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## BOOK REVIEW

**Earle, A.; Jagerskog, A. and Öjendal, J.** (Eds). 2010. Transboundary water management. Principles and practice. London, Washington, DC: Earthscan. ISBN 978-1-84971-138-8.40. 261 pp. GB£35.

(URL: [www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102372](http://www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102372))

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## INTRODUCTION

Most readers of *Water Alternatives* may be hard-pressed to name some transboundary rivers shared by Sweden and its neighbours, and the nature of their problems. Nevertheless, the Swedes are surprisingly prominent players in the international arena in training, publishing and peacemaking on transboundary rivers – a couple of years ago, the Swedish government launched the concept of 'Transboundary Water Management as a public good' (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Arcadis, 2001). While the present book was published by the Swedish International Water Institute, there is exactly one line in the entire volume about the river Torne (shared by Sweden and Finland). By contrast the authors bring a wealth of knowledge on contentious streams way beyond their borders – the Rhine and Danube, and further afield, the 'usual suspects' like the Jordan, Euphrates, Nile, Indus and Colorado river basins.

The authors clearly know their stuff and explain it well. In this sense, the book should work as an accessible textbook for the advanced students and water professionals it targets. It reads well, has clear artwork and a good index, and some minor gripes aside (e.g. Helle Munk Ravnborg from DIIS Copenhagen should not come under 'Helle') it emerges from a spot check as pretty accurate.

The entry-level approach however brings its limits too. For example, while Molle's work on 'closing basins' is explained with clarity, the text ignores his critical work questioning the concept of scarcity informing 'closing basins' (Molle, 2008). Allan and Mirumachi's interpretation of 'political economy' (Chapter 2) owes rather more to the classics – Smith and Ricardo – than to the range of contemporary interpretations, many of which would be unlikely to measure 'political economy' by per capita Gross Domestic Product. Likewise, the 'governance' chapter by Mostert and Krantz is really about participation, without broaching a perhaps pointless debate on what governance means.

The book does take some sound stances from the word go. It avoids the 'water wars' pitfalls: from the very start the book embraces the scholarship showing violent conflict may erupt about many things, but water is unlikely to be one. Yet it acknowledges that water is political at the core, which makes 'co-operation' also far from self-evident. This has long been a key message from the London geographer, Tony Allan. There is a close connection between the Swedish International Water Institute, home to the book's editors and organisers of the famous annual Stockholm Water Week, and Tony Allan, SIWI Stockholm Water Prize laureate; Allan supervised the PhD thesis of some of the book's editors, as well as those of some other authors. This brings coherence to a rather variegated bunch: the authors come from a range of disciplines and approaches so that the contributions to the section on river case studies are widely different.

## STRUCTURE

SIWI publications can be a bit idealistic, but starting the book off with two political scientists (Marwa Daoudy and Naho Mirumachi) and an 'enlightened engineer' (Mark Zeitoun) certainly helps to spice up the political side with ideas on hegemony and asymmetry. Daoudy makes it plain that the currently popular 'benefit sharing' mantra can only work if we engage with the effects of power asymmetry.

While prominently placed here as Part 1, 'Analytical Approaches' (chapters 2-4), regrettably not many of these political ideas transpire later on in the subsequent 'practical' parts of the book: 'Polity and Practice' (part 2 – chapters 5-10) and 'Challenges and Opportunities' (Part 3 – chapters 11-14). Thus, while Jarvis and Wolf describe a four-stage process to transform conflict into cooperation in chapter 9, their contribution ignores that Cascao and Zeitoun (chapter 3) have already asked serious questions about conflict and cooperation being at separate ends of a spectrum. Chapter 13, in which various authors discuss "fifteen initiatives from various parts of the world", is a microcosm of that disparity – there is no overarching framework.

Perhaps inevitably, then, the book's conclusions are hardly revolutionary but still worth repeating to managers and experts: we should question the 'tyranny' of the river basin as the natural approach; not all power can be equalised; not all cooperation is beneficial. In this sense the publication regrettably does not give us many pointers to 'water alternatives'.

## CONCLUSION

At first, little jumped out at me when I first picked up this volume. After browsing my review copy, I left it for a considerable time, unable to make up my mind about it. Since then however this book has proved very useful to me on topics I needed a quick refresher course on – when a project on transboundary river flow regimes presented itself, this book gave me a quick rundown on the basics (Brown and King), while Puri and Struckmeyer's contribution brought me up to speed on shared aquifers and conjunctive water resource use. While the book's emphasis is clearly social science, I found the non-social science chapters highly useful. In summary, this has turned out to be quite a helpful textbook that stays perhaps too much within its comfort zone, yet basically does what it says on the cover: a first dip into principles and practice of Transboundary Water Management.

## REFERENCES

- Molle, F. 2008. Why enough is never enough: The societal determinants of river basin closure. *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 24(2): 217-226.
- Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Arcadis. 2001. *Transboundary water management as an international public good*. Development Financing Study 2001. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

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