

**The construction of community: inscribing
and prescribing multiple voices in the upper
Berg River Catchment, South Africa**

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IWRM Context

- Management of fresh water resources plays out at the **society-nature interface**
- This interface requires modes of water resource management that goes **beyond the boundaries of typical water resource management**.
- To do this one needs to **seek more decentralised participatory modes** of water management.
 - Many researchers and practitioners argue that Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) can provide this.
- There is however **increasing concern** with regards to whether or not the water management frameworks like IWRM are “delivering the goods”

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What am I talking about today?



Introduction

- This paper emerges from research conducted as part of the CSIR team's research in the Upper Berg River Catchment.
- Social component to the project
- Methodology:
 - Qualitative
 - Interviews and focus groups
 - Case study: Berg River Partnership



Case Area: Upper Berg River Catchment

Case Study: Berg River Partnership

How did it start?

On the 26th of February 2009, it was resolved at the Premiers Coordinating Forum that a task team be established to investigate and put forward proposals to **prevent the loss of the export status of deciduous fruit** products to the EU due to the contamination of the Berg River.



- **Success Indicators**
- EU licence
- Lower pollution levels
- Reduced E-coli levels
- Community empowerment
- Reduction of informal settlers
- Reduction of waste removed
- Irrigation water for crops
- Social health & disease

Stakeholders and the construction of community

IWRM – first principles

1. Acknowledge: **water is finite and vulnerable resource**
2. Employ: **participatory approach**
3. Ensure the: **role of women**
4. Focus on: **social and economic value of water**
5. Implement: **equitable and efficient management and sustainable use of water.**

(Global Water Partnership, 2012)

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Berg River Partnership

1. Captured in Mission Statement
2. On paper – not necessarily in practice
3. Women included but not as the “female voice”
4. Economic impact highly valued – fruit export
5. Aligned to ‘loud’ voices

Constructed community - prescribing and inscribing community (1)

- Belonging to the group
 - Who is invited and how are they invited?
 - “same old same old”
 - Internet based invitations and network based
 - How are meetings run?
 - Stakeholder meetings are not secure spaces where multiple voices can emerge without feeling ‘out of place’
- Locus of power
 - Located with certain groups
 - Top down (government driven)

Constructed community - prescribing and inscribing community (2)

- Values?
 - Whose values?
 - What kinds of values cherished?
 - Prioritisation of values aligned with louder voices
- Identity
 - Factional identity markers
 - Who pays for water
 - Who qualifies for government support
 - Importance of contribution to local /provincial GDP
 - “Us vs them” – blame game

Rethinking...

- Structured processes do not necessarily mean integration
- We need to be aware of unintended consequences
 - Closed constructed communities
 - Limited 'real' inclusion of voices
- Emic and etic - in-group successes looking from inside out

Thank you



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