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WHO OWNS FRESHWATER?
Detecting and Deconstructing Discourses Relating to Community Participation in Water Supply Governance

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this dissertation was first to identify some of the common and prevailing discourses on community participation and water supply governance in developing countries as a whole, and South Africa in particular. Secondly, the study was intended to discuss why and how particular perceptions and practices continue to be so influential in the area of water supply governance.

The research conducted for this dissertation consisted of an extensive and critical review of various forms of relevant secondary data. In the first part of this study, different definitions of community participation and water supply governance, as well as ideas on how and why these concepts are linked, were discussed in general terms. Postmodern theory relating to truth claims, power and discourses was also included in order to deploy a particular analysing tool for the second part of the study. The latter sections of the dissertation focused respectively on deconstructing topic-related South African governmental publications as well as analysing and discussing common water supply and community participation discourses in the framework of different South African case examples.

This study found that discussions revolving around water supply easily become limited to contrasting public and private forms of ownership and management, although in actuality the same - largely neoliberal principles - often seem to guide both options. It was also discovered that new discourses are emerging, such as basic water supply as a universal human right and community participation in water supply governance as a form of empowerment for marginalised community members. Postmodern analysis, however, has additionally suggested that while decentralisation of water governance and participatory approaches are already becoming an integral part of water policies, this redefinition is still far from truly replacing the common centralising practices and influential neoliberal discourses.

Keywords: water supply governance, community participation, decentralisation, empowerment, neoliberal principles, postmodernism, discourses, deconstruction

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän päättötyön tarkoituksena oli ensinnäkin paikallistaa tyypillisiä ja vallalla olevia diskursseja, jotka liittyvät yhteisöosallistumiseen ja veden jakelun hallinnointiin kehitysmaissa ja erityisesti Etelä-Afrikassa. Toiseksi tutkimuksessa pohdittiin, miksi ja miten kyseisistä käsityksistä ja käytännöistä on tullut määrääviä vedenjakelun hallinnoinnissa.

Tutkimus koostui laajasta ja kriittisestä katsauksesta, joka koski aiheen ajankohtaista ja tieteellistä materiaalia. Päättötyön ensimmäinen osa tutki erilaisia yhteisöosallistumisen ja vesipalveluhallinnoinnin määritelmiä, ja pohti yleisellä tasolla miksi ja miten nämä määritelmät liittyvät toisiinsa. Tutkimuksen alkupuolella käsiteltiin myös postmodernia teoretisointia totuuskäsitysten, vallan ja diskurssin merkityksistä, jota hyödynnettiin erityisesti päättötyön jälkimmäisessä osassa dekonstruoimalla vesihallintoon liittyviä Etelä Afrikan julkishallinnon julkaisuja sekä tarkastelemalla vallitsevia vedenjakeluun ja yhteisöosallistumiseen liittyviä diskursseja erilaisten Etelä-Afrikkaan liittyvien tapausesimerkkien avulla.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että vedenjakelua koskeva problematisointi rajoittuu helposti yksityisen ja julkisen omistajuuden ja operatiivisen johtamisen vastakkainasetteluun, vaikka todellisuudessa samat - usein neoliberaalit - periaatteet tuntuvat ohjaavan molempia vaihtoehtoja. Tutkimus osoitti myös, että uusia diskursseja on vähitellen noussut esiin; esimerkiksi perusvedenjakelu yleismaailmallisena ihmisoikeutena, sekä yhteisöosallistuminen vedenjakelun hallinnoinnissa keinona voimaannuttaa huono-osaisia yhteisön jäseniä. Siitä huolimatta, että vaihtoehtoiset diskurssit ovat vähitellen saamassa enemmän näkyvyyttä, postmoderni analyysi muistuttaa, että kyseinen uudelleenmäärittely ei ole vielä todellakaan käytännön tasolla korvannut aiempaa hallinnon keskitystä sekä neoliberaaleja periaatteita.

Avainsanat: vedenjakelun hallinnointi, yhteisöosallistuminen, hallinnon hajautus, voimaannuttaminen, neoliberaalit periaatteet, postmodernismi, diskurssit, dekonstruktio

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1. INTRODUCTION

Water resources allocation and freshwater supply are currently perhaps the most topical and contested areas of natural resources management. The reason for this confrontation is twofold. On the one hand, water scarcity affects one third of the worlds' population and exists on every continent (WHO, 2009). Secondly, the ongoing population growth calls for increasing outputs from agriculture, food production and industry, placing unsustainable strain on the world's freshwater resources (Finger and Allouche 2002). The United Nations General Assembly (UN GA 2010), among others, has recently appealed for greater worldwide efforts to provide all people access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. In addition, many authors have reminded that since several countries are dependable of the same water resources (e.g. the river Nile), water scarcity can easily trigger conflicts between different countries and regions (Rinne, 2010; Kohr, 2010).

On the other hand, while water supply management needs restructuring in many parts of the world to meet the growing demand for freshwater, there is no consensus about the necessary changes. As an example, those in favour of the neoliberal economic paradigm believe that many public sector entities are ill-equipped to handle water management matters on their own and should therefore collaborate more with the private sector (e.g. Dumol 2000; So *et al.* 2008; DWAF 2003). Typical justification for this type of approach is the idea that introducing competition in water supply services results in better cost-efficiency and wider service coverage (Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2003). However, the other side of the debate sees the matter quite differently. Hall (2006), among others, points out that without strong government involvement there is no guarantee that the price levels remain reasonable for the underprivileged, or that water managers are held truly accountable to citizens for the decisions they make concerning water services (p.27). Hence, the proponents of public sector provided water supply services consider that improvements should be made within the public sector itself - for example by reviewing water regulations and policies - rather than through different forms of private sector participation.

However, there are underlying similarities between these opposite viewpoints. Bakker (2010) suggests that nowadays the centralised state governance in the water sector might actually not differ so much from private sector corporate forms of management (p.163). In other words, it might be beneficial to move beyond the mere private vs. public debate in water management and rather consider the possibilities and challenges of more decentralised and participatory approaches, regardless of who the actual owners of the water facilities are.

1.1. Scope of the research

This dissertation concentrates on analysing one main theme - community participation in the *decision-making* concerning water supply services for domestic users. Because of the above focus, for example important questions relating to sanitation services, irrigation systems and industrial use of water - as well as management issues relating to the actual everyday running of a water facility (technical matters and managing the workforce etc.) - do not fall within the scope of this discussion.

One of the main reasons for the particular choice of focus is the assumption that community participation in water *governance* is among the easiest ways to enable a wide spectrum of water users to have their say in water matters. As Bakker (2010) suggests, because water supply networks in urban areas tend to be technically complex and large in scale, participatory decision-making, rather than managing the entire supply facility, may often serve as the most appropriate mechanism for communities to exercise influence (p.188). Similarly, Harvey and Reed (2006) argue that "although community participation remains indispensable for sustainable rural water provision in Africa, community management does not" (p.375). Harvey and Reed's claim is based on research findings suggesting that the actual operational running of a water supply system tends to require more technical and managerial expertise, inputs and institutional (government, donor, or other) support, than what is usually available within or provided for rural communities (2006).

Because of the above reasoning, rather than examining *community-based management* of water supply facilities, the focus of this dissertation is on community participation in water supply services decision-making, which is usually at public authorities' hands and covers matters such as who the facility is contracted out to, what are reasonable tariff levels, which users are entitled to subsidies, etc. Interestingly enough, it seems that privatisation efforts are used increasingly often as scapegoats for problems with water services, which undermines the fact that in the end public sector authorities are usually the ones making the ultimate decisions concerning the possibilities and constraints for private sector involvement in the water services provision. Castro (2008) refers to this topic when writing about water and sanitation services (WSS) policies in developing countries. He suggests that the growing dissatisfaction with privatisations actually often stems from:

> "… undemocratic decision-making and implementation, and lack of citizen participation, … the widespread perception of public and private corruption in the introduction of private sector participation, and the increasing evidence that … [the WSS] policies privilege the interests of multinational private companies rather than the needs of the communities" (p.75).

1.2. Aims and structure of the research

The main purpose of this dissertation is to explore the role and overall justification of community participation in water supply governance. South Africa is used as the particular reference point and source of case examples, and thus the overall perspective is that of a developing country. The goal of the research is to detect discourses that influence the realisation of wider public participation in water supply governance, as well as to critically examine and deconstruct some of the discourses in order to gain better understanding of how these perceptions and practices are being created and reinforced.

The structure of this study is as follows;

- Second section ("Literature Review") looks into the common discourses relating to the governance of water supply services and to community participation, and thus links the 'big picture' of water management to particular definitions and the overall discussion concerning the relevance of participatory approaches.
- Third section ("Postmodern Perspectives") introduces the postmodern approaches that are used for analysing and discussing the research findings on South Africa and drawing conclusions.
- Fourth section ("Research Methods") explains the research methods deployed and their limitations.
- Fifth section ("South African examples: Analysis and Discussion") introduces and analyses publications and cases from South Africa.
- Sixth section ("Conclusions") summarises the key findings of the research and provides conclusive remarks.

1.3. Limitations

Water supply governance itself is a wide topic with many possible areas of study, and so is community participation. Combining these two concepts in the same analysis has meant that the discussion remains at a more general level with regard to both. Consequently, this dissertation is for the most part limited to critical analysis and discussion, rather than being able to provide concrete solutions for the identified problems. In addition, South Africa has been used as a source of case examples - and not as the overall focus of the research. As a result, the analyses of South African case examples are not able to cover a wide spectrum of historical and current factors that might have an impact on the water sector of the country. In other words, in the quest to detect and deconstruct prevailing discourses relating to community participation in water supply governance, unfortunately less space and attention has been left for deeper reflections of particular local experiences and specific participatory programmes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Water management paradigms

Despite being actively discussed and debated upon, water supply management in developing countries continues to be characterised by few prevailing discourses and powerful stakeholders. According to Finger and Allouche (2002), the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a handful of transnational corporations have for a long time been among the most influential international players in the field of infrastructure development (p.16-19). As an example, Finger and Allouche point out that when the World Bank changed its leading economic doctrine in the late 1980s from Keynesian to neoliberal economics, privatising water services provision and reducing the public sector in general became very typical in developing countries (2002). It can even be said that during the late 1980s and the 1990s, many transitional economies went through a "privatising boom" regarding water services provision. Later on, when many of these reforms proved to be ambiguous or even unsuccessful in their results, the public opinion became increasingly critical toward privatisations (Hall 2006, p. 23-26). As a consequence, the influential players have had to change their approach. While seemingly new water management concepts have been introduced, the underlying agenda, however, appears to have remained surprisingly unchanged. As Castro puts it:

> "…despite the mounting evidence of the failure of these [neoliberal] policies, and despite the rhetorical acknowledgement of this failure by the mainstream institutions, the legal, administrative, and political transformations set in motion since the 1980s underpin the continuation of the neoliberal programme for water and sanitation services either openly and unchanged, or refashioned and renamed…" (2008, p.74).

To give an example of the above, since the 1990s the World Bank and the World Water Council have supported and successfully advanced the adoption of "new" concepts such as integrated water resources management (IWRM) and public-private-partnerships (PPPs) (Laube 2009; Balanyá et al. 2006; Finger and Allouche 2002). The partnership-aspect of PPPs is often the most emphasised point in political discussions, even though PPPs enable the involvement of private enterprises in typically state-run fields of services provision, and thus are basically yet another form of privatising. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that there are numerous different levels of privatisation (ranging from collaboration agreements to the selling of government assets), and thus the general term ‘privatisation’ may be used in varied, and more or less purposeful ways by those who are pro-public provision (e.g. by over-emphasising the involvement and decision-making powers of the private sector), as well as by those who have a pro-privatising approach. Bakker clarifies that as PPPs refer to a contract on *building, managing and/or operating* of infrastructure - and not the *selling* of government assets to the private sector - many people do not consider PPPs as a form of privatising in the traditional sense (2010, p.xv).

What comes to the IWRM approach, in general it seems to have many good aspects in it. IWRM promotes “coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources [because] many different uses of finite water resources are interdependent” (GWP 2010b). Moreover, IWRM promotes decentralisation of water management by “assigning a river basin or a catchment area to be a water management unit” and “promoting democratic participation in governance” (GWP, 2010a&b). In other words, IWRM plausibly emphasises the importance of thinking beyond typical administrative boundaries (for example a state or municipality border that crosses a river basin), and seeks to facilitate a broader involvement of different stakeholders in water resources management. However, it is less often highlighted that when IWRM-based reforms are being introduced in developing countries, quite typically the implementation happens in the terms of the neoliberal economic paradigm, rather than in a way that truly engages and empowers local stakeholders (Laube 2009, p.16). In Ghana and South Africa, for example, this has meant that the World Bank and bilateral donors have heavily promoted and even pressured the countries to implement privatisations - or private management - of urban water supply systems, as well as ‘user-pays’-principles (Laube 2009, p.16).

2.2. Defining community participation

Bakker (2008) suggests that community governance usually involves devolving decision-making powers at lower levels of governance and emphasising trust-building and collaborative processes (p.243). That is, community participation often seems to be linked to decentralised governance as well as democratic decision-making processes. Additionally, IRC (2010) reminds that “extensive field experience and research show that participatory methods can empower local people to plan new services and make existing services more equitable and sustainable”. From this point of view, the ultimate goal of community participation would seem to be to empower community members and provide them with equal possibilities to access vital services. Along the same lines, Lyons *et al.* (2001) give a general explanation of the aims of community *empowerment* by calling empowerment "a process through which a community gains increasing control of its own affairs, and increasing initiative regarding its own destiny" (p.1245-1246). Laverack (2001) also suggests that there is a strong link between participation and empowerment, and summarises that empowerment is typically presented in the literature as "the potential of people to progress from individual to collective action along a dynamic continuum" (p.135). However, Poolman and van de Giesen (2006) point out that there is by no means consensus in the literature about participation having a direct link to the idea of empowerment; although some may indeed see participation itself as the goal of the project (ends), others may consider participation only as a method for achieving certain goals (means) (p.564). In other words, the latter approach might not be interested in improving community members' well-being, but rather enable community participation in order to advance other agendas. For example, development projects that are led and financed by donor organisations have sometimes so strictly predefined goals and programmes that encouraging 'participation' of the target group may end up entailing manipulative or even coercive characteristics (Warner 2006, p.24). In addition, Finger and Allouche (2002) suggest that for example World Bank's policy on water resources management in developing countries entails a rather different concept of participation and empowerment that that of many scholars. According to them, for the World Bank

> "the basic function of user participation … seems to be to make economic and fiscal decentralisation acceptable, in particular by (1) seeking the users' consensus on the overall project, and by (2) getting them to pay the increased users' fees at the local level" (2002, p.86).

In other words, Finger and Allouche imply that the Word Bank's policy is to support community participation in order to get legitimisation for market-based water management reforms at their initial stages. After these changes then have been successfully agreed upon, the concept of participation becomes redefined and community members are primarily seen as consumers. This usually means that in the end water users can only 'participate' by being customers who can alter their purchasing behaviour.

All in all the literature seems to suggest that community participation is a rather problematic concept, as there are very differing and even contradictory views about its nature and purpose. Brosius *et al.* (2005) write about community-based natural resource management in general and remind that the rhetoric of community control has been taken up by various different actors, which has resulted in that "key concepts - local initiatives and international mandates, economic development, environmental protection, local rights, empowerment and coercion - are reshaped to mean new things" (p.2).

2.3. Who has a stake?

Cosgrove and Rijsberman state that stakeholders in water management context should be "not just governments but also the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations representing civil society and consumers" (2000, p.3). This notion is based on the popular present day idea in water management that 'true participation' in water matters can only take place and result in a long-term accord and consensus if *all stakeholders* are involved (GWP 2010a, *referring to the popular 'Dublin principles' of 1992).* The underlying idea is that since there is undeniable interdependence of the 'stakes' that numerous stakeholders have in the same scarce water resource, getting everybody together to negotiate should increase understanding of this interdependence, as well as direct water usage to a more sustainable path (Warner 2006, p.20). Naturally the idea of broad-based stakeholder participation is very much in line with the fundamental idea of community participation; more people having their say on matters that affect the community. However, what is the limit for too many stakeholders being involved; how many differing stakes paralyse the ability to arrive at any conclusions? The 2009 climate change conference in Copenhagen and the 2010 climate summit in Cancún are prime global-level examples of the difficulties that may arise when too many stakeholders are trying to reach a consensus. As those summits indicated, in the worst cases the agendas of the participants are so different that the only decision that can be reached is an indifferent compromise, which in practice has little functional implications.

While the scale of international summits is different than when talking about local water management, the challenge of reaching a consensus is fundamentally the same, beginning from identifying who even should have their say in the matter. As an example, Warner (2006) writes about multi-stakeholder platforms in integrated catchment management, and reminds that "stakeholders are not usually self-electing and self-motivated enough to participate in platforms; they are more often invited by external facilitators to participate" (p.25). This of course gives initial decision-making powers to the party who is facilitating the platform (or other type of participatory process), as already the selection of stakeholders influences largely which topics will be covered later on and what kind of power-balance (e.g. different political parties and other organisations represented) there will be. As an example, Poolman and van de Giesen (2006) propose that in many donor-led development projects, 'participation' is automatically considered a synonym for 'public participation', which can mean that the project coordinator organisation itself forgets that it is as well one of the participants with an agenda, and at the same time does not realise that local decision makers or water user associations, for example, could also be relevant stakeholders (p.564).

2.4. Devolving decision-making powers: a chance for capacity-building or a fight over control?

As already mentioned before, participatory approaches tend to be connected to the decentralisation of decision-making *powers* and result in local em*power*ment. This means that locating and examining the functioning of these powers indeed is a very important topic when discussing community participation. Referring to the overall challenges of decentralising decision-making powers over natural resources, Ribot (2003) suggests that;

> "central governments are reluctant to devolve powers before capacity has been demonstrated. But without powers there is no basis on which local authorities can gain experiences needed to build capacity and demonstrate that capacity has been gained" (p.62).

In other words, if the key decision-making powers over water have always been at the hands of the central government, local authorities might not have been able to gain much relevant water supply governance experience. Ironically, the lack of experience can then serve as an excuse not to give more powers and responsibilities to the local authorities, who then still do not learn more and get to build their governance capacity. A vicious circle might continue to live on for a long time, and it can repeat itself easily at the lower levels of public administration too. Even if the central government devolves powers to local authorities, they might not want to include average community members into the governance processes, thinking that 'laymen' do not have sufficient enough capabilities for making such decisions. It seems to be very common that authorities consult rather 'experts' when important decisions need to be made. Consequently, Ribot (2003) plausibly encourages pondering how power could be transferred and used so that it creates capacity, and how central ministries could be required to be more willing to do such transfers (p.62).

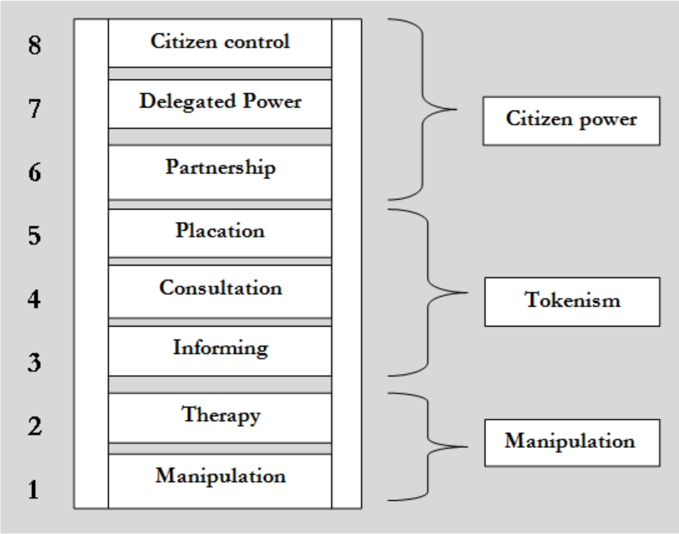

Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969)

Also relating to the challenges with the redistribution of power (or rather authorities' unwillingness to do so) Anstein (1969) has created a widely cited and still very influential model with a 'ladder' illustrating the extent to which different types of participation give citizens power to influence the end product of participation (see Figure 1). Anrstein's model suggests that in the types of participation that can be categorised below the level six ("Partnership"), power-holders retain the true influencing and decision-making powers at themselves, and only seemingly allow citizens to participate (e.g. by consulting them, but not in a binding way). One possible problem with project leaders (e.g. public authorities, donors, NGOs) using citizen participation in water projects could thus be, that participation is only included ceremonially, e.g. to secure political approval for the new water projects ("Placation").

On the other hand, as plausible and topical as Arnstein's theory still seems to be over 40 years after its publication, the theory has some limitations too. One of the more recent critical analyses of the 'ladder model' is written by Tritter and McCallum (2006). They suggest that the model focuses too much on participation as a struggle over power, because it measures the impact of participation in almost solely based on a citizen's power to make decisions and seize this control (p.157). Tritter and McCallum thus conclude that it could be more beneficial instead to acknowledge that power does not necessarily mean the same thing for users, providers and policy makers. According to them, the emphasis should be more in the *process* of participation, rather than on the (perceived) *fight over* power. In other words, maybe a win-win situation could be achievable if the discourse concerning community participation and power would be rearticulated.

2.5. Expanding the meaning of community participation

The principal idea that water users have a 'stake' in water matters is actually these days rarely being questioned, at least what comes to political rhetoric. A prime example of this is, that the UN recently declared access to freshwater and sanitation as one of the basic human rights (AP/HS 2010). Moreover, Poolman and van de Giesen (2006) remind that participatory approaches are increasingly being deployed by the international development community because they are seen to work towards achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (p.561), one of which is to "halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation" (Jensen 2010, p.58). Consequently, the institutional structures relating to the delivery of water supply services seem to be more of a hot topic at the moment, than the question of whether or not the general public should in principle have a say in water matters (though, as always, the practical implications of the right to participate are more contested).

Cosgrove and Rijsberman (2000) state that public agencies entrusted with the supply of water services in many developing countries have become "inefficient, unregulated and unaccountable" (p.3), and stronger private sector involvement in water supply management could thus be the solution for many current water management problems. Moreover, Yamout and Jamali (2007) argue that different forms of privatising such as PPPs may "remedy a persistent lack of dynamism in public service delivery … and provide access to finance, managerial efficiency and entrepreneurial spirit (p.612&630). In other words, it is often argued that publicly managed entities lack the expertise and incentives to improve their performance, and these fundamental defects cannot be fixed by merely including more stakeholders into the respective decision-making; rather the institutional structures should first be radically changed to match more those used in the private sector, and then community participation could be implemented to ensure that the services continue to match the needs of the water users.

Another increasingly common neoliberal idea - water as an economic good - relates to the hope to improve water services for domestic users at the same time as promoting a more environmentally sustainable use of the resource. As GWP (2010a) puts it; "managing water as an economic good is an important way of … achieving efficient and equitable use, and of…encouraging conservation and protection of water resources". In other words, GWP - among others - suggests that if water is given a higher economic value (by truly commercialising its supply), water users would better conceive the scarcity of the resource and the need for more sustainable water usage. How does the former relate to participation then?

Finger and Allouche (2002) discuss the same topic in relation to development programmes led by the World Bank. According to Finger and Allouche, the World Bank aims to

> "reform a country's institutional and legal environment in order to empower water users to make their own decision regarding the use of the source, while at the same time providing a structure that reveals the real scarcity value of water. 'Water as an economic good', 'privatisation', 'decentralisation', and 'user participation' thus emerge, as the solution to the world's water problems (p.76).

The combination of the different concepts listed above sounds quite ambitious - even problematic, and thus the meaning of these concepts, or rather the viability of their co-usage, will be critically examined also later on in this piece of writing, with the help of postmodern analytical tools and South African examples. However, below are a couple of examples of how different combinations of these concepts have been previously discussed in the literature.

It has been argued that if freshwater is seen as a private good with a clear economic value, then the water 'markets' in developing countries begin to be more attractive targets for direct investment. In an ideal situation this would mean that water as a private good and water service privatisations might be able to trigger much needed geographical redistribution of investment to developing countries (Schoenberger 2003, p.84&96). However, several counter-arguments have been presented for the previous reasoning. In the light of extensive empirical research made on the respective topic, even openly neoliberal institutions like the World Bank have already had to admit that developing countries cannot solely rely on private funding for the upgrading, expansion and maintenance of water facilities (Castro 2008, p.74). Jerome (2003) writes about the same topic and emphasises the need for state intervention in the field of infrastructure (instead of free market approach), so that everyone's basic access to these vital services could be ensured. According to him, the main rationale for regulation and strong state involvement in infrastructure management is to "counter pervasive market failures (such as natural monopolies) where competition is either not feasible or does not produce results compatible with the public interests" (2003, p.182-183). Jerome's arguments seem to be especially adequate when talking about freshwater supply, considering that the creation of monopolies is practically inevitable in water services provision. As Peussa (2006) writes, there can only be one water supply network per a town - be it a public or private one - and thus price reduction through competition does not really exist in the water sector (p.19).

3. POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES

3.1. Truth claims, power and discourses

Postmodernism argues that discourses (information, knowledge, communication, statements, texts, practices, etc.) are neither naturally intrinsic to the world, nor neutral means for communicating about the world, but rather constructed through social interaction (Cooper and Burrell 1988; Hardy and Palmer, 1999). In other words, when analysing discourses (e.g. water management legislation), a modernistic analysis would probably treat the written and spoken language themselves as "neutral carriers of information" (Grint 1991, p.146), whereas the 'linguistic turn' of postmodernism would remind that "the language that we use does not reflect reality, but rather it defines what we know and how we know it" (Hardy and Palmer 1999, p.381). Thus, if water policies are analysed from a postmodern perspective, it would not be enough to just examine the obvious way in which the policy aims to influence water services provision - i.e. what instructions and restrictions are given - but one should also pay attention to other matters that constitute the discourse, for example terminology that is used, the style of the writing (who seems to be the intended audience: lawyers or laymen, or both, etc.), the layout, topics that are emphasised, topics that receive little attention, points that are not considered, even the fact that such law has been made in the first place. Jacques Derrida is one of the well-known postmodern thinkers who promotes deconstructive analysis of discourses. This type of analysis has been defined as the "process of critical interpretation that works with a text, using its own terms and contradictions to uncover subtexts … [and in which] the concept of 'textuality' … extends beyond literature: the world can be viewed as a text, and social practices, as well as interlocutions can be viewed as narratives (Jun 2006, p.53).

One of the underlying assumptions of deconstruction is that people tend to - both intentionally and unintentionally - neglect inconsistencies, contradictions, and the ambiguity of concepts (or 'signifiers', in postmodern terms) when constructing discourses. At a certain level this type of simplification is necessary. For example, human psychology reminds that people create simplified representations (cognitive maps) in their minds of how the world works in order to go about in their daily lives and make decisions in a more focused and fast way without needing to "scan" and rate the relevance of all the available data all over again at every given instance (De Witt and Meyer 2005, p.31-32). As useful as the previous process is, "rating" information may become problematic when it produces discourses and truth claims that people begin to take for granted and no longer recognise as merely being socially constructed.

Michel Foucault, another widely-read postmodernist has referred to the previous phenomenon as *normalization*. In an interview published by Rabinow (1984), Foucault has explained the process of 'normalization' as follows;

> "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: this is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (p.73).

The 'general politics of truth' of a given society thus link discourses to power relations; some people's opinions (e.g. educated experts over non-educated people) are for example automatically considered "more rational" or "more important" than others', and thus they receive wider recognition. The result is, that "hegemonic discourses are those discourses which tend to privilege and sustain those already in power … [because] the use of particular ways of talking privileges certain views and certain interests, while silencing and marginalising others“ (Gabriel 2008, p.78). In other words, those already in powerful positions usually have more possibilities reinforce the status quo and effectively disseminate their point views, ideas of truth and justice, and so on. Consequently, Foucault considers power and knowledge to be inevitably linked; that information and knowledge of how the particular society functions bring power to their possessor, and having power makes it easier to influence what is widely considered as knowledge in a particular society (1977). This would also mean that when examining for example the problems of water service organisations, they should not be analysed just from within, but the organisation of organisations should be seen as a "process that occurs within the wider 'body' of society and which is concerned with the construction of objects of theoretical knowledge centred on the 'social body': health, disease, emotion, alimentation labour, etc. (Cooper and Burrell 1988, p.106). In short, it can thus be said the 'regimes of truth' of a certain society influence often surprisingly much the way in which organisations function.

However, it is also important to note that though hegemonic discourses do easily marginalise other, alternative discourses, Foucault's idea of power does not suggest that power only works in top-down and oppressing manner. According to Burrell (1998) Foucault sees power residing in a network of relationships which are systematically interconnected, resulting in the notion that;

> "… power should be seen in a positive sense as actively directed towards the body and its possibilities, converting it into something both useful and docile. Moreover organizational superordinates do not create discipline through their actions or strategies. On the contrary, they are as much disciplined as their subordinates. Discipline power is invested in, transmitted by and reproduced through all human beings in their day-to-day existence. It is discrete, regular, generalised and uninterrupted" (p.227-228).

In other words, there is no single source of power that disciplines and controls us, no ultimately superior body of power or such that forces us to obey and conform, but instead power can be described to work like a "spiderless web" (Hardy and Palmer 1999), that *creates* behaviours and actions (e.g. resistance, carelessness), identities (e.g. expert, underprivileged), and changing discourses.

3.2. Critique of postmodernism

Postmodernism has its limitations, especially when its applications are taken into extremes. Gabriel (2008), for example, suggests that the linguistic turn has "led researchers to become obsessed with language and neglect the structural aspects of organisational reality, such as bureaucracy, capitalism, and imperialism" (p.230). Moreover, Jun (2006) suggests that by emphasising relativity and multiplicity of meanings when analysing discourses, postmodernists are paradoxically at the same time elevating texts and lending them dynamism as well as denying them any final meaning (p.53). Postmodernists have also been referred to as "good critical deconstructors, and terrible constructors" (Butler 2002, p.116) because the postmodern theories provide a lot of tools for identifying problems, but not many practical, long term solutions for how to solve the discovered issues. In addition, postmodernism puts sometimes perhaps even too much emphasis on the power that social interactions and the society as a whole have on individuals, thus ignoring "the way the self is constituted by an individual's maintenance of an original often idiosyncratic narrative of him/herself … [which] is the key to creativity in the individual" (Butler 2002**,** 57-58).

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. The choice of methods

This research project is exploratory in nature, as it "looks for patterns, ideas or hypotheses, rather than tests or confirms a hypothesis" and focuses on "assessing which existing theories and concepts can be applied to the problem or whether new ones should be developed" (Collis and Hussey 2009, p.5). The project began from a general interest in water management with limited pre-existing knowledge of the topic, thus making it more meaningful to detect and analyse prevailing water management discourses rather than creating or testing a particular hypothesis.

The study has been carried out using a wide variety of academic and current secondary data, including journal articles, books, newspaper articles (hard copy and online), websites, online reports and government sources, in order to gain a broad insight into the research topic.

Choosing the developing countries' perspective resulted from the notion that developing countries have more problems with basic water supply in general, and thus an urgent need for alternative water supply governance solutions. South Africa was chosen as the main case example and the source of current data in order to have a consistent and more clearly defined point of reference when critically reflecting on the common discourses on water supply governance and community participation. The motivation to choose South Africa over other possible examples came from the notion that - at least on the official policy level - less than 20 years ago South Africa went through a transition from an elite-favouring and racist apartheid state to a democratic society that promotes social justice and "calls for people to participate in the decision-making process as and when it affects them" (Funke *et al.* 2007, p15). Also considering that South Africa has introduced some pioneering pieces of water legislation after the apartheid, it seemed probable that there would be some country-specific secondary data available for water governance-related discourse analyses.

4.2. Use of the chosen methods

South Africa -related case examples and other publications are deconstructed and analysed by deploying certain postmodern perspectives (introduced in the section 3), which can be categorised under interpretative, social constructionist research traditions. The previous approaches do not put strict limitations on the choice of research methods, but in general show a belief that there are "multiple realities and truths constructed and experienced by people in their everyday interaction" (Jun 2006, p.55). As a result, postmodernism can be seen to encourage researchers to seek and value divergent views and interpretations of the reality, rather than to construct universally applicable rationality-driven theories.

First, the postmodern approach is applied by deconstructing governmental publications from South Africa. Second, the functioning of powerful discourses in relation to the research topic is examined by using case examples derived from scholarly field research and other local (published) observations from South Africa. In addition, the theories and ideas presented in the literature review sections are reflected upon simultaneously with the South African sources.

For example, health psychologist Carla Willig (2000) has used a similar approach in order to deconstruct expert discourses on "health" and "illness". Willig referred to the method as being "discourse dynamic", and according to her, discourse analysis can assist in;

> "taking a critical turn whereby dominant discourses are subjected to a careful examination of the ways in which their use of linguistic categories and discursive constructions legitimates a particular version of reality and experience, thereby excluding alternative versions (p. 549).

4.3. Limitations of the methods

Ideally, empirical research from South Africa would have been used to complement the discussion and analysis, but due to resource limitations (money, time, lack of contacts in South Africa) only secondary data could be attained. Postmodernism usually strives to "give voice to otherwise marginalised, misunderstood, or deprivileged groups" (Gergen and Thatchenkery 2004, p.239), rather than expects a particular research method to be used. In the absence of primary data, however, it can be argued that the previous has happened only partially with regard to this research. The voice of marginalised groups and community members is brought forward based on observations from other researchers, which means that there is always an additional layer of interpretation in between this study and the primary data. Moreover, because the chosen method does not consist of e.g. a strictly defined sample or one particular case, it has been really difficult to determine where to conclude the data collection, as well as not to be overly selective with regard to the scope of secondary data.

5. SOUTH AFRICAN EXAMPLES: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Success-story?

The "official" discourse concerning South Africa and water supply services seems more than promising. Funke *et al.* (2007) write that "South Africa is the first country in the world to have adopted national water legislation that serves as a tool in the transformation of society based on social and environmental justice" (p.14). Funke's claim indeed is evident in many South African laws and policies. The constitution, for example, clearly declares that:

> "…everyone has the right (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and (b) to have the environment protected … through reasonable legislative and other measures that … (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development …"
>
> (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 1996, section 24)

> "everyone has the right to have access to … (b) sufficient food and water"
>
> (RSA 1996, section 27)

It can be said that from a practice-oriented point of view the above requirements are rather abstract, even ambiguous. However, from another viewpoint they can even be called remarkable. Why? The answer relates to seeing laws as signifiers of political will, as "maps" of the states' goals that governments' have made legally binding. Continuing with the same metaphor, South Africa's map can be referred to as considerably humane because it provides routes for bringing about social changes. On the other hand, it can be argued that the above piece of legislation is hardly exceptional since the UN as well has already declared water as a human right. However, it is important to note that the UN GA added the right to freshwater into the declaration of human rights 14 years after South Africa adopted its constitution. Moreover, while no UN member country voted against the decision, 41 countries abstained (among others, Sweden, the UK, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, the Republic of Korea, the

USA, Botswana, Kenya, Guyana and New Zealand) and 30 were absent (GA 2010). In other words, it can be claimed that - at least on the policy level - South Africa has been promoting considerably progressive discourse concerning people's right to access water supply.

What comes to community participation - be it in relation to water services or other municipalities' service areas - the importance of social justice and community participation in public governance have also been officially recognised on many occasions since the apartheid ended and the new South African government took over in 1994. As an example of the above, the White Paper on Local Government "advocates augmenting the process of representative democracy with a more accessible and day-to-day system of participatory democracy" (1998, cited in RSA 2000, section 6). Moreover, the White Paper on Municipal Services Partnerships (RSA 2000) emphasises that "residents require timely and effective ways to express their opinions regarding service delivery and obtain redress" (section 6). As a practical solution, the latter publication recommends that a position of a municipal services public protector should be established in municipalities (RSA 2000). In short, community participation definitely seems to be part of the official discourse disseminated by the government of South Africa. Williams (2006) suggests that one of the main reasons for this state-of-the-affair is that in the past government policies have been glaringly unjust and people have really struggled under the apartheid government, making community participation in post-apartheid South Africa practically a synonym for legitimate governance (p.197).

Although many official government publications (see also e.g. Department of Water Affairs and Forestry [DWAF] 2007) and scholars (e.g. Folifac 2007) seem to promote the same success story, postmodern approach reminds that no discourse exists without underlying contradictions. Moreover, even if it does not seem like that at first, there are usually several alternative discourses on the same matter; some of them might have just become very marginalised. Thus, Boje (1995) suggests that the postmodern motivation for performing deconstruction is, that "socially constructed stories open to reveal their multiple meanings and instead of a grand narrative, deconstruction leads to seeing a plurality of differences; a history of differences erupting into yet more differences" (p.1031). Consequently, some parts of two government publications relating to the South African "success-story" in water legislation are deconstructed in the Boxes 1 and 2 (and the referred text excerpts can be found respectively from Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

♦Box 1 Deconstructing parts of the *"Strategic Framework for Water Services - Water Is Life, Sanitation is Dignity"* (published by DWAF in 2003; see excerpts in Appendices 1 & 2)

It is emphasised in the strategy framework that South Africa is implementing a decentralisation principle, in which "decision making and control of water services projects is to be devolved to the lowest appropriate level" (see Appendix 1). However, at the same time that DWAF is devolving *responsibility* over efficient water service delivery and transferring water service assets to regional and local water service authorities, it seems to maintain a powerful regulating and overseeing function. For example, DWAF attaches terms such as *sector leader* and *leadership role* to itself several times in the Strategy Framework (see Appendix 1 for respective examples). Moreover, while the Strategy Framework itself is already fairly extensive (69 pages), throughout the text DWAF repeatedly refers to additional *guidelines* it will produce regarding water services (see Appendix 2 for examples of this).

Based on the above textual notions, it can be argued that as opposed to the officially highlighted decentralised approach, South Africa seems to have a fairly "DWAF-centred" situation in the water sector. Local water supply administrators are expected to bear the responsibility of - and be accountable for - the actual implementation of water services, while DWAF keeps a watchful eye on the local practices to make sure that the central government-provided rules are observed, and that there are "no adverse outcomes" (last sentence of Appendix 1).

Having a central decision-making authority is by no means necessarily a negative thing. For example (see the third citation in Appendix 2), it seems quite justified that a unified tariff framework is in place. Such system may help preventing corruption when municipalities outsource water supply to external service providers. If the retail tariff levels are predetermined, municipalities perhaps cannot make biased deals with external service providers so easily. However, the same citation also talks about determining a "reasonable rate of return on assets". Could the previous be interpreted so that DWAF also prevents municipalities from reducing domestic water supply tariffs in the name of cost recovery? South African water policies (e.g. DWAF 2003) stipulate that either ♦ every person should have an access to 25 litres of free water supply per day, or ♦ every formal connection should have an access to 6000 litres of free water supply per month. Such a rule - together with the notion that water supply services usually are government-subsidised - makes expecting cost recovery sound a bit paradoxical. How can local service providers simultaneously be expected to generate "reasonable" returns *and* secure a certain level of entirely free water supply? A case study from Johannesburg (introduced in section 5.5. and Appendix 6) provides an adverse example of an outcome that such contradictory rules have had. On the other hand, a study from Harrismith (discussed in section 5.5. and case summary is in Appendix 7) gives a more positive example. In the latter case, local authorities have used a public-*public* partnership to tackle investment issues, and in addition apply stricter tariff payment conditions to those community members who have a higher income level.

To sum up, a critical reading of DWAF (2003) strategy framework indicates that responsibilities are being devolved while most of the strategic and other key decision-making powers still remain at centralised hands. If the local authorities themselves do not have sufficient decision-making powers, do South African water policies really empower community members in water supply governance?

💧Box 2 **Deconstructing parts of the** *"Water Services Act 1998"* **(published by the RSA in 1997; see excerpts in Appendix 3)**

One word in particular in the Water Services Act does not seem to be a subject of a great reflection, though it arguably should: *a consumer*. The term seems to be widely used in water legislation and other publications to refer to a domestic water user. As Finger and Allouche's (2002) World Bank example earlier in this dissertation (section 2.2.) suggested, *a consumer* is sometimes used as a synonym for a person who is empowered. The rationale is that a consumer is able to express his/her dissatisfaction on goods or services delivered, by demanding a refund or changing the provider. Other, quite differing views of empowerment have also been introduced in this dissertation. However, the deconstruction process here is not attempting to rate the adequacy of the previous definition of empowerment with regard to other existing empowerment discourses. Postmodern perspectives (section 3) already suggested that making superiority ratings as such does not provide anything other than subjective truth claims. Therefore, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider different meanings that flicker around the word *consumer*, and discuss how those meanings seem to correspond to the goals that the South African government has placed for its water policy.

The Water Services Act (see Appendix 3) lists duties that authorities have "to all consumers or potential consumers" regarding water services delivery. However, using the term *consumer* (as opposed to water user, for example) might lay down some automatic expectations to the subjects it aims to describe. One expectation is even clearly stated in the Water Services Act: *a duty to pay*. An important question is, does the previous meaning correlate with the humane water supply discourse South Africa's government is trying to create and maintain? Should a human right include a duty to pay?

Postmodernism suggests that words are not meaningful "because of their external references, but because of the existence of an oppositional term over which each apparently 'self-standing' term stands to differentiate itself from the other and become meaningful" (Calás and Smircich 1991: 569). Following the previous notion, what meanings can be derived from looking at the (possible) binary opposition of the term *consumer*? The word *non-consumer* could potentially be seen as an opposite meaning for *a consumer*. What does being *a non-consumer* then mean? Perhaps that when a person does not consume any goods and services, that there is a lack of consuming *action*? How is it clarifying the meaning of the word *consumer?* The notion is indicating that if one is not *actively* consuming, one is something else than a consumer.

Does the above definition correlate with the humane goals South African water policies have? South African citizens' constitutional right to have sufficient access to water supply can be interpreted so that the right is automatic for anyone who is a citizen. In other words, the right should result from mere *being*, instead from active *doing*. The Water Services Act (see Appendix 3) says that the "interests of consumers…must be promoted". Maybe referring to the water rights of *citizens* would correlate better with the policy's goal?

The use of the word *consumer* seems to even construct new subjectivities for some citizens. Water Services Act includes a definition for *consumer* (see Appendix 3), which emphasises that "an end user in an informal settlement" also falls within its scope. The additional remark about informal settlements seems to indicate that an end user living in an informal settlement does not typically fall within the scope of the term consumer, but needs specifically to be attached to it. What does this new subjectivity then bring along with it? As indicated earlier, some authors have argued that seeing water as an economic good encourages sustainable usage. However, talking about water users as *consumers* can, indeed, also be seen as an encouragement to *consume* more water.

5.2. The normalizing power of discourses

South Africa's history provides some good examples for examining the relevance of postmodern ideas about the 'normalizing' effect of hegemonic discourses. Funke *et al.* (2007) remind that until the apartheid ended in 1994, black South African people were denied the right to citizenship and had only very limited number of basic rights (also what came to allocating water resources and providing water services), which was additionally enforced by extensive, segregating legislation. The situation may seem very absurd and unjust now, especially since the current water policies emphasise that everybody has the equal right to access basic water and sanitation services. However, during the apartheid many people firmly believed that segregation was justified and that South Africa's emerging economic development should foremost benefit the white population. In other words, segregation began to be 'normalized' for many people in South Africa; it formed the common belief - hegemonic discourse - of the right way for the society to function. However, South Africa as a case example indicates also that even the most pervasive discourses are constantly "under construction". Laube (2009) explains what implications the change in government power and transition to majority rule has had in South Africa's water discourses;

> "The most pressing issues were the reorganisation of the rural water supply system and the provision of reliable water resources to the large black minority. Furthermore, the racist water bureaucracy had to be restructured and the unequal distribution of water rights redressed. (p.12)

5.3. Is community participation all about control?

Theory on the functioning of power as well as about community participation (arguably) being characterised by an ongoing "fight" over influence and control were discussed earlier in this dissertation. What kind of insights do South African examples give to those discussions?

Appendix 4 introduces two case studies from Durban South Africa conducted by Lyons *et al.* (2001). Although the studies do not relate to water supply services in particular, they provide ideas of the challenges with community participation in general, which can also be applied to the water supply governance context.

In regard to Mansel Road' Market's case (see Appendix 4), Lyons *et al.* suggest that the leader is powerful because she is capable of "mediating and interpreting" and as a chair of committee can easily influence the decision-making that goes on in the committee. In other words, it seems that the chair is holding all the strings. This supports Foucault's theorising of power/knowledge as indeed it appears that the chairwoman's skills and knowledge have gotten her to the position where she is at, and the position continues to provide her with knowledge, which in turn assists her with remaining in a powerful position.

It can be argued that the case studies also fit to Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder model'. First, on the Mansel Road's case hundreds of women migrated to live and trade on the streets and got even persecuted by public authorities because of doing that (see Appendix 4). However, the traders eventually won over the authorities and got what they wanted: the city gave the market operators free hands and acted only as a leasing contractor. In Anstein's terms the situation could perhaps be referred to as "delegated power" or even "citizen control". Secondly*, Lyons et al.* suggest that in both cases the community project was dominated by a so-called leadership élite. This would again suggest that a more or less constant struggle over power and control has been taking place, and that by far the powerful élite has remained on the winning side. However, as Foucault has suggested (e.g. in Rabinow 1984), power should not only be seen as working in top-down or oppressive manner. Details supporting the latter view can also be found from the cases by Lyons *et al.* For example, in Tshelenmnyama's situation, the development committee is said to have lack of direction and leadership experience (Appendix 4). In addition, it is said that other residents are "reluctant to participate in local democracy" (Appendix 4). Perhaps this seeming passivity could also be seen as one form of power? Maybe some of the "reluctant residents" are actually satisfied that someone else has taken up the decision-making responsibilities? Maybe instead of merely being "reluctant" or "passive", those residents are actually purposefully *allowing* the others take the lead? In such a situation the common discourses on local democracy might not have been so appealing, and thus have rather *created* resistance in some community members (in the form of reluctance to participate) rather than *forced or disciplined* them to act that way.

5.4. Redefining water management discourses

A case study by Golding *et al.* (see summary of the case in Appendix 5) suggests - perhaps even contrary to Harvey and Reed's (2006) findings (introduced in section 1.1.) - that community *management* of a water supply system can actually be a very sustainable option for improving a rural village's water supply. On the other hand, the example is also in line with

Harvey and Reed's views, as it is apparent from the case that the successful ongoing community management would not have been possible without an extensive external institutional help (NGOs, tribal authorities, government's departments). Moreover, it took rather long (over ten years) from the project initiation before the village's water supply truly began to function well (see Appendix 5). What conclusions can be drawn from the case example? Especially from the point of view of coordination and progress it would seem to be more beneficial if the local public authorities had greater initiative and means to be the primary facilitators of community participation in water supply decision-making. Now it seems, instead, that the community members needed to seek help and funds from here and there - and a little by little - without getting consistent support from any particular public sector source. The case example indicates that the improvement of the water supply in the village relied very much on the proactive approach of a group of community members (the 'Sivukiles Women's group) and on NGO support. However, the positive side was of course that different public authorities did offer help when asked; they were not prejudice against the unemployed women and their ability and will to improve their own and their community's living standards.

The "Mjejane" -case also emphasises how training and other forms of capacity building related to the water and agriculture project had a very positive influence on the community members' lives and well-being. The notion would support those discourses that believe in overall empowerment of community members as being one of the main goals of participatory projects. In the Mjejane case study, it seems that the broad approach to the water supply and agriculture project (including e.g. housing budget, nutrition and hygiene trainings) was foremost supported by different NGOs. However, it could be argued that while NGOs are doing crucial work, they should not be relied on too much in the fields where also the public authorities ought to be active. Although a great source of development project support, different NGOs' capacities and networks are inevitably smaller than those of tax- and tariff-funded governments'. Perhaps public water supply authorities should take up a stronger coordinator's role, meanwhile also seeking to learn something from NGOs and their broader understanding of water supply development projects. Laube (2009) suggests that water bureaucrats tend to believe too much on the discourse that "water can be produced and controlled by technical means, while human behaviour can be controlled through rules and regulations and steered through economic incentives" (p.3). Hence, it can be argued that one influential discourse that is stopping wide and effective application of community participation in water governance could be that public authorities see water supply too much in technical terms, rather than as an inseparable part of other fields of life.

5.5. Johannesburg and Harrismith: Same water law, different practical implications

The case studies from Johannesburg (see Appendix 6) and Harrismith (see Appendix 7) are both fairly recent and describe water supply services provision by public companies under the same water regulations. However, the water supply services in these two South African locations seem to happen under totally different discourses.

Bond and Dugard (2008; see Appendix 6) provide a very tragic example of what consequences pre-paid water meters and the relating automatic disconnection of water supply may have for poor people. Placed at the beginning of Bond and Dugard's original journal article, the real-life story definitely captures the audience, which can be considered to be a good way of giving at least some marginalised community members more influential voices. The Phiri's case is more than unfortunate, and one likes to assume that no public authorities would have purposely intended such outcomes for their policies. Bond and Dugard suggest that the explanation lies more in the overall neoliberal thinking that is commonly exercised in South Africa, rather than in directly targeted discrimination of Phiri or other underprivileged areas.

It has already been indicated earlier in this research that although South Africa's government is promoting water discourses that aim at social inclusion, the government is at the same time also sending totally different signals to the local water supply authorities. Or how well do the two principles below seem to fit in together?

> "*Ownership of assets.* Water is an important social good ("Water is life") and it is government's responsibility to protect this public interest. Water services infrastructure built with public funds and for public benefit will not be alienated from public ownership (privatised).
>
> …
>
> *Operating in accordance with sound business principles.* Water services must be run in accordance with sound business principles within a sound subsidy framework. Failure to do this will substantially increase the risk of the service not being sustainable…"
>
> (DWAF 2003, p.26; *Water services financial framework, Key principles informing the vision*)

In the DWAF's framework it is stated that water services assets themselves will not be sold to private companies. The need for the emphasis comes most likely from South Africa's past privatisation efforts that had quite ambiguous results and were criticised widely in public discussions (e.g. Jerome 2004). However, when looking at publications from other countries, the topic of public vs. private ownership comes forth repeatedly as well. Does the ownership form really make a difference? Based on the findings of this research, it can be argued that nowadays publicly owned water facilities operate under similar neoliberal principles as private companies. Of course there is nothing wrong with state-run businesses operating according to "sound business principles" (as stated in the DWAF 2003 citation). However, the key dilemma seems to be deciding which of the contradicting principles should be treated as the leading ones. Should water supply services (regardless of the ownership structure) foremost be treated from efficiency and cost-recovery point of view? Or should the leading principles be those relating to social concerns and water as a universal human right of everyone, distributed fairly by the government?

Looking at the case of Hammersmith (Smith 2006; see Appendix 5) directly after that of Phiri, reminds that a postmodern analysis should not get bogged down to showing only one version of the reality. While voicing inequalities in South Africa is very important, it is also necessary to notice the positive developments. In Harrismith's case, the public officials were engaged in a two-way dialogue with the civil society about the requirements for and experiences of water supply services. The case does not tell what in particular triggered such a broad-based approach to water governance. The main rationale could have been e.g. the mere fear of public disapproval of the public-public partnership and problems that could have resulted from not consulting the community members. However, irrespective of the underlying motives for choosing such an inclusive governance model, the usefulness of the approach became obvious. According to Smith (see Appendix 7), the public officials were positively surprised by the viability of community members' and civil society organisations' ideas, and began to consider establishing even more partnership-like participatory projects in the future. In other words, it seems that in Harrismisth's case the participatory approach helped public water authorities to be more reflective toward the idea that average water user's knowledge could be of equal value as "expert" or "consultant" knowledge.

6. CONLUSIONS

This research has identified various influential discourses relating to community participation in water supply governance. The following have emerged as the key themes of the discussion;

- Privatisation efforts, neoliberal thinking and the role of the state
- Decentralisation in water supply governance: community participation as capacity building and empowerment vs. community participation as a power struggle
- Truth claims and the normalizing power of hegemonic discourses
- Treating water as an economic good and seeing water users as consumers
- Redefinition of water discourses: linkages between water supply and social concerns

6.1. (Why) is community participation important in water supply governance?

The postmodern approach plausibly suggests that no discourse is intrinsically more right or wrong than another, but that the truth is always socially constructed. Hence, this study has not strived to present one water management discourse as superior to another. The research has rather sought to point out which are some of the most common discourses influencing water supply practices, and remind that there are other alternatives to consider in case the prevailing ones are not producing the desired outcomes. In other words, this dissertation suggests that it is dangerous to assume that the current hegemonic discourses guiding water supply governance in developing countries are worth conserving, especially since many pervasive local water supply problems have not yet been comprehensively and sustainably solved. Thus, it seems rather appropriate that one very heterogeneous and large stakeholder group - domestic water users - is more broadly present in the strategic water supply decision-making in order to provide new perspectives and solutions to water supply problems.

6.2. What is influencing, hindering, or even preventing successful community participation in water supply governance in developing countries?

It was found that while new discourses are emerging (water as a human right, etc.), many governments, municipalities, and other water service providers still operate largely based on neoliberal principles. In some cases there even seems to be pressure from developed countries toward developing countries to adopt and implement neoliberal water policies in order to receive aid and investments. On the other hand, developing countries' governments also seem to be deploying neoliberal principles without particular prompting and in the hope of fixing persistent service delivery problems in the public sector.

6.3. What about other, "smaller" discourses?

This dissertation has indicated that in addition to "grand narratives", there are also other discourses that shape the successfulness of participatory approaches at local levels. For example, seeing water supply in very technical terms and governing it in municipalities as a separate matter from other areas of life may result in a lack of coordination as well as artificial restrictions of topics that can be covered in water supply-related participatory processes. Moreover, sometimes participation may become restricted because of mutual misconceptions different parties' have of each others' expectations for the process. For example those who are in key decision-making positions may see participation of community members as a threat to their current powerful status, whereas average community members may just be interested in getting their opinions heard a bit better, or perhaps to have a stronger sense of belonging in the community.

6.4. Suggestions for further research

This research has intended to explore and discuss influential discourses in relation to the topic at hand, and not to analyse the characteristics and functioning of particular participatory platforms or programmes. Consequently, further research is suggested for developing propositions on how to facilitate and enhance community participation in water supply governance in practice. There are several possible avenues for conducting such studies. For example, deriving from Linstead's (1999) idea that postmodern deconstruction theory and ethnography are fairly compatible research methods, it would be interesting to observe a particular group of community members participating in water supply governance and see how and why certain discourses (e.g. policies, “best practices”, means of communication and use the of particular terms) influence their individual experiences of the process. On the other hand, it would also be interesting to identify differences in perceptions that public administrators in a certain municipality vs. at regional or national levels have on the same water supply policies, and to explore conditions that could explain some of those differences.

6.5. Final remarks about the case of South Africa

At what conclusion has this research arrived in regard to South Africa’s governmental “success-story” in the field of water supply policies? And can the findings be linked to the postmodern idea that all truth claims are relative? The implications of the latter to the former lie perhaps in allowing several relative truths to be visible in parallel, rather than trying to construct and maintain one grand story without any contradictions. The findings from South Africa have indicated that during the apartheid, everyone’s equal right to access basic water services was not at all on the government’s agenda. From that point of view, South Africa is indeed in the middle of a success-story: for example during the year 2007, 1.1 million additional South Africans received access to basic water services (DWAF 2007). On the other hand, if water is nowadays truly seen as everybody’s human right, then another version of the “truth” should also be allowed to exist respectively. From that perspective, the adequate reference point for success in water supply services would be the situation in which 100% of the population have a sufficient and affordable access to freshwater. While South Africa has progressed a lot in the past two decades, it still has a long way to go before all its citizens can call themselves the true owners of the country’s freshwater resources.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

💧 Success-story?

Selected quotations from the *"Strategic Framework for Water Services - Water Is Life, Sanitation is Dignity"* (DWAF 2003).

Below quotations (changed into italics for this appendix) are taken directly from the report. Words are written in bold only if they appeared so in the original text.

- *DWAF will become a sector leader, supporter and regulator (rather than operator)."*
- *"Water services authorities are responsible for the delivery of water services."*
  [Definition of water services authorities is on p.68: *"any municipality that has the executive authority to provide water services…in terms of the Municipal Structures Act 118*]

(1.2. Key changes compared to the 1994 White Paper, p.3.)

- *"DWAF will oversee the activities of all water sector institutions and will regulate water resources and water services."*
- *"Water service authorities have the constitutional responsibility for ensuring access, planning and regulating provision of water services within their area of jurisdiction."*

(3.1. Institutional vision - the water sector, p.8)

- *The institutional vision provides for management, decision making and control of water services projects to be devolved to the lowest appropriate level whilst taking into account efficiency benefits related to economies of scale.*

(3.1. Key principles informing the institutional vision: 6.
Management at the appropriate level, p.10)

- *"Regionalisation (where it occurs) will be driven by a* ***bottom-up process*** *where local institutions lead the initiative to regionalise."*
- *"National government will exert a* ***leadership*** *role in the reform process to protect the public interest by ensuring that parochial interests do not lead to adverse outcomes."*

(3.4.3. Reform principles and approach, p.15)

APPENDIX 2

💧 Success-story?

Selected quotations from the *"Strategic Framework for Water Services - Water Is Life, Sanitation is Dignity"* (DWAF 2003).

Below quotations (changed into italics for this appendix) are taken directly from the report. Words are written in bold only if they appeared so in the original text.

- *"DWAF will provide* ***guidelines*** *to assist water services authorities in selecting appropriate institutional arrangements for the provision of water services."*

(3.4.4. Choosing water service providers, p.16)

- *"Guidelines on the regulation of intermediaries will be developed by DWAF."*

(3.5.2. Water services intermediaries, p.19)

- *"DWAF will exercise a regulatory oversight role over water services authorities with respect to setting of tariff levels for water services…DWAF will develop guidelines on the development of water and sanitation tariff policies and on setting tariffs. These will include guidelines for determining a reasonable rate of return on assets."*

(4.5.4. Retail water and sanitation tariff policies - water services authorities, p. 35)

- *"****Guidelines*** *will be developed by DWAF on the form of the financial provisions in contracts to ensure the appropriate sharing of responsibilities, risks and rewards for each of the types of contract identified above, any likely variations of these contracts and the additional considerations given above."*

(4.7 Financial provisions in contracts, p.39)

- *"Until such time as it is considered appropriate for an independent regulatory function to be created, DWAF will fulfil the role of the national regulator of the water services sector."*

(7.1 Vision and key principles, Regulatory framework: national regulations, p.49)

APPENDIX 3

💧 Success story?

Selected quotations from the *"Water Services Act 1998"* **(RSA 1997).**

Below quotations (changed into italics for this appendix) are taken directly from the report. Words are written in bold/capital letters only if they appeared so in the original text.

"RECOGNIZING that water supply services and sanitation services are often provided in monopolistic or near monopolistic circumstances and that the interests of consumers and the broader goals of public policy must be promoted"

(Preamble)

*"**Definitions.** In this Act, unless the context shows that another meaning is intended —*

(iv) "consumer" means any end user who receives water services from a water services institution, including an end user in an informal settlement.

…

(v) "consumer installation" means a pipeline, fitting or apparatus installed or used by a consumer to gain access to water services and includes a meter attached to such pipeline, fitting or apparatus."

(Chapter 1: Introductory Provisions, section 1.)

*"**Duty to provide access to water services***

(1) Every water services authority has a duty to all consumers or potential consumers in its area of jurisdiction to progressively ensure efficient, affordable, economical and sustainable access to water services.

(2) This duty is subject to

- *(a) the availability of resources;*
- *(b) the need for an equitable allocation of resources to all consumers and potential consumers within the authority's area of jurisdiction;*
- *(c) the need to regulate access to water services in an equitable way;*
- *(d) the duty of consumers to pay reasonable charges, which must be in accordance with any prescribed norms and standards for tariffs for water services;*
- *(e) the duty to conserve water resources;*
- *(f) the nature, topography, zoning and situation of the land in question;*
- *(g) the right of the relevant water services authority to limit or discontinue the provision of water services if there is a failure to comply with reasonable conditions set for the provision of such services."*

(Chapter III: Water services authorities, section 11.)

APPENDIX 4

♦ Is community participation all about control?

Details of two case studies made by Lyons, M., Smuts C., and A. Stephens (2001) on community participation in South Africa. The studies have been published in the article *'Participation, Empowerment and Sustainability: (How) Do the Links Work?'* **in** *Urban Studies, 38 (8), pp.1233-1251.*

Project: *Tshelenmnyama Community Hall*
Date: *1997-1998* Funder: *Provincial Housing Board* Landowner: *City of Durban*
Community structure: *Voluntary association (Elected representatives and ward councillors; low participation rates; violent conflicts and violent crime; weak leadership)*
Project completion: *Partial success (Hall completed but seldom used and poorly maintained; no new projects planned)*

Project: *Mansel Road Market*
Date: *1994* Funder: *City of Durban* Landowner: *City of Durban (on lease)*
Background: *In 1984 hundreds of women migrate to live and trade on Durban streets; persecution. After negotiation in 1992, city of Durban formalises the small market as a pilot.*
Community structure: *Informal (Committee members appointed strong leader; trust has signed 20-year lease agreement for the buildings with DMC)*
Project completion: *Partial success (Community out-manoeuvred by competing traders; no further developments planned)*
(Both case details from: "Table 1. Summary of case study data", p. 1242)

A summary of the researchers' analysis of the cases:

Tshelenmnyama's crippling indecision is reflected in its development committee. Despite being based on a spatial democratic structure, the committee is comprised almost entirely of one political faction. Almost all its members are very young and inexperienced, as they have, in effect, seized power from the older generation. They lack a sense of direction from other residents, who are reluctant to participate in local democracy; but also the experience that would help them to take a proactive leadership role.

In parallel, the Mansel Road Market's leader effectively appoints the committee. The leader's hold on power is strong because she is able to mediate and interpret and because, as a chair of committee, she controls the democratic decisions taken by the committee in terms of allocation of spaces and other joint decisions.

In both situations, the leadership élite closely manages the democratic process and this is reflected in the spread of opportunities offered within projects and in the suspicion exhibited by local residents at committee decisions.

…

Our findings suggest that the continuing empowerment of a community depends heavily on its commitment to empowering a large number of individuals and to spreading information, training and opportunity. In contrast, communities in which power is hoarded by a leadership élite, whether elected or not, and whether from fear or from ambition, must stagnate. (From: p.1242)

APPENDIX 5

♦ Redefining water supply discourses: capacity building and empowerment

A summary of a case study made in Mjejane community in Mpumalanga Province (South Africa) by J. Goldin, R. Rutherford and D. Schoch (2008). The study has been published in the article *'The Place Where the Sun Rises: An Application of IWRM at the Village Level'* **in** *Water Resources Development, 24 (3), pp. 345-356.*

Households in Mjejane's rural village rely heavily on government grants and the majority of dwellings do not have access to electricity, nor do they have running water within 200m of their homes. An electronically operated borehole supplies water to the community through communal taps that were installed by the KaNgwane government before 1990. Many households have illegal connections to the borehole, resulting in unnecessary volumes of unallocated water and leakages. In 1993, 18 women from Mjejane came together to find ways in which they could enhance their household cash flows and improve their living standards. Most of the women were unemployed. The women approached the local chief for land so that they could grow food. The local traditional chief ceded four hectares at no cost. To get help with other practical matters, through a collective decision-making process the group contacted the Spring Ministries for aid. This proactive approach was successful: they received a donation of fencing material etc. Training in organisational and business skills was provided by a local NGO and a formal "Sivukile Women's Group" was established in Mjejane. In 1997 Sivukile requested training in agricultural techniques. In addition to permaculture techniques, training was also provided e.g. in environmental awareness, nutrition and hygiene as well as household budgets, organisational management and HIW/AIDS awareness. The leading idea was that in order to address problems in endemic poverty, agricultural concerns could not be separated from these other factors.

Because of the obvious links between food production and water security, one of the most urgent requirements was to secure water, as there were severe quality and supply assurance problems. Household members were falling ill and tests indicated that there was sewage pollution that exceeded the government's allowable limit for safe drinking water. In order to address the problem of quality and quantity, Sivukile and three NGOs, Quawater, Ecolink and KAP, collectively designed a project to harvest, store an purify water from the unprotected source so that it could be used for both irrigation and drinking water. The stream was dammed and protected with fences by Sivukile, and a pumping and purifying system was installed. Transfer of technical knowledge took place over a three-month period. Unfortunately, there were impediments to the smooth running of the system. For example, the water source was not deep enough to prevent the pump from clogging with reed and mud etc. In 2006, a cement dam was constructed so that the pump would work more effectively.

Today, the water purification system provides for approximately 70 households (although some household members travel up to 3 km to get access to this safe drinking water). Food security training has resulted in an increased production of cash crops, but income generation is not the only positive outcome; community members have gotten enhanced capabilities such as pride, dignity, self-esteem and social relations. What comes to authorities' support, the tribal authority was engaged in the project through the provision of land, as well as through Chief Nduna's regular social visits to the project. DWAF on the other hand gave advice and support, and the Department of Land and Agriculture provided material to build the cement dam. (Summarised from pages 348-352)

APPENDIX 6

♦ Johannesburg and Harrismith: Same water law, different practical implications

A summary of a case study presented in the article *The case of Johannesburg water: What really happened at the pre-paid 'Parish pump'* **by P. Bond and J. Dugard (2008), published in** *Law, Democracy and Development, 12 (1), pp.1-28.*

In the morning on 27 March 2005, Phiri (one of the poorest areas of Soweto, Johannesburg) resident Vusimuzi Paki awoke to the shouts of a tenant who was trying to put out a fire in one of the other backyard shacks on Paki's property. Assisted by neighbours, the first minutes were spent trying to extinguish the fire using the pre-paid water meter supply that the (public) Johannesburg Water Company had recently installed to control the residents' water supply. However, the water pressure was insufficient to make much impact on the fire and, after a while, the pre-paid meter water supply automatically disconnected due to insufficient water credit. Residents were then forced to scoop up ditch water with buckets in a desperate attempt to put out the fire. More minutes passed. After battling for an hour, residents finally put out the fire, but not before the shack had burnt to the ground. It was only after Paki's tenant returned home from her night shift that everyone discovered to their horror that her two small children had been sleeping in the shack. They both died in the fire. (Summarised from: Introduction, p.1)

Summary of the researcher's comments and analysis:
Paki's story highlights the life and death importance of pre-paid water meters. Beyond this tragic incident are other durable water problems: the daily indignity and inhumanity that people in Phiri have had to endure since Johannesburg Water installed pre-paid meters as a cost-recovery measure, starting in 2004.

The Johannesburg City's "Free Basic Water" (FBW) supply (6000 litre per month) is allocated per stand and only to property-owning account-holders. It is not uncommon that in the poorer areas several people live in the same property as well as in shacks in properties' backyards. With even 9 or more people sharing the water, the monthly free allocation never lasts to the end of the month, even if household members flush the toilet only once a day and bathe only every second day. Since the advent of the pre-paid meters, once the FBW allocation is exhausted, the pre-paid water meter automatically disconnects the water supply until further water credit is purchased. However, in many poor households there is rarely enough money to purchase sufficient water to ensure an adequate supply for the whole month, and thus the automatic disconnection typically signals no water supply at all until the next month's FBW allocation is loaded and dispensed.

The automatic disconnection feature of pre-paid meters is unusual and it does not occur in conventional meters (found elsewhere in Johannesburg), which provide procedural protections prior to any disconnection of the water supply. These protections – the purchase of water on credit with reasonable notice of possible disconnection, along with an opportunity to make representations before there is a disconnection – are in place in conventional water supplies precisely to avoid the Phiri situation. Yet, while people in Johannesburg's richer suburbs with conventional meters continue to enjoy substantive protections prior to water disconnection, poverty-stricken people in Phiri with pre-paid meters have been forced to forgo such procedural protections: their water supply terminates automatically and immediately on exhaustion of the FBW or credit supply. (Summarised from pages 1-2)

APPENDIX 7

♦ Johannesburg and Harrismith: Same water law, different practical implications

Case details from the chapter '*South Africa: Testing the Waters of Public-public Partnerships*' by Laïla Smith (2006), published in the book *Reclaiming public water* *(NOTE: the translated, Finnish version of the book - "Vettä kaikille", published by Like, Helsinki - was used as the source of the below case details).*

The township of Harrismith (in Maluti-a-Phophung's municipal jurisdiction) had severe problems with water and sanitation services because there had been a lack of investments in its infrastructure for years. Local officials eventually recognised that the problem needed to be fixed, and as the officials did not have sufficient means to improve township's water supply management on their own, external help was sought. The officials investigated possibilities for private sector participation, but it became apparent that it would be difficult to find interested investors as the area was poor and many water users suffered from insolvency issues. Harrismith's officials thus launched a tendering process for other municipalities' public water services providers and that of Gauteng (called "Rand Water") won the bidding. Rand Water and Harrismith's public authorities formed a public-public partnership, and launched a public enterprise for water and sanitation services called Amanziwethu (AWS) under the township's water and sanitation department.

South Africa's first ever public-public partnership ended up being successful and one of the reasons for this was that strong public participation was included in the planning process. Community participation happened at different levels. For example, water forums were organised in the region to enable water users to bring about concerns they had regarding water supply services and tariffs (the feedback was always recorded and included into the agenda of monthly partnership board meetings). Moreover, there were different information campaigns (in which elected councillors also took a proactive role) educating community members about their rights and terms renewals concerning water supply services. Various means (radio broadcasts, video screens in communities, community theatre productions, newspaper articles and public events) were used to reach as large share of the community population as possible.

One of the important points was to encourage indigent people (those households earning less than 1100 Rand pro month) to register themselves, as this would secure them from disconnections in water supply in case of incapability to pay for the usage that exceeds the government stipulated minimum free monthly water allowance (minimum 6000 litres per household). AWS thus applied a different approach than many other service providers: underprivileged had easier contract terms (as long as they were appropriately registered) where as those with higher income had stricter credit terms.

In addition to above mentioned ways of involving community members in and informing them of water supply governance, also local trade unions, NGOs, political parties and small businesses were consulted during the three-year partnership. Based on the positive experiences gained from the consultation and feedback rounds, the public authorities concluded that introducing an even more engaging participatory mechanism (instead of the "consultative approach" which is fairly typical for the water sector) would most likely be a beneficial development.

(Summarised from pages 138-146)