

## Exploring standards as a form of adaptation governance

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Climate adaptation goes global – SC 9.6

**Asuncion Lera St.Clair and Kjersti Aalbu**

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### Standardising adaptation to climate change

- Adaptation involves complex processes of change
- Objective, transparent and universal frameworks or recommended practices seem elusive
- Emerging efforts to standardise adaptation

## Outline of presentation

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1. What are standards
2. Standards as a form of governance
3. Standardising adaptation?

## Standards are everywhere

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- Many everyday decisions are regulated and shaped by standards
- We not only accept standards, we adapt to them
- Standards
  - provide the infrastructure of the global economy
  - promote coherence and facilitate sharing of best practices
  - enable knowledge transfer and translation across societal actors
  - shape demand
- Standards are also social, political and normative



Source: GRID Arendal

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Standards “have a way of sinking below the level of social visibility, eventually becoming part of the taken-for-granted technical and moral infrastructure of modern life.”

Timmermans and Epstein, 2010: 71

## What is a standard?

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“A document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose” (ISO)

## The standards landscape

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### Formal standards

- Developed by recognised standards organisations
- Legitimacy through voluntary consensus standard setting

### Informal standards

- All other standards
- Norms, rules, guidelines, industry recommended practices
- Some fit the ISO definition
- Input to formal standards

## There are standards for nearly everything

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Standards can be classified as follows (Timmermans and Berg, 2003):

**Design standards**

*Structural specifications*

**Terminology standards**

*Meaning specifications*

**Performance standards**

*Outcome specifications*

**Procedural standards**

*Specification of processes*

## Emerging efforts to standardise adaptation to climate change

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1. Debate on monitoring and evaluation
2. Incipient effort among standard organisations
3. Development of adaptation "guidance"



## Thinking about what standards do: standards as a form of governance

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1. Most standards are at the core concerned with realising public goals
  2. Standards seek to steer the behaviour of a particular constituency
  3. Standards are considered as authoritative and legitimate by the actors who implement them
- A private or a hybrid form of governance
  - Standard organisations as providers of governance functions
  - ISO as a de facto global governance organisation? (Murphy and Yates, 2009)

## Thinking about the usually overlooked issues

- Often overlooked: normative and sociological aspects of standards, the power relations they entail and shape, and how they construct reality (Busch, 2011)
- Standards as political – importance of paying attention to **content** and **process**

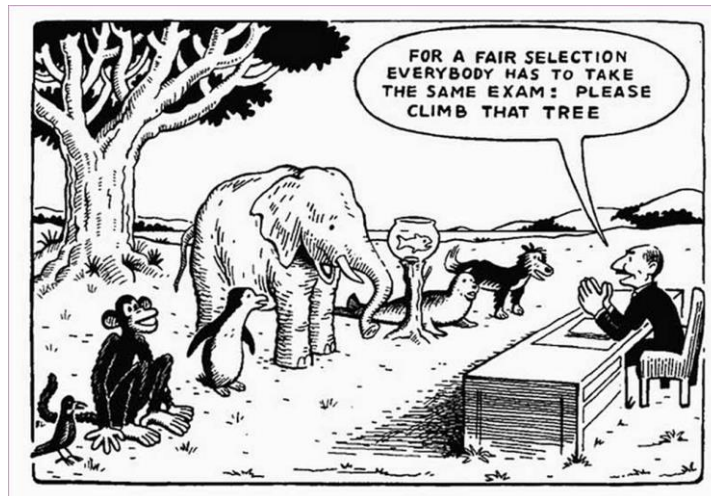
### Content

Standards transform  
"things" as well as  
behaviour

### Process

A political process  
Products of negotiation  
A specific representation of  
"best practice"

## Commonality and universality is not necessarily good for all things



## The need for the broader view – standardising adaptation?

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1. What elements of adaptation can actually be standardised?
2. Which parts of adaptation could benefit from standardisation?
3. Who should be involved in standard setting?
4. What standard setting processes are needed to develop salient and legitimate standards?
5. How can we ensure that standard setting processes are equitable and lead to equitable outcomes?

**Thank you!**

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