

Critical review

Gulbenkian Think Tank on Water and the Future of Humanity (2014). *Water and the Future of Humanity. Revisiting Water Security*. New York: Springer: 241 pp. ISBN: 978-3-319-01456-2; ISBN eBook: 978-3-319-01457-9; DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01457-9

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"Improved water supply and sanitation contributes to human dignity, health, education, and economic development"
(Foreword, pp v)

Within the framework of the International Decade for "Water as source of life" (2005-15)¹, the Think Tank of Foundation Calouste Gulbenkian (FCG) on Water and the Future of Humanity, published (joint edition by FCG and Springer) the book "Water and the Future of Humanity *Revisiting Water Security*" in early 2014. This book gathers the

¹ For more information, see <http://www.un.org/spanish/waterforlifedecade/> (retrieved online on 10.04.2014)



work and debate of eleven internationally acknowledged experts² whose work has focuses on water resource management and community water policy.

The analysis presented in the book's 241 pages focuses on identifying the seven large world regions that evidence differences in terms of global demand for drinking water. More than continental areas, the seven regions are identified based on their main features³, namely: *Rural*; *Villages*; *Urban*; *Metropolis*; *Large Cities*; *Towns*; e *Secondary Cities*. These differences are made manifest by a set of imbalances, among which demographic growth, economic and technological trends and the increase in agricultural production, the use of natural resources, the relative importance of the urban areas, which directly influence urban culture, the distribution and availability of income.

Considering that water is a vital resource that is unequally distributed and available worldwide, concerns regarding its sustainability are obvious since its unplanned use has impacts that require control and regulation. Complementarily, water resources are considered the basis for social, economic and environmental development. However, because always lacking or at risk of degrading, they become restrictions to the change process and have even worse consequences for poor and vulnerable populations. Thus, they represent added social, economic, environmental and political risk, even at international level.

The main sectors dependent on water, which require especial attention and which, because of that, pose (national, regional and international) challenges are: food security, health, energy, biodiversity, maintenance of ecosystems, production of consumption goods, including processed goods, and climate change.

Throughout the book, possible future scenarios are presented for each of the thematic sections, along with an explanation of the trends. The history of consumption of water resources is considered, as well as water (un)availability and its impact.

From a methodological point of view, and since this is a work by all the eleven experts involved in the debate and in the discussions, regardless of the geographical area where they have been working, the text proposes a joint approach focused on shared resources.

Water is presented as being a common resource, whose scarcity, stress and availability crisis are felt globally and which requires adopting and complying with negotiated actions in search of what is called "sustainable prosperity". This concern is especially evidenced by the concept of globalization, especially in economic terms, which influences and conditions maintenance of water resources and implies that, in certain areas of the World, alternatives have to be identified and implemented (as is the case of water desalination).

The concept of Water Governance is amply described, its analysis being based on a series of features previously presented by the OECD⁴ that influence relations among countries, especially when shared resources are at stake, as is the case of most river

² The eleven experts who participated in the discussion coe from different geographical areas, namely from: Austria; Brazil; Canada; China; the United States of America; the Netherlands; India; Morocco; Portugal; Sweden; and Sri Lanka.

³ Though the typologies are defined, examples will be given throughout the text on the analyzed themes.

⁴ OECD (2011). *Water Governance in OECD countries. A multi-level approach. OECD Studies on water*. Paris: OECD



basins. Among these features are legitimacy, transparency, responsibility, inclusiveness, justice, integration, individual and community ability to manage water and adaptability. These implicit criteria to "Water Governance", together with a more global criterion, linked the four dimensions deemed crucial:

- a) the **social dimension**, which implies fair, and just, management and use of water resources at world level, both in terms of the amount available and its quality, regardless of the fact that these are rural or urban areas,
- b) the **economic dimension**, which is clearly presented considering the concepts of efficacy and efficiency in promoting economic growth and in fostering economies at world level based on water availability and use,
- c) the **environmental dimension**, focused on sustainability, in ecosystem integrity, in preserving areas and species in their natural habitat, focused on life that depends on water resources,
- d) the **political dimension**, which implies assigning and acknowledging opportunities to citizens and different actors interested in directly and indirectly influencing decision making.

The book is divided into nine main chapters, each including an introductory note, a preface, a prologue and a message on water and the future of humanity, which discuss the main issue in water management, namely:

- 1. Our Water; Our Future*
- 2. Drivers of Water Demand, Course Changes, and Outcomes*
- 3. Water Management in a Variable and Changing Climate*
- 4. Water for a Healthy Environment*
- 5. Integrated Urban Water Resources Management*
- 6. Water and Food Security: Growing Uncertainties and New opportunities*
- 7. Water and Energy*
- 8. Water Projections and Scenarios: Thinking About Our Future*
- 9. Our Water Future: leadership and Individual Responsibility*

As this book presents results of two years' research developed by an international interdisciplinary team, a book that includes relevant theoretical concepts, statistical data that evidence developments and trends, as well as diversified computer graphics such as maps, charts, schematics and images, **Water and the Future of Humanity. Revisiting Water Security** is very interesting work, especially for further academic and scientific studies. The publication's interest is not limited to its approach to water resources and its management. In fact, the complementary themes under discussion are varied and scientifically relevant.



To cite this text

Brito, Brígida Rocha (2014). Gulbenkian Think Tank on Water and the Future of Humanity (2014). *Water and the Future of Humanity. Revisiting Water Security*. New York: Springer: 241 pp. ISBN: 978-3-319-01456-2; ISBN eBook: 978-3-319-01457-9; DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01457-9, *JANUS.NET e-journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5, N.º 1, May-October 2014. Retrieved [online] date, observare.ual.pt/janus.net/en_vol5_n1_rec1