



The politics of water research

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As we move from normal science a la Kuhn, to post-normal science as Ravetz and Functovicz discuss or public interest science as Shiva and Bandyopadhyay call it, we are faced with the realization that research is often a function of the context within which it is produced and may often be self-serving. Funding pushes research into certain directions; the normative and epistemic context within which researchers function and the reward systems (i.e. the need to publish in top journals; or the need to find generalizable results) often determine the underlying normative and theoretical framework of the analysis; and such a framework will bias conclusions in specific directions. Furthermore, the way such research is used by policymakers will shape not only policies but the kinds of research that may be funded in the future.

Against this theoretical background, this paper will analyse key conflicts in water research and focus on conflicts based on different norms. It will present three case studies. First, it will look at the emphasis authors from the richer countries put on the ecological uses of water and contrast that with the emphasise that authors and policymakers from the poor countries on the social and economic aspects of water. Second, it will look at the different normative frameworks of different academic disciplines and how this leads to different emphasis in policy recommendations. Here it will take the case of legal and social science scholars who like to put the emphasis on the notion of water as a human right and contrast it with economists who focus on the need for water to be seen as an economic good. Third, a case study will look at how economists, engineers and policymakers often define large-scale solutions to address large-scale problems. This often leads to recommendations for large dams and inter-basin trans-

fer of water. In contrast, non-state actors and social groups often argue in favour of a number of small-scale solutions to address large scale problems. These three case studies will be based on a literature survey and will use empirical data to demonstrate the need to unpack science in order to understand why certain kinds of scientific results point in certain policy directions.