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Viewpoint – IWRM and I: A Reflexive Travelogue of the Flows and Practices Research Team

Alex Bolding

Water Resources Management group, Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands;
alex.bolding@wur.nl

Rossella Alba

Governance and Sustainability Lab, Trier University, Trier, Germany; alba@uni-trier.de

ABSTRACT: This viewpoint article critically discusses how IWRM travelled to each of the researchers of the Flows and Practices team, through which networks they personally engaged with IWRM, what opportunities the IWRM saga offered these researchers and how they tried to translate the concept and policy idea of IWRM into something more aligned with their concerns. By providing this self-reflection we aim to apply the conceptual framework used for the study of the travel and transformation of IWRM as a policy idea to ourselves, as a group of water professionals, realising that we ourselves have actively attempted to influence, transform, promote or resist the IWRM policy agenda. The viewpoint calls for enhancing transparency, self-reflection and appreciating the role (and power) of researchers and practitioners both as individuals and groups in shaping concepts and ideas.

KEYWORDS: IWRM, policy articulation, policy networks, translation, personal reflection

INTRODUCTION

What makes Integrated Water Resources Management, or IWRM as we know it for short, special? Besides the fact that it enhances one's status as a water professional, the I in IWRM can yield one lots of status as a parent amongst teenage offspring as well – iPod, iPhone, iTunes, iCloud and iWRM constitute an interesting list. Such was at least the experience of the lead author of this self-reflexive article on IWRM and I. Contrary to what readers may expect, the aim of this contribution to the special issue is not about the different types of integration that may be alluded to by the I of IWRM, but rather to reflect on the role of IWRM in the lives and careers of the core researchers making up the Flows and Practices: The Politics of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in Africa project team (hereby referred also as 'Flows and Practices' team, F&P).

The 'Flows and Practices' project investigated the travel of IWRM ideas as framed in a global policy arena, and their translation into narratives and practices in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The articulation of IWRM was analysed by focusing on three key moments/episodes: the flow and spread of IWRM as an idea, the *translations, adoptions and transformations* of IWRM in national policies and the practices or the implementation of IWRM in local contexts (Mehta and Movik, 2014). As analysed in the articles included in this Special Issue, the project critically looked at when, with whom, and how IWRM ideas have travelled across countries and river basins. We analyse the politics of the policy process and the outcomes in terms of distribution and access to (water) resources (Mehta et al., 2014). The study insisted on exploring the role of key policy actors, or champions, such as researchers, consultants, state bureaucrats, experts, donors and NGOs in fostering and/or altering the spread of IWRM (Mehta and

Movik, 2014). Soon we realised that we ourselves were not impartial observers of this odyssey, but were very much part and parcel of the network of water professionals that contributed to the emergence of, responded to or engaged with IWRM. Hence we ourselves have been articulating, translating and diverting the content and policy journey of IWRM.

With this in mind, we turn our attention to the participants of the F&P project and attempt a self-analysis and critique of our role in the journey. The travelogue provided in this viewpoint is reflexive in the sense that it applies the conceptual framework used for the study of the travel and transformation of IWRM as a policy idea to ourselves, as a group of water professionals and researchers. We propose a reflection on how we have actively attempted to influence, transform, promote or resist the IWRM agenda. This viewpoint complements the articles included in the Special Issue as it illustrates who the members of the Flows and Practices team are and how they have engaged with IWRM in their work and during their careers.

Eventually, this paper provides a space for discussing and reflecting on our knowledge and experiences as researchers and professionals in the water sector – including our own ideational 'power'. The direct voices of the participants of the 'Flows and Practices' project, their thoughts, aspirations and dilemmas emerge throughout the paper. Following Levine et al. (2013: 148) we believe this is relevant for two reasons: first, much of this knowledge is often hidden and "lost after the retirement of key actors of the water sector"; and second, the paper offers a space for self-criticism and reflection on the ethical and personal dilemmas we have encountered in the everyday practice of critical water studies. In this way, we aim at contributing to the discussion on the 'voices of water professionals' started in the pages of this Journal (see Water Alternatives' Special Issue Voices of Professionals: Shedding Light on Hidden Dynamics in the Water Sector -2013).

In the remainder of this contribution we first of all discuss the methodology used for this self-study. Thereafter we use as a guide five questions we posed during interviews with members of the F&P team. We first analyse when people were confronted with IWRM as a concept and what formed our initial responses and engagements. Next we analyse in which networks people operated when they engaged with IWRM and what opportunities were offered as a result of this engagement. We also try to assess what role IWRM played in our respective careers. Next we delve into the attempts of various members of the group to resist, transform or translate certain elements of IWRM as a policy idea. Finally, we explore the question of what comes next – is there life after IWRM and, if so, what would it look like?

METHODS OF SELF-STUDYING THE FLOWS AND PRACTICES TEAM

The Flows and Practices project brought together fifteen researchers. Of these, eight are male and seven female, a composition which renders the group unrepresentative for the water world which tends to be dominated by men. In terms of nationality the group is diverse with representatives from Austria (1), Canada (1), France (1), India (1), Italy (1), the Netherlands (2), Norway (1), South Africa (1), Tanzania (3), United Kingdom (1), United States of America (1), and Zimbabwe (1). Most of the participants have working and research experience in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the five so-called case study countries included in the F&P project: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda. All group members have been engaged in academia or other research organisations either as a professional or as a student, with the exception of one member who worked for an international NGO in Uganda at the time of the research (but who had a research background). The group is composed of six young, five mid-career and four senior professionals, with four professors in our midst. In terms of disciplinary background, the group is split between six people with a background in applied or water engineering while the remaining nine have a social science background that ranges from economics and water management to anthropology and development studies.

The project came about as a result of three attempts to secure funding of which only the last was successful. First, and key to the genesis of group was an attempt at securing European Union funding,

coordinated by Bill Derman and Lyla Mehta at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (in 2013 the acronym changed from UMB to NMBU with the addition of the veterinary school) in Norway.¹ In December 2009, representatives from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Wageningen University, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Water Research Commission of South Africa, University of Zimbabwe, and the University of Malawi (Chancellor College) were invited by UMB to spend a week together to develop an EU FP7 research project proposal on the Travel of IWRM to Africa. The resulting proposal was submitted for a call on Africa and Natural Resources Management, but was ultimately turned down by one reviewer who did not see how our research project would help spread IWRM in Africa, failing to appreciate the critical nature of our proposed study. A second attempt at securing funding for a 'dumbed down' version of the original EU proposal brought a smaller group together around a similar study on the travel of IWRM with an application to the European Science Foundation's 'European Collaborative Research Projects' scheme which sought co funding from Norwegian, British and Dutch research councils. Despite some very strong and constructive comments by the reviewers, one reviewer felt insulted by the lack of respect and attention to the EU Water Framework Directive, which sunk the whole proposal. When this second attempt at securing funding had also failed, an even further focused and financially modest proposal was written for exclusive Norwegian funding by The Research Council of Norway. The third attempt proved successful. By then the team had become even smaller still, coalescing around initially four African countries, viz. South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania (later expanded to five, by including Uganda).

Of the 15 core researchers associated with the Flows and Practices project, 12 were interviewed for this article. The interviews were performed in English by the two lead authors in person, mostly during a project workshop held in Brighton (UK) in May 2014, with some follow-up in July 2014, and three interviews by Skype later on. One researcher answered our questions by Email. The interviews were guided by the five questions listed below.

1. When did you first hear about IWRM? Did it appeal to you?
2. What was your first personal engagement with IWRM (where, when)?
3. Did IWRM play a big role in your career? Did it provide opportunities that you would not have had without IWRM?
4. When and how did you develop a critical standing toward IWRM?
5. How are you engaging with IWRM today?

FIRST ENGAGEMENT WITH IWRM

We started our interviews by asking the interviewees to recall their first encounter and engagement with IWRM. Soon we noticed a clear distinction between young and senior researchers: while the former studied IWRM and its critique, the latter heard about IWRM in the 1990s when the concept was in its initial stage of development carrying a promising agenda. Secondly, despite differences in age and experience, most of the interviewees did not relate the emergence of IWRM with the endorsement of the so-called Dublin Principles during the International Conference on Water and the Environment held in Dublin in 1992 (ACC/ISGWR, 1992). The multiple engagements with IWRM are further outlined below.

¹ By 2009, Norway as a non-EU country was allowed entry for the first time into bidding for EU funding for research.

Constructing critical perspectives

Three of the M.Sc. students involved in the project learned about IWRM during their university studies and engaged with the concept while writing their Masters thesis within the F&P project. Two students interviewed commented:

I heard about IWRM for the first time during my first degree studies in Environmental Science. IWRM was just mentioned during a course. I didn't pay much attention to it. (...) My first real engagement with IWRM was with my MSc thesis in the context of the F&P project.²

I heard about IWRM during my MSc study in International Land and Water Management in Wageningen (...) I have been critical of IWRM even before I heard of it properly – first I had the critique and then I engaged with the concept.³

Some of the senior researchers in the group were rather optimistic when they first encountered IWRM. For instance, Emmanuel Manzungu explained:

I heard of IWRM towards the end of my PhD. The concept seemed to reconcile land and water, and promote integration. I then wrote a five pager jointly with Alex [Bolding] and Pieter van der Zaag arguing in favour of IWRM as a new approach in a book on water for agriculture in Zimbabwe, published in 1999 (Manzungu et al., 1999). IWRM promised to be more encompassing/holistic than just irrigation.⁴

Alex Bolding first heard about IWRM in the 1990s while working on his PhD on water management at field, irrigation scheme and catchment levels in Zimbabwe (Bolding, 2004) and contributed to the book Emmanuel mentioned above:

I heard of IWRM in mid-1998 when finishing a book on water in Zimbabwe that came out in 1999. It made a lot of sense – we made our own definition of IWRM at the time in contrast to the IUCN [International Union for the Conservation of Nature] definition. The concept opened up a much-needed agenda – holistic, how to engage with different types of water use. (...) For my PhD I thought that certain indigenous water allocation and distribution practices I had observed were in line with IWRM as I wanted to promote it. I linked IWRM very much with river basin management and Tennessee Valley Authority style holistic natural resources management.⁵

In contrast, if IWRM was initially an appealing concept for some, the experience of the senior social and political scientists of the Flows and Practices group proved different as Bill Derman noticed:

The concept did not appeal to me as such, I was not coming from the water world (...) I was looking at it [water] from the point of view of resource use and property relations.⁶

He noticed that when he started researching the impact of newly introduced water laws in Zimbabwe, in the mid-nineties, the focus was on water resources management (WRM) not IWRM. Thus, he first engaged with water resources management and only later on with Integrated Water Resources Management as an approach.

² Skype interview with Aurelia van Eeden by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, 27 May 2014.

³ Interview with Rossella Alba by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

⁴ Interview with Emmanuel Manzungu by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

⁵ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

⁶ Interview with Bill Derman by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014. Bill Derman entered water through the observations of Zambezi Valley farmers who were disturbed by changes in river flows due to irrigation on the plateau. Calvin Nhira (then Director of the Centre for Applied Social Sciences at the University of Zimbabwe) formulated a research strategy to examine water as property, and the impacts of Zimbabwe's new water laws.

A more critical approach towards IWRM was embraced by a part of the researchers within F&P since their first encounter with the concept. For instance Alan Nicol highlights:

I heard about IWRM in 1993 at the Nile 2002 conference in Aswan, Egypt. Seemed to me to be an anti-politics concept – technical, boring and policy blind.⁷

However, most of the researchers in the F&P project soon embraced a critical position towards IWRM. Indeed, the first enthusiasm towards IWRM and its potential was soon replaced by mounting criticism and disillusion. Alex Bolding noticed:

By 2000, IWRM was the only game in town and I wrote a critical paper about it for a research conference – in the paper we (Bolding et al., 2000) argued for a politicised IWRM and wondered about five possible meanings of the I in IWRM.⁸

The limits of IWRM were highlighted also by Barbara van Koppen, who actively participated in defining it, for the Global Water Partnership (GWP):

IWRM was soon like a mantra in the GWP. Over time I got frustrated with GWP and IWRM. In 2003 I published a critical paper on IWRM in Africa. IWRM brought a 'paralysis of analysis' and many important issues (water development, poverty alleviation) were side-lined by it. However, GWP just wanted to push one generic agenda for the whole world.⁹

I and the 'Dublin Principles'

Even though the idea of integrated management of water resources has a long history, IWRM gained increased attention during the 1990s (Biswas, 2004; Conca, 2005; Cherlet, 2012; Mehta and Movik, 2014). The International Conference on Water and the Environment held in Dublin in 1992 represents a turning point in the debate surrounding IWRM (ACC/ISGWR, 1992). The conference led to the endorsement of the so-called 'Dublin Principles' that soon became the guiding principles for the implementation of IWRM worldwide to the point that for many IWRM is conflated with the 'Dublin Principles'. Interestingly, despite differences in age and experience, most of the interviewees, if not all, did not relate the emergence of IWRM with the endorsement of the so-called Dublin Principles.

[IWRM] Had nothing to do with Dublin in my perception – I only got to know Dublin Principles through the F&P project.¹⁰

Andrew Tarimo learned about IWRM almost ten years before the endorsement of the Dublin Principles, when he started working as Irrigation Manager in the Morogoro Region in Tanzania. Rather than relating IWRM with the Dublin Principles, he first heard about IWRM when the Tanzanian Government introduced a River Basin Management approach and established nine river basins in the country.¹¹

Nevertheless, the discussion surrounding the recognition of water as an economic good (Principle No. 4) played a big role in the debate, as Synne Movik, Jeremy Allouche and Lyla Mehta mentioned:

I think I first heard of IWRM in 2002 at a conference on FMIS [Farmer-Managed Irrigation Systems] in Kathmandu. The big issue then was water as an economic good, meaning that water would be pushed out of agriculture which of course was perceived as a threat to FMIS. I did not really relate to IWRM at the time

⁷ Skype interview with Alan Nicol by Rossella Alba, 5 June 2014. Note: The Nile 2002 conference refers to a series of conferences that took place in the 1990s focusing on 'Comprehensive Water Resources Development of the Nile Basin'.

⁸ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

⁹ Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

¹⁰ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

¹¹ Email personal communication with Andrew Tarimo, 8 May 2015.

(...) IWRM sounded reasonable but it was a water thing – it was about hydrological boundaries, river basins, etc. Dublin Principles did not really connect with it, in my mind.¹²

In 1999 I was doing research on privatisation in the water services sector, and I came across the IWRM concept in a World Bank paper on water reforms in Morocco. During subsequent interviews in Washington at the World Bank I became aware of the so-called Dublin Principles, which pushed IWRM. Actually the reform agenda pushing privatisation and decentralisation had started with a World Bank paper in 1993 on WRM (World Bank, 1993), but it actually happened in the water services sector.¹³

I only picked up on IWRM in the 2000s, when critical papers about it came out from the early to mid-2000s. I also recall a DFID meeting of water professionals where it was debated and many critical views were put forward. Prior to that, I had always been critical of Dublin Principle No.4 that largely focused on private good/economic aspects of water, as opposed to taking a more multifaceted approach.¹⁴

Concluding, the discussion above reveals different responses to our first question. First, the age and the experience of the participants seem to shape their opinions on IWRM. Second, at the time of the Flows and Practices project most of the researchers were critical towards IWRM, but some were not when IWRM entered the water policy scene. Often, these early believers were directly involved in the water sector as engineers or PhD researchers. They first welcomed IWRM as a new approach and it was only through experience and over time that they developed a critical stand towards it. Nevertheless, the advent of IWRM provided opportunities for all the interviewees to converge around the Flows and Practices project and the chance to work together. We further elaborate on this in the following section.

NETWORKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

One of the key characteristics of IWRM as a concept and policy idea is that it offered many opportunities for networking – opening doors to different ideas, bringing together people from many different disciplines. This is also one aspect of IWRM that has been emphasised by many of the interviewees. Barbara van Koppen enthusiastically reflected on her term with the Steering Committee and later Nomination Committee of the Global Water Partnership:

We met once or twice a year. In Costa Rica we had one of our first regional meetings. There I had the chance to meet a lot of people, like Sunita Narain and Anil Agarwal and many others. We exchanged lots of ideas and had a nice time together. That time was really exciting. People from all over the world, 'the brightest brains from all countries' including civil society organisations were involved in the meetings at the GWP. It was a 'toolkit for learning'.¹⁵

Hence if the concept of IWRM can stake one undisputed claim to fame, it must be that it enabled people and ideas to navigate networks, different profession(al)s to meet and opportunities to be offered. So it is legitimate to ask what role IWRM played in the careers of the Flows and Practices team members and what networks and opportunities the concept and its flow offered to the team members.

Below the three most common reactions are presented in more detail. One can summarise them as IWRM providing (1) a stepping stone; (2) a focus point to articulate criticism while making a career in the water world; (3) a sideshow to real issues and a no-brainer which featured in the background. Besides discussing the role IWRM played for the participants, the opportunities offered by the F&P

¹² Interview with Synne Movik by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

¹³ Interview with Jeremy Allouche by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 7 July 2014.

¹⁴ Interview with Lyla Mehta by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 8 July 2014.

¹⁵ Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

project are also outlined. All the interviewees emphasise that the F&P project has offered them opportunities, for some in the shape of MSc thesis projects, for others temporary research assistant positions, and for others an opportunity to get to know other critical water academics and provide further exposure to critical studies on 'policy travel'.

IWRM as a stepping stone

While most of us stress that working together in the F&P project has been nice and inspiring, many would say like Synne Movik that their engagement with IWRM did not offer tremendous opportunities, neither in terms of career nor in fostering IWRM or water in general, during their career, before engaging with Flows and Practices. However, Synne discovered that after moving to a Norwegian consultancy firm:

I am working on the EU-WFD [European Union – Water Framework Directive] in Norway today and it's all about IWRM. My colleagues do wonder why I'm so critical of the IWRM concept – it does sound very logical to pursue it.¹⁶

In contrast, the critical engagement with IWRM through the Flows and Practices project has provided a stepping stone for many of the younger members of the F&P team. Yet, rather than IWRM per se, the F&P project brought them several opportunities, as Aurelia van Eeden illustrates:

IWRM as such did not play a big role in my career, it just happened to be around. At the start I found it boring, redundant and a distraction from the real issues.¹⁷

The interviewees readily acknowledge IWRM as the key focus point of the research project, offering opportunities to critically engage with IWRM in thesis work, providing a formative experience and allowing them to learn, and engage with critical water studies and develop research skills. The project also yielded tangible benefits like jobs as research assistants, participation in three conferences and a first publication in a scientific journal (Mehta et al., 2014). Moreover, the opportunity to accumulate knowledge and insights on different dimensions of IWRM helps in engaging with ongoing debates in the water world, like the new Water Act in British Columbia, Canada.

IWRM as a focus point to articulate criticism

The second most prevalent response points at the role of IWRM as a focus point for articulating critical positions while developing a career. This reaction was particularly prevalent amongst those already occupying a job in the water world as an engineer at the time IWRM became a dominant idea in the water sector. IWRM provided opportunities to further develop their career as critical thinkers/academics/consultants galvanising their agenda and critically engaging with different dimensions of IWRM like decentralisation, stakeholder management, privatisation and water pricing. Although critical towards IWRM as a concept, for those involved in the water sector, IWRM appears as a set course as it was (and still is) a catalyser for funding and project opportunities.

For Alex Bolding, the IWRM proliferation helped in finding research funds:

IWRM did provide opportunities – it was a hegemonic concept in the water world, no way around it and it put things on the agenda – like reserving water for the environment, concerns with democratising water management, decentralisation, and water pricing. IWRM released quite some funds including those associated with my post-doc research on water governance at river basin level. It also generated a lot more

¹⁶ Interview with Synne Movik by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

¹⁷ Skype interview with Aurelia van Eeden by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, 27 May 2014.

knowledge. But more than IWRM it was the idea of River Basin Management that helped me in my career as a researcher.¹⁸

For Emmanuel Manzungu, the funded spread of IWRM in the SADC region provided a living:

It allowed me to pursue a career by criticising it, definitely not by promoting it. I was part of a team that was in charge of a mid-term review about IWRM implementation in SADC countries; we physically travelled to many countries. I travelled to South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho and Swaziland in addition to talking to Zimbabwean officials. They initially asked us for a 100-page report. I prepared a 30-page report. The document focused on IWRM, infrastructure development and water resources development. It was around 2004-2005. The greater part of the content of that 30 pages later became part of the SADC strategy on Integrated Water Resources Development and Management.¹⁹

For Andrew Tarimo, IWRM offered the opportunity to work closely with former colleagues and strengthen his professional network:

In 1995, the Government [of Tanzania] made a review of the Water Policies following an earlier advice by the World Bank and Danida and, in 1996, the World Bank financed an inter-ministerial project titled River Basin Management and Smallholder Irrigation Improvement Project (RBMSIIP). The RBM component was hosted by the ministry responsible for water, while the SIIP component was lodged with the Ministry of Agriculture. It is at this stage that I developed a real interest in IWRM because the head of the RBM was my former university classmate and the head of SIIP used to be my colleague in the Ministry of Agriculture. By then I was already employed by Sokoine University of Agriculture and therefore I had an opportunity to work with them more closely.²⁰

For Barbara van Koppen operating in the IWMI southern Africa regional office, her earlier-mentioned involvement with IWRM through the GWP helped her establish a reputation:

It helped me in my professional career – to become visible, though mainly as a troublemaker (...). I find this work on vague concepts that hide an anti-poor agenda boring. Though I must admit that my exposure to the networks associated with GWP helped me to gain recognition. It has probably also been effective in obtaining my present senior position.²¹

Alan Nicol who worked for the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) critically engaging with IWRM (Nicol, 2000), before joining the World Water Council in Marseille for a two year stint indicated that:

IWRM provided an idea to count on, providing researchable issues, helping me to establish a position and its critique helped to reinforce the debate on politics and power.²²

IWRM as a sideshow

Yet in a third response, particularly prevalent amongst those engaging from a social science perspective, IWRM was at the fringe of their main concerns, and only became part of a main course through the F&P project. Virtually all more-senior social science researchers engaging with the water world involved in the F&P project have been critical of Dublin Principle No.4 – whereby the water privatisation debates provided them with a bigger impetus to their careers both intellectually and politically. For instance, for political scientist, Jeremy Allouche:

¹⁸ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

¹⁹ Interview with Emmanuel Manzungu by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

²⁰ Email personal communication with Andrew Tarimo, 8 May 2015.

²¹ Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

²² Skype interview with Alan Nicol by Rossella Alba, 5 June 2014.

IWRM was always a side dish, never the main course. It didn't mean a lot in terms of fostering my career; as a policy engagement it wasn't offering opportunities and as claim to fame? Not sure. There is only one element of IWRM, treating water as an economic good that is heavily contested and inspires debate...²³

The same applies to social scientists, Bill Derman and Lyla Mehta. Bill Derman indicated that:

IWRM just happens to be the dominant narrative and as such it needs to be unravelled. Nobody ever explained to me the beauty of IWRM, so it didn't really feature for me, until such time that we as a team started to develop the EU proposal.²⁴

TRANSLATING AND ALIGNING IWRM WITH A HOME-BRED AGENDA

As already alluded to above, many of the researchers of the F&P team have engaged critically with one or two dimensions of the IWRM idea and used the advent of the concept as a key element in critiquing hegemonic discourses in the water world and as a means to foster their own (policy or research) agenda. In that sense, the F&P team members did not treat the concept differently from other policy actors – running with some aspects and actively trying to translate or transform other parts of the concept to align it with their own agenda. A number of translations and diversions feature prominently and are treated in more detail below.

Many of us in our careers initially saw IWRM as something benign and neutral – a good idea, containing all the necessary elements – though it was on the fringe of the research or policy concerns of many team members of the F&P project before the start of the project. There is a general feeling that there is nothing wrong with the concept as such or with the network of advocacy organisations promoting its spread, like the Global Water Partnership and the World Water Council. The concept makes (hydrological) sense, and the extent to which we can ascribe negative effects to it is debatable. Perhaps by focusing exclusively on its flow into Africa in the context of a research project one is tempted to overestimate its (negative or positive) effects.

Against privatisation and water grabbing, but pushing water as a human right

What some of the team members have issues with are some of the underlying Dublin Principles. It seems that principle No. 3 on women's role in water supply was added as an afterthought at the end of the Dublin conference. While Principle No. 4 on treating water as an economic good has triggered huge debates and is profoundly contested. As Jeremy Allouche highlighted:

If I want to be very critical of IWRM I would just observe that IWRM is a spiel of a little clique of consultants. Yet one must also admit that through different gatherings IWRM has been opening up new possibilities. The initial push behind the concept came from environmentalists and the anti-dam movement, and I must admit that I'm not against this dimension of the IWRM 'movement' – it has made engineers rethink about the potential impacts of their infrastructure. (...) We have difficulties in pinning down exact criticism on the concept. People are puzzled by IWRM – it is a vague concept, it contains some good elements. IWRM has failed to deliver, that's what our case studies show. But the principles behind it remain. Water as an economic good, has a much stronger appeal and potential to be criticised than IWRM as such.²⁵

The last point indicates the direction of the most notable and vehement resistance to IWRM: against promoting Dublin Principle No. 4 seeking to treat water as an economic good. Associated with this resistance is the pushing of an alternative agenda that treats water as a human right. As Bill Derman

²³ Interview with Jeremy Allouche by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 7 July 2014.

²⁴ Interview with Bill Derman by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

²⁵ Interview with Jeremy Allouche by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 7 July 2014.

indicated "I've always engaged whatever water reform from the perspective of human rights".²⁶ Similarly, Lyla Mehta has always been critical of attempts to push for water privatisation and the role of IWRM inspired policy discourse in institutionalising Dublin Principle No.4. For Alex Bolding the second World Water Forum in The Hague (2000) provided an eye-opener in this respect:

I thought 'hey, the IWRM crowd is the wrong crowd, this is the private sector'. It was also the time of the peak of privatisation and cherry picking. French companies were involved in promoting 'packaged water' and making a profit out of it, before even improving the public service.²⁷

Aurelia van Eeden has studied how IWRM and its emphasis on water as a private good has affected the ongoing land and water grab on the African continent:

I was always critical of IWRM, but in the context of this project I've been trying to see what it does for the ongoing land and water grab in Africa. IWRM has different meanings in each context. When you focus on access to water and water rights, water grabs become an important issue and how IWRM discourse facilitates access by companies. I'm more cynical than critical. At the start, IWRM seemed a wonderful idea, but lots of unforeseen stuff has happened so I cannot accept IWRM with open arms anymore. I'm critical to some aspects of IWRM like the definition of water as an economic good, which implies in terms of water rights that the flow of money and commodification of water work towards skewed access.²⁸

Translating IWRM from management to water development and access

The second most felt point of criticism on IWRM focuses on its purported role in sidelining a pro-poor development agenda for Africa, by redirecting attention towards water management issues rather than towards water development. As Alex Bolding indicated:

In the case of Africa, it was a way to stop development of water resources and focus on management, while lack of access to water still remains a big issue together with a lack of development of water infrastructure.²⁹

Barbara van Koppen readily explained how she became critical of the concept over time. Of course, it was Asit Biswas who famously declared the concept dead in 2004 to the shock of some of the Stockholm Water Week attendants (Biswas, 2004). The Tushaar Shah paper (co-authored with van Koppen, 2006) provided a tipping point for van Koppen in criticising the concept. The GWP itself started to get disillusioned by 2009-10.

I also fought hard in the GWP to include a poverty eradication and water development component to IWRM. Mike Muller really managed to get more attention for the 'D' for Development within the GWP.³⁰

Pivotal in that transformation of the IWRM agenda into one dealing with water development as well was the work of Emmanuel Manzungu, who has already related above what his role was in formulating the second SADC regional strategic action plan (2005-10), which explicitly adds a water development agenda to the customary IWRM recipe book:

It was the time of Bruce Lankford's renewed focus on irrigation adaptation and infrastructure development; the African Development Bank was focusing also on irrigation; and the Blair Commission for

²⁶ Interview with Bill Derman by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

²⁷ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

²⁸ Skype interview with Aurelia van Eeden by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, 27 May 2014.

²⁹ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

³⁰ Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

Africa was active. Hence infrastructure development became a key element of SADC's strategy for IWRM despite resistance by a French lady who insisted on removing dams from the agenda.³¹

Bringing water allocation back in – multiple use services as IWRM-light

The third stream of criticism raised against IWRM took issue with its GWP-inspired discourse on the trade-off between efficiency, equity and environmental sustainability (GWP, 2000) which helped to depoliticise water allocation debates. Synne Movik was already a doubting Thomas with regard to the benefits of IWRM, but it was not until 2004 with the Biswas speech at the Stockholm water week (Biswas, 2004) and a Tony Allan article (Allan, 2003) that she got really critical:

IWRM allows you to see in it and get from it what you like. The Allan article made me realise that water allocation debates were stifled by its apolitical conception in IWRM discourse. It made me realise that allocation issues were really missing from it – that was too political. Contestations did not feature in the concept of IWRM. I started thinking about getting politics back in water governance, and how IWRM helped to keep politics out.³²

Barbara van Koppen shared these sentiments but got really disillusioned when IWRM was next used in newly adopted southern African water legislation to promote the issuing of water permits, detrimentally affecting water-allocation debates, by depriving the poor of customary water rights. However, the talk of integration did help to pave the road for the MUS concept – Multiple Use Services (MUS, see www.musgroup.net):

I remember well that we presented MUS at the World Water Forum in Istanbul in 2009 as an IWRM-light. That was an active attempt to translate IWRM into something else by promoting a new MUS perspective. Redirecting IWRM towards community water development.³³

Against centralisation, pro participation

A closely affiliated critique to the points raised above takes issue with the propensity of the IWRM discourse to paradoxically promote centralised, expert-driven institutions that are at base anti-democratic, under the cloak of decentralised user management of water in newly established stakeholder-based institutions (Wester et al., 2009). This phenomenon has been called 'the ghost of TVA' (Tennessee Valley Authority; see Miller and Reidinger, 1998). Alex Bolding became really critical of IWRM in the context of writing a paper on the three waves of River Basin Management – whereby IWRM featured as an anti-democratic ghost of TVA (see also Iyer, 2004):

Of course, in 2000 presenting a paper at a Dutch water conference, my co-authors and I were the only ones critical of IWRM – we feared that IWRM would only help reinforce the water engineers' position as so-called experts.

Interviewer: Why were you critical?

Because IWRM is anti-democratic, experts use it for claiming their role, and the bureaucracies to propagate themselves. Instead of opening up the sector, it closed it up.³⁴

³¹ Interview with Emmanuel Manzungu by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014. Manzungu refers to the irrigation chapter of the Commission for Africa, written by Bruce Lankford (2005).

³² Interview with Synne Movik by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

³³ Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

³⁴ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

Yet it is also readily acknowledged by many of the F&P project team members that IWRM contains certain elements worth fighting for, the most mentioned of which is its emphasis on stakeholder participation in water resources management (Dublin Principle No. 2). As Rossella Alba indicated:

I was critical of IWRM before I got to know the concept in a proper manner. (...) Over time I got more critical of various aspects of the concept, like that it is a-political and that it includes the element of seeing water as an economic good. Yet its emphasis on stakeholder participation can be quite useful.³⁵

Similarly, Kristi Denby thought IWRM was a good idea in theory putting together environmental, gender, economics and participation concerns. However, she became very critical of certain aspects of the IWRM policy idea and questioned IWRM's usefulness in practice through engaging with this project.

IWRM morphing into something else...

Finally, it is salient to observe that IWRM is prone to morphing into something else, as indicated above by Barbara van Koppen who started promoting MUS based community development as 'IWRM-light'. Two other emerging guises or interpretations of IWRM, are climate-smart agriculture and the resilient call for adaptive water management in the face of global climate change. IWRM has been used and abused both for 'good' and 'bad' causes – like WaterNet offering accessible research funding for practitioners in the African water sector (through WARFSA) and capacity building programmes in African universities scrutinising questions of politics and equity under the banner of IWRM. Alex Bolding observes that

At the same time GWP and affiliated advocacy groups like the Netherlands Water Partnership has been using IWRM to shamelessly promote the sale of expert knowledge. So, in principle, there is nothing wrong with IWRM – as a concept it opened up questions (on groundwater management, ecosystem integrity and issues of integration) that are relevant to teach about.³⁶

Alan Nicol, however, never liked the idea:

I think engineering and economics provide incomplete solutions. I remember a dinner with the GWP group in London, where I criticised IWRM for not working in practice. (...) [a senior GWP member] acted as if I had insulted his mother. IWRM espouses true believers. The F&P project provides a nice opportunity to articulate our critique on the concept but ultimately IWRM is out-dated – its high point was in 1999-2000 at the second WWF. Since then it has been subject to criticism and has fallen victim to Climate Change and a different set of post 9-11 geopolitical interests. We need to go beyond IWRM. I'm presently involved in water-smart agriculture which is a kind of IWRM at micro-scale though I prefer to avoid the IWRM term.³⁷

IWRM AND OUR FUTURE

So is there a future for IWRM or will the water world switch and bet on a different horse or set of horses? We discussed this question both with our interviewees and in a group discussion during our project conference in Brighton in May 2014.

Interviews revealed different opinions on this amongst the team members, with basically three responses. First there are those of us, who despite levelling criticism against different elements of the IWRM policy idea, believe it is there to stay in its original guise or differently as Adaptive Water Resources Management (AWRM) in response to Climate Change. Second, some interviewees highlighted that some aspects of IWRM were actually quite useful, like the principle of emphasising

³⁵ Interview with Rossella Alba by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

³⁶ Interview with Rossella Alba by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

³⁷ Skype interview with Alan Nicol by Rossella Alba, 5 June 2014.

stakeholder participation, but that it just needs deepening to become more inclusive. A final and third response was that IWRM has done enough damage and needs to be replaced by a human right to water approach.

Within the first category of being critical of IWRM but believing in another lifeline yet, Alex Bolding stressed that the a-political GWP definition of IWRM needs to be unpacked so people realise they have to make choices – you can't have it all. He also believed the Dublin Principles to be fatally flawed:

The mention of women is useless in the principles; it doesn't say anything about gender. The definition of water as a private good is abused to promote pricing and profit-making. It is nice that they mention stakeholder participation, but they only say 'at the appropriate level' without specifying. Am I still fascinated by IWRM? Yes, I am fascinated because I understand where it comes from. I understand the hydrological perspective. And I think it is there to stay. For example, look at the ICID [International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage]; it is a club of traditional engineers purporting to solve political distribution problems with technical, supply-side solutions. But they are still organising their meetings. They even organised the first Irrigation World Water Forum (in Turkey, 2014). For some of them, IWRM is still a revolutionary, innovative concept!³⁸

Jeremy Allouche concurred with the last point, while not expecting to have another project involving IWRM, though many of the issues raised under the banner of IWRM will continue to feature in studies/debates engaging with the water-food-energy nexus (Allouche et al., 2015). He continued by stressing that:

[T]he literature on IWRM never really inspired me. Most of it seems to comprise boring case studies of bad quality that contain IWRM in their title. (...) The problem seems to be that IWRM was never really defined as a sexy topic from a social science perspective. (...) It is also important to realise that IWRM can reconfigure itself as adaptive WRM in the face of Climate Change. Thus it can garner a new lease of life.³⁹

A second set of responses were informed by an equally critical perspective on IWRM, but stressed the fact that the concept for its ills had brought something worthwhile as well. Synne Movik stressed that in her new job as a consultant operating in the EU water world, her colleagues frown at her critical perception of IWRM. Yet:

[D]espite me being very critical of IWRM, my present work with the EU-WFD (...) points at the issue of stakeholder participation being tabled. IWRM helps to bring different stakeholders together and to talk with each other and debate issues. That did not happen before. Of course, we need to deepen the inclusiveness and type of participation involved.⁴⁰

In a similar vein, Emmanuel Manzungu stressed that the decentralised stakeholder management of water in so-called Catchment Councils is probably there to stay:

Today, there are elements of IWRM in Zimbabwe that are difficult to get rid of. For instance, Catchment Councils – I'm presently engaged in action research that tries to link the work of the Catchment Council to the grassroots level, providing bottom-up feedback loops to improve the quality and depth of stakeholder participation. IWRM still plays a key role in securing funding in the SADC Region.⁴¹

Finally, a third set of responses engages with the purported 'damage done' by IWRM and the need for a radically different approach that emphasises a human right to water, explicitly discarding the depoliticising rhetoric of IWRM. As mentioned earlier, the GWP has provided a platform to meet

³⁸ Interview with Alex Bolding by Rossella Alba, Wageningen, 28 May 2014.

³⁹ Interview with Jeremy Allouche by Alex Bolding, Brighton, 7 July 2014.

⁴⁰ Skype interview with Alan Nicol by Rossella Alba, 5 June 2014.

⁴¹ Interview with Emmanuel Manzungu by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

interesting people and ideas, but attempts to push a pro-poor development agenda in GWP have led to naught. Barbara van Koppen stressed the role that the GWP are still playing in agenda-setting in the water sector for SADC, and she acknowledged her critical approach towards IWRM:

My engagement nowadays with IWRM is only focused on criticising it. I have a problem because I'm passionate about a human rights approach to water, but hardly any of my colleagues are.⁴²

Lyla Mehta wishes to continue the struggle by engaging with critical research on the successor to IWRM, whether that is the nexus (water-food-energy), the politics of land and water grabs as well as the promise and challenge of integrating human rights around water, food and land issues. Bill Derman emphatically believes the latter comprises the future:

I critique water reforms with regard to their inadequacy with human rights. I still do not critique it from an IWRM perspective. I think there was and is no capacity in terms of institutional reach and human resources to do IWRM in countries like Zimbabwe. The key issue of the future in the water sector is the human right to water.⁴³

The discussion about 'the future of IWRM' continued during our project conference where we raised a vote on what's next. The guiding question was: "What is the successor to IWRM as a hegemonic concept or will IWRM simply morph into adaptive water resources management and earn a new lease on life?" We differentiated regionally between the European Union (EU) and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). First, we addressed the question of what you would wish the next hegemonic concept (the heart) to be that would succeed or displace IWRM.

It was striking to note that only one person in our midst believed and hoped that IWRM would continue to drive the minds and hearts of the water world both in Africa and the EU, albeit possibly in a different guise as adaptive water resources management in the face of climate change mitigation. Water as a human right took an overwhelming lead as a wish for the future, emphasising access to water for all and countering the Dublin Principle that sees water as an economic good. Second placed were the water-food-energy nexus and the Green Growth Economy in the context of the European Union – realising that the greening of the economy may be a powerful alternative discourse for growth in an otherwise stagnant economic zone.

Next we asked the same question about the successor of IWRM but then focusing on what people would suspect the discourse of the day (the gut) will be rather than what they would wish themselves. Gut feelings on what would become the hottest concern in the water world were quite different from the vote cast from the heart. A much more prevalent role for the nexus on water-energy-and food is foreseen both in Europe and Africa, and hardly any for the water as a human right movement. The key geopolitical challenges around energy in the wealthy West and the competition between food and biofuel production in Africa under the rubric of the ongoing land (and water) grab (Mehta et al., 2012) would warrant attention to the nexus (see also Allouche et al., 2015). On the other hand, people expect the Green growth economy to play a major role in EU water debates, while IWRM or its successor AWRM is expected to play a role in sub Saharan African water debates and funding which is heavily tainted by climate-change concerns. On the other extreme, some people expect venture capitalism to rise both in the EU and Africa.

Thus, if we are a barometer for experience and direction, where might IWRM go next (or has gone already)? Discussing the future of IWRM is outside the scope of this paper and the survey presented above is rather speculative and idiosyncratic. A systematic research by means of discursive analysis of water-related scientific articles and web-based surveys on key words is required for this purpose.

⁴² Interview with Barbara van Koppen by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 1 May 2014.

⁴³ Interview with Bill Derman by Alex Bolding and Rossella Alba, Brighton, 2 May 2014.

Nevertheless, the answers of the interviewees and the group show again how personal beliefs, ideas and knowledge influence the unfolding of concepts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to reconstruct the travel of IWRM within the ranks of the Flows and Practices research team. Our journey started from different places, disciplines and different perspectives as described in the first section. The paper follows the researchers through their careers and documents how the team members engaged, transformed and used IWRM. The F&P project brought the team together and contributed to further develop the critique not only towards IWRM, but more in general towards dominant concepts, the hidden agendas behind the concept and the power of IWRM-related ideas to divert attention from key societal problems.

The engagement with IWRM has enabled people and ideas to navigate networks, shape and engage policies related with water resources management in different countries – what we referred to as *flow*. For some of the interviewees, IWRM acted as a stepping-stone, a focus point to build a career and/or a research focus, for others as a sideshow to more pertinent issues (water development and access). While several aspects of the IWRM package received critiques – namely the definition of water as an economic good, the side-lining effect of IWRM in relation to a pro-poor development agenda and the a-political character of IWRM; (most of) the F&P researchers tried to transform IWRM following their personal interests and research agendas. Eventually, we point at some of the personal struggles of the researchers and the tensions between the 'need' to engage with IWRM (if only for increasing one's chances of receiving funding), the increased recognition of the critiques of the concept, and the difficulties in putting forward a different perspective – i.e. the *translating* of IWRM towards the acknowledgment of water as a human right and water for development.

This points at appreciating the key role and transformative power that researchers and practitioners have in crafting new concepts, shaping the unfolding and translation of ideas. Such processes are deeply influenced by the personal experiences, knowledge systems, beliefs and opportunities that academics and professionals have. This recognition calls for enhancing transparency and self-reflection in research projects.

The fortune of IWRM resides in its ability to encompass multiple meanings, morph into something else while still being defined in one way, for example, the title of an Italian book, is at the same time one, no one and multiple.⁴⁴ With this paper, we attempt to clarify our positions and beliefs, and outline the origin of our understanding and critical approach towards IWRM as a group of researchers.

At heart, we researchers and practitioners are not different from the policy actors, bureaucrats and stakeholders we have been studying under the banner of the F&P project. This insight provides a final and necessary plea for self-reflexive work by scientists, political activists and academics operating in the water field. More subjectivity in research, both in its process and how its findings are constructed/performed, does not make science 'weaker' or more prone to contestation. Rather it shows, in typical symmetrical fashion (Bloor, 1976 cited in Latour, 1987), that water 'experts' and researchers are capable of exerting the same kind of agency as their objects of study, for good or for worse.

⁴⁴ 'One, no one, one hundred thousand' (in Italian, *Uno, Nessuno, Centomila*) is the title of a famous Italian novel written by Luigi Pirandello.

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