

A global crisis and local realities - Governing water in the 21st Century -

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There is much talk about water and the world of science and practice is full of conferences about it. Water is life and water is a pre-condition for human development. Nevertheless, water resources are under pressure globally and stressors range from increased demand over pollution to alterations of aquatic ecosystems. It took a while to understand that the place-specific water problems in their accumulated effects add up to a global crisis. Policy responses are still struggling to address effectively the global level of such a multi-level governance challenge. At the same time, global environmental change research is (re-) discovering the regional perspective, as put forward by the ICSU "Grand Challenges", that highlights water as well. A "region" as diverse as Asia poses many challenges to those who have to govern waters such as transboundary waters, seasonal flow fluctuations, scarcity and abundance of water, and a rapid development that is running the risk of being hampered, if water is not managed sustainably. The focus of the talk is, from a social science perspective, on the multi-level and cross-sectoral nature of water vis-à-vis institutional and governance responses.