

EADI/DSA General Conference
(European Association of Development research and training Institutes/
UK Development Studies Association),
panel on “Development ends and management means: can they be in harmony?”,
York univ., Toronto (Canada), 19-22 sept. 2011

Heading towards efficiency... and democracy? The case of water resource management agencies in South Africa

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Presentation outline

- Background information
- Empirical findings
- Explanations
- Recommendations
- Concluding remarks

Background information

- Role of water in the devlpt of semi-arid country
- Water policy reform in SA

Ambitious objectives: Poverty alleviation; redeeming past inequalities

Strong link between water management and democracy in SA

- Functions of Catchment management agencies (CMAs)
- Question: have CMAs been able to achieve their transformative agenda?

Empirical findings

- « *Catchment management strategy* »: no real decisions taken-
status quo
- Rules of the game are biased:
 - ✓ Division of work between Governing Board and staff: not specific to SA
 - ✓ CMS as business plan (financial targets)

Implies competence = induces a certain form of stakeholders' selection

- ✓ Surprising use of terms like « company », « customers »:
CMA as enterprises that have to benefit their clients?
- ✓ Risk of organization capture by vested interests (e.g. water tariff; funding mechanisms resting on farmers contribution)

Explanations

- influence of imported so-called « international best practices and principles »

Management recipes: favoring efficiency

- Downplaying the political dimension and difficult political debate
- Ignoring the existence of competing principles

Ex.: water as an economic good

Recommendations

- To avoid CMAs being captured by strong vested interests:
Crucial issue of representation and selection of representatives
« *substantive stakeholders' representation* » (Wester)
Pay attention to participants selection and local politics
Profesionalization of representatives excludes legitimate representatives
- **Dilemmas:**
Capacity-related challenges/skills and service delivery crisis and bankrupts due to mismanagement at local level
Political network and corruption issues (esp. at local gvt level), e.g. huge stipend in exchange for keeping quiet
- No politics but *polity*
- No pre-requisites, training along the way

Concluding remarks

- Which contribution as compared to Wester; Perret and Wilson; de Lange; Movik ; Swatuk; Allan; Mollinga; Mollard :
re-politicizing water resources management
Criticisms of river basin unit; IWRM concept; fake participation; liberal conception of democracy
 - For effective participation, everything lays in the representatives' selection modes?
- Also look at the rules of the game, CMAs functioning and what is expected from representatives in the governing board

Concluding remarks

- No « one-fits-all » solutions/prescriptions or methodological toolkit

No neutral but **Political** dimension

Socio-cultural-economic-political-historical **context:**
past and present (continuity)

- Public policy analysis approach (horizontal and vertical interactions: accross sectors and accross levels)

- « devpt ends, management means: at odds? »

of course different management types (devpt; emancipatory; etc) but *water management* or *water governance*?