

Call for papers

Knowledge of water, techniques and power relations

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In a context where there is increasing pressure on resources, where climate change models foresee various water-related problems and where participatory management lies at the heart of water reforms throughout the world, questioning our knowledge of water would appear to be central to these issues. Indeed, knowledge is inherent in any use of water: it underpins the techniques used for water appropriation and distribution, the process for qualifying the resource and for assessing any change in its availability, and the way it is managed and shared, whether water is used for agricultural, domestic, environmental or industrial purposes. Thus, various forms of knowledge are at play here. This may be so-called local knowledge, which has been historically constructed, or so-called scientific knowledge, which is theoretically objective and independent of the social context. It may be the result of different contributions. The goal here is both to understand how this knowledge is constructed, appropriated, challenged, reworked or even the source of considerable controversy, and to question this range of knowledge through the prism of technical proficiency, decision-making and power relations.

It is quite common to oppose two major logics that reflect various ways of understanding the relation to water. On the one hand, there are logics based on social, symbolic, power or territorial dimensions but also on know-how inherited and built around a direct relationship to water. These logics remain pervasively present throughout the world, as evidenced by the work of anthropologists. On the other hand, the logic of technical effectiveness prevails in development projects and reforms. It is based on a modern abstraction of water, highlighting the "natural" aspects of the resource, such as water cycle or watershed concepts. Very different ways of dealing with water often coexist in the same area, especially with the general implementation of public intervention in water projects and with the liberalization of agriculture or the water sector. This confrontation between various forms of knowledge and their underlying logics is more and more common in southern countries where local knowledge still has an active role to play.

Contemporary concerns about water are changing and with them scientific issues. This issue of the *Autrepart* journal aims at offering food for thought based on interrelated themes – the techniques and the power relations – that are largely involved in the production or use of knowledge.

Indeed, the use of water involves applying techniques, and they themselves rely on local or scientific knowledge: techniques for water acquisition and distribution (infrastructures for diverting, pumping, sharing, measuring water, etc.), techniques for quantifying the resource and its availability, and for evaluating its quality. The organization of water management – whether traditional or induced by water reforms of the participatory or integrated management type – often relies on technical choices legitimized by quantified data. Do these techniques or data herald a fair, equitable distribution? Changes in techniques for accessing water (wells, pumps) and associating various technical means in a same area imply changes in knowledge and in social relationships related to water. What are these new forms of knowledge and who are the new actors emerging in connection with these new techniques?

Furthermore, although water is the basis of social relationships of solidarity and alliance, sharing it has always been associated with issues of power and of asymmetric relations, inequality and hierarchies. Though these power relations are well documented, the way they are expressed through knowledge issues is not. What role does this knowledge play in the interaction between people and social groups? Does access to some type of knowledge help impose a certain vision or lead to a consensus? Is this done by going beyond power relations or not? When do the "dominated" accept the "dominant" logic? What position do the elites (dignitaries, experts, government executives, development brokers, etc.) adopt regarding the various types of knowledge? Specialized knowledge is often used. Who produces it? Who keeps it? Is it properly disseminated and collectively appropriated or, on the contrary, is it limited to a realm that is inaccessible to many? How is it integrated into the decision-making process?

Contributions should necessarily be based on examples taken from developing countries and integrate the following three topics – knowledge, techniques and power – in their interaction.

Proposals (title and abstract not exceeding 1,000 characters) must be sent to the journal *Autrepart* before 15th June 2012.

The articles selected have to be submitted by 15th September 2012.

Book reviews on the topic of this issue must be sent to the journal *Autrepart* before 30th September 2012

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