

Investigating Freshwater governance in a decolonization context: knowledge, values & policies.

The case of New-Caledonia

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Freshwater supply is complex and contested in most Pacific Island countries. In particular, it is intertwined with questions of access, appropriation and control over land resources, considered together with sea resources as a principal source of wealth and identity in many island nations. In New Caledonia, freshwater governance faces a wide range of issues. The territory has also been engaged in negotiated decolonization since the political agreements of Matignon-Oudinot (1988) and Noumea (1998). In this specific context of continuing decolonization, New Caledonia still needs to develop its own competencies in Water management. Currently, New Caledonia's provinces have extensive powers to administer their territories, which interact with other governance levels (indigenous village, local community, government, the French state). This results in a complex web of legal competencies and multilevel policies which hampers the coordination of interests. Furthermore, Nickel-mining extraction, growing urbanization, complex land uses and scattered water rights continually raise new freshwater management challenges. Through the framework of continuing decolonization, this communication analyzes the dynamics of local governance conflicts related to heterogeneous water uses (settler agriculture, indigenous agriculture, mining activities) and to heterogeneous water laws and rights (especially between indigenous land, and public land).

First, we identify the different levels and sites of water governance, and mapping the authorities, interest groups and informal stakeholders that are active in major arenas of water governance.

Then, on the basis of a study case in the river of Pouembout, we analyze the emergence and of local governance conflicts through the lens of decolonization.

Finally, we discuss the need to analyze the various processes of imaginary building, knowledge formation and implementation values associated with the access to, usage of, and governance of freshwater specifically on indigenous land.

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