



Governing Urban Water Conflict through Watershed Councils — A Public Policy Analysis Approach and Critique

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In recent decades, integrated water resources management (IWRM) has become a popular model for the governance of water resources. IWRM relies on watershed councils that bring together diverse stakeholders from both inside and outside of government to make policies around water use and conservation. This paper explores the viability of IWRM using the city of San Miguel de Allende (SMA) as a case study. The author coded federal, state, and local water laws using the Institutional Grammar (IG) to analyze the institutions that oversee water governance. The author also conducted interviews and ethnographic studies to learn what water governance looked like in practice.

KEY FINDINGS

- The Institutional Grammar can assist in identifying when laws and regulations lack adequate enforcement provisions.
- Mechanisms for facilitating cooperation and coordination across stakeholders are crucial for shared governance arrangements like IWRM to succeed.

Analyzing Mexican Water Laws Using the IG

The author coded the 2004 National Water Law as well as the 2011 version of the state water laws for Guanajuato (where SMA is located), in addition to some municipal regulations, identifying 345 relevant institutional statements. The author found that the institutional statements consisted primarily of norms and strategies rather than rules, setting out aspirations for water governance without introducing many enforcement mechanisms to make those aspirations a reality. Crucially, the author found no rules that established or otherwise supported the adoption of IWRM arrangements. This finding illustrates how the IG can be used to identify shortcomings in laws and regulations regarding enforcement of policy goals.

Questioning the Viability of IWRM

In addition to laws that lacked adequate enforcement mechanisms, the author identified other obstacles to the implementation of IWRM in SAM. Water governance in Mexico is highly centralized in the federal-level National Water Commission; thus there are few systems in place that encourage cooperation and coordination across diverse stakeholders. There is also a disconnect between the priorities of water governance bodies — which want to maintain SAM's status as a tourist destination — and ordinary citizens, who are concerned about inadequate access to water to meet basic needs. These factors led the author to conclude that IWRM is not a viable model for water governance in the context of SAM.

For more information, please see Pacheco-Vega, R. (2020). Governing Urban Water Conflict through Watershed Councils — A Public Policy Analysis Approach and Critique. *Water* 12(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/w12071849>.

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