

COMPARATIVE WATER STUDIES



**2nd International Workshop
at ZEF, University of Bonn, Germany
20-21 January 2012**



REPORT



INTRODUCTION

After the initial workshop of the comparative water studies group in London, a second workshop took place in Bonn, Germany, on January 20/ 21st, 2012. While some of the 32 participants were present at both events, the majority of those joining the Bonn event participated for the first time. Several other participants were not able to join the workshop but showed interest in keeping in touch with the network and in participating in a follow-up event.

The attendance of the workshop (in spite of the invitation on short notice) and the papers presented showed a great interest in the topic of comparative water studies from very different scientific communities. The Bonn workshop was organised around four thematic sessions (see below) and plenary discussions on one side, and two keynote speeches by Claudia Pahl-Wostl and Wendy Olsen on methodological approaches to comparative water studies on the other side.

A common feature of the presentations in the four working groups was a major interest for the social and political aspects of water management and related norms on the local, national and global levels. The workshop allowed for further broadening and strengthening the network on Comparative Water Studies and facilitated a common reflection on appropriate and possibly shared methodological approaches as well as related opportunities and challenges. The thematic sessions helped gathering like-minded researchers on the four topics, and even if some of them could not attend the meeting, the call for papers provided a good opportunity for contacts on the related matters. This workshop report gives a short impression of the topics dealt with by the four working groups as well as the plenary discussions, as well as next steps planned. All available presentations will be distributed to the participants.

SESSIONS

1. “The role of new donors in dam development in Asia, Africa and Latin America“, conveners: Oliver Hensengerth and Waltina Scheumann

The session used a multi-level angle to discuss problems associated with the construction of reservoir dams. The topics ranged from national development strategies with international implications for hydropower investment to comparative socio-economic analysis and finally personal accounts of expert activists in their fight against large dams. The session was mostly results-orientated, with future projects still being debated.

In their opening presentation on “Brazil, China and India in regional and African dam businesses”, Oliver Hensengerth and Waltina Scheumann presented findings from a BMZ-funded research project on the national dam planning practices of Brazil, India, China and Turkey, and the investment practices of China in Ghana and Cambodia. Led by Waltina Scheumann at DIE, the research was a collaborative effort by Waltina (Turkey study), Nirmalya Choudhury (India study), Agnes da Costa (Brazil study) and Oliver Hensengerth (China studies).

The most advanced ideas for a new project was subsequently presented by Peter Newborne, who over the past two months has been working with Agnes da Costa and Guillermo Rudas on a new project proposal on “Private investment and public policy in dams and hydropower in Latin America: negotiated solutions for sustainable development?” The project will investigate the practice of Brazilian actors in Latin American countries.

Next, Stefanos Xenarios, Irit Eguavoen and Matthew McCartney (absent) presented their results on “A comparative social-economic analysis of water storage schemes in Sub-Sahara Africa”. The project compared the social and environmental performance of small and large water storage schemes in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the test cases located in Ethiopia and Ghana. The project proposed an outranking methodology based on a set of preference conditions and weighting indices. As this project is now finished, they are currently working towards a methodology for a new research project that can be linked to the work they have already done on the ground.

Finally, Ravi Baghel presented fresh field work for his PhD thesis on the “Price of change: expert activism against large dams in India.” Based on biographical research, he examined shifts in personal attitudes towards large dams in India through interviews with retired high-profile Indian experts who had turned from champions of large hydro dams to strong critics.

Further contributions (Suhardiman and Giordano “Legal pluralism and the logic of hydropower development in the Mekong;” K Ravi Raman “State Forms, Contested Legality and Dammed Politics: Mullaperiyar Dam Discourse in India”) could not be discussed but will be circulated to those interested.

A number of people had expressed interest in participating but – given the limited planning time – were unable to come: Frauke Urban (SOAS), Darrin Magee (Hobart and William Smith Colleges), Naho Mirumachi (King’s College), Christoph Merdes (Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), and Ana Bachurova (German Development Cooperation). Their contact emails can be found in the attached session document.

2. “Water resources, power and regime change in the MEAN region”, convener: Annabelle Houdret

All papers presented in the session focused on water in Sudan, as several other researchers who had shown interest in the topic were not able to attend. First, the papers as well as the initial introduction by the convener confirmed that using water as a lens for understanding social and political relations in the region not only makes sense but is a useful entry point for tracing relationships between people, institutions and the environment. Second, it also became clear that in all cases presented water management was a materialisation of power relations. This was the case for technical choices, i.e. for irrigation such as in the Sudanese Gezira scheme, organising people and their means of production. It was also related to management choices and the organisation of subsequent institutions, i.e. for drinking water in Khartoum. And it was clear in the case of politically induced security threats of people working in drinking water administrations. Furthermore, in many MENA countries water management choices dating from the colonial period also reflect political choices and relations empowering specific elites.

Third, the papers presented provided insights into the links between regime creation or stabilisation and water management. It became clear that the negotiation of water management rules was very closely linked to practice of political rules. In the case of Southern Sudan, the creation of new infrastructure is closely linked to political (peace building) ambitions of donors but also to the interest of the (new) political elite. In this case, water management accompanies and supports *regime formation*. The Gezira scheme reflects the implementation of *regime policies* and the subsequent organisation of the local population, first under the colonial rule and now for the objectives of the current regime. Finally, the analysis of drinking water management in Khartoum shows how *regime stabilisation* is pursued through and backed by water management practices.

The participants of the MENA session agreed upon further exploring the debated links between water management and regime (in)stability through a possible common journal article and through a future project initiative.

3. “Currencies of Globalisation”, convener: Peter Mollinga

A total of seven papers were presented in the *Currencies of Globalisation* session. Three papers directly addressed institutional reform with strong global dimensions. Marja Hirvi discussed the institutional foundations of privatisation in Ghana; Amrita Lamba presented on regulatory form in the water sector in India; Synne Movik provided a comparative perspective on water allocation discourses. Two papers presented case studies of water sector, including irrigation, reform in India and Sri Lanka (NC Narayan, Rahul Pillai). The last two papers of the session had a common theme in their focus on the knowledge and technology dimension of water governance. Bettina Weiz compared cultural dimensions of water infrastructure in India and Germany; Arjen Zegwaard discussed water research knowledge in the Bangladesh and Dutch deltas.

Based on the paper presentations and discussions, and reflecting on discussions in the first workshop at SOAS, London, the contours of a broader research programme on *Currencies of Globalisation* acquired some additional shape. At least three thematic areas or research foci seem to emerge from the discussion.

The *first* is an analysis of the ‘cultural political economy of state forms in water resources management’ (papers speaking to this topic, in different ways, are Reis, Scott Moore, Lamba, Movik). It is clear that there is strong interest in comparative analysis of the ‘nature of the state’ as active in water resources management, and considerable analytical challenges in that. The theme speaks to debates on globalisation, notably the (changing) role of the state in global and national environmental governance, and the structure, logics and forms of state governance in the water sector.

The *second* theme addresses the ‘mechanisms’ of globalisation-localisation dynamics. Most papers speak to this theme in one way or the other. Using the four-fold classification in the *CoG* concept note: law, policy and rights (Mitra, Lamba, Hirvi, Pillai, Allouche); knowledge and ideas (Zegwaard, Hirvi); technology and landscapes (Weiz, Narayan, the ‘dams and development’ cluster). Not covered so far is ‘markets and money’, suggesting a need to invite economists working on this thematic. This may be a focus for the next workshop

A *third* theme would, logically, be a focus on the outcomes of globalisation-localisation processes. This is as yet hardly covered, and constitutes another possible theme for the third CWS workshop in Wageningen.

4. “Water pollution, health impact and urban planning”, conveners: V.S. Saravanan and Daphne Gondhalekar

The session “Water pollution, health impact and urban planning” had discussed intensively on two papers: Srinivasan Janakarajan presented his research proposal, planned to be submitted soon, for a comparative study in India and Bangladesh taking four cases of river deltas and wetlands in total (three in India and one in Bangladesh) and focusing on ecosystem and livelihood vulnerability. Vishal Narain presented the project ‘Water security in peri-urban South Asia: Adapting to climate change and urbanization’, which compares four cases in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. His team plans to make a detailed presentation during the follow-up workshop in May 2012. The session was organized building on ZEF Research theme on ‘Water and Health’, and aimed to capture the growing health concerns from rapid urbanization in fast growing economies. The major part of the session was spent discussing on how to strengthen the group and the possibility of submitting a joint research proposal. In addition to the paper presenters and conveners, Wendy Olsen and Andrea Rechenburg joined the session.

FINAL DEBATE

On Saturday morning the outcomes of the working group sessions were discussed, focusing on what to compare, why do comparative studies, what do we have to offer and next steps. A pertinent question that was raised was “why do we do all these studies”, indicating the need for further thinking on the rationale for comparative water studies and its transformative agenda. To tackle the “so what” question reference was made to transdisciplinary research and the need and large potential to develop both knowledge for action and understanding through comparative research.

Concerning the Dams session it became apparent that there is a strong interest in this topic and that a follow-up session should be held during the Wageningen workshop to discuss the development of funding proposals. While countries and cases still need to be selected and discussed, the focus could be on global players and the “globalization” of the dam industry, focusing on how for example Brazil, China and India work abroad in the dam industry. Other questions relate to dams as a technology and links with food security, decommissioning, climate change and the push for new dams and self-regulation.

The MENA session was not discussed in-depth during the plenary, but it was clear that the links between water management and regime formation, stabilisation and change are a pertinent topic of analysis in the Arab world. While the papers presented at the workshop focused on Sudan, debates showed that a comparative approach to these links is particularly meaningful in the current context of regime contestation and change in many countries of the region. Further development of this topic could focus on water management as a useful entry point for studying power relations and resource allocation, exploring these links from the colonial times to the practice of often autocratic regimes and until recent changes such as observed in Tunisia.

Concerning the Currencies of Globalization session comments were made on the role of knowledge and discourses in water governance and policy processes in the current age, with a focus on whose knowledge counts. How to translate this into comparative research and the more general question of methods of comparative research still needs to be taken up. The topic of globalization-localization will be explored further during the Wageningen workshop with a first design session to develop a fundable program for CoG, to be followed up later in the year in London. Three elements were stressed: cultural / political economy of state forms and water resources management, mechanisms of globalization (policy odysseys, discursive encounters, money + market mechanisms, technologies and landscapes), and what to compare.

Concerning Water Management, Health and Urban Planning attention was drawn to the health initiative at ZEF and how to develop that further. The multidisciplinary initiative at ZEF on the water and health research theme aims to assess risk from rapid urbanization, intensification of agriculture, industrialization and poor environmental hygiene on human health in a comparative perspective across developing countries, and also between developing and developed countries. Drawing across various disciplinary researches towards an interdisciplinary perspective is not without challenges. The initiative 'water pollution, health impact and urban planning' aims to focus on the extent that societies are equipped to deal with (re) emerging diseases caused by water (mis)management. More thinking on methodological challenges to capture the complexity of human health is needed. The following workshop in May aims to focus on the different approaches from government and international agencies in addressing human health issues across different countries in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

For the 3rd workshop in Wageningen it was discussed that this workshop should move from sessions with paper presentations to focusing more on defining and developing fundable initiatives. It is clear that there is a strong interest in comparative water studies and that there is a large reservoir of researchers interested in new networking opportunities. The Wageningen workshop could be built around the following five themes/sessions: hill irrigation; technologies and landscapes; urban water and health; comparative basin studies; and knowledge/policy/stakeholder interfaces, with each session consisting of a mix of papers and the design of a research programme. Two additional design sessions could be held on CoG and Dams and an overall session on identifying and developing funding proposals for ICCWaDS as a research network.

CONCLUSION

The conference organizers would like to thank all participants for attending the 2nd International Workshop on Comparative Water Studies. Most participants came to Bonn at very short notice and with their own funding, which the organizers much appreciate and happily take as a sign of a strong interest in the topic. From the first workshop in the series to the one in Bonn, the number of participants had significantly increased, with many more interested but unable to attend. Across the four sessions, a broad range of topics, regions internationally and methodological approaches were covered. The outcome of the individual sessions was several ideas for new initiatives. The workshop programme accommodated for plenty of discussion: inside the sessions as well as in plenary sessions, and at the informal dinner and lunches. This served to highlight topical and methodological interlinkages between sessions and opportunities for broader research collaborations. Thus, the workshop, once again, served as a very dynamic platform for networking on the topic of comparative water studies.

NEXT STEPS

At the 'business meeting' held right after the workshop, the next steps for the Comparative Water Studies Group were discussed. The next International Workshop on Comparative Water Studies is planned to be held on 31 May and 1 June in Wageningen. Back to back with this, a training session by Wendy Olsen on QCA is planned on 29 and 30 May. The development of the International Consortium for Comparative Water and Development Studies (ICCWaDS) website was highlighted as a main priority.