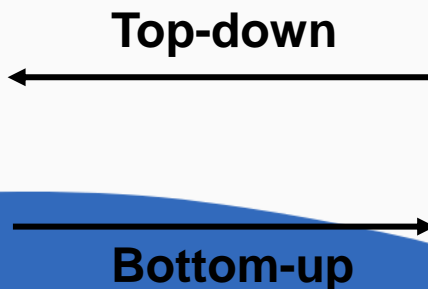


## 1. Developing new ideas

The ideas generated in the water sector have been a cornerstone in policy transitions worldwide. The discourses are created from the ideas that take power among a variety of actors that shape policy-making.

Some ideas are formed within and others outside the borders of a country. On the one hand, countries that have adopted **water policies from abroad** generate dependence on international organizations, mainly implementing **top-down transitions** that need financial assistance and help through the reform process.

On the other hand, when ideas come from **within a country's borders**, it is mainly considered a **bottom-up approach**, where past inspirations encourage the development of ideas. Subsequently, the results are disseminated and publicized in order to change the perception and mental models of people inside and outside their borders.



## 2. Building coalitions and selling ideas

Huitema et al. (2011) point out **three mechanisms of coalition-building by policy entrepreneurs**. Coalitions are generally **formed by actors who share ideas, beliefs, and values**, which are intertwined by a **common disciplinary background**.

- The **first coalition** refers to the support and defense of a particular set of ideas; the similarities in beliefs form the coalition.
- The **second coalition** is an alliance between parties that do not share the same values, beliefs, or ways of seeing the world, but the convergence of a particular policy change interest shapes the coalition.
- The **third coalition** describes parties that do not share values, beliefs, or preferences but are dependent on each other to fulfill their different goals.



### 3. Recognizing and exploiting windows of opportunity

To generate policy change, **coalitions** must **land their ideas** precisely when a **given situation** demands it and when society is more receptive to accepting changes. The **windows of opportunity** represent a **crucial aspect** in generating **policy transitions**.

Huitema et al. (2011) divide the windows of opportunity in two ways:

- **Problem windows** about events or data that denote the urgency of action concerning a problem.
- **Political windows** made up of political leaders who emerge in a given social context.

**SUCCESSFUL POLICY ENTREPRENEURS EXPLOIT CRISIS**

## 4. Orchestrating and managing networks

The cases in which a policy change was achieved through the intervention of policy entrepreneurs denoted a substantial **role of networks of individuals who challenged the current state** of the context in which they wanted to intervene (Huitema et al., 2011).

**Groups of policy entrepreneurs** denote two **advantages**: the **first** is that the **positions** of various actors configure an **advantageous set of strategies to generate a trajectory for change**, while the **second** is that **every actor has different abilities and skills** to contribute to policy change, regardless of their positions.

*Networks that operate outside of “formality” are essential to carry out policy change.*

## 5. Recognizing, exploiting, creating and/or manipulating multiple venues

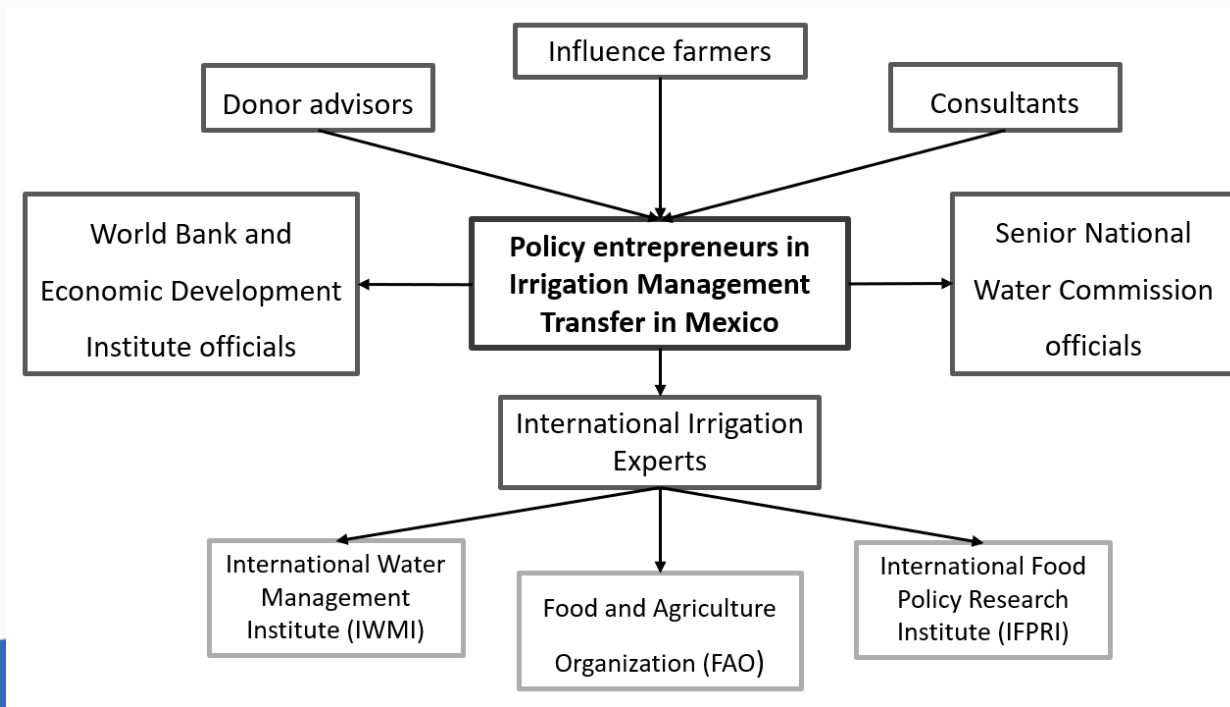
The issues are discussed in venues (or forums), which can be different types, such as scientific groups, negotiation and deal-making venues, or media venues. Successful policy entrepreneurs can manipulate the different venues in which they interact



# Results and Discussion

## Unpacked policy entrepreneurs in IMT in Mexico

Actors were identified by extensive literature research as *organizations* that played a crucial role in the implementation of the IMT in Mexico.



# Unpacked strategies of policy entrepreneurs

## 1. Idea

IMT was an approach from **outside the country**, privatizing and decentralizing irrigation districts from the government.

In that sense, it was mostly a **top-down approach**, but with **some inference from government policies** developed by policy implementers that were interpreted and reconstructed based on the Mexican context of the time (e.g., creation of the CNA as the body in charge of IMT) (Rap, 2004).

## 2. Building coalitions

According to Rap (2004) epistemic communities were constructed in the Mexican IMT (groups of professionals who share the same style of thought, believes or faith in relation to policy-relevant knowledge for a defined issue; Haas, 1992).

- 1) **Senior National Water Commission officials** or “**Senior Mexican hydrocrats**” belonging to the CNA, involved in the **development and implementation of the IMT**. The community was mainly divided into **groups of irrigation engineers** and **irrigation planners** (Rap, 2004).
- 2) **International irrigation experts** specialized in user participation in irrigation management and irrigation policy reforms from institutions such as the **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**, the **International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)**, and **FAO** (Kloezen, 2002; Rap, 2004).
- 3) **Donor officials and advisors** as the **World Bank** and **Economic Development Institute (EDI) officials** (former educational part of the World Bank; nowadays the **World Bank Institute-WBI**), as well as donor advisors and consultants.

**Each epistemic community represented a first-type coalition. At the same time, the set of three communities can be considered as a second-type coalition (Rap, 2006).**



### 3. Window of opportunity

The **window of opportunity** recognized and exploited by policy entrepreneurs that gave rise to the IMT policy was the **severe political and economic crisis that Mexico was going through in the late 1980s** (Rap, 2006).

The Mexican government did not have the **monetary resources to cover the basic management and operation needs of the irrigation districts**, coupled with the low fees collected from irrigation users and a noticeable **political instability in the country** (Johnson, 1997).

This window of opportunity can be **classified** as a **combination of problem and political window**.



## 4. Managing networks

Through **missions**, the **World Bank** and **FAO** were **precursors in managing networks**. In 1987 they **advised the Mexican government** means to **reform irrigation policies** for the re-establishment of **loans** within the irrigation sector (Rap, 2004). Consequently, **diverse actors joined the policy change efforts** when the **window of opportunity** was open due to the **economic crisis**.

The convergence of the coalitions' efforts formed networks that steered the establishment, financing, application, and promotion processes of the IMT based on embedded narratives. For example, **CNA officials identified and worked with influential farmers to implement the WUAs**. Also, international irrigation experts from **IWMI, IFPRI, and FAO implemented participatory approaches** in irrigation management and irrigation policy reforms.





## 5. Shopping for venues

The **World Bank** and **FAO** not to mention **CNA officials**, **international irrigation experts**, **donor officials and advisors** contributed to **policy debates** regarding the **necessary irrigation reforms** to obtain **loans** for **irrigation** management purposes (Rap, 2004).

These institutions defined the **path to be followed by governments in "need"** that would opt for a change in irrigation policy **to amend social and economic problems** within their borders.



## Limitations of the study

- Limited or null information regarding policy entrepreneurs in the Mexican IMT, mostly as individuals.
- Personal-embedded interest and drivers of policy entrepreneurs are not expressly mentioned in specialized literature.
- Social-related issues normally ignored or not properly addressed/investigated among irrigation experts' community.

## Conclusions

- It was defined that the IMT approach came from outside Mexico.
- The actors identified as policy entrepreneurs were the World Bank-EDI, Senior CNA officials, international irrigation experts, influence farmers, donor advisors, and consultants.
- Three epistemic communities were recognized as coalitions.
- The identified window of opportunity was the political and economic crisis of the late 1980s.
- The management of the networks occurred even before the start of the IMT process, with recommendations from the World Bank and the FAO for a change in the Mexican irrigation policy in order for the Mexican government to be a creditor of loans.
- The shopping of venues was mainly done through irrigation policy debates, where ideas were disseminated and subsequently adopted in the Mexican case.



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 **Thank you!**

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