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The Value Base of Water Governance: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective

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Description / Abstract

Some scholars promote water governance as a normative concept to improve water resources management globally, while others conceive of it as an analytical term to describe the processes, systems and institutions around the management of water resources and water supply. Critics often highlight how specific water governance scenarios fail to deliver socially desirable outcomes, such as social justice or environmental sustainability. While water governance is often perceived as a technical matter, its conceptual and practical components are in fact based on multiple values that, nonetheless, often remain implicit. The present paper seeks to uncover this value base and discusses existing research on values from multiple perspectives, using material from economics, philosophy, psychology, and other social sciences. In different disciplines, values can be understood as fundamental guiding principles, governance-related values or as values assigned to water resources. Together, they shape complex relationships with water governance, which from an analytical perspective is understood as a combination of policy, politics, and polity. Introducing a new conceptual framework, this study seeks to provide a theoretical foundation for empirical research on water governance processes and conflicts.

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